Mid-Term Review of FAO-GEF Project

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Innovative Transformation of China's Food Production Systems and Agro-ecological Landscapes towards Sustainability

Final Report

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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Contents

Acknowledgements ..... **iv**
Acronyms and abbreviations ..... **v**
Executive summary ..... **vi**
1. Introduction **1**
1.1. Purpose and scope of the MTR 1
1.2. Objective of the MTR 1
1.3. Intended users 4
1.4. Methodology 4
1.5. Limitations 7
2. Project background and context **8**
3. Theory of change **11**
4. Key findings and MTR questions **13**
4.1. Relevance 13
4.2. Effectiveness 15
4.3. Efficiency 21
4.4. Sustainability 24
4.5. Factors affecting progress 26
4.6. Cross-cutting priorities 38
5. Conclusions and recommendations **42**
5.1. Conclusions 42
5.2. Recommendations 44
6. Lessons learned **50**
7. Appendices **51**
Appendix 1. Terms of reference for the MTR 51
Appendix 2. MTR itinerary, including field missions (agenda) 52
Appendix 3. Stakeholders interviewed during the MTR 63
Appendix 4. MTR matrix 65
Appendix 5. List of documents consulted 78
Appendix 6. Results matrix showing achievements at mid-term and MTR observations 80
Appendix 7. Co-financing table 98
Appendix 8. GEF evaluation criteria rating table and rating scheme 101
Appendix 9. List of cooperatives with increased capacity 108
Appendix 10. Recalculation of Capacity Development Scorecard data and baseline 109
Appendix 11. Risks to achieving project outcomes 111

List of figures and tables

Figures

Figure 1. Map showing the five target provinces and listing the target counties in each province (source: Project Inception Workshop Report). 10
Figure 2. Theory of change for the project; source: project document 12

Tables

Table 1. MTR questions from the terms of reference 2
Table 2: Main purpose and intended users of the MTR (source: MTR TOR) 4
Table 3: Summary of assessment of target provinces against site selection criteria 7
Table 4: Summary of monitoring results for Outcome 2.1 indicators (d), (e), (f) and (g); source: prepared by MTR team using data from NPMO 18
Table 5: Expenditure of OP's portion of GEF funds by component (at 31 December 2024; source: NPMO) 29
Table 6: Risks and mitigation actions from the project's Environmental and Social Risk Management Plan 40

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MTR team
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Acronyms and abbreviations

BTOR	Back-to-office report
CPF	Country Programming Framework
ESMP	Environmental and Social Risk Management Plan
FACS	Food And Agricultural Commodity Systems
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FGD	Focus group discussions
FOLUR IP	GEF-7 Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration Impact Program
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
GEB	Global environmental benefits
HS	Highly satisfactory
HU	Highly unsatisfactory
ILM	Integrated landscape management
IPM	Integrated pest management
KII	Key informant interviews
LTO	Lead Technical Officer
MARA	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs
MS	Moderately satisfactory
MT	Mid-term
MTR	Mid-term review
MU	Moderately unsatisfactory
NBS	Nature-Based Solutions
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
OP	Operational Partner
OPA	Operational Partnership Agreement
PIF	Project Identification Form
PIR	Project Implementation Review
NPMO	National Project Management Office
PMO	Project Management Office
PPR	Project Progress Report
PSC	Project Steering Committee
PTF	Project Task Force
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SMART	Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound
TOC	Theory of change
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group

Executive summary

Introduction

1. This is the report for the mid-term review (MTR) of the project " Innovative Transformation of China's Food Production Systems and Agro-ecological Landscapes towards Sustainability". This evaluation is a requirement of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) for project monitoring and reporting purposes. It was conducted for both accountability and learning purposes of the GEF, FAO and other participating institutions.

2. The primary audience and users of the MTR are: GEF and other donors; the FAO–GEF Coordinating Unit; FAO management and staff; the Executing Agency the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA); the Project Task Force, the Project Steering Committee; and other project developers and implementers.

3. The MTR covers project design and the project implementation period since its start in July 2021 until June 2025, and analyses all the project components. It will cover all the geographical areas where the project has been implemented.

4. The objectives of the MTR are to address and rate the GEF MTR criteria: Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability, Factors affecting performance, and Cross-cutting dimensions. A list of MTR questions, grouped under these criteria, informed and directed the MTR.

5. The MTR also assesses how the programmatic approach has been successful in promoting linkages and synergies with the GEF-7 Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration Impact Program (FOLUR IP, of which this project is a child project) and in amplifying the magnitude of results achieved so far.

6. The MTR was undertaken by a team of two: an international consultant and a national consultant. The MTR involved primarily qualitative methods and some quantitative secondary analysis of project M&E data. The following four main data collection methods were used: (i) desk reviews of all relevant documents and information; (ii) key informant interviews (KIIs) with project stakeholders; (iii) focus group discussions (FGDs) with some stakeholders to draw out experiences in a group setting; and (iv) field visits. The SSIs, FGDs and site visits were conducted between 11 and 18 June 2025, and included visits to two of the five target provinces and three of the six project demonstration sites. Data analysis was conducted to address the MTR questions and ratings were assigned to some criteria, in accordance with the FAO–GEF MTR requirements.

Main findings

7. The main findings are presented below, arranged under the GEF MTR criteria. For details and rationale, please see the body of the report.

RELEVANCE

Finding 1. The project is highly consistent with several GEF programming directions, especially the GEF-7 Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program strategy, with relevant objectives under the Biodiversity, Climate Change, and Land Degradation focal areas, and with the Chemicals and Waste Program.

Finding 2. The project design is highly congruent with national environmental and development priorities, and this relevance has increased since its formulation.

Finding 3. At the time of project design, the project's contribution to the FAO Country Programming Framework (CPF) for China was strong; the contribution to the current CPF at mid-term is still strong.

EFFECTIVENESS

Finding 4. The project has made good contributions towards the project's GEF Core Indicator targets and achieved the targets for increased capacity development scores.

Finding 5. The project has made satisfactory progress towards Outcome 1.1 - Strengthened ILM policies, plans and capacities that promote participatory planning and enable national and provincial institutions across agricultural landscapes to meet their relevant sustainable agriculture, rural revitalization, land restoration and related climate and biodiversity targets.

Finding 6. The project has made satisfactory progress towards Outcome 2.1 - Sustainable agricultural practices deployed and scaled up that enhance ecological functions, improve soil quality and fertility, mitigate GHG emissions and establish resilient agricultural production models.

Finding 7. The project has made satisfactory progress towards Outcome 2.2 - Responsible, market-oriented agricultural value chains implemented and scaled up, including through government-private enterprise-farmer cooperative partnerships and capacity building.

Finding 8. The project has made moderately satisfactory progress towards Outcome 3.1 - Enhanced conservation and restoration of agroecosystems and biodiversity.

Finding 9. The project has made satisfactory progress towards Outcome 4.1 - Effective knowledge management/information exchange and M&E.

Finding 10. There are no known unintended results.

Finding 11. The project has made good progress addressing the barriers identified in the project design, although there are barriers and challenges to scaling up the results.

EFFICIENCY

Finding 12. The project has generally been implemented efficiently, with management responding effectively to significant impacts of COVID-19 restriction.

Finding 13. Project design was based on an exhaustive analysis of baseline initiatives, partnerships and data; during implementation, interaction occurred with other projects relating to agro-biodiversity conservation.

Finding 14. The cost effectiveness of the total project expenditure is considered high and the timeliness was moderate.

SUSTAINABILITY

Finding 15. The project has undertaken a lot of excellent work that contributes to the likelihood of the project results being sustainable after the end of the project, especially by empowering provincial- and county-level stakeholders, establishing cross-departmental coordination mechanisms, conducting extensive capacity building, closely involving farmer cooperatives, developing county-level ILM and restoration plans, and including knowledge management as a key project component.

Finding 16. The OPIM modality is contributing to an increase in national, provincial and local ownership to support better sustainability of results.

FACTORS AFFECTING PROGRESS

Finding 17. The project is complex but well designed, with clear and coherent logic and a focus on sustainability of the results; however, there is little substantive content on how results will be scaled up after the project.

Finding 18. MARA was highly effective in discharging its role and responsibilities related to the management and administration of the project and has shown very strong ownership of the project.

Finding 19. The main financial challenge for the project is low expenditure of the GEF allocation, with approximately 28 percent disbursed to 31 December 2024; this is mainly due to the impacts of COVID-19 restrictions.

Finding 20. Approximately half of the committed co-financing has materialized to 30 June 2025; government and private-sector co-financing has been central to the project's success and achievements, and FAO's co-financing has represented important contributions to project implementation and management and technical input to the project.

Finding 21. The FAO has effectively delivered on its responsibilities as GEF Agency for oversight and implementation.

Finding 22. Partnerships with the private sector and among national, provincial and local experts and practitioners have been strengths of the project; there will be a challenge ensuring that funding is available to engage staff to coordinate activities and to engage the experts to guide scaling-up interventions.

Finding 23. Knowledge management is a focus of the project's design and implementation; generally, communication to core project stakeholders is considered to have been effective, although it is not clear whether communication with individual smallholder farmers and with the general public was effective.

Finding 24. The M&E system at the time of project endorsement was generally practical and sufficient, with the project's technical monitoring delivered through Output 1.1.4 and funded from outside the M&E budget; six indicators did not have baselines in the endorsed results framework, and these are to be developed during implementation.

Finding 25. The M&E system is generally operating as per the M&E plan and information has been gathered in a systematic manner; information generated by the M&E system has been used to inform and improve project planning and execution; baselines have not been set for the six indicators in the results framework that required baselines to be set during implementation; also, the monitoring protocols and provision of evidence for some indicators need improvement.

Finding 26. The FOLUR IP program is providing valuable benefits, mostly in the form of diverse knowledge-sharing opportunities that are expanding the range of ideas and tools that can be considered in this project; the World Bank Hubei sub-project only commenced in 2025, therefore exchanges between the two projects have only recently commenced.

CROSS-CUTTING PRIORITIES

Finding 27. Gender considerations were taken into account adequately during project design and are being appropriately considered during implementation, including through the engagement since 2022 of a gender consultant, appointment of gender focal points, review of the Gender Action Plan in 2025, and preparation of gender-specific knowledge products.

Finding 28. Consideration of environmental and social concerns has been appropriate during project design and implementation; the current overall risk rating of moderate is still valid. It is now timely to screen the project for environmental and social risks using the FAO Framework for Environmental and Social Management (2022).

8. The following ratings are provided:

i. progress towards achieving the project's development objective(s): SATISFACTORY.

ii. overall progress on implementation: SATISFACTORY.

iii. an overall risk rating: MODERATE.

9. The following summary paragraphs are provided:

i. Progress, challenges and outcomes of stakeholder engagement: This project has attracted active participation from many actors and these have had a positive effect on the project results. Partnerships with farmer cooperatives have provided access to the land required to achieve holistic, landscape-scale agricultural production transformation, and these cooperatives have business models that are based on working sustainably with the farmers on developing value chains and marketing strategies and providing a more secure farmer income. As part of these local-level partnerships, county- and city-level governments are also vital, coordinating farmer support programs and subsidies and identifying opportunities in accordance with government policies. The project has also built an active and supportive partnership of experts and practitioners at the national, provincial and city/county levels. The main challenge of the partnerships is the need for funding to engage staff to coordinate activities and to engage the experts to guide the interventions. This should be considered when planning scaling-up initiatives.

ii. Progress on gender-responsive measures, indicators and intermediate results: The project's results framework includes four gender-disaggregated targets and the Gender Action Plan contains gender-specific actions for each project output, with assigned responsibility, indicators, targets and a timeline. A national-level gender consultant has been engaged since 2022, who is responsible for implementation of the Gender Action Plan. Implementation has had a strong focus on gender, including: a gender working group to provide oversight to the gender consultant's work; the All-China Women's Federation has a representative on the PSC and is involved as a project partner in each target county; extensive gender training provided to project stakeholders; requirements for gender consideration are built into project contracts; gender-specific data is collected on women's

participation in project activities; and the Gender Action Plan was reviewed in 2025. Various gender-specific knowledge products have been prepared, including a presentation "Gender-assisted agricultural production transformation" that was loaded onto the project's knowledge platform and ten case studies that were prepared relating to gender-specific results.

iii. Knowledge activities/products and lessons learned: Component 4 of the project is "Knowledge management and M&E", therefore knowledge management is a key part of the project design. Highlights of knowledge activities/products include: A remote training platform, with 10 recorded online training courses available and approximately 1.6 million visits; project-related activities and promotional reports disseminated through other platforms, including agency websites and media outlets; various print media promotional materials, including project popularization brochures and demonstration area display boards; a wide variety of online and in-person knowledge exchanges within China and internationally, including several organized through the FOLUR IP; interaction between project personnel in the five participating provinces and with other GEF projects. It is not clear whether communication with individual smallholder farmers was effective, because most farmers interviewed were also active cooperative members, and it is also not clear whether the project has succeeded in communicating with the general public, because no data have been provided on the reach of the project's general communications.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1. Relevance. The project design is highly consistent with several GEF programming directions, especially the GEF-7 Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program strategy, and relevant objectives under three focal areas; it is highly relevant to national environmental and development priorities, especially its aim to transform China's food production system to promote sustainable increases in productivity and incomes, while contributing to economic development, protecting biodiversity and ecosystems, and reducing GHG emissions; this relevance has increased since its formulation.

Conclusion 2. Effectiveness. The project is implementing significant holistic landscape-scale sustainable agriculture interventions at demonstration sites in 14 counties across five provinces; 17 of the project's 21 mid-term targets are considered achieved and four targets are partially achieved; good progress has been made towards the GEF Core Indicators, the capacity development targets and the project objective.

Conclusion 3. Efficiency. The project has generally been implemented efficiently, with project start-up occurring efficiently despite the complexity of the project arrangements; COVID-19 had a very significant impact on this project and led to significant delays, although management responded effectively to this challenge; there is a significant underspend of the GEF allocation, largely due to COVID-19; the cost-effectiveness of the project is high and the timeliness is moderate.

Conclusion 4. Sustainability and scaling up. The project has undertaken a lot of excellent work that increases the likelihood of sustainability, especially by empowering provincial- and county-level stakeholders, establishing cross-departmental coordination, conducting extensive capacity building, closely involving farmer cooperatives, developing county-level ILM and restoration plans, and through knowledge management; the project faces significant challenges in achieving widespread scaling up, for various reasons including the need to bring new provinces and counties

on board, challenges convincing and engaging farmers and cooperatives of the benefits, and the likely need to provide financial support to farmers and cooperatives.

Conclusion 5. Progress towards development objective. The project has made satisfactory progress towards the development objective "to support the innovative transformation of China's agro-landscapes and agri-food value chains towards environmental and ecological sustainability at scale in support of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), rural revitalization, ecological civilization, and climate resilience".

Conclusion 6. Overall progress on implementation. MARA was highly effective in discharging its role and responsibilities related to the management and administration of the project and has shown very strong ownership of the project; FAO has effectively delivered on its responsibilities as GEF Agency for oversight and implementation; collaboration between MARA and FAO was constructive and respectful; the OPIM modality was used effectively and contributed to increased national, provincial and county-level ownership of the project.

Conclusion 7. Overall risk rating. The original and current risk classification for the project is Moderate; the MTR team considers this classification to still be appropriate.

Conclusion 8. Overall assessment of the project. Good progress has been made towards the project's objective and outcomes. The project is complex but well designed, and the National Project Management Office and MARA have been very effective at putting in place the required project arrangements, which has been vital to the project's success. COVID-19 had very significant impacts during the first two years, therefore delays occurred and the GEF expenditure is very low. With two years remaining, there is still substantial work to be done and significant unspent GEF funds remaining; the quality of the results would be optimized and significantly enhanced if a one-year no-cost extension were granted. The project should now have a focus on planning for significant scaling up of the approaches and practices.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Grant a one-year no-cost extension, to optimize the quality of key results and to ensure full and strategic expenditure of GEF funds.

Recommendation 2. Arrange a special PSC meeting/workshop and provincial/county workshops to plan the final phase of the project and ensure coordination is in place.

Recommendation 3. Undertake a review of the resourcing requirements for the remainder of the project, including an assessment of the needs of provincial and county offices, and identify whether additional support is needed to ensure effective delivery (such as through co-financing allocations).

Recommendation 4. Develop improved monitoring protocols, in collaboration with the Lead Technical Officer, as follows:

i. Core Indicator 11 and Outcome 4.1 (b): agree on a methodology that provides an accurate measure of the number of people reached by information dissemination and knowledge, justifies any assumptions, and enables accurate gender disaggregation of reporting.

ii. Outcome 2.2 (b): ensure that the data collection methodology is transparent and systematic, that data analysis links any farmer income increases to project interventions, and that both of the indicator's sub-targets are considered.

iii. Outcome 3.1 (a): ensure that the data collection methodology is transparent, that reporting addresses the intent of the Outcome (Enhanced conservation and restoration of agroecosystems and biodiversity) and the indicator (Species and ecosystems indicators), and ensure that both of the indicator's sub-targets are considered.

iv. Outcome 2.1 indicators (d), (e), (f) and (g): review the monitoring protocols for these indicators to ensure that there is consistency between provinces, that appropriate variables are measured, and that data are collected systematically.

Recommendation 5. Set seven new baselines for the indicators below, prepare a revised results framework that includes these new baselines, obtain PSC approval of the revised results framework, and use the revised results framework for future reporting in PIRs, PPRs and for the terminal evaluation:

i. Capacity Development Scorecard: revise the baselines for the capacity scorecard results indicator to reflect the changes in the sites participating in the first-batch demonstration sites (see analysis and suggestions in Appendix 10).

ii. Outcome 2.1: in accordance with the endorsed results framework, set detailed baselines for the four indicators: (d) chemical fertilizer reduction, (e) pesticide reduction, (f) soil organic matter and (g) average yield per hectare.

iii. Outcome 2.2 indicator (b): in accordance with the endorsed results framework, set a detailed farmer income baseline for participating farmers.

iv. Outcome 3.1: establish baselines for both sub-targets in indicator (a).

Recommendation 6. Establish a commitment to long-term monitoring of the project's results, beyond the period of the GEF project.

Recommendation 7. Develop a scaling-up strategy that systematically addresses how widespread scaling up of the project's approaches across China will be achieved.

Recommendation 8. Conduct another review of the Gender Action Plan that includes reporting against each of the gender-specific actions, indicators and targets for each project output, and use the findings from this to improve practices and modify the Gender Action Plan where necessary.

Recommendation 9. Screen the project for environmental and social risks using the FAO Framework for Environmental and Social Management (2022).

GEF rating table

GEF criteria/sub-criteria	Rating[1]	Summary comments
A. STRATEGIC RELEVANCE		
A1. Overall strategic relevance	HS	See Section 4.1 "Relevance".
A1.1. Alignment with GEF and FAO strategic priorities	HS	Highly consistent with several GEF programming directions, especially the GEF-7 Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program strategy and three focal areas; strong contribution to the FAO Country Programming Framework (CPF) for China.
A1.2. Relevance to national, regional and global priorities and beneficiary needs	HS	Highly congruent with national environmental and development priorities, especially 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020), the National Plan for Sustainable Development of Agriculture (2015–2030), the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2023–2030), and China's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC).
A1.3. Complementarity with existing interventions	S	Project design was based on an exhaustive analysis of baseline initiatives, partnerships and data; during implementation, interaction occurred with other projects relating to agro-biodiversity conservation, especially after COVID-19 restrictions ended.
B. EFFECTIVENESS		
B1. Overall assessment of project results	S	
B1.1 Delivery of project outputs	S	The project is on track to deliver all project outputs by project end, although the quality of some key results would be optimized by a one-year extension of time available. See Section 4.2 "Effectiveness" and Appendix 6.
B1.2 Progress towards outcomes and project objectives	S	
- Objective	S	The project has made good progress towards the development objective "to support the innovative transformation of China's agro-landscapes and agri-food value chains towards environmental and ecological sustainability at scale in support of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), rural revitalization, ecological civilization, and climate resilience".
- Outcome 1.1	S	Integrated landscape management and restoration plans developed for six cities/counties; extensive training of government decision-makers and technical staff; high-quality work establishing monitoring systems in the target provinces; and the target under GEF Core Indicator 4 was achieved.
- Outcome 1.2	N/A	There are no mid-term targets for Outcome 1.2.
- Outcome 2.1	S	Work underway towards developing new or improved standards for green agricultural

[1] See rating scheme in Table A11.4 at the end of Appendix 8.

		production, although target only partially achieved; monitoring results show strong trends towards the targets for reduced chemical fertilizer use, reduced pesticide use, increased soil organic content, and increased average yield, and each of these mid-term indicators is considered achieved.
- Outcome 2.2	S	Extensive farmer training activities undertaken and target met; increased farmer incomes reported although reporting was incomplete; target for number of agri-food brands certified was met and the target for number of farmer cooperatives with increased capacity to support responsible value chains was met.
- Outcome 3.1	MS	Little reporting has been received against the species and ecosystems indicators that were to be determined; mid-term data for Core Indicator 3 also contributes to Outcome 3.1, and this was partially achieved.
- Outcome 4.1	S	Met the mid-term target to establish at least one new information dissemination platform, and met the target for the number of people reached by information dissemination and knowledge exchange.
- Overall rating of progress towards achieving objectives/ outcomes	S	
B1.3 Likelihood of impact	Not rated at MTR	
C. EFFICIENCY		
C1. Efficiency	S	The project has been implemented efficiently, with project start-up occurring efficiently despite the complexity of the project arrangements; COVID-19 had a very significant impact on this project and led to significant delays, although management responded effectively to this challenge; there is a significant underspend of the GEF allocation, largely due to COVID-19; the cost-effectiveness of the project is high and the timeliness is moderate. See Section 4.3 “Efficiency”.
D. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES		
D1. Overall likelihood of risks to sustainability	L	The project has undertaken a lot of excellent work that increase the likelihood of sustainability, especially by empowering provincial- and county-level stakeholders, establishing cross-departmental coordination, conducting extensive capacity building, closely involving farmer cooperatives, developing county-level ILM and restoration plans, and through knowledge management; the project faces significant challenges in achieving widespread scaling up. (See Section 4.4 Sustainability.)

D1.1. Financial risks	L	Risk that provincial and county governments will stop supporting the project after it ends. If this occurs, it is unlikely that cooperatives, farmers and other local stakeholders would continue the project's results independently. This risk is considered low, because all provincial and county governments indicated that they would continue to support the existing sites and the associated cooperatives and farmers.
D1.2. Sociopolitical risks	L	Risk that cooperatives will not continue to be involved; this would make it difficult for the project to continue the large-scale activities that are underway. This risk is considered low, because they have shown their commitment through contributing co-financing, their business models are based on working sustainably with farmers on developing value chains and marketing strategies, and they show a strong commitment to continuing after the project ends
D1.3. Institutional and governance risks	L	The level of ownership of the project by government agencies is very high. Also, the cross-departmental coordination mechanisms have improved governance arrangements and increased the likelihood of the results being sustainable.
D1.4. Environmental risks	L	Climate change and extreme weather events represent a threat to all crops and agri-ecological systems, including those established under this project. Project design mitigates this by developing innovative and climate-smart approaches to crop production and restoration, and the project applies adaptive management underpinned by detailed monitoring systems. The risk is therefore considered lower than for most crops. The project is focused on developing environmentally friendly practices, such as reducing chemical pesticide and fertilizer use and reducing GHG emissions.
D2. Catalysis and replication	MU	There are various significant challenges to scaling up results to new provinces and counties, including some of the original project barriers still being present in those locations; the need for knowledge management and capacity building; the need to convince new farmers and cooperatives of the benefits; the likely need for funding to provide financial support; the need to transfer lessons learned about brand, marketing and value chains; and the need to foster new partnerships with cooperatives. See Finding 11.
E. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE		
E1. Project design and readiness	HS	The project is complex but well designed, with clear and coherent logic and a focus on sustainability of the results; the project's readiness for delivery was high, and the OP put in place required arrangements efficiently in late

		2021 / early 2022, despite the challenges of COVID-19; the project design has little substantive content on how results will be scaled up after the project
E2. Quality of project implementation	S	
E2.1 Quality of project implementation by FAO (BH, LTO, PTF, etc.)	S	FAO effectively delivered on its role and responsibilities as the GEF Agency. The PTF meets regularly and FAO staff are responsive in providing support and proactively addressed challenges during implementation. FAO also provided important technical input to the project. See Finding 21.
E2.1 Project oversight (PSC, project working group, etc.)	S	The PSC was established early in accordance with the project document, has met four times and is operating effectively. See Finding 18
E3. Quality of project execution	HS	
E3.1 Project execution and management (NPMO and executing partner performance, administration, staffing, etc.)	HS	MARA was highly effective in discharging its role and responsibilities related to the management and administration of the project and has shown very strong ownership of the project. See Finding 18.
E4. Financial management and co-financing	MS	The main financial challenge for the project is low expenditure of the GEF allocation, mainly due to the impacts of COVID-19 restrictions; approximately half of the committed co-financing has materialized to 30 June 2025, and government and private-sector co-financing has been central to the project's success and achievements. See Findings 19 and 20.
E5. Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement	S	Partnerships with the private sector have been central to the design and implementation of this project and are a strength; also partnerships with government officials at all levels, and partnerships with experts and practitioners. See Finding 22.
E6. Communication, knowledge management and knowledge products	S	Knowledge management is a focus of the project's design and implementation; a remote training platform was established, and other existing platforms and methods were used to disseminate knowledge; project representatives participated in many knowledge exchange activities, including international exchanges; it is not clear whether communication with individual smallholder farmers and with the general public was effective. See Finding 23.
E7. Overall quality of M&E	S	
E7.1 M&E design	S	The M&E system at the time of project endorsement was generally practical and sufficient, with the project's technical monitoring delivered through Output 1.1.4 and funded from outside the M&E budget; six indicators did not have baselines in the endorsed results framework, and these are to be developed during implementation. See Finding 24.

E7.2 M&E plan implementation (including financial and human resources)	S	The M&E system is generally operating as per the M&E plan and information has been gathered in a systematic manner; information generated by the M&E system has been used to inform and improve project planning and execution. However, baselines have not been set for the indicators in the results framework that required baselines, and several indicators require improved monitoring protocols to ensure monitoring and reporting are consistent and systematic. See Finding 25.
E8. Overall assessment of factors affecting performance	S	
F. CROSS-CUTTING CONCERNS		
F1. Gender and other equity dimensions	S	Gender considerations were taken into account adequately during project design and are being appropriately considered during implementation, including through the engagement since 2022 of a gender consultant, appointment of gender focal points, review of the Gender Action Plan in 2025, and preparation of gender-specific knowledge products. Finding 27.
F2. Human rights issues	S	Attention to human rights issues during implementation has been adequate, although human rights were not considered in project design.
F2. Environmental and social safeguards	S	Consideration of environmental and social concerns has been appropriate during project design and implementation; the current overall risk rating of moderate is still valid. See Finding 28.
Overall project rating	**S**	

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose and scope of the MTR

1. This mid-term review (MTR) is a requirement of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and is also required by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) for project monitoring and reporting purposes. It is being conducted for both accountability and learning purposes of GEF, FAO and other participating institutions.

2. In accordance with the terms of reference for this MTR ("MTR TOR" hereafter), the main purpose is to:

- provide accountability – to respond to the information needs and interests of policy-makers and other actors with decision-making power, for example, FAO management and the FAO–GEF Coordination Unit (FAO–GEF CU);

- improve the project – project improvement and organizational development provide valuable information to managers and others responsible for regular project operations (for example, the National Project Management Office (NPMO), Project Task Force (PTF), FAO–GEF CU and Project Steering Committee (PSC)); and

- contribute to knowledge – in-depth understanding and contextualization of the project and its practices, of particular benefit to the FAO–GEF CU, other FAO staff, and future developers and implementers.

3. The MTR covers project design and the project implementation period since its start in July 2021 until June 2025, and analyses all the project components. It will cover all the geographical areas where the project has been implemented.

1.2. Objective of the MTR

4. The TOR identified that the objective of the MTR is to address and rate the GEF evaluation criteria, as below:

- Relevance

- Effectiveness

- Efficiency

- Sustainability

- Factors affecting performance

- Cross-cutting dimensions

5. The TOR provided a set of MTR questions, grouped under the GEF criteria, to inform and direct the MTR (see Table 1). Sub-questions, methods and information sources for the MTR questions were developed and are presented in the MTR matrix in Appendix 4.

Table 1. MTR questions from the terms of reference

1. Relevance (rating required)	1.1 Are the 4 project components and objectives congruent with the GEF focal areas/operational program strategies, China environment priorities and FAO China Country Programming Framework? 1.2 Has there been any change in the relevance of the project since its formulation, such as new national policies, plans, or programs that affect the relevance of the project objectives and goals? If so, are there any changes that need to be made to the project to make it more relevant?
2. Effectiveness of project results (rating required)	2.1 (component 1) To what extent has the project contributed to *Development of integrated landscape management (ILM) systems in agricultural landscapes*? 2.2 (component 2) To what extent has the project contributed to *Promotion of sustainable food production practices and responsible agri-food value chains for the staple crops of rice, wheat and maize?* 2.3 (component 3) To what extent has the project contributed to *Conservation and restoration of agroecosystems and biodiversity?* 2.4 (component 4) To what extent has the project contributed to *Knowledge management and M&E?* 2.5 Are there any unintended results? 2.6 (Likelihood of impact) Are there any barriers or other risks that may prevent future progress towards and the eventual achievement of *Innovative transformation of China's food production systems and agro-ecological landscapes towards sustainability?*
3. Efficiency (rating required)	3.1 To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently, cost-effectively, and management been able to adapt to any changing conditions to improve the efficiency of project implementation? *Sub-questions:* *Have the specific features related to OPIM modality been taken into consideration during project preparation (e.g. subcontract and procurement procedures of the OP, etc.)* *How efficient was the contracting and procurement process during the first half of the project (involvement of BH, LTO)?* 3.2 To what extent has the project built on existing agreements, initiatives, data sources, synergies, and complementarities with other projects, partnerships, etc., and avoided duplication of similar activities by other groups and initiatives? 3.3 Is the project cost-effective? How does the project cost/time versus output/outcomes equation compared to that of similar projects?
4. Sustainability (rating required)	4.1 (Sustainability) What is the likelihood that the project results will continue to be useful or will remain after the end of the project? What are the key risks that may affect the sustainability of the project results and benefits (consider financial, socio-economic, institutional and governance, and environmental)? What are the main risks to the achievement of environmental benefits (GEBs) supported by GEF financing? *Did the OPIM modality contribute to ensure major ownership and sustainability of the project results?* *Did the OPIM modality contribute to increase national, sub-regional and sub-regional ownership to support better sustainability of results? And to strengthen capacities of regional, sub-regional and/or national entities?*
5. Factors affecting progress	5.1 (Project design) Is the project design appropriate for delivering the expected outcomes? Is the logic coherent and clear? To what extent are the project's objectives and components, clear,

(ratings required)	practical and feasible within the timeframe? 5.2 (Project management) To what extent did the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs effectively discharge its role and responsibilities related to the management and administration of the project? What have been the main challenges in relation to the management and administration of the project and what changes are needed to improve delivery in the second half of the project? *Sub-questions:* *Does the OP provide quality financial reports, PPRs and PIRs and present calls for funds in a timely manner?* *Does FAO review/approve reports and arrange for funds transfer in a timely manner?* *(Project implementation and execution) To what extent did the OPIM modalities facilitate or hamper project execution and contribution to the project objectives?* 5.3 (Financial management and Co-financing) What have been the challenges related to the financial management of the project and to what extent has the pledged co-financing been delivered? 5.4 (Project oversight, implementation role) To what extent has FAO delivered on project identification, concept preparation, appraisal, preparation, approval and start-up, oversight and supervision? 5.5 (Partnerships and stakeholder engagement) Have other actors, such as civil society, indigenous population or private sector, been sufficiently involved in project design and implementation, and what has been the effect of their involvement/non-involvement on the project results? What are strengths and challenges of the project's partnerships? 5.6 (Communication and knowledge management) How effective has the project been in communicating and promoting its key messages and results to partners, stakeholders and a general audience? How can this be improved? 5.7 (M&E design) Is the M&E plan practical and sufficient? 5.8 (M&E implementation) Does the M&E system operate as per the M&E plan? Has information been gathered in a systematic manner? To what extent has information generated by the M&E system during project implementation been used to adapt and improve project planning and execution, achievement of outcomes and ensure sustainability?
6. Cross-cutting priorities	6.1 (Gender and minority groups) To what extent were gender considerations taken into account in designing and implementing the project? 6.2 (Environmental and social safeguards) To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project? Is the current risk classification still valid?

6. Also in accordance with the MTR TOR, this MTR assesses how the programmatic approach has been successful in promoting linkages and synergies with the GEF-7 Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration Impact Program (FOLUR IP; described under Section 2) and in amplifying the magnitude of results achieved so far. The following specific questions were identified:

- Links between the Program and the Child Project

    a. To what extent is the program providing the necessary coordination and technical support?

b. What are the tools brought by the program that have been used at the child project level?

c. What is the expected impact of the tools and resources brought by the project at national level?

d. To what extent has the child project contributed to the four outcomes of the program as set out in the program framework document?

e. To what extent has the program contributed to costs savings through leveraging key partnerships across child projects?

- Synergies between child projects?

  a. Did the child project have any synergies and exchanges with other child project? What type of exchanges? How have these exchanges been useful at all stakeholders' level? What are the expected impacts of these exchanges at national, provincial and local levels? To what extent were the child project activities efficient in capturing synergies among other child projects?

1.3. Intended users

7. The MTR TOR identified intended users of the MTR under the different MTR purposes, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Main purpose and intended users of the MTR (source: MTR TOR)

Purpose		Intended user
Accountability: to respond to the information needs and interests of policy-makers and other actors with decision-making	Inform decision making Provide accountability	GEF and other donors FAO–GEF CU and FAO management
Improvement: Project improvement and organizational development provides valuable information for managers or others responsible for the regular project operations	Improve project	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (Executing Agency), NPMO, PTF, FAO–GEF CU, PSC
Enlightenment: In-depth understanding and contextualized the project and its practices Normally caters to the information needs and interest of staff and sometimes participants	Contribute to knowledge	FAO–GEF CU, FAO staff, project developers and implementers

1.4. Methodology

8. This MTR adhered to the FAO "Guide For Planning and Conducting Mid-Term Reviews of FAO–GEF Projects And Programmes" (2020) and associated annexes, the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation (2016), and the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation (2020).

9. The MTR was undertaken by a two-person MTR team comprising two independent consultants: Dr. Adrian Stokes as the international consultant and team leader, and Professor Li Lingling as the national consultant.

10. During the design and preparation phase of the MTR, an inception report was prepared, which included:

- a stakeholder analysis to inform decisions on who would be involved and the methodology that would be used to engage with them;

- an evaluation methodology, giving information on the approaches to be used and the methods selected for data collection; and

- an MTR matrix, presenting the MTR questions (from the MTR TOR) and relevant indicators, data sources and methods for each MTR question (reproduced in Appendix 4).

11. The methodology involved multiple sources of data to inform the evaluation, to ensure the collection of evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful. It involved primarily qualitative methods and some quantitative secondary analysis of project M&E data (especially information on the Capacity Development Scorecard and the monitoring of key variables).

12. Four main data collection methods were used:

- Desk reviews were undertaken of all relevant documents and information covering project design, implementation progress, and monitoring and review. This included relevant strategic and planning documents such as FAO policy documents and national policies and strategies for China. The list of documents consulted is provided in Appendix 5.

- Key informant interviews (KIIs) with project stakeholders were held. These were conducted as semi-structured interviews in a conversational format. Interviewees were selected through a sampling strategy based on the stakeholder analysis undertaken as part of the inception report. A priority rating was applied to each stakeholder (1 = essential; 2 = desirable; 3 = interview if time and resources allow). Key informants were grouped in the following categories:

    - Active stakeholders with direct responsibility for the project, i.e. key stakeholders from FAO and MARA.

    - Active stakeholders with authority to make decisions on the project. This includes the provincial PMOs and participating agencies, who will provide vital information on implementation of the project at a provincial level, and PSC members.

    - Secondary stakeholders (only indirectly or temporarily affected). These stakeholders will provide important insights into some aspects of the project, such as specific technical work, research partnerships and other institutions' priorities.

    - Stakeholders at grassroots level who benefit directly or indirectly from the intervention. This category includes village committees, farmers and cooperatives/enterprises.

- Other interest groups / individuals that are not participating directly in the intervention (no stakeholders identified).

- Focus group discussions (FGDs) were planned for some stakeholders to draw out experiences in a group setting. These were appropriate for beneficiaries at project sites, especially at villages and farms, and were planned carefully to be sensitive to specific settings and circumstances.

- Field visits were undertaken to obtain a first-hand understanding of project interventions and achievements and to connect with local stakeholders and beneficiaries. KIIs and FGDs with beneficiaries were conducted during the field visits.

13. A mission in China was undertaken between 11 and 18 June 2025, to collect data for the MTR. The list of stakeholders interviewed is provided in Appendix 3.

14. The project has field sites in five provinces: Shandong, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Guizhou and Heilongjiang. Due to time constraints for logistical considerations (the mission was limited to seven days, plus an eighth day when the MTR team returned to Beijing), it was not possible to visit all of these during this MTR. It was determined that two provinces could be visited in the available time. Provinces to be visited were selected using a range of criteria:

    i) Coverage of crop types: the aim was to visit at least one location of each crop type (rice, wheat and maize) covered by the project. The crop types covered in each province are: rice – Heilongjiang, Jiangsu, Jiangxi and Guizhou; wheat – Shandong and Jiangsu; maize – Shandong and Heilongjiang.

    ii) Number of demonstration areas that can be visited per province: there are six demonstration areas in the five provinces, with two in Shandong; therefore, if Shandong was visited then half of the demonstration areas would be covered.

    iii) Suitability of the timing of visits: in Jiangsu province at the time of the mission it was the interval between crop rotations, whereas crops were currently in the field in Shandong and Jiangxi.

    iv) Geographical distance: it was preferable to avoid spending excessive time travelling between locations. Heilongjiang (in north-east China) and Guizhou (in south-west China) are a long distance from Beijing, whereas Shandong, Jiangxi and Jiangsu are closer to Beijing.

15. Table 2 summarizes the assessment of the pilot provinces against the four criteria.

16. On this basis, the mission visited Shandong (two sites) and Jiangxi, and did not visit Jiangsu, Heilongjiang or Guizhou. This ensured that each crop type was visited, that half of the demonstration areas were visited, that the timing was suitable for the crop stages to be visited, and that the most distant provinces were not visited. The mission itinerary is provided in Appendix 2.

Table 3: Summary of assessment of target provinces against site selection criteria

Criterion	Shandong	Jiangxi	Jiangsu	Heilongjiang	Guizhou
1) Coverage of crop types	Wheat Maize	Rice	Wheat Rice	Maize Rice	Rice
2) Number of demonstration areas	2	1	1	1	1
3) Suitability of the timing of visits	OK	OK	Poor	OK	OK
4) Geographical distance	Near	Near	Near	Distant	Distant
Visit?	**Yes**	**Yes**	**No**	**No**	**No**

17. Online presentations and interviews were arranged with stakeholders in Jiangsu, Heilongjiang and Guizhou to collect information on interventions in those provinces.

18. The MTR team provided a debrief of initial findings in Beijing on 18 June 2025.

19. Data analysis was conducted after completion of the interviews and mission, to address the MTR questions as detailed in the MTR matrix (Appendix 4). Where possible, evidence was triangulated by assessing the relevant evidence collected by at least two methods, to verify findings and build a richer narrative of the results.

1.5. Limitations

20. Due to limited time and resources, the MTR team did not visit Jiangsu, Heilongjiang or Guizhou, which means that there was limited first-hand understanding of the interventions at these pilot sites. This was mitigated to a limited extent by scheduling a 90-minute online presentation and interview session with provincial Project Management Offices (PMOs) and experts in these provinces.

21. The NPMO was proactive in preparation of the required project information package for the start of the MTR. There were some limitations to the quantitative reporting and provision of baselines for indicators in the results framework, which means that achievement of some indicators could not be assessed in the first draft report. This adversely affected the MTR team's holistic perspective of the project's progress and achievements. It will be important for the terminal evaluation that reporting against all indicators is prepared in a timely manner, that all required data and other evidence is provided, and that measurement methodologies and baselines are clear.

2. Project background and context

22. The project "Innovative transformation of China's food production systems and agro-ecological landscapes towards sustainability" is a six-year project funded by the GEF 7th replenishment cycle. The GEF Implementing Agency is the FAO and the Executing Agency is the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA), China.

23. The total budget of the project is USD 63 679 450, comprising a GEF contribution of USD 7 179 450 and committed co-financing of USD 56 500 000. The project started on 1 July 2021 and has an end date of 1 April 2027.

24. This project is one of two sub-projects of the GEF-7 Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration Impact Program (FOLUR IP) child project in China, entitled "Innovative transformation of China's food production systems and agro-ecological landscapes towards sustainability". The other sub-project is a World Bank project in Hubei Province, "Hubei Smart and Sustainable Agriculture Project". FAO is the Lead Agency and World Bank the Co-Implementing Agency of the GEF-7 child project in China. This TE only considers the FAO-implemented sub-project, it does not evaluate the World Bank sub-project in Hubei. The FOLUR IP has the objective "To promote sustainable, integrated landscapes and efficient food value and supply chains at scale".

25. The context for this project is described in detail in the project document. In summary, China's agriculture has undergone rapid transformation over the past four decades. Through institutional and market reforms and technological advances, China has been able to meet almost all of its own food demand primarily through increased domestic agricultural production in recent decades. At the time of project design, China's agricultural production had grown by nearly 5 percent per year since the late 1970s, and total factor productivity growth had accounted for around half of this expansion. This enabled China to feed nearly 20 percent of the world's population with only 5 percent of the world's freshwater and 8 percent of global arable land. The project document noted that China was the world's largest producer of rice and wheat, accounting for 30 percent of the world's rice and 17.5 percent of the world's wheat production. China is also the world's second largest producer of maize.

26. The reduction of cultivated land area in China due to urban development, disaster damage, and ecological restoration of farmland has been mostly offset by measures to increase cultivated land, such as land treatment and agricultural structure adjustment. However, as in other parts of the world, the rapid development of China's modern agriculture, especially the development of intensive agriculture and its focus on high input and high yield, has led to a number of environmental challenges. The project document reported that among the main root causes of unsustainable production of the grain crops wheat, maize and rice in China is the over four-decade-long focus on high inputs / high yields, which is driven by the national policy of food self-sufficiency and the increase of food demand as the population and incomes grow.

27. The project document identified the following main environmental challenges:

- Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions
- Land and environmental degradation

- Decline in farmland biodiversity and ecosystem services
- Climate change impacts
- Rising incomes and food consumption.

28. The project document also identified the following four barriers to a transformation towards sustainable food production systems:

Barrier 1: Gaps in the enabling policies and planning frameworks at the national and sub-national level.

Barrier 2: Limited capacity and mechanisms at the local level to scale up innovative approaches for sustainable agriculture and restoration.

Barrier 3: Limited market incentives and engagement of smallholder farmers in value chains supportive of sustainable production and land management.

Barrier 4: Limited platforms and knowledge sharing and exchange mechanisms to support replication and scaling.

29. The project's objective is "to support the innovative transformation of China's agro-landscapes and agri-food value chains towards environmental and ecological sustainability at scale in support of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), rural revitalization, ecological civilization, and climate resilience".

30. The project promotes the integrated management of agricultural ecological systems and the enhancement of agricultural value chains, implements new technologies and modes of agricultural green development, and establishes eco-compensation incentive mechanisms and stakeholder partnerships. It aims to achieve positive impacts for biodiversity, soil and water conservation, climate change mitigation, food security, and sustainable rural livelihoods.

31. To achieve the objective and address the identified barriers, the project is structured around four components, each comprising one or more outcomes and several outputs:

Component 1: Development of integrated landscape management (ILM) systems in agricultural landscapes (two outcomes and six outputs).

Component 2: Promotion of sustainable food production practices and responsible agri-food value chains for the staple crops of rice, wheat and maize (two outcomes and six outputs).

Component 3: Conservation and restoration of agroecosystems and biodiversity (one outcome and two outputs).

Component 4: Knowledge management and M&E (one outcome and three outputs).

32. The project is being executed by a central ministry (MARA) and pilot interventions are being implemented in five provinces: Shandong, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Guizhou and Heilongjiang. The original project design included only four provinces and this was updated at the time of project inception to include Heilongjiang, at the request of MARA.

33. Figure 1 shows the locations of the five provinces and lists the target counties at the time of project inception.

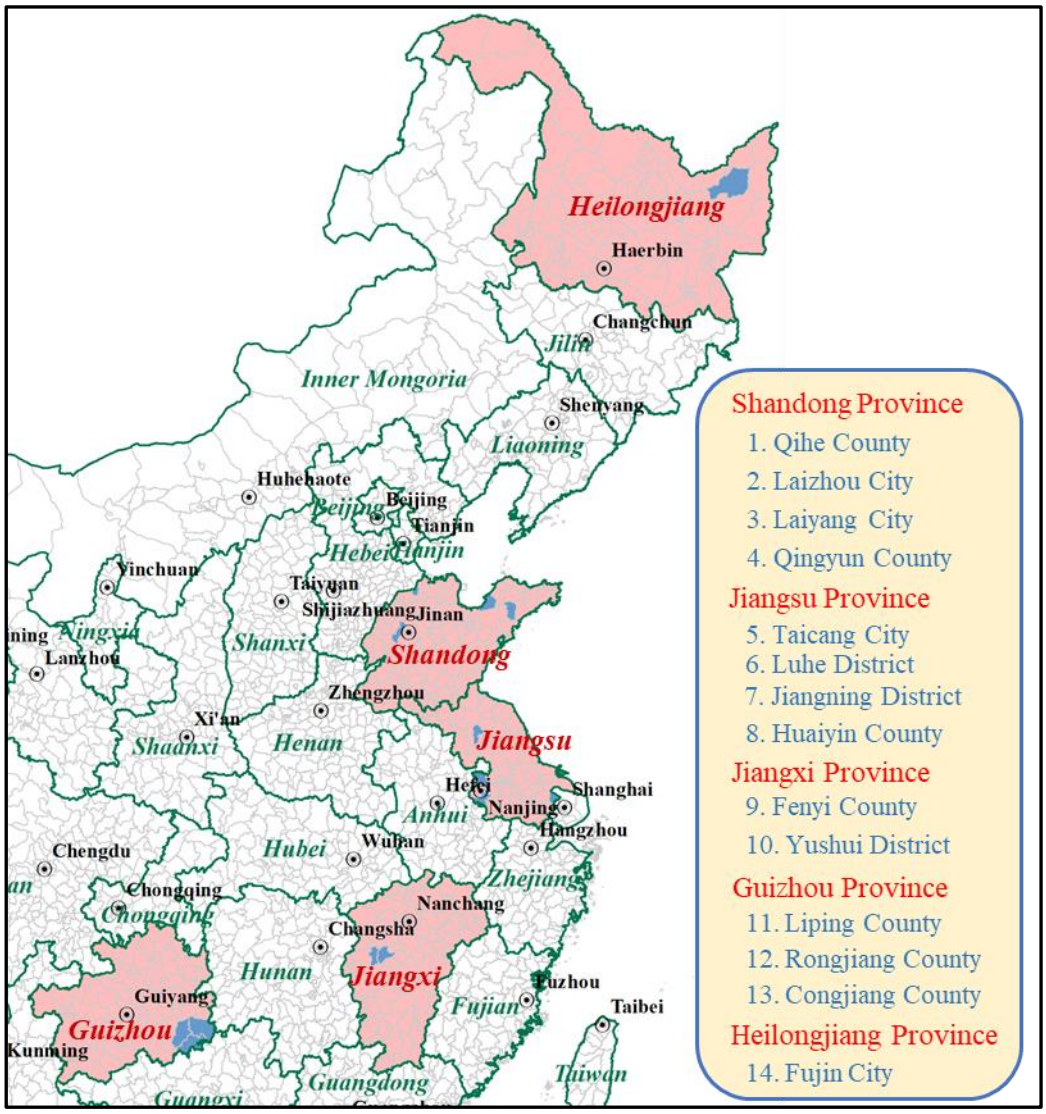


Figure 1. Map showing the five target provinces and listing the target counties in each province (source: Project Inception Workshop Report).

34. The MTR TOR lists the following main beneficiaries of the project:

- The five provincial Departments of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (Shandong, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Guizhou and Heilongjiang) benefit from this project. They will be the targets for a range of project-developed training, including on-ground training in on-farm conservation of traditional crop varieties.

- Research organizations, at national and provincial levels, benefit from this project. Research work and training capacity of those institutes in the area of on-farm conservation of traditional crop varieties are strengthened.

- Local farmers benefit through improved livelihoods and incomes, better knowledge and skills, and access to improved markets. Farmer cooperatives are also beneficiaries.

3. Theory of change

- The project logic and theory of change (TOC) for the project were presented in Section 1a(3) of the project document, with an accompanying narrative. The TOC was designed to reflect the FOLUR program results framework, and includes the World Bank FOLUR sub-project in Hubei Province, because the two sub-projects share the same goal, outcomes and components and jointly contribute to the achievement of the project's global environmental benefits. The TOC is shown in Figure 1.

- The TOC shows a sound logical flow, from analysing the "Current situation" (root causes, barriers, threats and positive drivers), identifying the project's responses to these, defining project outcomes and long-term outcomes expected to arise from the interventions, and showing the project goal and long-term impacts to be achieved. Five assumptions are embedded in the TOC, relating to the project's interventions.

- The TOC provides a useful overview of the project's logic, strategy and long-term impacts. It provides a suitable basis for assessing the project's progress towards achieving the objective and long-term impacts.

- There is one shortcoming to the TOC. The TOC identifies 15 "Project Entry Points" when referring to the project's interventions; however, these entry points do not correspond to the project's outputs in the project document. Also, the project document text describes five "entry points" through which transformation of the food production system will be realized (p. 43), but these five do not correlate with the 15 in the TOC or with the project's outputs.

- Otherwise the TOC is considered appropriate and, because it also includes the World Bank Hubei sub-project, it has not been revised.

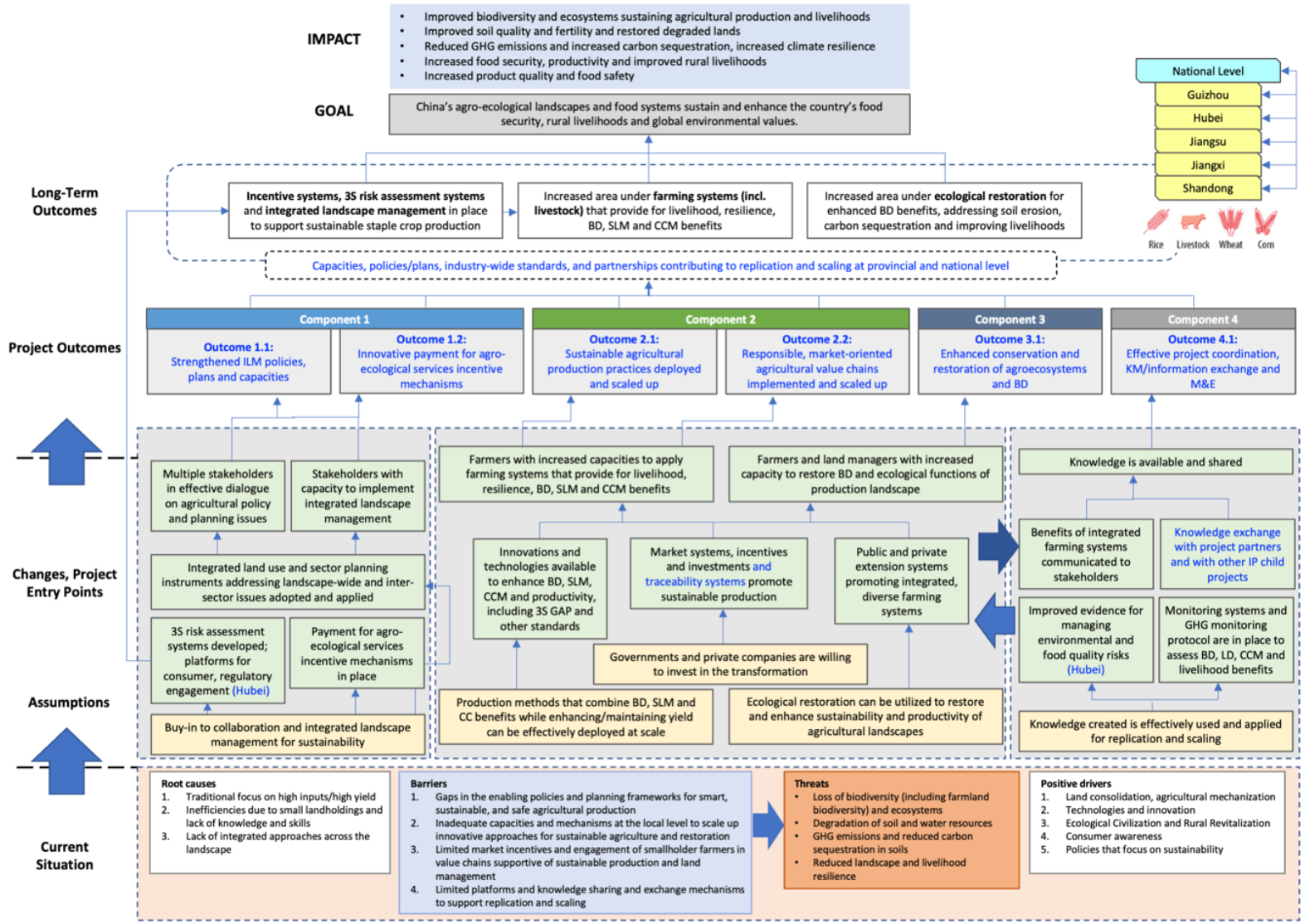


Figure 2. Theory of change for the project; source: project document

4. Key findings and MTR questions

4.1. Relevance

RELEVANCE RATING: HIGHLY SATISFACTORY

MTR question 1.1: Are the 4 project components and objectives congruent with the GEF focal areas/operational program strategies, China environment priorities and FAO China Country Programming Framework?

MTR question 1.2: Has there been any change in the relevance of the project since its formulation, such as new national policies, plans, or programs that affect the relevance of the project objectives and goals? If so, are there any changes that need to be made to the project to make it more relevant?

Finding 1. The project is highly consistent with several GEF programming directions, especially the GEF-7 Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program strategy, with relevant objectives under the Biodiversity, Climate Change, and Land Degradation focal areas, and with the Chemicals and Waste Program.

35. The project is strongly aligned with the GEF-7 Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program strategy and its Objectives 1 "Promoting sustainable food systems to meet growing global demand" and 3 "Promoting restoration of degraded landscapes for sustainable production and to maintain ecosystem services". The project's engagement of the private sector as a key mechanism to achieving the project's objectives and transformational impact, and establishing innovative financing mechanisms such as through payments for agro-ecological services and access to rural/digital finance, are in line with the Impact Program's strategy.

36. Through these interventions, the project aligned with the following GEF programming directions:

- Biodiversity Objective 1 "Mainstream biodiversity across sectors as well as landscapes and seascapes through biodiversity mainstreaming in priority sectors", by mainstreaming biodiversity in in the agriculture sector through improved land use planning and local capacity to incorporate biodiversity considerations in agricultural production and associated land and water management, including the implementation of ecological corridors for increased farmland biodiversity.

- Climate Change Objective 2 "Demonstrate mitigation options with systemic impacts", by introducing and scaling up technologies and best practices in agriculture that enhance soil carbon sequestration and reduce methane and nitrous oxide emissions from agriculture, such as through improved water management and reduced use of chemical inputs.

- Land Degradation Objective 1 "Support on the ground implementation of SLM to achieve LDN", by contributing to reversing soil degradation and enhancing ecosystem services from cropland and surrounding ecosystems and preventing further degradation of farmland by promoting sustainable agriculture practices that reduce chemical use, reduce disturbance to soil, increase crop cover, and encourage rotation and fallow systems.

- Chemicals and Waste Program 2 "Agriculture Chemicals Program", by promoting integrated pest management (IPM) and low-chemical systems in food production in the

four target provinces and beyond and by supporting the elimination of highly hazardous pesticides and improved management of discarded pesticides and pesticide containers.

Finding 2. The project design is highly congruent with national environmental and development priorities, and this relevance has increased since its formulation.

37. As described in the project document, the project design is highly congruent with various national environmental and development priorities, especially:

- China's 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) and its No. 1 Central Document 2018 included clear commitments to sustainable agricultural development to enhance productivity while preserving important ecosystem functions.

- The National Plan for Sustainable Development of Agriculture (2015–2030) includes various relevant commitments relating to agricultural mechanization and modernization, the use of technologies and innovation, and agro-ecological restoration to improve ecological functions.

- The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2011–2030) sets as a priority to incorporate biodiversity conservation into sectoral and regional planning to promote sustainable use, and to reduce impacts of environment pollution on biodiversity.

- The Strategy on Rural Vitalization in 2017 aimed to eliminate poverty, promote the modernization of agriculture and increase prosperity in rural areas. In 2018, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs issued the "Implementation Plan for Science and Technology Supporting Actions for Rural Revitalization", focusing on solving the key factors of cost-effectiveness, quality and safety, and environmental protection in accordance with the concept of coordinated development of production, ecology and life.

- The Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement (2015) includes several objectives and priorities relating to agriculture and greenhouse gas emissions reduction.

38. In 2024, China released the updated NBSAP 2023–2030, which has a vision of "building a beautiful China where humans live in harmony with nature". The diverse range of activities in this project are consistent with many aspects of the NBCSAP 2023–2030, especially Priority Area II "Addressing threats of biodiversity loss" and Priority Action 16 "Sustainable management of agriculture, forestry, and fisheries".

39. The project was well designed to address the national priority to transform China's food production system to promote sustainable increases in productivity and incomes, while contributing to economic development, protecting biodiversity and ecosystems, and reducing GHG emissions, in line with the country's rural revitalization agenda and the vision of "ecological civilization".

40. There are no changes needed to make the project more relevant.

Finding 3. At the time of project design, the project's contribution to the FAO Country Programming Framework (CPF) for China was strong; the contribution to the current CPF at mid-term is still strong.

41. When designed, the project's objectives and activities aligned well with the FAO Country Programming Framework (CPF) 2016–2020 for China, especially Priority Areas 1 "Fostering sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture development" (Outputs 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3) and 2 "Reducing rural poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition" (Output 2.1).

42. At mid-term, the project remains highly consistent with the current CPF (2021–2025), especially the two overarching objectives "Agri-food systems resilience" and "Agri-food systems transformation" and the umbrella programs Climate Change and Biodiversity Conservation, Natural Resources Management and Livelihoods, and Private and Financial Sector Engagement.

43. The project results are relevant to the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031, especially the Priority Program Areas BP1 "Innovation for sustainable agriculture production" and BE3 "Biodiversity and ecosystem services for food and agriculture".

4.2. Effectiveness

EFFECTIVENESS RATING: SATISFACTORY

44. Progress towards the project indicators and targets, including information on how progress was validated, is reported on in Appendix 6.

Finding 4. The project has made good contributions towards the project's GEF Core Indicator targets and achieved the targets for increased capacity development scores.

45. The project has targets that contribute towards the GEF Core Indicators 3, 4, 6, 9 and 11, and has targets for capacity development as measured by the Capacity Development Scorecard. See Appendix 6 for detailed reporting against these.

46. For Core Indicator 3, the mid-term target is partially achieved, with 36,584 ha of degraded agricultural land restored (target: 63,000 ha). The main activities covered by this indicator include:

- Vegetation restoration: afforestation and reforestation to prevent soil erosion and protect water sources, construction of farmland shelterbelts, and reconstruction of composite ecological systems of trees, shrubs and grasses in watersheds;

- Land management: erosion control on slopes and land consolidation;

- Agroforestry and forestry integrated operations: such as intercropping beans, grains and grass cover within orchards of tea trees, oil tea trees, fruit trees, etc., and intercropping between agricultural and forestry crops;

- Ecological corridor construction: establishment of plant buffer zones to protect rivers, lakes, and ponds from pollution; construction of plant fences / protective forests to control soil erosion; conversion of slope farmland into terraced fields or long slope cutoff projects; construction of ecological corridors to improve landscape and ecological conditions; and

- Ecological ditch and pond construction: ecological management of ditches and ponds around farmland, including construction of ecological ditches for nutrient retention (reducing nitrogen/phosphorus loss) and increasing biodiversity.

47. For Core Indicator 4, the mid-term target is achieved and exceeded, with 206,845 ha of landscapes under improved practices (target: 156,000 ha). The main activities covered by this indicator are in three areas:

- Application of good agricultural practices and climate-smart agriculture technologies, such as crop straw return to fields; wide-row intercropping; cover crop planting; diversified cropping systems including rotation and fallow periods, rice field water-land rotation and alternating wet and dry irrigation, rice-fish, rice-crab, and rice-shrimp integrated farming systems; crop variety updates to adapt to climate change and reduce emissions; high-standard farmland construction; and mechanized technologies that save labour and reduce labour intensity.

- Application of technologies related to reducing chemical inputs and pest and disease management, such as soil testing and formula fertilization; water-fertilizer integration; other precision agriculture technologies; organic fertilizer substitution for chemical fertilizers; green manure planting technologies for reducing chemical fertilizer and pesticide use; pest and disease monitoring and early warning systems; biological control, unified pest control and new plant protection technologies for green pest and disease management; mechanized side-deep fertilization and water-fertilizer integration technologies; and recycling of agricultural films and plastic packaging.

- Comprehensive landscape management, primarily including interventions related to rural environmental improvement and integrated management of mountains, forests, fields and roads, implemented by relevant industry departments within the project counties; these include land consolidation and ecological restoration (by local natural resources bureaus), forestry engineering and soil and water conservation (by local forestry bureaus), and restoration of acidified or heavy-metal-polluted degraded farmland and rural ecological environment management (by local agriculture and rural affairs bureaus).

48. When the areas for Core Indicators 3 and 4 are combined, the combined target has been achieved (combined target: 219,000 ha; combined total: 243,429).

49. Core Indicators 6 and 9 do not have mid-term targets.

50. The mid-term target for Core Indicator 11 for the number of direct beneficiaries (disaggregated by gender) as co-benefit of GEF investment is considered achieved, although more rigorous reporting will be required for the terminal evaluation (see Appendix 6).

51. The project achieved the mid-term targets for an increase in Capacity Scorecard results (see Appendix 6 and Appendix 10 for detailed explanations and recalculations by the MTR team). Because of changes to the project's first-batch demonstration sites, the baseline for this indicator requires revision (see Appendix 10).

MTR question 2.1: (Component 1) To what extent has the project contributed to *Development of integrated landscape management (ILM) systems in agricultural landscapes?*

Finding 5. The project has made Satisfactory progress towards Outcome 1.1 - Strengthened ILM policies, plans and capacities that promote participatory planning and enable national and provincial institutions across agricultural landscapes to meet their relevant sustainable agriculture, rural revitalization, land restoration and related climate and biodiversity targets.

52. Of the four indicators with mid-term targets under Outcome 1.1, all targets were achieved; also, there is one indicator without a mid-term target against which good progress is reported. The achievement rating for Outcome 1.1 is satisfactory (Appendix 6).

53. Progress is summarized below.

- Integrated landscape management (ILM) and restoration plans were developed for six cities/counties, incorporating landscape-level planning focused on sustainable land management and restoration (Indicator (a)). These were developed in a consistent format and in accordance with the requirements of ILM planning in China. The NPMO reported that 14 ILM and restoration plans were developed, although only six were verified to check achievement of the mid-term target.

- The project has undertaken extensive training in ILM of decision-makers and technical staff of national, provincial and local governments (Indicator (c)), exceeding the mid-term target.

- Also, the project has undertaken good-quality work establishing monitoring systems in the five provinces (Indicator (d)), which includes monitoring for integrated farmland landscape management. This monitoring is important and will enable long-term monitoring of the changes that result from the project's interventions. Given that many of the expected changes, such as GHG emissions reductions, will only be recorded over the long term, it is recommended that steps are taken to ensure that this monitoring continues after the GEF project ends.

- The mid-term target for Core Indicator 4 also applies to Outcome 1.1, and this was achieved.

54. Outcome 1.2 (Innovative payment for agro-ecological services incentive mechanisms in place for sustainable, safe, and smart agri-food systems) has only one indicator and this does not have a mid-term target.

MTR question 2.2: (Component 2) To what extent has the project contributed to *Promotion of sustainable food production practices and responsible agri-food value chains for the staple crops of rice, wheat and maize?*

Finding 6. The project has made satisfactory progress towards Outcome 2.1 - Sustainable agricultural practices deployed and scaled up that enhance ecological functions, improve soil quality and fertility, mitigate GHG emissions and establish resilient agricultural production models.

55. Of the six indicators with mid-term targets under Outcome 2.1, five were achieved and one was partially achieved; there is one indicator without a mid-term target – this is Core Indicator 6. The achievement rating for Outcome 2.1 is satisfactory (Appendix 6).

56. Work is underway towards developing new or improved standards for green agricultural production and/or climate-smart / organic / green / sustainable agriculture (Indicator (c)), although the mid-term target to develop two standards was not achieved.

57. Monitoring is in place to monitor chemical fertilizer reduction, pesticide reduction, soil organic matter content, and average yield per hectare in the project intervention area, and indicators (d), (e), (f) and (g) set targets for increases or decreases in these variables. Table 4 summarizes the monitoring results received for these indicators. Although there is high variability between counties in the results and reporting for some sites was not available (especially for Heilongjiang), the results show strong trends towards the targets for reduced chemical fertilizer use, reduced pesticide use, increased soil organic content, and increased average yield. Each of the four mid-term targets is considered achieved.

Table 4: Summary of monitoring results for Outcome 2.1 indicators (d), (e), (f) and (g); source: prepared by MTR team using data from NPMO

Outcome 2.1 indicator	Year	County/City, Province				
		Qingyun, Shandong	Liuhe, Jiangsu[2]	Rongjiang, Guizhou	Yushui, Jiangxi	Fujin, Heilongjiang
d) Chemical fertilizer reduction (t)	2021	39,235	29.6	2,399	669	87,058
Mid-term target: reduce by 5%	2024	36,926	26.4	2,400	641	N/A
[2] Liuhe County uses kg/mu	% change[1]	-5.9	-10.8	+0.1	-4.2	N/A
(e) Pesticide reduction (t)	2021	365	N/A	1.21	694	1,247
Mid-term target: reduce by 5%	2024	330	N/A	0.97	624	N/A
	% change[1]	-9.6	N/A	-19.8	-10.1	N/A
(f) Soil organic matter content (g/kg)	2021	17.8	18.6	13.5	28.8	43
Mid-term target: increase by 3%	2024	18.0	24.0	15.5	31.5	N/A
	% change[1]	+1.1	+28.8	+14.8	+9.4	N/A
(g) Average yield per hectare (10,000 t)	2021	52.9	39.8	7.2	29.9	319
Mid-term target: increase by 3%	2024	55.0	40.6	7.5	32.7	N/A
	% change[1]	+4.0	+2.0	+4.1	+9.3	N/A

[1] % change: negative value indicates decrease, positive value indicates increase
N/A: reporting for this variable not available

58. It should be noted that baselines for these indicators have not yet been formally set.

59. The mid-term target for Core Indicator 4 also applies to Outcome 3.1, and this was achieved.

Finding 7. The project has made satisfactory progress towards Outcome 2.2 - Responsible, market-oriented agricultural value chains implemented and scaled up, including through government-private enterprise-farmer cooperative partnerships and capacity building.

60. Of the four indicators with mid-term targets under Outcome 2.2, three were achieved and one was assessed as partially achieved because reporting against the mid-term target was incomplete. The achievement rating for Outcome 2.2 is satisfactory (Appendix 6).

61. The project has undertaken extensive farmer training activities, including through online live broadcasts, field classrooms, and technical training courses involving provincial and county-level experts (Indicator (a)), and the mid-term target is achieved.

62. The MTR team received some reporting showing increased farmer incomes from project-supported agri-food value chains (Indicator (b)), and the MTR team heard several anecdotal reports that farmer incomes had been increased. However, insufficient evidence was provided to link this to the project's interventions and the reporting received was incomplete (Appendix 6), therefore the indicator is partially achieved. Also, a baseline for this indicator has not been formally set.

63. The mid-term target for the number of new agri-food brands certified has been exceeded (Indicator (c)) – the project has been very active in promoting brand certification to farmers and cooperatives as an approach to enhancing agri-food value chains.

64. The project has met the mid-term target for the number of farmer cooperatives with increased capacity to support responsible value chains (Indicator (d)). The proactive approach to working with cooperatives and building their capacity has been a key to the success of the project's work in building sustainable and replicable models for holistic landscape-scale management and agricultural transformation.

MTR question 2.3: (Component 3) To what extent has the project contributed to *Conservation and restoration of agroecosystems and biodiversity?*

Finding 8. The project has made moderately satisfactory progress towards Outcome 3.1 - Enhanced conservation and restoration of agroecosystems and biodiversity.

65. Of the two indicators with mid-term targets under Outcome 3.1, both were partially achieved; also, one indicator does not have a mid-term target – this is Core Indicator 6. The achievement rating for Outcome 3.1 is moderately satisfactory (Appendix 6).

66. Little reporting has been received against the species and ecosystems indicators that were to be determined as part of Output 1.1.2 (Outcome 3.1 Indicator (a)). It will be necessary to agree on indicators and the methodology that will be used and to provide clear reporting against both sub-targets at the time of the terminal evaluation. Also, baselines for this indicator have not been formally set.

67. The mid-term target for Core Indicator 3 also applies to Outcome 3.1, and this was partially achieved.

MTR question 2.4: (Component 4) To what extent has the project contributed to *Knowledge management and M&E?*

Finding 9. The project has made satisfactory progress towards Outcome 4.1 - Effective knowledge management/information exchange and M&E.

68. Of the two indicators with mid-term targets under Outcome 4.1, both have been achieved; all indicators under Outcome 4.1 have mid-term targets. The achievement rating for Outcome 4.1 is satisfactory (Appendix 6).

69. The project has met the mid-term target to establish at least one new information dissemination platform (Indicator (a)), with a remote training platform established that has 10 technical training courses that are publicly available.

70. The project is also considered to have met the target for the number of people reached by information dissemination and knowledge exchange (Indicator (b)), although the evidence for this was not strong. The methodology to calculate the number of people reached relied

on an assumption that 10 percent of users spend "a relatively long time" browsing the remote training platform and could be considered beneficiaries, although no justification of this assumption was received. This methodology only gives an approximation, not an accurate measure. Also, no gender-disaggregated data were available from this method. More rigorous reporting will be required for the terminal evaluation (Appendix 6).

MTR question 2.5: (Component 4) Are there any unintended results?

Finding 10. There are no known unintended results.

71. MARA and the NPMO have followed the project design closely and there are no known unintended results.

MTR question 2.2: *(Likelihood of impact)* Are there any barriers or other risks that may prevent future progress towards and the eventual achievement of *Innovative transformation of China's food production systems and agro-ecological landscapes towards sustainability*?

Finding 11. The project has made good progress addressing the barriers identified in the project design, although there are barriers and challenges to scaling up the results.

72. The main barriers and risks to future progress relate to the likelihood of scaling up the results in additional provinces and counties. The project has made good progress addressing the four identified barriers (described in Section 2), although the barriers are still in place to some extent, as outlined below.

- Barrier 1: The gaps in the enabling policies and planning frameworks have been effectively addressed at the national level and at the levels of the five target provinces and 14 target counties. This barrier remains for the provinces and counties that are not involved in the project and this should be addressed in scaling-up initiatives.

- Barrier 2: The limited capacity and mechanisms at the local level have been addressed in the five target provinces and 14 target counties, although this barrier remains for the provinces and counties that are not involved in the project and this should be addressed in scaling-up initiatives.

- Barrier 3: The project's demonstration activities are building knowledge and experience in market incentives and engagement of smallholder farmers in value chains supportive of sustainable production and land management. It will be necessary to document and share these to enable them to be applied in scaling-up initiatives.

- Barrier 4: The project is effectively addressing the lack of platforms and knowledge sharing and exchange mechanisms, with one knowledge platform developed and at least one more to be established before project end. The project should ensure that these are suitable to support replication and scaling-up initiatives.

73. In addition, the following challenges will need to be addressed to facilitate widespread scaling-up beyond the target provinces and counties:

- It will be necessary to convince farmers and cooperatives of the benefits and advantages of the new approaches.

- Practices may not all be economically beneficial when the GEF project is no longer financially supporting inputs and construction costs (including capacity building). A funding source is likely to be needed to address this.

- It will be necessary to document and transfer the project's lessons learned about brand, marketing and value chain development.

- Partnerships with local enterprises and cooperatives are vital to the project's design and implementation and will need to be fostered in each new location.

74. As described under Finding 17, the project design has little substantive content around scaling up after the project ends.

4.3. Efficiency

EFFICIENCY RATING: SATISFACTORY

MTR question 3.1: To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently, cost-effectively, and management been able to adapt to any changing conditions to improve the efficiency of project implementation?

Sub-questions:

Have the specific features related to OPIM modality been taken into consideration during project preparation (e.g. subcontract and procurement procedures of the OP, etc.)

How efficient was the contracting and procurement process during the first half of the project (involvement of BH, LTO)?

Finding 12. The project has generally been implemented efficiently, with management responding effectively to significant impacts of COVID-19 restrictions.

75. COVID-19 pandemic restrictions had a very significant impact on this project, from project commencement in mid-2021 until mid-2023.

76. As described under Finding 17, the project is complex, both technically and logistically. This means that the start-up period during COVID-19 was particularly challenging for this project. Despite these challenges, MARA made steady progress with project start-up after the Operational Partners Agreement (OPA) was signed in June 2021, with the first PSC meeting and the Project Inception Workshop held on 17 December 2021, and the NPMO formed and the cross-sector coordination mechanism established during early 2022.

77. Management adapted well to the challenging conditions under COVID-19 restrictions. This included rescheduling the construction of the project's demonstration sites, reducing the first "batch" to be constructed from eight sites to six. Also in response to COVID-19, project management effectively adapted the way of working and combining online and offline approaches, and strengthened the role of local experts in providing project guidance. Nevertheless, there were significant impacts on progress during the first two years and there are still very substantial results to deliver, especially finalizing construction of the second batch of eight demonstration areas.

78. A significant challenge in efficiency is the low GEF disbursement at mid-term (approximately 28 percent disbursed), which is discussed under MTR question 5.3.

79. This MTR is being undertaken approximately four years into the six-year project. There are two years remaining, approximately USD 5 million unspent, and significant activities still to be implemented. The MTR team considers that a one-year no-cost extension would enable a considered approach to be brought to concluding the project and disbursing GEF funds, which would significantly improve the efficiency of the project at project completion.

80. There was a three-month gap between CEO endorsement on 4 March 2021 and the OPA being finalized in June 2021. This is a relatively short period between these milestones for FAO–GEF projects in China.

81. The project document takes into consideration the specific features relating to the OPIM modality. In particular, the identified role of the FAO budget holder includes: i) managing OPIM for results, including monitoring of risks and overall compliance with the OPA provisions; ii) reviewing and clearing financial and progress reports received from the Operational Partner (OP) and certifying requests for funds; iii) reviewing and clearing budget revisions and annual work plan and budgets; iv) ensuring implementation of the Risk Mitigation and Assurance Plan; and v) following up and ensuring that the OP implements all actions and recommendations agreed upon during assurance activities.

82. Regarding procurement, the conditions in the project document are that procurement will follow the OP's rules and regulations for the procurement of supplies, equipment and services. The OP draws up a procurement plan as part of the supporting documentation to each request for funds submitted to FAO. The procurement plan is updated every quarter and submitted to FAO BH and LTO for clearance. The OPA also includes detailed provisions relating to procurement.

83. As described under Finding 17, the OP efficiently implemented the required recruitment and procurement, with all key roles and consultants filled in a timely manner.

MTR question 3.2: To what extent has the project built on existing agreements, initiatives, data sources, synergies, and complementarities with other projects and partnerships, etc., and avoided duplication of similar activities by other groups and initiatives?

Finding 13. Project design was based on an exhaustive analysis of baseline initiatives, partnerships and data; during implementation, interaction occurred with other projects relating to agro-biodiversity conservation.

84. The project document provided a highly detailed analysis of baseline initiatives and projects that underpin the project, including national government policies and programmes (see also under Finding 2), financial mechanisms to support sustainable agriculture, standards and certifications, and provincial policies and programmes for the four original target provinces.

85. The intent of the project was to "build on the experiences and lessons learned of these numerous government plans and programmes at the national and local levels. It will aim to scale up good practices and technologies that have been tested, and go beyond demonstration areas to achieve sustainable production at scale" (project document p. 38).

86. The project document also summarized FAO's existing and proposed role in supporting the Government of China in relevant areas.

87. The project document also identified the following ongoing GEF projects that the project would coordinate with closely:

- UNDP-led GEF-6 "PRC-GEF Partnership Program for Sustainable Agricultural Development" (C-SAP) and its child project "Conservation and sustainable use of indigenous agricultural genetic diversity in Hubei". The project will strengthen incentive mechanisms for agricultural biodiversity and will demonstrate, in particular, incentive mechanisms for rouge rice in Yunyan County, wild kiwi in Wudang Mountain City, and Matou goat in Yunxi County of Hubei. The GEF-7 project will collaborate with this project to capture lessons learned and exchange knowledge on agricultural biodiversity conservation.

- Furthermore, in Shandong, Hubei, Jiangsu and Jiangxi provinces, the GEF-7 project will exchange with the UNDP GEF-6 project "Phase out of Endosulfan in China". Although the GEF-6 project is focused on cotton and tobacco, the GEF-7 project can benefit from the systems and integrated pest management mechanisms and practices established by this project in the target provinces.

- In Jiangxi Province, the GEF-7 project will exchange with FAO's GEF-5 project "Piloting Provincial-level Wetland Protected Area System in Jiangxi Province (Poyang Lake)". Although not implemented in the same counties, the two projects have indirect linkages as the GEF-7 project aims to reduce agricultural pollution in river systems upstream of Poyang Lake. When developing biodiversity indicators, the project will seek inputs from the GEF-5 project.

- In Jiangxi and Guizhou, linkages will be established with IUCN's GEF-6 project "Building Climate Resilient Green Infrastructure: Enhancing Ecosystem Services of Planted Forests in China through Forest Landscape Restoration and Governance Innovation", which is part of the global program The Restoration Initiative. Although not working in the same landscapes/counties, the two projects can exchange lessons learned in particular with regard to technologies and species selection for ecological restoration and agroforestry.

88. Finally, the project document analyses baseline and proposed activities and priorities for the private sector, universities and research institutions.

89. Through this exhaustive analysis, the project design avoided duplication of similar activities by other groups and initiatives.

90. Throughout implementation, the project has worked closely with the GEF-6 project "On-farm Conservation and Sustainable Use of Genetic Diversity of Crops Originated in China", also being executed by MARA. During the COVID-19 restrictions there was little interaction with other projects; since COVID-19 restrictions were eased the project has had some interaction with the UNDP C-SAP child projects in Hubei and Hainan, sharing knowledge around agro-biodiversity conservation.

MTR question 3.3: Is the project cost-effective? How does the project cost/time versus output/outcomes equation compare to that of similar projects?

Finding 14. The cost effectiveness of the total project expenditure is considered high and the timeliness is moderate.

91. As described under Finding 20, approximately half of the committed co-financing for the project has been realized. For the total project expenditure (GEF and co-financing) of

approximately USD 31 million, cost effectiveness is considered high relative to similar projects in terms of cost/time versus outputs/outcomes, given that extensive activities have been delivered across six landscape-scale demonstration areas in five provinces and covering approximately 239 000 ha of land, that highly functional networks and partnerships have been built, and that a detailed monitoring system has been established (as described under Section 3.4 Effectiveness).

92. The timeliness of the project implementation is moderate. Originally scheduled as a six-year project, there are approximately two years remaining, with more than 70 percent of the GEF allocation yet to be spent and major results still to be delivered. The timeliness is considered moderate, because the main reason for the delays and low expenditure was COVID-19 impacts.

4.4. Sustainability

SUSTAINABILITY RATING: LIKELY

MTR question 4.1: *(Sustainability)* What is the likelihood that the project results will continue to be useful or will remain after the end of the project? What are the key risks that may affect the sustainability of the project results and benefits (consider financial, socio-economic, institutional and governance, and environmental)? What are the main risks to the achievement of environmental benefits (GEBs) supported by GEF financing?

Did the OPIM modality contribute to ensure major ownership and sustainability of the project results?

Did the OPIM modality contribute to increase national, sub-regional and sub-regional ownership to support better sustainability of results? And to strengthen capacities of regional, sub-regional and/or national entities?

Finding 15. The project has undertaken a lot of excellent work that contributes to the likelihood of the project results being sustainable after the end of the project, especially by empowering provincial- and county-level stakeholders, establishing cross-departmental coordination mechanisms, conducting extensive capacity building, closely involving farmer cooperatives, developing county-level ILM and restoration plans, and including knowledge management as a key project component.

93. The project has made many positive contributions to the likelihood of sustainability, including:

- The delivery modality and management arrangements have empowered experts, institutions and officials at the provincial and county levels. This has included incorporating local knowledge and expertise into the technologies being developed and the monitoring systems established, while ensuring technical standards are met. During interviews, provincial- and county-level officials frequently commented favourably on the high level of support that the NPMO and national experts provided during this process.

- Most provincial and county government officials interviewed indicated that they would continue to support the project's interventions approaches after the GEF project ends.

- Cross-departmental coordination mechanisms at national and provincial levels have been established and have improved coordination and collaboration.

- Extensive capacity building has been undertaken, for decision-makers and technical staff of national, provincial and local governments and for farmers and farmer cooperatives.

- Farmer cooperatives have been closely involved in all demonstration sites and this involvement will continue, providing certainty to farmers and securing sustainable access to the large areas of farmland required for the landscape approaches being implemented.

- Development of county-level ILM and restoration plans mean that the strategic context and required actions have been developed and are owned by the county-level stakeholders.

- Knowledge management is an important component to the project (Component 4) and the project is disseminating knowledge to experts, decision-makers, officials, farmers and local communities. Much of this information will continue to be available after the project on the platforms established by the project.

94. Some risks to sustainability are discussed below, although most are not considered significant and sustainability of the results at project sites is considered likely.

Financial risks to sustainability

95. The main financial risk is that provincial and county governments will stop supporting the project after it ends. If this occurs, it is unlikely that cooperatives, farmers and other local stakeholders would continue the project's results independently. However, this risk is considered low, because all provincial and county governments indicated that they would continue to support the existing sites and the associated cooperatives and farmers.

Sociopolitical risks to sustainability

96. The cooperatives are the key to sociopolitical sustainability, providing the link between the experts and government bureaus and the implementation by farmers of the project's interventions across landscapes. If the cooperatives did not continue to be involved, then it would be very difficult for the project to continue the large-scale activities that are underway. The MTR team considers the risk of cooperatives ending their involvement in the project to be low, because they have shown their commitment through contributing co-financing; their business models are based on working sustainably with farmers on developing value chains and marketing strategies; and during interviews they showed a strong commitment to continuing after the project ends.

Institutional and governance risks to sustainability

97. The level of ownership of the project by government agencies is very high. Also, the cross-departmental coordination mechanisms have improved governance arrangements and increased the likelihood of the results being sustainable.

Environmental risks to sustainability

98. Climate change and extreme weather events (such as severe rainfall events or drought) represent a threat to all crops and agri-ecological systems, including those established under this project. This risk was analysed in detail in Section 5 of the project document, and the project design mitigates this by developing innovative and climate-smart approaches to crop production and restoration that are aimed at increasing the resilience of production systems and farmer livelihoods. The project applies adaptive management

to adjust to new developments in the target counties, underpinned by the detailed monitoring systems that have been established.

99. There are no other identified environmental risks to the project's sustainability. The project is focused on developing environmentally friendly practices, such as reducing chemical pesticide and fertilizer use and reducing GHG emissions.

Finding 16. The OPIM modality is contributing to an increase in national, provincial and local ownership to support better sustainability of results.

100. The project is being executed by MARA under the OPIM modality. Accordingly, MARA is responsible as OP for the day-to-day management of project results in accordance with the Operational Partnership Agreement (OPA) signed with FAO. In addition, provincial-level project management and implementation support is delivered by the five provincial Departments of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (in Shandong, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Guizhou and Heilongjiang Provinces), and county-level project coordination committees/project management offices (PMOs) have been established in the counties where the target sites are located.

101. The role of FAO is to provide oversight as the GEF Implementing Agency.

102. Accordingly, the national, provincial and county-level bureaus are responsible for delivering a complex internationally funded project and are doing this to a high standard. Through this, OPIM is contributing to increased national, provincial and county-level ownership of the project. Furthermore, this contributes significantly to the likelihood of sustainability, because these agencies will have responsibility for the relevant activities when the GEF project ends.

4.5. Factors affecting progress

MTR question 5.1: *(Project design)* Is the project design appropriate for delivering the expected outcomes? Is the logic coherent and clear? To what extent are the project's objectives and components, clear, practical and feasible within the timeframe?

Finding 17. The project is complex but well designed, with clear and coherent logic and a focus on sustainability of the results; however, there is little substantive content on how results will be scaled up after the project.

103. Project design was based on a clear situation analysis (identifying the main relevant environmental challenges and the barriers to transforming sustainable food production systems), a clear and practical project objective, and feasible interventions to address the barriers and achieve the objective.

104. The project is technically complex, because it applies a holistic approach involving integrated planning, incentive systems, implementation of innovative, sustainable agricultural practices and value chains, ecological restoration and conservation, in order to address the identified barriers and achieve a more sustainable food production system in the target landscapes. The project is also logistically complex, involving national-, provincial- and county-level institutional arrangements, recruitment of high-level experts, establishment of cross-sector coordination, and the active engagement of farmer cooperatives, companies and farmers.

105. The project document describes the following five "entry points" to achieve transformation of the food production system: (i) policy change, leading to a transformation of incentive systems in staple crop production (such as by revisiting agricultural subsidies with a focus on sustainability); (ii) integrated, landscape-level planning enabling stakeholders to reconcile objectives of production and resource conservation; (iii) capacity and knowledge, improved technical standards (national, province and industry-wide), and innovative technologies, enabling farmers and other local stakeholders to switch from practices that degrade soil and biodiversity to practices that enhance and restore soil fertility while sustaining productivity; (iv) increased private sector support and commitment to sustainability across the target commodities' value chains; and (v) partnerships that support replication and scaling.

106. Despite the project's complexity, the project design effectively identified practical and feasible interventions under the project's four components. With a clear results framework and indicators that meet the SMART criteria, the project's readiness for delivery was high. Furthermore, key aspects of the design, such as cross-departmental coordination, the engagement of national and provincial experts and the role of farmer cooperatives, have been central to the project's successful implementation.

107. The outcomes and outputs under the four components are designed to be interlinked and iterative. Outcomes under Components 2 and 3 are intended to provide evidence and experiences to inform policy reform under Component 1. In turn, policy and planning outcomes and partnerships with private sector actors under Component 1 are intended to support implementation and scaling up of sustainable practices and restoration under Components 2 and 3. Knowledge-sharing mechanisms and platforms under Component 4 are further intended to enhance replication and scaling.

108. The project design has a focus on sustainability of the project's results at the project sites. However, regarding scaling up of the results beyond the project counties and provinces, the project design has little substantive content around this (although Section 7 of the project document discusses aspects of the project that are intended to contribute to scaling up) and there are significant challenges to scaling up (as described in Finding 11).

MTR question 5.2 (Project management) To what extent did the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs effectively discharge its role and responsibilities related to the management and administration of the project? What have been the main challenges in relation to the management and administration of the project and what changes are needed to improve delivery in the second half of the project?

Finding 18. MARA was highly effective in discharging its role and responsibilities related to the management and administration of the project and has shown very strong ownership of the project.

109. MARA is showing very strong ownership of the project, is results focused and committed to building sustainability of the project's results. MARA has also successfully leveraged the GEF funding to deliver high-quality results and build commitment and enthusiasm across the project's stakeholders, including government departments and officials and farmer cooperatives.

110. As described under Finding 12, the project was significantly affected by restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic, from commencement in mid-2021 until mid-2023. MARA

responded appropriately to this and attempted to speed up implementation, as documented in the relevant PIRs and PPRs.

111. Despite the challenges of COVID-19, MARA made steady progress with project start-up and the OPA was signed, with the first PSC meeting and the Project Inception Workshop held on 17 December 2021, and the NPMO formed and the cross-sector coordination mechanism established during early 2022.

112. MARA also effectively established the project management arrangements required by the project document, with national and provincial experts engaged and provincial and county-level PMOs established. The MTR team found that there was a strong sense of teamwork among those involved in the project, and that different government agencies and officials had a good understanding of the project's aims and of their role in the project.

113. MARA's recruitment of experts was highly effective – the MTR team was impressed by the high level of technical expertise at national, provincial and county levels.

114. The relationship between MARA officials and FAO officials is constructive and mutually respectful. The requirements under the OPA were met satisfactorily. There were no shortcomings identified with regard to MARA fulfilling its role as OP.

115. MARA effectively discharged its role and responsibilities to manage the project's day-to-day activities and to ensure the appropriate use of funds, procurement and contracting of goods. To date, 42 consulting services have been procured. Procurement is executed by the NPMO, in accordance with the project document and the OPA. There were no reports of any difficulties in the contractual arrangements between MARA and contracted organizations or individuals.

116. Decision-making has been transparent, with PPRs, PIRs and PSC minutes providing clear documentation of progress, challenges, and changes to implementation. MARA provides quality financial reports and presents calls for funds to FAO in a timely manner.

117. In accordance with the project document, annual work plans and budgets are developed based on the multi-year work plan (Annex H of the project document) and the previous year's plan and progress, and these are reviewed and approved by the PSC before being submitted to FAO for approval.

118. The PSC has meet four times and is effectively fulfilling its oversight role to ensure that the project is implemented, outputs are delivered and resources are mobilized and used as per project design and in keeping with relevant policies and agreed standards.

119. This complex project requires coordination at many levels – national, provincial and county – and between many partners, experts, contractors and across 14 project sites. To this stage, coordination by the OP, NPMO and project staff has been very effective. However, as the project enters the final phase and construction of the eight final demonstration sites, new county-level stakeholders will become involved. The MTR team recommends that a special PSC meeting/workshop be held, to plan the final phase of the project and ensure that the required coordination is in place. This should be associated with provincial and county-level workshops to involve them in planning and ensure that they understand and have ownership of the remainder of the project and their roles.

120. Also, the successful management of this project relies strongly on provincial- and county-level bureaus and officials undertaking significant project management and coordination activities. This is a significant workload and is done using in-kind co-financing, not GEF funds. Most interviewees were confident with this role and stated that their bureau would allocate sufficient resources. However, some interviewees expressed concern at the workload and questioned whether sufficient funds would be available. It is recommended that a review is conducted of the resourcing requirements for the remainder of the project, including an assessment of the needs of each provincial and county office, to identify whether additional support is needed to ensure effective delivery (such as through co-financing allocations).

MTR question 5.3 *(Financial management and co-financing)* What have been the financial management challenges of the project and to what extent has pledged co-financing been delivered?

121. The most recent available data on project expenditure is from the Mid-Term Review Summary Report and is shown in Table 5, broken down by project component. At 31 December 2024, 27.6 percent of the OP's portion of the GEF allocation was spent. Expenditure under Component 1 and project management is satisfactory (40.8 percent and 41.3 percent respectively), whereas expenditure under Components 2, 3 and 4 and M&E is very low. Reporting on the FAO's portion of the GEF allocation was not yet available.

Table 5: Expenditure of OP's portion of GEF funds by component (at 31 December 2024; source: NPMO)

Component	Budgeted cost at design (USD)	Actual cost/ expenditure (USD)	%
Component 1	1,423,375	581,065	40.8
Component 2	2,503,125	603,610	24.1
Component 3	1,376,125	318,766	23.2
Component 4	1,204,262	275,087	22.8
Project management costs	288,185	119,092	41.3
M&E	220,000	37,178	16.9
Overall project total	7,015,072	1,934,798	27.6

Finding 19. The main financial challenge for the project is low expenditure of the GEF allocation, with approximately 28 percent disbursed to 31 December 2024; this is mainly due to the impacts of COVID-19 restrictions.

122. The main financial challenge and the reason for the low GEF disbursement relate to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on various activities, especially international exchanges, some national and provincial training, on-site inspections in project areas, and construction of demonstration areas. This was the reason for rescheduling the construction of demonstration sites (described under Finding 12), with construction of the first batch of six demonstration areas being underway for two years and construction of the second batch of eight demonstration areas starting in 2025. This will involve substantial expenditure, especially under Components 2 and 3.

123. Under M&E, it should be noted that the combined MTR and terminal evaluation costs are approximately USD 114 000, and no expenditure against these items had occurred at the

time of the financial report. Also, USD 75 000 was budgeted for the Project Inception Workshop, which was not fully spent. Expenditure against M&E is therefore considered satisfactory.

124. Approximately USD 5 million remains to be spent in the remaining project period. This is a significant amount to be spent in less than two years. A project extension would enable the remaining funds to be spent over a longer period, ensuring that expenditure can be carefully planned and not rushed.

Finding 20. Approximately half of the committed co-financing has materialized to 30 June 2025; government and private-sector co-financing has been central to the project's success and achievements, and FAO's co-financing has represented important contributions to project implementation and management and technical input to the project.

125. Appendix 7 provides the co-financing table for the project, showing reported materialized co-financing of USD 28 853 876, which is 51 percent of the total committed co-financing in the project document (USD 56 500 000). Achieving approximately half of the committed co-financing at mid-term is a very good outcome.

126. Co-financing from MARA and the provincial bureaus has been vital for putting in place the management structures required for the project's success and has also made important contributions to various aspects of project activities, including the construction of the demonstration areas, high-standard farmland renovation, ecological corridor and ecological ditch construction, and road improvements. Private sector co-financing has also been important. Cooperatives and companies have been central to the project and their contributions have included in-kind person time, marketing and branding activities, and farmer collaboration.

127. The materialized co-financing includes an FAO contribution at mid-term of USD 250 000, which is 83 percent of its committed contribution. This represents important contributions to project management, meeting requirements under the OPA, and providing technical input to the project (described further under Finding 21).

MTR question 5.4 (*Project oversight, implementation role*) To what extent has FAO delivered on project identification, concept preparation, appraisal, preparation, approval and start-up, oversight and supervision?

Finding 21. The FAO has effectively delivered on its responsibilities as GEF Agency for oversight and implementation.

128. The project identification and preparation for this project were good and the project design was very good, with a high level of readiness. In addition to its role as GEF Agency, FAO contributed technical expertise and experience to the project development.

129. As described under Finding 18, project start-up was efficient after the OPA was signed, despite the significant difficulties faced due to COVID-19. This reflects good collaboration between FAO and MARA.

130. Positive feedback was received about FAO's oversight and support, indicating that FAO staff were responsive and addressed challenges to implementation. The Project Task Force meets regularly, and a good level of support has been available from the FAO China and regional staff. There were few on-site oversight visits by FAO personnel during the COVID-

19 restrictions. During this time, FAO staff maintained regular contact with FAO China and the NPMO via online communication. After COVID-19 restrictions eased, FAO oversight visits resumed – the MTR team viewed back-to-office reports for five oversight missions between March 2023 and April 2025.

131. Risk management through the annual PIRs is effective. Six project risks with associated mitigation actions were identified in the project document, and these risks are reported on annually under "Progress on mitigation actions" in the PIRs. The impact of COVID-19 was identified as a high risk in the project document, with five sub-risks each with mitigation actions. This approach of proactively managing COVID-19 as a project risk was good practice.

MTR question 5.5 (Partnerships and stakeholder engagement) Have other actors, such as civil society, indigenous population or private sector, been sufficiently involved in project design and implementation, and what has been the effect of their involvement/non-involvement on the project results? What are strengths and challenges of the project's partnerships?

Finding 22. Partnerships with the private sector and among national, provincial and local experts and practitioners have been strengths of the project; there will be a challenge ensuring that funding is available to engage staff to coordinate activities and to engage the experts to guide scaling-up interventions.

132. Partnerships with the private sector have been central to design and implementation and are a strength of the project. As described in the project document, local enterprises and cooperatives in the target areas support farmers with production, processing and marketing of the project's target crops. They support agricultural mechanization, supply of inputs, development of market linkages and supply chains. These local companies work closely with county and township governments and receive targeted support and subsidies from government to support agricultural production. Some companies help farmers to implement green policies such as green manure, crop straw reutilization, organic fertilizer production, and recycling of agricultural input waste. Others have established agricultural product supervision and traceability platforms. They are an important means for smallholder farmers to generate income from their land. For this project, they are a vital enabler for the project's aims for holistic, landscape-scale interventions and the project has successfully formed partnerships in the target counties (see Appendix 9 for a list of cooperatives that partnered with the project to increase capacity to support responsible value chains).

133. As part of these local-level partnerships, county- and city-level governments are also vital. These local officials have close professional relationships with enterprises and cooperatives, which includes coordinating support programs and subsidies and identifying opportunities in accordance with government policies.

134. The project has built an active and supportive partnership of experts and practitioners, which is also a strength of the project. National-level experts provide oversight and support to the target provinces and counties. The MTR team heard that this support was responsive and respectful, with requests for advice and document review being addressed in a timely manner. The project also engaged provincial-level experts with high levels of technical knowledge and credibility in the field in the province. These provincial experts have close working relationships with the national experts. Finally, the project has engaged county-

level experts and practitioners (including government officials assigned to project tasks through co-financing) to ensure that implementation uses local expertise, skills and networks. These county-level project stakeholders have close working relationships with the provincial experts. The MTR team was impressed with the high-quality technical expertise at the county level. This implementation model is working well, with the partnerships ensuring that the project is efficiently guided by national, provincial and local expertise and skills.

135. The main challenge of the partnerships is the need for funding to engage staff to coordinate activities and to engage the experts to guide the interventions. This should be considered when planning scaling-up initiatives.

136. As described under Finding 28, there are many people from ethnic minority groups in the target counties in Guizhou and these groups have been sufficiently involved in project design and implementation. A result of this involvement is that they have been the main beneficiaries of the project in Guizhou.

MTR question 5.6 *(Communication and knowledge management)* How effective has the project been in communicating and promoting its key messages and results to partners, stakeholders, and a general audience? How can this be improved?

Finding 23. Knowledge management is a focus of the project's design and implementation; generally, communication to core project stakeholders is considered to have been effective, although it is not clear whether communication with individual smallholder farmers and with the general public was effective.

137. Knowledge management is a focus of project design and Outcome 4.1 is "Effective knowledge management/information exchange and M&E". Project implementation has followed the project design and the two relevant indicators have been met at mid-term (see Appendix 6). Some highlights of knowledge management include:

- A remote training platform was established, with 10 recorded online training courses available. Course topics were launched on online learning platforms such as the China Rural Distance Education Website, Yunshang Zhinong APP, and Nongguang Online APP. There have been approximately 1.62 million visits to the online training platform.

- Project-related activities and promotional reports were disseminated through other platforms, including the Website of the Rural Energy And Environment Agency of the MARA, provincial agricultural and rural affairs department websites, Xinhua Daily, Tencent, and China Agriculture Network.

- Various print media promotional materials were produced, including project popularization brochures and demonstration area display boards. The MTR team viewed several examples of the printed brochures and display boards. The display boards were prominent at the demonstration sites, provided detailed information on the project and the specific intervention, and clearly acknowledged FAO and GEF.

- Project representatives actively engaged in international knowledge exchanges, including:

    - a visit to Italy for international exchanges on ecological low-carbon agricultural technologies;

- presentation of Chinese experiences at the FOLUR IP Launch Event held on the sidelines of the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26);
- delivery of an online keynote speech to the FOLUR Side Event at the 50th Session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS);
- attendance and knowledge sharing at the 2024 FOLUR Regional Dialogue in Hanoi, Vietnam;
- attendance at an International Seminar on Ecological Low-Carbon Agriculture and Project Training Course in Yancheng City, Jiangsu Province;
- management personnel from project areas in various provinces participated in the Asia-Pacific online exchange seminar on nature-based solutions conducted by the FOLUR Global Platform;
- online attendance at the first south-south exchange seminar on low-carbon rice in 2025, organized by the FOLUR China project; and
- FAO staff attended the FOLUR forums in 2025 on sustainable maize and wheat in Istanbul and advancing restoration in Malaysia.

- These knowledge-sharing activities mostly occurred after COVID-19 restrictions were eased.
- Also under the FOLUR program, the NPMO and relevant project staff have been invited to join the Food And Agricultural Commodity Systems (FACS) online community, where they can receive various information about FOLUR projects in other countries and share relevant information.
- Four management and technical training courses were organized, attended by local agricultural management departments, project technical teams, enterprises, and cooperatives.
- Project management personnel participated in exchange and discussion activities between the project's provinces to share experiences and build a sense of teamwork.
- Project personnel carried out project exchanges with other GEF projects, especially the GEF-6 project that was implemented by MARA, as described under Finding 13.

138. The main communication channels used by the project are those described above. There is no assessment available of the effectiveness of the project's communication. The MTR team feels that communication with core project stakeholders – staff and contracted experts, government officials at all levels, and enterprises and cooperatives – has been effective, because the level of awareness of the project's aims, activities and innovative approaches was high during interviews and site visits. However, it is not clear whether communication with individual smallholder farmers was effective, because most farmers interviewed were also active cooperative members. Also, It is not clear whether the project has succeeded in communicating with the general public, because no data have been provided on the reach of the general communications that the project conducted.

Although the remote training platform received 1.62 million visitors, most of these are likely to be stakeholders with an existing interest in the subject matter being promoted.

MTR question 5.6 *(M&E design)* Is the M&E plan practical and sufficient?

Finding 24. The M&E system at the time of project endorsement was generally practical and sufficient, with the project's technical monitoring delivered through Output 1.1.4 and funded from outside the M&E budget; six indicators did not have baselines in the endorsed results framework, and these are to be developed during implementation.

139. Section 9 of the project document provided a detailed M&E program for the project.

140. The M&E program includes the standard FAO and GEF requirements and is clear about responsibilities and timing. The M&E program committed to the following specific reports: (i) Project Inception Report; (ii) Annual Work Plan and Budget; (iii) regular Project Progress Report (PPR); (iv) annual Project Implementation Review (PIR); (v) various technical reports; (vi) co-financing reports; and (vii) Terminal Report. In addition, assessment of relevant GEF-7 Core Indicators and the Capacity Development Scorecard against the baselines (completed during project preparation) were required at mid-term and final project evaluation.

141. The M&E program included a "Project Monitoring and Evaluation Plan", which included budget allocations for M&E activities from GEF funds and co-financing. This included provisions from the GEF allocation for the following M&E activities: an inception workshop (with no allocation for preparing the project inception report); annual PSC meetings; PPRs; PIRs; the MTR; and the final evaluation. The M&E budget does not include provisions for technical monitoring of project results, because the project includes a major technical monitoring aspect that is funded separately through Output 1.1.4 ("Monitoring systems for sustainable food systems and land use established (or existing systems improved) and implemented"). There is no provision for auditing or preparation of a self-assessment report at terminal evaluation.

142. The total M&E budget from the GEF allocation is USD 334 378, which is 4.7 percent of the GEF grant; this is an appropriate allocation, given that the technical monitoring under Output 1.1.4 is funded outside the M&E budget. The budget includes an allocation of USD 75 000 for the inception workshop, which the MTR team considers to be excessive. Otherwise, the M&E plan is considered appropriate and sufficient.

143. In the results framework in the project document, six indicators do not yet have a baseline and this is to be determined during implementation. These indicators are for chemical fertilizer use, pesticide use, soil organic matter and average yield per hectare under Outcome 2.1; for farmer incomes under Outcome 2.2; and for species and ecosystems indicators under Outcome 3.1. The work on developing the monitoring system under Output 1.1.4 is intended to contribute to establishing these baselines.

144. Some targets in the results framework were increased after the project started to reflect the addition of Heilongjiang to the project's scope. These changes were approved by the PSC in December 2021 and noted under "Minor project amendments" in the 2022 PIR. These processes followed were appropriate. In summary, the changes involved increasing the target for the area of land restored by 10 000 hectares; increasing the target for the area of landscape under improved practices by 30 000 hectares; increasing the greenhouse

gas emissions target by 720 000 tCO_2-e; and increasing the number of direct beneficiaries as co-benefit of GEF investment by 20 000 people.

145. With the exception of those indicators with no baselines established, all indicators and targets in the results framework meet the criteria of being specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound (SMART).

146. The results framework contains four gender-disaggregated targets. This is described further under Section 4.6 (Cross-cutting priorities – MTR question 6.1).

MTR question 5.7 *(M&E implementation)* Does the M&E system operate as per the M&E plan? Has information been gathered in a systematic manner? To what extent has information generated by the M&E system during project implementation been used to adapt and improve project planning and execution, achievement of outcomes and ensure sustainability?

Finding 25. The M&E system is generally operating as per the M&E plan and information has been gathered in a systematic manner; information generated by the M&E system has been used to inform and improve project planning and execution; baselines have not been set for the six indicators in the results framework that required baselines to be set during implementation; also, the monitoring protocols and provision of evidence for some indicators need improvement.

147. As described under Finding 24, appropriate changes were made to some indicators to reflect the addition of Heilongjiang to the project's scope.

148. Regarding the M&E plan in the project document, this has been followed closely and information has been collected in a systematic manner. The MTR team viewed the following M&E documents:

- Project Inception Report, from the Project Inception Workshop held in Beijing, China, on 17 December 2021;
- annual work plans and budgets for the years 2022 to 2025;
- PPRs for the six-month periods from July–December 2021 to July–December 2024;
- PIRs for the years ending 30 June 2022, 2023 and 2024;
- co-financing reports – annual reporting included in PIRs; and
- MTR (this report) – on schedule.

149. Gender-disaggregated reporting is provided against the results framework.

150. Mid-term reporting against the GEF Core Indicators was received, using the GEF Core Indicator Worksheet, and this had been cleared by FAO.

151. A Mid-Term Review Summary Report was prepared by the project and provided to the MTR team to inform the MTR. This provided detailed reporting on project implementation, progress against the results framework, budget status, and various other information. This was of assistance to the MTR team.

152. Some of the reporting in the PIRs, PPRs and the Mid-Term Review Summary Report was not backed up with evidence to enable verification of reported results, and the methodologies used to calculate quantitative reporting was not always clear. This includes information on setting baselines for the six indicators that did not have baselines in the endorsed results framework. The MTR has liaised closely with the NPMO to obtain the required evidence. Some evidence has not been received at the time of this draft report. It will be important at the time of the terminal evaluation that comprehensive information on evidence and methodologies is provided in a timely manner to enable full and holistic assessment of achievements.

153. Also, although robust monitoring systems for sustainable food systems and land use have been developed in accordance with Output 1.1.4, the monitoring protocols for some indicators need to be improved, especially: i. Core Indicator 11 and Outcome 4.1 (b) (the number of people reached by information dissemination and knowledge); ii. Outcome 2.2 (b) (farmer's income and the impact of project interventions, and the number of farmers involved); iii. Outcome 3.1 (a) (enhanced conservation and restoration of agroecosystems and biodiversity); and iv. Outcome 2.1 indicators (d), (e), (f) and (g) (review the monitoring protocols for these indicators to ensure that there is consistency between provinces).

154. The project used information generated by the M&E systems to inform and improve implementation, as follows:

- The PIRs enabled the recording of "Measures to address MS, MU, U and HU ratings" (in the 2022 PIR the rating for Outcome 4.1(a) was MS and actions were identified to address this – in the 2023 the rating was S).

- Risk management through the PIRs and PPRs was proactive.

- Minor project amendments were identified in the PIRs and PPRs. For example, the 2022 PIR reported the agreed changes to the results framework and the 2023 PIR reported that the project community in Kaiyuan, Liaoning province was adjusted from Sandaogou Village to Qiangengwangzhuang Village.

Additional MTR questions: *(FOLUR IP)*

Links between the Program and the Child Project

a. To what extent is the program providing the necessary coordination and technical support?
b. What are the tools brought by the program that have been used at the child project level?
c. What is the expected impact of the tools and resources brought by the project at national level?
d. To what extent has the child project contributed to the 4 outcomes of the program as set out in the program framework document?
e. To what extent has the program contributed to costs savings through leveraging key partnerships across child projects?

Synergies between child projects

a. Did the child project have any synergies and exchanges with the other child project? What type of exchanges? How have these exchanges been useful at all stakeholders' level? What are the expected impacts of these exchanges at national, provincial and local levels?

To what extend the child project activities were efficient in capturing synergies among other child projects?

Finding 26. The FOLUR IP program is providing valuable benefits, mostly in the form of diverse knowledge-sharing opportunities that are expanding the range of ideas and tools that can be considered in this project; the World Bank Hubei sub-project only commenced in 2025, therefore exchanges between the two projects have only recently commenced.

155. FAO China country office undertakes the formal coordination with the FOLUR IP, with a focal point nominated within the office. FAO China gathers relevant reporting on Core Indicators and provides it to the program, and the program prepares a FOLUR IP annual report. The FAO China focal point works closely with the NPMO to distribute the required information and share the learning materials and training opportunities from the FOLUR program.

156. The program has brought many benefits in the form of international knowledge-sharing and learning opportunities, as summarized under Finding 23. This includes access to the Food And Agricultural Commodity Systems (FACS) online community. The program provides necessary coordination and technical support, mainly in the form of arranging and promoting the tools and knowledge sharing opportunities.

157. The program has provided tools in low-carbon rice, sustainable wheat and maize (corn), and nature-based solutions. The impact of these is to bring practical learning and knowledge exchange opportunities around innovative practices in sustainable agriculture and transforming agri-food systems. These exchanges were appreciated by project personnel because they greatly expanded the range of ideas and tools that they could consider when planning the interventions in the China child project.

158. The engagement with international exchanges was limited during COVID-19 restrictions, but this has now increased significantly. For some in-person international knowledge exchange events, FAO staff and consultants have attended instead of MARA project staff, because there are limitations on international travel for Chinese government officials.

159. The FOLUR IP Annual Report does not systematically report against program outcomes from the Program Framework Document (PFD), therefore it is difficult to assess the contribution of this project to program outcomes. However, the Annual Report does report at a program level on progress towards the program's total targets for GEF Core Indicators across the 27 child projects: this project has contributed 36 584 ha towards the IP's GEF Core Indicator 3 target of 2 387 402 ha, and has contributed 206 845 ha towards the IP's GEF Core Indicator 4 target of 43 454 864 ha. Also, the FOLUR Annual Report groups reporting under the following three headings (referred to as "pillars" in the PFD), and the project has made strong contributions under each: program capacity strengthening; policy and value chain engagement; and strategic knowledge management and communications

160. The program's support has been a cost-effective approach to sharing knowledge and building partnerships between projects. It is difficult to formally assess whether the program has contributed to cost savings through leveraging key partnerships across child projects (as per sub-question (e) above), because this information is not collected or reported in the FOLUR IP annual report. Nevertheless, for this project, some knowledge sharing activities were delivered for a lower cost than would have been incurred if the IP had not provided coordination and materials.

161. The World Bank Hubei sub-project has been significantly delayed and only commenced in 2025. This was partly due to COVID-19 restrictions. For this reason, communication has only recently commenced between the sub-projects. The NPMO of this project has been communicating with the Hubei PMO, sharing their implementation progress and inviting the Hubei PMO to join their national training session. Also, Hubei PMO staff visited this project's demonstration sites in May 2025. Ongoing exchanges are planned.

162. At this stage, these exchanges have mostly benefited the Hubei project during their start-up. As the Hubei project gathers momentum and has its own learnings to share, these exchanges will become mutually beneficial and synergistic. The benefits of these exchanges are expected primarily at the national and provincial levels, although the project should invite county-level project personnel to also participate.

4.6. Cross-cutting priorities

MTR question 6.1: *(Gender and minority groups, including Indigenous peoples, disadvantaged, vulnerable and people with disabilities)* To what extent were gender considerations taken into account in designing and implementing the project?

Finding 27. Gender considerations were taken into account adequately during project design and are being appropriately considered during implementation, including through the engagement since 2022 of a gender consultant, appointment of gender focal points, review of the Gender Action Plan in 2025, and preparation of gender-specific knowledge products.

163. Section 3 of the project document ("Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment") included a detailed summary of the role of women in agriculture in China and explained that this project would build on previous experiences and best practices in engaging and creating benefits for women. A Gender Analysis was conducted during the PPG phase and a Gender Action Plan was developed and included as Annex N of the project document. These documents were prepared by gender experts and provided a good context for addressing gender equality and women's empowerment during implementation. The project document includes some gender-sensitive activities and repeatedly states that the project will maximize opportunities for women to participate in the project's activities, including in ILM planning, policy development, technology implementation for farmers, and in various training and capacity building.

164. The project's results framework includes four gender-disaggregated targets. The Gender Action Plan contains gender-specific actions for each project output, with assigned responsibility, indicators, targets and a timeline.

165. Project implementation has had a strong focus on gender, summarized as follows:

- A national-level "social security and gender consultant" has been engaged since 2022, whose responsibilities include implementation of the Gender Action Plan.
- A gender working group was established to provide oversight to the gender consultant's work.
- There are gender focal points at the national level and in each of the target provinces.

- The All-China Women's Federation has a representative on the PSC and is involved as a project partner in each target county.

- Gender training has been provided to project stakeholders at national, provincial and county levels. This included organizing a conference to which these stakeholders were invited.

- Requirements for gender consideration are built into project contracts, such as identifying specific indicators for female participation in project activities.

- Detailed gender-specific data is collected on women's participation in project activities.

- Gender mainstreaming is reported on in each PIR.

166. The Gender Action Plan was reviewed in 2025. This was not a detailed review, containing brief, high-level observations of actions the project took under four "Gender mainstreaming strategies" (also referred to in the project document as "principles") and not including reporting against the Gender Action Plan's gender-specific actions, indicators and targets for each project output. It is recommended that another review is conducted that includes reporting against each of these gender-specific actions, indicators and targets, and that the findings from this reporting are used to improve practices and modify the Gender Action Plan's actions where necessary.

167. Several gender-specific knowledge products were generated, especially:

- The gender consultant prepared a presentation "Gender-assisted agricultural production transformation" that was loaded onto the project's knowledge platform.

- Ten case studies were prepared relating to gender-specific results from the project, with at least one from each of the five target provinces.

MTR question 6.2: *(Environmental and social safeguards)* To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project? Is the current risk classification still valid?

Finding 28. Consideration of environmental and social concerns has been appropriate during project design and implementation, and the current overall risk rating of Moderate is still valid. It is now timely to screen the project for environmental and social risks using the FAO Framework for Environmental and Social Management (2022).

168. The project was screened during design for environmental and social risks, in accordance with requirements at that time (Annex I1 of the project document). The overall risk classification was moderate and an Environmental and Social Risk Management Plan (ESMP) was prepared, which included mitigation actions to address the risks. The risks, risk classification and mitigation actions from the ESMP are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Risks and mitigation actions from the project's Environmental and Social Risk Management Plan

Risk identified	Risk classification	Mitigation action (s)
1) Pesticide Management 5.1 – Would this project procure, supply and/or result in the use of pesticides on crops, livestock, aquaculture or forestry? Yes 5.2 – Would this project provide seeds or other materials treated with pesticides (in the field and/or in storage)? Yes	Moderate	An Integrated Pest Management Plan has been prepared in line with the concept of integrated pest management (IPM) and is included as Annex O of the project document. Activities to reduce the use of chemical pesticides have been incorporated into the project design. GEF-7 project funds will not be used to purchase chemical inputs. However, the project may issue technical guidelines and recommendations for improved, low-impact chemical use and application, in line with the overall aim of reducing the use of chemical pesticides.
2) Ethnic Minorities/ Indigenous Peoples (Guizhou only) 9.1 – Are there indigenous peoples living outside the project area where activities will take place? Yes. However, the project activates will not influence any facets of their life. 9.2 – Are there indigenous peoples living in the project area where activities will take place? Yes	Moderate	Ethnic minorities are present in the target counties of Guizhou Province. Consequently, a Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) procedure was prepared during the project preparation phase in line with FAO Environmental and Social Management Guidelines and GEF Indigenous Peoples Principles and Guidelines. Measures to mitigate risks and enhance opportunities were also elaborated as part of the FPIC report. The FPIC process is described in Annex J of the project document.

169. The FPIC procedure (for Guizhou Province only) is a detailed document that includes background to the sites in Guizhou, a socio-economic analysis, description of the ethnic minority groups in the target sites (mostly Dong, Miao and other groups) and their culture and traditions, and a detailed FPIC procedure. The FPIC procedure includes a plan to mitigate risks (two risks identified) and enhance opportunities (one opportunity identified).

170. Approximately 90 percent of the population in the target areas in Guizhou are from ethnic minority groups, therefore most participants are from an ethnic minority group and there are no specific steps required other than those in the FPIC procedure.

171. Project implementation has followed the ESMP and the FPIC procedure, as follows:

- The project's Integrated Pest Management Plan is being implemented and integrated pest management technologies are being implemented at each demonstration site as a core element of the project. Integrated Pest Management Plans are being prepared based on the implementation progress of the integrated pest control demonstration technologies in each project area.

- The social security and gender consultant is overseeing implementation of the FPIC procedure. FPIC was obtained during development and approval of the proposed activities in Guizhou. While preparing the project demonstration plan, technical demonstration and monitoring system, ethnic minorities were the main implementers and beneficiaries of the project, and consultation included consideration of their needs and priorities.

- The PIRs include annual reporting on ethnic minorities and FPIC under "Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities Involvement".

172. The current risk classification is still considered valid, because the identified risks still require the identified mitigation actions. No additional social or environmental risks have been identified.

173. The original screening and classification were undertaken in 2020. Because FAO's Framework for Environmental and Social Management (2022) (FESM) is now in operation, it is timely to conduct a new screening of the project for environmental and social risks using the new FESM. This would present an opportunity for the project to bring its social and environmental risk management approaches in line with current best practices.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

Conclusion 1. Relevance. The project design is highly consistent with several GEF programming directions, especially the GEF-7 Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program strategy, and relevant objectives under three focal areas; it is highly relevant to national environmental and development priorities, especially its aim to transform China's food production system to promote sustainable increases in productivity and incomes, while contributing to economic development, protecting biodiversity and ecosystems, and reducing GHG emissions; this relevance has increased since its formulation. (See Section 4.1 Relevance.)

Conclusion 2. Effectiveness. The project is implementing significant holistic landscape-scale sustainable agriculture interventions at demonstration sites in 14 counties across five provinces; 17 of the project's 21 mid-term targets are considered achieved and four targets are partially achieved; good progress has been made towards the GEF Core Indicators, the capacity development targets and the project objective. (See Section 4.2 Effectiveness.)

Conclusion 3. Efficiency. The project has generally been implemented efficiently, with project start-up occurring efficiently despite the complexity of the project arrangements; COVID-19 had a very significant impact on this project and led to significant delays, although management responded effectively to this challenge; there is a significant underspend of the GEF allocation, largely due to COVID-19; the cost-effectiveness of the project is high and the timeliness is moderate. (See Section 4.3 Efficiency.)

Conclusion 4. Sustainability and scaling up. The project has undertaken a lot of excellent work that increase the likelihood of sustainability, especially by empowering provincial- and county-level stakeholders, establishing cross-departmental coordination, conducting extensive capacity building, closely involving farmer cooperatives, developing county-level ILM and restoration plans, and through knowledge management; the project faces significant challenges in achieving widespread scaling up, for various reasons including the need to bring new provinces and counties on board, challenges convincing and engaging farmers and cooperatives of the benefits, and the likely need to provide financial support to farmers and cooperatives. (See Section 4.4 Sustainability and Finding 11.)

Conclusion 5. Progress towards development objective. The project has made satisfactory progress towards the development objective "to support the innovative transformation of China's agro-landscapes and agri-food value chains towards environmental and ecological sustainability at scale in support of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), rural revitalization, ecological civilization, and climate resilience".

Conclusion 6. Overall progress on implementation. MARA was highly effective in discharging its role and responsibilities related to the management and administration of the project and has shown very strong ownership of the project; FAO has effectively delivered on its responsibilities as GEF Agency for oversight and implementation; collaboration between MARA and FAO was

constructive and respectful; the OPIM modality was used effectively and contributed to increased national, provincial and county-level ownership of the project. (See Findings 18 and 21.)

Conclusion 7. Overall risk rating. The original and current risk classification for the project is Moderate; the MTR team considers this classification to still be appropriate. (See MTR question 6.2, Finding 28.)

Conclusion 8. Overall assessment of the project. Good progress has been made towards the project's objective and outcomes. The project is complex but well designed, and the NPMO and OP have been very effective at putting in place the required project arrangements, which has been vital to the project's success. COVID-19 had very significant impacts during the first two years, therefore delays occurred and the GEF expenditure is very low. With two years remaining, there is still substantial work to be done and significant unspent GEF funds remaining; the quality of the results would be optimized and significantly enhanced if a one-year no-cost extension were granted. The project should now have a focus on planning for significant scaling up of the approaches and practices.

5.2. Recommendations

Rec. no.	Rationale for recommendation	Recommendation	Responsibility	Timing/dates for actions
General				
1	This MTR has been conducted after approximately four years of a six-year project, with less than two years remaining. Most mid-term indicators have been met, but there is a significant workload remaining, especially to finalize construction of the eight demonstration areas in the second batch of implementation. Also, expenditure of GEF funds is approximately 28 percent and USD 5 million remains to be spent. The main reason for these delays and low expenditure is the effects of COVID-19 restrictions during the first two years. A one-year no-cost extension would enable a considered approach to be brought to concluding the project and disbursing GEF funds, ensuring that expenditure can be carefully planned and not rushed.	Grant a one-year no-cost extension, to optimize the quality of key results and to ensure full and strategic expenditure of GEF funds.	NPMO, MARA, FAO, OFP	Immediate
2	This complex project requires coordination at many levels – national, provincial and county – and between many partners, experts, contractors and across 14 project sites. To this stage, the OP, NPMO and project staff have done a very good job of coordination. However, as the project enters the final phase and construction of the eight final demonstration sites accelerates, new county-level stakeholders will	Arrange a special PSC meeting/workshop and provincial/county workshops to plan the final phase of the project and ensure coordination is in place.	NPMO, PSC, provincial and county bureaus, FAO	Before the end of 2025

	become involved. It will be important to ensure effective coordination.			
Effectiveness				
3	The successful management of this project relies strongly on provincial- and county-level bureaus and officials undertaking significant project management and coordination activities. This is a significant workload and is done using in-kind co-financing, not GEF funds. Most interviewees were confident with this role and stated that their bureau would allocate sufficient resources. However, some interviewees expressed concern at the workload and questioned whether sufficient funds would be available.	Undertake a review of the resourcing requirements for the remainder of the project, including an assessment of the needs of provincial and county offices, and identify whether additional support is needed to ensure effective delivery (such as through co-financing allocations).	NPMO, provincial and county bureaus	Before the end of 2025
Monitoring and baselines				
4	A specific rationale for each point is provided below. i. Methodology to calculate the number of people reached relied on assumption that 10% of users spend "a relatively long time" browsing the remote training platform and could be considered beneficiaries. A justification of this assumption was not received. This methodology only gives approximation, not an accurate measure. Also, no gender-disaggregated data were available from this method. ii: Not clear how data used to calculate farmer incomes was collected, and collection was not systematic (e.g. some income data was reported as a range and data were not collected from all sites at the	Develop improved monitoring protocols, in collaboration with the Lead Technical Officer, as follows: i. Core Indicator 11 and Outcome 4.1 (b): agree on a methodology that provides an accurate measure of the number of people reached by information dissemination and knowledge, justifies any assumptions, and enables accurate gender disaggregation of reporting. ii. Outcome 2.2 (b): ensure that the data collection methodology is transparent and systematic, that data analysis links any farmer income increases to project interventions, and that both	NPMO, FAO, PSC	For the next PSC meeting

	same times). Also, insufficient evidence to link income increases to project's interventions. Finally, no reporting was received against the second sub-target (number of farmers). iii: Methodology for this indicator is unclear. Should have a strong focus on biodiversity, species and ecosystems, because this is the intent of the outcome and indicator. No reporting received against second sub-target. iv: Some inconsistency between provinces in data collection protocols (e.g. reporting on fertilizer use in tonnes or tonnes/hectare, and using whole demonstration county areas or only core demonstration areas) and some variability in availability of data. These indicators are central to the project's achievements, so monitoring protocols must be agreed upon and clearly understood.	of the indicator's sub-targets are considered. iii. Outcome 3.1 (a): ensure that the data collection methodology is transparent, that reporting addresses the intent of the Outcome (Enhanced conservation and restoration of agroecosystems and biodiversity) and the indicator (Species and ecosystems indicators), and ensure that both of the indicator's sub-targets are considered. iv. Outcome 2.1 indicators (d), (e), (f) and (g): review the monitoring protocols for these indicators to ensure that there is consistency between provinces, that appropriate variables are measured, and that data are collected systematically.		
5	A specific rationale for each point is provided below. i: The first and second batches of demonstration site construction were changed at	Set seven new baselines for the indicators below, prepare a revised results framework that includes these new baselines, obtain PSC approval of the revised results framework, and use the revised results framework for future reporting in PIRs, PPRs and for the terminal evaluation: i. Capacity Development Scorecard: revise the baselines for the capacity	NPMO, FAO, PSC	For the next PSC meeting

	project inception, mainly as an adaptive response to COVID-19. This means that the baselines for the Capacity Development Scorecard that were calculated during project development are no longer appropriate. These baselines have not yet been changed. See Appendix 10 for a detailed analysis. ii: For each of these four indicators, the results framework states that "Monitoring system, with detailed baseline, to be put in place at the beginning of project implementation", but baselines have not yet formally been put in place. iii: The results framework states that "detailed baseline for each county is yet to be compiled", but baselines have not yet formally been put in place. iv: The results framework states "Detailed baseline for participating farmers to be established at the start of value chain activities", but baselines have not yet formally been put in place.	scorecard results indicator to reflect the changes in the sites participating in the first-batch demonstration sites (see analysis and suggestions in Appendix 10). ii. Outcome 2.1: in accordance with the endorsed results framework, set detailed baselines for the four indicators: (d) chemical fertilizer reduction, (e) pesticide reduction, (f) soil organic matter and (g) average yield per hectare. iii. Outcome 2.2 indicator (b): in accordance with the endorsed results framework, set a detailed farmer income baseline for participating farmers. iv. Outcome 3.1: establish baselines for both sub-targets in indicator (a).		
6	The project is aiming for large scale and significant changes that take a long time to be realized. The project has undertaken high-quality work establishing monitoring systems in the first six project demonstration areas, which includes monitoring for integrated farmland landscape management. This monitoring is important and will enable long-term	Establish a commitment to long-term monitoring of the project's results, beyond the period of the GEF project.	MARA, NPMO	Medium term – during 2026

	monitoring of the changes that result from the project's interventions. It is currently scheduled to end when the GEF project ends. Given that many of the expected changes, such as GHG emissions reductions, will only be recorded over the long term, it is recommended that steps are taken to ensure that this monitoring continues after the GEF project ends.			
Sustainability and catalysis/replication				
7	The project has the ambition and the potential to scale up significantly within target provinces and in other provinces, but there are many challenges to be addressed, as described under Finding 11.	Develop a scaling-up strategy that systematically addresses how widespread scaling up of the project's approaches across China will be achieved.	NPMO, FAO	Before the end of 2025
Cross-cutting priorities				
8	The Gender Action Plan was reviewed in 2025. This was not a detailed review, containing brief, high-level observations of actions the project took under four "Gender mainstreaming strategies" (also referred to in the project document as "principles") and not including reporting against the Gender Action Plan's gender-specific actions, indicators and targets for each project output.	Conduct another review of the Gender Action Plan that includes reporting against each of the gender-specific actions, indicators and targets for each project output, and use the findings from this to improve practices and modify the Gender Action Plan's actions where necessary.	NPMO, Gender Expert	Before the end of 2025
9	The original screening and classification of environmental and social risks were undertaken in 2020, in accordance with requirements at that time; the Environmental and Social Risk Classification was assessed as moderate. Because FAO's Framework for Environmental and Social Management (2022) (FESM) is now in operation, it is timely to	Screen the project for environmental and social risks using the FAO Framework for Environmental and Social Management (2022).		

	conduct a new screening of the project for environmental and social risks using the new FESM. This would present an opportunity for the project to bring its social and environmental risk management approach in line with current best practices.			

6. Lessons learned

Farmer cooperatives are a key stakeholder group and can play a vital role in projects aiming to achieve holistic, landscape-scale agricultural production transformation in China.

174. The project is implementing holistic, landscape-scale sustainable agriculture interventions at a meaningful scale, guided by best-practice knowledge and monitoring. To do this, it is vital that sufficient area of farmland is secured and that the involvement of farmers is sustainable. The farmer cooperatives that are involved in this project have formal arrangements with many farmers in the demonstration areas and have business models that are based on working sustainably with the farmers on developing value chains and marketing strategies and providing a more secure farmer income.

Local-level expertise has made an important contribution to determining the interventions and monitoring in the demonstration areas, with strong national and provincial oversight and capacity building.

175. The project has a three-tier model of experts, with national experts, provincial experts and county-level experts involved in planning interventions and monitoring. This has worked very well and has ensured that local knowledge and different local conditions are respected and included in interventions and monitoring, while ensuring technical oversight to ensure that agreed standards are met and best-practice knowledge is brought in to build local capacity. The involvement in the FOLUR IP ensures that international best practice is brought into the project.

7. Appendices

Appendix 1. Terms of reference for the MTR

To be added.

Appendix 2. MTR itinerary, including field missions (agenda)

日期 Date	时间 Time	地点 Location	内容 Activity	参加人 Participants
MTR：June 11th, Inception workshop in Beijing, interview in Shandong **6 月 11 日 北京启动会，赴山东省**				
Day 1 Wednesday, June 11th, 2025 2025/6/11 星期三	08:30-09:30	Room 205， REEA 生态总站 202 会议室	MTR Inception Workshop 中期评估启动会 1. Introduction of participants; 介绍参会人员 2. Remarks by MARA; MARA 代表讲话 3. MTR team briefing; 评估组介绍中评要求	MTR Consultants 中评专家 GEF Portfolio Officer of FAO 联合国粮农驻华代表处项目经理 NPMO and Project Consultants 项目办人员及项目专家 Interpreter 翻译
	09:30-12:30	Shandong Dezhou City 山东省德州市	Travel to Shandong, Dezhou City 乘高铁前往德州（G205 北京-德州东 10:37-11:53）	MTR Consultants 中评专家 GEF Portfolio Officer of FAO 联合国粮农驻华代表处项目经理 NPMO and Project Consultants 项目办人员及项目专家 Interpreter 翻译
	12:30-13:30	Shandong Dezhou City 山东省德州市	Launch 午餐	
	13:30-15:00	Shandong Qingyun County 山东省庆云县	Travel to Shandong, Qingyun County 前往山东省庆云县	
	15:00-18:00	Shandong Qingyun County 山东省庆云县	Project Progress Report and Interview 项目进展汇报及访谈 1. Project Progress Report by CTA. 项目进展汇报 2. Local Consultant in Shandong 山东省地方专家 3. Task undertaking Units 项目任务承担团队 4. NPMO	MTR Consultants 中评专家 GEF Portfolio Officer of FAO 联合国粮农驻华代表处项目经理 NPMO and Project Consultants 项目办人员及项目专家 Interpreter 翻译 Song Zhenwei, Institute of Crop Sciences, Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences

日期 Date	时间 Time	地点 Location	内容 Activity	参加人 Participants
				Li Xuedong, Shandong Jianzhu University 李学东 山东省建筑大学 Zhao Jianning, Agro-Environmental Protection Institute, MARA 赵建宁 农业农村部环境保护科研监测所 Zhang Yanjun, Agro-Environmental Protection Institute, MARA 张艳军 农业农村部环境保护科研监测所
		Shandong Qingyun County 山东省庆云县	Stay in Qingyun County 宿庆云	MTR Consultants 中评专家 GEF Portfolio Officer of FAO 联合国粮农驻华代表处项目经理 NPMO and Project Consultants 项目办人员及项目专家 Interpreter 翻译
MTR: June 12th, Field survey and Interview in Qingyun County, Shandong **6 月 12 日 山东省庆云县项目区评估（实地考察＋座谈）**				
Day 2 Thursday, June 12th, 2025 2025/6/12 星期四	08:30-12:00	Shandong Qingyun County 山东省庆云县	Field Survey 调研 1. Donglangwu Demonstration Site 东郎坞示范区 2. Liudong Demonstration Site 刘东示范区 3. Xuyuanzi Demonstration Site 徐园子示范区	MTR Consultants 中评专家 GEF Portfolio Officer of FAO 联合国粮农驻华代表处项目经理 Qu Zhaoling, Local Consultant in Shandong 曲召令 山东省项目咨询专家 NPMO and Project Consultants 项目办人员及项目专家 Interpreter 翻译 Relevant stakeholders from the Department of Agricultural Environmental Protection Agency, Shandong Province 山东省农业生态与资源保护总站相关人员 Relevant stakeholders from Qingyun County 庆云县相关人员

日期 Date	时间 Time	地点 Location	内容 Activity	参加人 Participants
	12:00-14:00	Shandong Qingyun County 山东省庆云县	Lunch in Qingyun County 午餐	
	14:00-17:00	Shandong Qingyun County 山东省庆云县	Progress Report of Qingyun County 座谈 1. MTR team briefing 评估专家介绍工作 2. Qingyun County Project Report the Progress 山东省庆云县项目进展汇报（赵建宁） 3.Interviews (Stakeholders, Private Sectors)访谈（利益相关方、私营部门）	MTR Consultants 中评专家 GEF Portfolio Officer of FAO 联合国粮农驻华代表处项目经理 NPMO and Project Consultants 项目办人员及项目专家 Interpreter 翻译 Mr. Qu Zhaoling, Local Consultant in Shandong 曲召令 山东省项目咨询专家 Mr. Yan Yue, Shandong Provincial Agricultural Environmental Protection Agency 颜越，山东省农业生态与资源保护总站 Ms. Li Guidan, Qingyun County Agriculture and Rural Affairs Bureau 李桂丹，庆云县农业农村局代表 Mr. Liu Hongyan of Hegu Shuntian Modern Agriculture (Qingyun) Co., Ltd. 刘洪岩，河谷舜田现代农业（庆云）有限公司科技部负责人 Mr. Jin Heyu, Representatives of relevant enterprises in Qingyun County 金何玉，山东鲁供庆农农业发展有限公司技术负责人 Mr. Wei Dezhi, Local Cooperative representative 魏德智，柴家村土地股份专业合作社负责人 Mr. Luan Xuecheng, Local Farmer representative 栾学成，山东省庆云县尚堂镇马家村村民
	17:00-18:00	Shandong	Dinner 晚餐	MTR Consultants 中评专家

日期 Date	时间 Time	地点 Location	内容 Activity	参加人 Participants
		Qingyun County 山东省庆云县		GEF Portfolio Officer of FAO 联合国粮农驻华代表处项目经理 NPMO and Project Consultants 项目办人员及项目专家 Interpreter 翻译
	18:00-19:30	Shandong Dezhou City 山东省德州市	Travel to Shandong, Dezhou City 前往山东省德州市	
	19:30-22:00	Shandong Laizhou City 山东省莱州市	Travel to Shandong, Laizhou City 乘坐高铁前往山东莱州（G2089 德州东-莱州 19:51-21:42）	
		Shandong Laizhou City 山东省莱州市	Stay in Laizhou City 宿莱州	
MTR: June 13th, Field survey and Interview in Laizhou City, Shandong **6 月 13 日 山东省莱州市项目区评估访谈**				
Day 3 Friday, June 13th, 2025 2025/6/13 星期五	08:30-12:00	Shandong Laizhou City 山东省莱州市	Field Survey 调研 1. Guojiadian Demonstration site 郭家店院庄示范区 2. Zhuqiao Demonstration site 朱桥由家示范区	MTR Consultants 中评专家 GEF Portfolio Officer of FAO 联合国粮农驻华代表处项目经理 NPMO and Project Consultants 项目办人员及项目专家 Interpreter 翻译 Relevant stakeholders from the Department of Agricultural Environmental Protection Agency, Shandong Province 山东省农业生态与资源保护总站相关人员 Relevant stakeholders from Laizhou City 莱州市相关人员
	12:00-14:00	Shandong Laizhou City	Lunch 午餐	

日期 Date	时间 Time	地点 Location	内容 Activity	参加人 Participants
		山东省莱州市		
	14:30-18:00	Shandong Laizhou City 山东省莱州市	Progress Report of Laizhou County 座谈 1. MTR team briefing 评估专家介绍工作 2. Laizhou City Project Report the Progress 山东省莱州市项目进展汇报 3.Interviews (Stakeholders, Private Sectors)访谈（利益相关方、私营部门）	Mr. Chen Fu, China Agricultural University, CTA 陈阜，中国农业大学，项目首席技术顾问 Mr. Zhang Weijian, Institute of Crop Sciences, Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Sustainable Agriculture Expert 张卫建，中国农业科学院作物科学研究所，可持续农业专家 Mr. Yan Yue, Shandong Provincial Agricultural Environmental Protection Agency 颜越，山东省农业生态与资源保护总站 Ms. Wang Xiaojuan, Laizhou Municipal Agriculture and Rural Affairs Bureau 王晓娟，莱州市农业农村局 Ms. Liu Xiaochen, Laizhou Municipal Agriculture and Rural Affairs Bureau 刘晓晨，莱州市农业农村局 Mr. Ji Fuping, head of Xinli Agricultural Professional Cooperative in Laizhou City 季富平，莱州市新力农业专业合作社负责人 Mr. Yang Weisong, Weisong Plant Protection Professional Cooperative in Chenggang Road, Laizhou City 杨维松，莱州市城港路维松植保专业合作社 Ms. Wang Ling, representative of Xiaolong Agricultural Products Farmers Professional Cooperative in Langyaling, Laizhou City 王玲，莱州市琅琊岭小龙农产品农民专业合作社代表
	18:00-19:00	Shandong Weifang City	Travel to Weifang City, Shandong 前往潍坊市	MTR Consultants 中评专家 GEF Portfolio Officer of FAO 联合国粮农驻华代表处

日期 Date	时间 Time	地点 Location	内容 Activity	参加人 Participants
		山东省潍坊市		项目经理 NPMO and Project Consultants 项目办人员及项目专家 Interpreter 翻译
	19:00-23:00	Beijing 北京市	Travel back to Beijing 返程回京（潍坊北-北京南 G21219:40-22:15）	
MTR: June 14th, online interview **6 月 14 日 线上访谈**				
Day 4 Saturday, June 14th, 2025 2025/6/14 星期六	10:00-10:30	Online 线上	**Interview 访谈** Landscape and ecology consultant 景观与生态专家	TE consultants 终评专家 Interpreter 翻译 Mr. Yu Zhenrong, China Agriculture University 宇振荣 中国农业大学
	10:30-11:00	Online 线上	**Interview 访谈** Climate-smart agriculture consultant 气候智慧型农业专家	TE consultants 终评专家 Interpreter 翻译 Mr. Li Hu, Institute of Agricultural Resources and Regional Planning, CAAS 李虎 中国农科院资源与农业区划研究所
	11:00-11:30	Online 线上	**Interview 访谈** Social security and gender consultant 社会保障与性别专家	TE consultants 终评专家 Interpreter 翻译 Ms. Tan Shuhao, Renmin University of China 谭淑豪 中国人民大学
	11:30-12:00	Online 线上	**Interview 访谈** Policy and strategy development consultant 政策与规划专家	TE consultants 终评专家 Interpreter 翻译 Mr. Luo Shiming, South China Agricultural University 骆世明 华南农业大学
	12:00-13:30		Lunch break 午餐、休息	TE consultants 终评专家 Interpreter 翻译
	13:30-14:00	Online 线上	**Interview 访谈** Pest control consultant 病虫害防治专家	TE consultants 终评专家 Interpreter 翻译 Mr. Liu Wancai, National Agro-Tech Extension and Service Center, MARA 刘万才 全国农机推广服务中心

日期 Date	时间 Time	地点 Location	内容 Activity	参加人 Participants
	14:00-15:30	Online 线上	**Interview with Jiangsu Task Undertaking Unit 江苏省项目承担单位访谈** 1. Demonstration and implementation of ecological low-carbon agricultural technology in Liuhe District, Jiangsu Province 江苏省六合区生态低碳农业技术的示范与应用 2. Tracking and monitoring of the implementation effect in the project area of Jiangsu Province 江苏省项目区实施效果跟踪与监测 3. DARA of Jiangsu Province 江苏省农业农村厅 4. Local consultant of Jiangsu Province 江苏省项目咨询专家	TE consultants 终评专家 Interpreter 翻译 Ms. Liang Yonghong, DARA of Jiangsu Province 梁永红 江苏省农业农村厅 Mr. Sun Hongwu, Project local consultant of Jiangsu province, Jiangsu Academy of Agricultural Sciences 孙洪武 江苏省咨询专家 江苏省农业科学院 Guozhi, Jiangsu Academy of Agricultural Sciences 郭智 江苏省农业科学院 Liu Zhipeng, Nanjing Agriculture University 刘志鹏 南京农业大学
	15:30-15:40		Break 休息	TE consultants 终评专家 Interpreter 翻译
	15:40-17:10	Online 线上	**Interview with Guizhou Task Undertaking Unit 贵州省项目承担单位访谈** 1. Demonstration and implementation of ecological low-carbon agricultural technology in Rongjiang County, Guizhou Province 贵州省榕江县生态低碳农业技术的示范与应用 2. Tracking and monitoring of the implementation effect in the project area of Guizhou Province 贵州省项目区实施效果跟踪与监测 3. Local consultant of Guizhou Province 贵州省项目咨询专家	TE consultants 终评专家 Interpreter 翻译 Mr. Wu Pan, Project local consultant of Guizhou province, Guizhou University 吴攀 贵州省咨询专家 贵州大学 Tian Guangliang, Guizhou University 田光亮 贵州大学 He Yong, Institute of Environment and Sustainable Development in Agriculture, CAAS 贺勇 中国农业科学院农业环境与可持续发展研究所
MTR: June 15th, online interview, travel to Jiangxi Province **6 月 15 日 北京访谈，赴江西省**				

日期 Date	时间 Time	地点 Location	内容 Activity	参加人 Participants
Day 5 Sunday, June 15th, 2025 2025/6/15 星期日	10:00-11:30	Online 线上	**Interview with Heilongjiang Task Undertaking Unit** **黑龙江省项目承担单位访谈** 1. Demonstration and implementation of ecological low-carbon agricultural technology in Fujin City, Heilongjiang Province 黑龙江省富锦市生态低碳农业技术的示范与应用 2. Tracking and monitoring of the implementation effect in the project area of Heilongjiang Province 黑龙江省项目区实施效果跟踪与监测 3. Heilongjiang Provincial Department of Agricultural Environmental Protection Agency 黑龙江省农业环境与耕地保护站 4. Local consultant of Heilongjiang Province 黑龙江省项目咨询专家	TE consultants 终评专家 Interpreter 翻译 Mr. Liu Guohui, Heilongjiang Provincial Department of Agricultural Environmental Protection Agency, 刘国辉黑龙江省农业环境与耕地保护站 Ms. Wang Qiuju, Project local consultant of Heilongjiang province, Heilongjiang Academy of Agricultural Sciences 王秋菊 黑龙江省地方咨询专家 黑龙江农科院 Du Hailun, Institute of Black Soil Protection and Utilization in Heilongjiang 杜海伦 黑龙江省黑土保护利用研究院 Zhou Feng, Peking University 张万通 北京大学
	11:30-16:00	/	Lunch break 午餐、休息	TE consultants 终评专家 Interpreter 翻译
	16:00-20:00	Jiangxi Nanchang City 江西省南昌市	Travel to Nan Chang City, Jiangxi 乘坐飞机前往江西南昌（首都 T2-昌北 T2 CA1577 17:25-19:45） Stay in Nanchang City 宿南昌	MTR Consultants 中评专家 GEF Portfolio Officer of FAO 联合国粮农驻华代表处项目经理 NPMO and Project Consultants 项目办人员及项目专家 Interpreter 翻译
6 月 16 日 江西省新余市调研				
Day 6 2025/6/16 星期一	9:00-10:00	Jiangxi Xinyu City 江西省新余市	Interview 访谈 1. DARA of Jiangxi Province 江西省农业农村厅 2. Project local consultant of Jiangxi province 江西省项目咨询专家	Mr. Huang Zhenxia, DARA of Jiangxi Province 黄振侠，江西省农业农村厅 Mr. Li Daming, Local consultant of Jiangxi Province 李大明，江西省项目咨询专家

日期 Date	时间 Time	地点 Location	内容 Activity	参加人 Participants
	10:00-12:00		Travel to Xinyu City, Jiangxi 赴江西新余	MTR Consultants 中评专家 GEF Portfolio Officer of FAO 联合国粮农驻华代表处项目经理 NPMO and Project Consultants 项目办人员及项目专家 Interpreter 翻译
	12:00-13:30	Jiangxi Xinyu City 江西省新余市	Lunch 午餐	
	14:45-15:25	Jiangxi Xinyu City 江西省新余市	Field Survey 调研 Nan An Demonstration site 南安乡项目示范区 Changtangli - core demonstration site for comprehensive transformation of living and production ecosystem 长塘里—生活生产生态系统综合改造核心示范点	MTR Consultants 中评专家 GEF Portfolio Officer of FAO 联合国粮农驻华代表处项目经理 NPMO and Project Consultants 项目办人员及项目专家 Interpreter 翻译 Relevant stakeholders from the Department of Agricultural Technology Extension Center, Jiangxi Province 江西省农业技术推广中心相关人员 Relevant stakeholders from Xinyu City 新余市相关人员
	15:40-16:20	Jiangxi Xinyu City 江西省新余市	Yuejiafu organic rice planting base--demonstration site for organic rice production and comprehensive landscape transformation of mountains, rivers, forests, fields and lakes 悦嘉福有机大米种植基地--有机大米生产及山水林田湖综合景观改造示范点	
	16:30-18:00	Jiangxi Xinyu City 江西省新余市	Jiangxi Province Xinyu City Project Progress Report 江西省新余市项目进展汇报 Interview (Stakeholders, Private Sectors) 访谈（利益相关方、私营部门）	Project consulting expert: Li Daming, researcher at the Provincial Red Soil and Germplasm Resources Research Mr. Institute 李大明，江西省红壤及种质资源研究所 Mr. Zou Long, Associate Professor of Jiangxi Normal University 邹龙，江西师范大学 Ms. Zhang Ru, Professor of Nanchang University 章茹南昌大学教授 Mr. Zhang Xiaosheng, Agricultural Ecology Section of Xinyu Agricultural Science Research Center 张小生，新

日期 Date	时间 Time	地点 Location	内容 Activity	参加人 Participants
				余市农业科学研究中心 Mr. Kuang Yaoyun, Yushui District Agricultural Science Research Center 况姚赟，渝水区农业科学研究中心
	18:00-22:00	Jiangxi Xinyu City 江西省新余市	Stay in Xinyu 宿新余	MTR Consultants 中评专家 GEF Portfolio Officer of FAO 联合国粮农驻华代表处项目经理 NPMO and Project Consultants 项目办人员及项目专家 Interpreter 翻译
6 月 17 日 江西省新余市调研				
Day 7 2025/6/17 星期二	08:30-10:40	Jiangxi Xinyu City 江西省新余市	Field Survey 调研 Luo Fang Demonstration site 罗坊镇项目示范区 Luofang Town Rice Field Sustainable Agriculture Practice and Climate Smart Agriculture Technology Model Experimental Demonstration Site 罗坊镇稻田可持续农业实践与气候智慧型农业技术模式试验示范点 Demonstration site for ecological function restoration and product value enhancement of agro-fruit forest complex system + Zhenghe Ecological Agriculture Co., Ltd. - Interest linkage with green and low-carbon cycle as the core 农果林复合系统生态功能恢复和产品价值提升示范点+正合生态农业有限公司—以绿色低碳循环为核心的利益联动	MTR Consultants 中评专家 GEF Portfolio Officer of FAO 联合国粮农驻华代表处项目经理 NPMO and Project Consultants 项目办人员及项目专家 Interpreter 翻译 Relevant stakeholders from the Department of Agricultural Technology Extension Center, Jiangxi 江西省农业技术推广中心相关人员 Relevant stakeholders from Xinyu City 新余市相关人员
	10:40-12:00	Jiangxi Xinyu City 江西省新余市	Progress Report of Xinyu City, Jiangxi 座谈 1. MTR team briefing 评估专家介绍工作 2. Xinyu City Project Report the Progress 江西省新	MTR Consultants 中评专家 Ms. Peng Peng, head of Xinyu Longsheng Agricultural 彭鹏，新余市隆升农机服务农民专业合作社负责人

日期 Date	时间 Time	地点 Location	内容 Activity	参加人 Participants
			余市项目进展汇报 3.Interviews (Stakeholders, Private Sectors) 访谈（利益相关方、私营部门）	Machinery Service Farmers' Professional Cooperative Mr. Zhang Hongyan, sales manager of Jiangxi Jiafu Agricultural Technology Co., Ltd. 张红艳，江西嘉福农业科技有限公司销售经理 Mr. Jiang Zhihui, head of the organic rice planting base 蒋志辉，有机大米种植基地负责人 Mr. Liu Daigen, head of Xinyu Genlan Farmers' Professional Cooperative 刘带根，新余市根兰种养农民专业合作社负责人
	12:00-14:00	Jiangxi Xinyu City 江西省新余市	Lunch 午餐	
	14:00-18:30	Jiangxi Nanchang City 江西省南昌市	Travel to Nanchang, Jiangxi 赴江西南昌	MTR Consultants 中评专家 GEF Portfolio Officer of FAO 联合国粮农驻华代表处项目经理 NPMO and Project Consultants 项目办人员及项目专家 Interpreter 翻译
	18:30-23:00	Beijing 北京	Travel to Beijing 乘坐飞机返回北京（昌北 T2-首都 T2 CA1578 20:35-23:00）（	

Appendix 3. Stakeholders interviewed during the MTR

	First name	Last name	Position	Organization/location
1	Chunsheng	Yao	GEF Portfolio Officer	FAO / Beijing office
2	Yurie	Naito	GEF Technical Officer (GTO)	FAO / online
3	Bo	Zhou	Lead Technical Officer (LTO)	FAO / online
4	Yinghao	Xue	Deputy Director of NPMO	REEA, MARA
5	Zhao	Liu	Project Officer of NPMO	REEA, MARA
6	Fu	Chen	Chief Technical Advisor	China Agricultural University
7	Weijian	Zhang	Sustainable Agriculture Consultant	Institute of Crop Sciences, CAAS
8	Zhenrong	Yu	Landscape and ecology consultant	China Agricultural University
9	Hu	Li	Climate-smart agriculture Consultant	Institute of Agricultural Resources and Regional Planning, CAAS
10	Shuhao	Tan	Social security and gender Consultant	Renmin University of China
11	Shiming	Luo	Policy and strategy development consultant	South China Agricultural University
12	Wancai	Liu	Pest control consultant	National Agricultural Technology Extension Service Center
13	Hongwu	Sun	Project local consultant of Jiangsu province	Jiangsu Academy of Agricultural Sciences
14	Pan	Wu	Project local consultant of Guizhou Province	Guizhou University
15	Qiuju	Wang	Project local consultant of Heilongjiang province	Heilongjiang Academy of Agricultural Sciences
16	Zhaoling	Qu	Project local consultant of Shandong province	Shandong Provincial Agricultural Environmental Protection Agency
17	Daming	Li	Project local consultant of Jiangxi Province	Jiangxi Red Soil and Germplasm Resources Research Institute
18	Zhenwei	Song	Researcher	Institute of Crop Sciences, CAAS
19	Xuedong	Li	Associate Professor	Shandong Jianzhu University
20	Jianning	Zhao	Researcher	Agro-Environmental Protection Institute, MARA
21	Yanjun	Zhang	Researcher	Agro-Environmental Protection Institute, MARA
22	Yue	Yan	Section Chief	Shandong Provincial Agricultural Environmental Protection Agency
23	Guidan	Li	Section Chief	Qingyun County Agriculture and Rural Affairs Bureau
24	Hongyan	Liu	Department Head	Hegu Shuntian Modern Agriculture (Qingyun) Co., Ltd.
25	Dezhi	Wei	Manager	Chaijia Village Land Share Cooperative
26	Heyu	Jin	Department Head	Shandong Lugongqingnong Agricultural Development Co., Ltd.

	First name	Last name	Position	Organization/location
27	Xuecheng	Luan	Villager representative	Majia Village, Shangtang Town, Qingyun County, Shandong Province
28	Xiaojuan	Wang	Section Chief	Laizhou Municipal Agriculture and Rural Affairs Bureau
29	Xiaochen	Liu	Section Chief	Laizhou Municipal Agriculture and Rural Affairs Bureau
30	Fuping	Ji	Person in charge	Xinli Agricultural Professional Cooperative in Laizhou City
31	Weisong	Yang	Person in charge	Weisong Plant Protection Professional Cooperative in Chenggang Road, Laizhou
32	Ling	Wang	Person in charge	Xiaolong Agricultural Products Farmers Professional Cooperative in Langyaling, Laizhou City
33	Yonghong	Liang	Researcher	DARA of Jiangsu Province
34	Zhi	Guo	Researcher	Jiangsu Academy of Agricultural Sciences
35	Zhipeng	Liu	Associate Professor	Nanjing Agriculture University
36	Guangliang	Tian	Associate Professor	Guizhou University
37	Yong	He	Researcher	Institute of Environment and Sustainable Development in Agriculture, CAAS
38	Guohui	Liu	Deputy Director	Heilongjiang Provincial Department of Agricultural Environmental Protection Agency
39	Hailun	Du	Associate Researcher	Institute of Black Soil Protection and Utilization in Heilongjiang
40	Wantong	Zhang	PhD	Peking University
41	Zhenxia	Huang	Deputy Director	DARA of Jiangxi Province
42	Long	Zou	Associate Professor	Jiangxi Normal University
43	Ru	Zhang	Professor	Nanchang University
44	Xiaosheng	Zhang	Deputy Director	Agricultural Ecology Section of Xinyu Agricultural Science Research Center
45	Yaoyun	Kuang	Deputy Director	Yushui District Agricultural Science Research Center
46	Peng	Peng	Person in charge	Xinyu Longsheng Agricultural Machinery Service Farmers' Professional Cooperative
47	Hongyan	Zhang	Manager	Jiangxi Jiafu Agricultural Technology Co., Ltd.
48	Zhihui	Jiang	Person in charge	Organic rice planting base
49	Daigen	Liu	Person in charge	Xinyu Genlan Farmers' Professional Cooperative

Appendix 4. MTR matrix

Evaluative questions	Indicators	Sources	Methodology
1. Relevance			
1.1 Are the 4 project components and objectives congruent with the GEF focal areas/operational program strategies, China environment priorities and FAO China Country Programming Framework?	Relevance and congruence at CEO endorsement and at mid-term During KIIs and FGDs, ask about whether project met the needs and priorities of beneficiaries and others Analyse and discuss changes in strategic context / relevance	Information sources: - FAO CPF, previous CPF, GEF-7 Programming Directions, national plans and strategies - informants including beneficiaries, FAO CO staff, agency staff	Methods: - Desk review - KIIs/FGDs
1.2 Has there been any change in the relevance of the project since its design, such as new national policies, plans or programs that affect the relevance of the project objectives and goals? If so, are there any changes that need to be made to the project to make it more relevant?			
2. Effectiveness			
2.1 (component 1) To what extent has the project contributed to *Development of integrated landscape management (ILM) systems in agricultural landscapes?*	Components, outcome indicators and output mid-term indicators and targets in the project results matrix	Information sources: - Annual and 6-monthly reporting, other reporting, Core Indicators reporting, project deliverables	Methods: - Desk review, including of project M&E

Evaluative questions	Indicators	Sources	Methodology
2.2 (component 2) To what extent has the project contributed to *Promotion of sustainable food production practices and responsible agri-food value chains for the staple crops of rice, wheat and maize?*	Analysis of level of achievement of mid-term targets and indicators	and other documentation, to assess progress in achieving mid-term targets of relevant indicators - Other relevant project outputs - Site inspections - All stakeholders	- KIIs/FGDs - Site visits
2.3 (component 3) To what extent has the project contributed to *Conservation and restoration of agroecosystems and biodiversity?*			
2.4 (component 4) To what extent the project contributed to *Knowledge management and M&E?*			
2.4 Are there any unintended results?	Identify outcomes additional to those in results framework – assess whether GEF project contributed – was this unintended?	Information sources: - All reporting - All stakeholders	Methods: - Desk review, including of project M&E - KIIs/FGDs - Site visits
2.6 (Likelihood of impact) Are there any barriers or other risks that may prevent future progress towards and the eventual achievement of *Innovative transformation of China's food*	Progress towards addressing the barriers identified in the project document Any additional barriers that can be identified	Information sources: - All reporting	Methods: - Desk review - KIIs/FGDs

Evaluative questions	Indicators	Sources	Methodology
production systems and agro-ecological landscapes towards sustainability?	See also under 4. Sustainability	- FAO and project staff, beneficiaries, other stakeholders	
3. Efficiency			
3.1 To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently, cost-effectively, and management been able to adapt to any changing conditions to improve the efficiency of project implementation? *Sub-questions:* *Have the specific features related to OPIM modality been taken into consideration during project preparation (e.g. subcontract and procurement procedures of the OP, etc.)* *How efficient was the contracting and procurement process during the first half of the project (involvement of BH, LTO)?*	Expenditure / co-financing / assessment of deliverables Identify significant changing conditions – analyse how well the project adapted to improve the efficiency of project implementation Other significant factors affecting delivery e.g. delays *OPIM: identify relevant features of OPIM and the OPA, assess whether they were taken into account during project preparation* *Discuss OPIM with relevant staff from MARA and FAO* *How efficient was the contracting and procurement process during the first half of the project?*	Information sources: - Financial reporting (including co-financing), progress reporting - OPA, OP processes - Project staff, FAO stakeholders	Methods: - KIIs - Desk review

Evaluative questions	Indicators	Sources	Methodology
3.2 To what extent has the project built on existing agreements, initiatives, data sources, synergies and complementarities with other projects, partnerships, etc. and avoid duplication of similar activities by other groups and initiatives?	Review relevant sections of project document Identify any relevant agreements, initiatives, data etc that the project did not build from Identify synergies, duplication and key partnerships	Information sources: - Project document, other relevant documents / data / projects etc - Project staff, FAO stakeholders, implementing partners	Methods: - Desk review and analysis of findings - KIIs
3.3 Is the project cost-effective? How does the project cost/time versus output/outcomes equation compare to that of similar projects?	Cost to achieve project results, relative to similar projects Consider results achieved, GEF expenditure, total expenditure (including co-financing)	Information sources: - Reporting against results, personal observations - Financial expenditure and budget reporting - Co-financing	Methods: - Desk review of findings and cost - KIIs
4. Sustainability			
4.1 (Sustainability) What is the likelihood that the project results will be useful or will remain after the end of the project? What are the key risks that may affect the sustainability of the project results and its benefits (consider financial, socio-economic, institutional and governance, and environmental aspects)?	Is sustainability being planned for from early in project? Was a sustainability / exit strategy developed? Identify key risks and mitigation opportunities Were GEF funds targeted at interventions that build capacity and capability after the project?	Information sources: - All project reporting and documentation, especially information on sustainability planning - Knowledge products and dissemination	Methods: - Desk review - KIIs, FGDs - Site visits

Evaluative questions	Indicators	Sources	Methodology
Did the OPIM modality contribute to ensure major ownership and sustainability of the project results?	Identify key positive and negative factors that contribute to the likelihood (in categories financial, institutional, environmental, sociopolitical and others) Assess whether the project identified, anticipated and planned for these *OPIM: Assess contribution to national ownership and improved capacity, leading to increased likelihood of sustainability*	- Implementing partners, beneficiaries - Other projects	
4.2 What are the main risks to the achievement of global environmental benefits (GEBs) supported by GEF financing?	Identify expected GEBs and challenges along the project's logical pathway (using the TOC) that affect the likelihood of the GEBs being met		
5. Factors affecting progress			
5.1 (Project design) Is the project design suited to delivering the expected outcomes? Is the logic coherent and clear? To what extent are the project's objectives and components clear, practical and feasible within the timeframe?	Analyse causal logic and TOC Analyse components, outcomes, results matrix Feasibility and practicality assessment	Information sources: - Project document and associated documents / data / reporting etc - Project stakeholders	Methods: - Desk review and analysis of findings - KIIs, FGDs
5.2 (Project management) To what extent did the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs effectively discharge its role and	Identify roles and responsibilities – assessment of execution against these	Information sources:	

Evaluative questions	Indicators	Sources	Methodology
responsibilities related to the management and administration of the project? What have been the main challenges in relation to the management and administration of the project and what changes are needed to improve delivery in the second half of the project? *Sub-questions:* *Does the OP provide quality financial reports, PPRs and PIRs and present calls for funds in a timely manner?* *Does FAO review/approve reports and arrange for funds transfer in a timely manner?* *(Project implementation and execution) To what extent did the OPIM modalities facilitate or hampered project execution and contribution to the project objectives?*	Identify challenges – ask in every KII	- Project document, PIRs and PPRs, other reporting - Operational partner's agreement - FAO staff	
5.3 (Financial management and Co-financing) What have been the challenges related to the financial management of the project and to what extent has the pledged co-financing been delivered?	Are records kept of co-financing and is it reported in PIRs / other reporting? Comparison of realized with pledged co-financing Is reporting of co-financing substantiated?	Information sources: - Financial and co-financing reporting, PIRs and PPRs - FAO CO and project staff	

Evaluative questions	Indicators	Sources	Methodology
	Identify financial challenges (ask in KIIs)		
5.4 (Project oversight, implementation role) To what extent has FAO delivered on project identification, concept preparation, appraisal, preparation, approval and start-up, oversight and supervision?	Discuss FAO's implementation role with NPMO and MARA Separate analysis of project identification, formulation, approval, start-up and execution, since project design to now – identify shortcomings / strengths Assessment of the extent to which FAO delivered oversight and supervision and backstopping (technical, administrative and operational)	Information sources: - Documentation of project preparation and approval, start-up, and execution; all project reporting and M&E - FAO staff, NPMO, MARA staff	
5.5 (Partnerships and stakeholder engagement) Have other actors, such as civil society, indigenous population or private sector, been sufficiently involved in project design and implementation, and what has been the effect of their involvement/non-involvement on the project results? What are strengths and challenges of the project's partnerships?	Analysis of involvement of other actors in project design Analysis of involvement of other actors in project implementation – from document review, discussions and assessment Assessment of strengths and challenges of partnerships, based on identifying partnerships, defining their results, and discussing with stakeholders	Information sources: - Project document and associated documentation - All reporting - FAO staff, NPMO, MARA staff, other informants	

Evaluative questions	Indicators	Sources	Methodology
5.6 (Communication and knowledge management) How effective has the project been in communicating and promoting its key messages and results to partners, stakeholders, and a general audience? How can this be improved?	Identify key communication and knowledge management aspects Is there any evaluation of effectiveness available?	Information sources: - Project reporting - Communication and knowledge management products - All stakeholders, including beneficiaries	
5.7 (M&E design) Is the project's M&E system practical and sufficient?	Analyse relevant parts of project document and other supporting M&E	Information sources: - Project document and other M&E planning	
5.8 (M&E implementation) Does the M&E system operate per the M&E plan? To what extent has information generated by the M&E system during project implementation been used to adapt and improve project planning and execution, achieve outcomes, and ensure sustainability?	Assess implementation against each component of the M&E plan Is the project clear about each indicator and how it is being reported against? Are some adjustments needed to results framework? Assess how M&E is being used	Information sources: - All M&E at project level - M&E systems - Other reporting and adaptive management	
6. Cross-cutting priorities			
6.1 (Gender and minority groups, including indigenous peoples, disadvantaged, vulnerable and people with disabilities) To what extent were gender considerations taken into account	The extent of gender consideration in project design and implementation, gender-equitable participation and benefits, and whether gender analysis is undertaken	Information sources: - Pro doc, gender planning, ethnic minority planning (ESS screening)	Methods: - Desk review - KIIs, FGDs

Evaluative questions	Indicators	Sources	Methodology
in designing and implementing the project?		and other relevant documents from project design - Relevant reporting on gender and ethnic minorities - PIRs and PPRs - All key informants	
6.2 (Environmental and social safeguards) To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project? Is the current risk classification still valid?	Assessment of environmental and social safeguards planning during design and implementation Have agreed measures have been taken and if not, investigate why not	Information sources: - Pro doc, ESS screening and associated ESS planning documents, other relevant documents from project design - Relevant reporting on environmental and social safeguards - PIRs and PPRs - All key informants	

5. Factors affecting progress			
5.1 (Project design) Is the project design suited to delivering the expected outcomes? Is the project's causal logic (per its theory of change) coherent and clear? To what extent are the project's objectives and components clear, practical and feasible within the timeframe allowed? To what extent was gender integrated into the project's objectives and results framework? Were other actors – civil society, Indigenous peoples or private sector – involved in project design or implementation and what was the effect on project results?	Analyse causal logic and TOC Analyse components, outcomes, results matrix, and gender-related components (including gender analysis and action plan) Involvement of other actors	Information sources: - Project document and associated documents / data / reporting etc - Project stakeholders	Methods: - Desk review and analysis of findings - KIIs, FGDs
5.2 (Project execution and management) To what extent did the executing agency effectively discharge its role and responsibilities in managing and administering the project? What have been the main challenges in terms of project management and administration? How well have risks been identified and managed? What changes are needed to improve delivery in the latter half of the project?	Analyse the implications of the change in institutional arrangements since the fall of the government and the changes in roles and responsibilities Clearly document these changes and consider whether there should be recommendations for the remainder of the project Identify revised roles and responsibilities and assess execution against these Identify challenges Risk management processes	Information sources: - Project document, PIRs and PPRs, other reporting - Operational partner's agreement - FAO staff	
5.3 (Financial management and co-financing) What have been the financial management challenges of the project? To what extent has pledged co-financing	Clearly document the changed expectations around co-financing from government partners and consider whether there should be	Information sources: - Financial reporting, PIRs and PPRs - FAO CO and project staff	

been delivered? Has any additional leveraged co-financing been provided since implementation? How has any shortfall in co-financing or unexpected additional funding affected project results?	recommendations for the remainder of the project Are records kept of co-financing and is it reported in PIRs / other reporting? Is reporting of co-financing substantiated? Analyse the impact of changed co-financing expectations on the project's delivery Identify financial challenges	
5.4 (Project oversight, implementation role) To what extent has FAO delivered oversight and supervision and backstopping (technical, administrative and operational) during project identification, formulation, approval, start-up and execution?	Discuss FAO's implementation role with NPMO Separately analyse project identification, formulation, approval, start-up and execution, since project design to now Assess the extent to which FAO delivered oversight and supervision and backstopping (technical, administrative and operational)	Information sources: - Documentation of project preparation and approval, start-up, and execution; all project reporting and M&E - FAO staff, NPMO
5.5 (Communication and knowledge management) How effective has the project been in communicating and promoting its key messages and results to partners, stakeholders, and a general audience? How can this be improved? How is the project assessing, documenting, and sharing its results and lessons learned and experiences? To what extent are communication products and activities likely to support the sustainability and scaling up of project results?	Identify key communication and knowledge management aspects Is there any evaluation available? See also under 4. Sustainability	Information sources: - Project reporting - Communication and knowledge management products - All stakeholders, beneficiaries and RMAs/FMAs

5.6 (M&E design) Is the project's M&E system practical and sufficient? How have stakeholder engagement and gender assessment been integrated into the M&E system? How could this be improved?	Analyse relevant parts of project document and other supporting M&E	Information sources: - Project document and other M&E planning	
5.7 7 (M&E implementation) Does the M&E system operate per the M&E plan? Has the information been gathered systematically, using appropriate methodologies? To what extent has information generated by the M&E system during project implementation been used to adapt and improve project planning and execution, achieve outcomes, and ensure sustainability? Are there gender-disaggregated targets and indicators? How can the M&E system be improved?	Assess implementation against each component of the M&E plan Is the project clear about each indicator and how it is being reported against? Are some adjustments needed to results matrix? Assess how M&E is being used See also under 6.1 Gender	Information sources: - All M&E at project level - M&E systems - Other reporting and adaptive management	
6. Cross-cutting priorities			
6.1 (Gender and minority groups, including Indigenous peoples, disadvantaged, vulnerable and people with disabilities) To what extent were gender considerations taken into account in designing and implementing the project? Has the project been designed and implemented in a manner that ensures gender-equitable participation and benefits? Was a gender analysis done?	The extent of gender consideration in project designing and implementation, gender-equitable participation and benefits and whether gender analysis is undertaken	Information sources: - Pro doc, gender planning, ethnic minority planning (ESS screening) and other relevant documents from project design - Relevant reporting on gender and ethnic minorities - PIRs and PPRs - All key informants	Methods: - Desk review - KIIs, FGDs

6.2 (Environmental and social safeguards) To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project? Has the project been implemented in a manner that ensures the ESS Mitigation Plan (if one exists) has been adhered to?	Assess environmental and social safeguards planning during design and implementation Have agreed measures have been taken and if not, investigate why not	Information sources: - Pro doc, ESS screening and associated ESS planning documents, other relevant documents from project design - Relevant reporting on environmental and social safeguards - PIRs and PPRs - All key informants	

Appendix 5. List of documents consulted

Project-related documents

1. Project Identification Form (PIF)
2. FAO Concept Note
3. CEO Endorsement Letter
4. PPG Approval letter
5. Project Document and associated annexes
6. Revised results framework (reflecting revised indicators after addition of Heilongjiang)
7. Project Inception Report, from the Project Inception Workshop held in Beijing, China, on 17 December 2021
8. Operational Partners Agreement between MARA and FAO
9. Three six-monthly PPRs 2021, 2022, 2023
10. Annual work plans and budgets for the years 2022 to 2025
11. PPRs for the six-month periods from July–December 2021 to July–December 2024
12. Two Spot Check Reports and two Financial Audit reports
13. Three annual PIRs, 2022, 2023, 2024
14. Mid-Term Review Summary Report (dated June 2025)
15. Minutes for 4 Project Steering Committee meetings
16. List of stakeholders
17. Nine Back-to-office Reports (BTORs) from supervision missions and knowledge exchange trips
18. Environmental and Social Management Plan and FPIC procedure (in project document)
19. Gender Action Plan (in project document and reviewed 2025)
20. Various awareness raising posters, flyers and booklets
21. 10 gender-specific case studies
22. 6 Integrated Land Management and Restoration Plans
23. FAO Country Programming Framework for China (CPF) 2021–2025
24. Various specific plans, reports and training materials from implementation relating to gender and ESS
25. Monitoring Guidelines for Innovative Transformation Projects of China's Agro-Ecosystems towards Sustainable Development (dated September 2023)
26. 5 brand certification certificates

Other documents

FAO. 2017. *Guidelines for the assessment of gender mainstreaming*. Rome, FAO. (Also available at https://www.fao.org/publications/card/fr/c/5e86b58b-ab7d-42bd-bd93-e9274ab011cd/).

FAO. 2019. *OED Capacity Development Evaluation Framework*. Rome, FAO. (Also available at http://www.fao.org/3/ca5668en/ca5668en.pdf).

FAO. 2020. *Guide for planning and conducting mid-term reviews of FAO–GEF projects and programmes*. Rome, FAO. (Also available at https://www.fao.org/3/ca7788en/ca7788en.pdf).

FAO. 2022. *Framework for Environmental and Social Management*. Rome, FAO. (Also available at *https://doi.org/10.4060/cb9870en*).

GEF. 2020 update. *Guidelines on the project and program cycle policy*. Global Environment Facility. (Also available at *https://www.thegef.org/council-meeting-documents/guidelines-project-and-program-cycle-policy-2020-update*).

UNEG. 2016. *Norms and Standards for Evaluation*. United Nations Evaluation Group. (Also available at http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914).

UNEG. 2020. *UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation*. United Nations Evaluation Group. (Also available at http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/2866).

Appendix 6. Results matrix showing achievements at mid-term and MTR observations

Progress-towards-results matrix showing the degree of achievement of project outcomes and outputs (against mid-term targets)*

* This assessment uses the project's revised results framework that was approved by the PSC in December 2021, NOT the results framework from the project document.
**Achievement rating is at the outcome level not indicator level.

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Level at first PIR (self-reported) (30 June 2022)	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Mid-term (MT) level & assessment (colour-coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement rating**	Justification for rating
GEF-7 Core Indicators	a) Core Indicator 3: Area of land restored (hectares) Sub-Indicator 3.1: Area of degraded agricultural land restored Note: This indicator results from interventions under Component 3 (restoration).	0	NA (to be assessed in the 2nd PIR)	Total: 63,000	Total: 90,000, of which: - Shandong: 20,000 - Jiangsu: 20,000 - Jiangxi: 20,000 - Guizhou: 20,000 - Heilongjiang: 10,000	**Partially achieved** Total: 36,584 ha - Shandong: 4,150 - Jiangsu: 3,993 - Jiangxi: 7,359 - Guizhou: 16,507 - Heilongjiang: 4,575 Verified by reviewing measurement and data collection methodology.		
	b) Core Indicator 4: Area of landscapes under improved practices (hectares) Sub-Indicator 4.3: Area of landscapes under sustainable land management in production systems Note: This indicator results from interventions under Components 1 (ILM plans) and 2 (SLM).	0	NA	Total: 156,000	Total: 480,000, of which: (i) GAP/IPM (210,000): - Shandong: 70,000 - Jiangsu: 50,000 - Jiangxi: 30,000 - Guizhou: 50,000 - Heilongjiang: 10,000 (ii) ILM plans (270,000)*:	**Achieved** Total: 206,845 ha - Shandong: 15,829 - Jiangsu: 27,987 - Jiangxi: 46,306 - Guizhou:16,441 - Heilongjiang: 100,281 Verified by reviewing measurement and		

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Level at first PIR (self-reported) (30 June 2022)	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Mid-term (MT) level & assessment (colour-coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement rating**	Justification for rating
					- Shandong: 75,000 - Jiangsu: 65,000 - Jiangxi: 50,000 - Guizhou: 60,000 - Heilongjiang: 20,000 *Note: Other area targets have been deducted from this number to avoid double-counting.	data collection methodology. For the terminal evaluation, it will be necessary to report separately on (i) GAP/IPM and (ii) ILM plans, in accordance with the target.		
	c) Core Indicator 6: Greenhouse Gas Emissions Mitigated (metric tons of CO_2e) Sub-indicator 6.1: Carbon sequestered or emissions avoided in the AFOLU sector	0	NA	-	Direct: 5.37 million Indirect: 1.35 million	**No MT target** Total reported to MT: 2,737,200 CO_2e Verified by reviewing calculation files from FAO's Ex-Ante Carbon-balance Tool (Ex-Act). The project is considered on track to achieve the EOP target.		
	d) Core Indicator 9: Reduction, disposal/destruction, phase out, elimination and avoidance of chemicals of global concern and their waste in the	0	NA	-	5 (1 per province)	**No MT target** Reported that IPM (integrated pest management) plans for each project area have been initiated at the national level and are being promoted for		

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Level at first PIR (self-reported) (30 June 2022)	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Mid-term (MT) level & assessment (colour-coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement rating**	Justification for rating
	environment and in processes, materials and products Sub-indicator 9.5: Number of low-chemical/non-chemical systems implemented particularly in food production, manufacturing and cities					implementation (not verified by the MTR team). The project is considered on track to achieve the EOP target.		
	e) Core Indicator 11: Number of direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as co-benefit of GEF investment	0	-	75,000 (at least 50% women)	270,000 (at least 50% women) This number includes individuals benefiting from capacity building, assets or services provided by the project, and/or who use the specific resources that the project maintains or enhances (in line with GEF definition).	**Achieved** Reported 179,883 (82,636 females = 45.9%). Calculated as 19,883 people reached through various information dissemination and knowledge exchange measures and an estimated 160,000 have improved their capabilities through online platforms and media dissemination (approximately 10% of users spend "a relatively long time" browsing the platform and could be considered		

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Level at first PIR (self-reported) (30 June 2022)	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Mid-term (MT) level & assessment (colour-coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement rating**	Justification for rating
						beneficiaries). This methodology was not verified by the MTR team, although it is considered that the MT target of 75,000 would have been met. More rigorous reporting, including with accurate gender disaggregation, will be required for the terminal evaluation.		
Capacity Scorecard results	a) Capacity development scores	Baseline score (average): 51% See Capacity Development report for detailed scores per county.	NA	Mid-term target: 56% Increase of at least 5 percentage points per county.	End-of-project target: 61% Increase of at least 10 percentage points per county.	**Achieved** Mid-term score: 54%, from a revised baseline of 47%, an increase of 7% (see Appendix 10 for explanation). The following increases from baseline to MT were recorded for the 4 counties included in the revised baseline: Laizhou, Shandong: 4% Liuhe, Jiangsu: 10% Yushui, Jiangxi: 9% Rongjiang, Guizhou: 4%		

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Level at first PIR (self-reported) (30 June 2022)	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Mid-term (MT) level & assessment (colour-coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement rating**	Justification for rating
						MT data were collected for Qingyun (Shandong) and Fujin (Heilongjiang), although no baselines were collected for these. Verified by viewing the MT Capacity Development Scorecard and re-calculating baselines and overall scores, as shown in Appendix 10. The baseline and EOP target for this indicator should be formally revised.		
Outcome 1.1: Strengthened ILM policies, plans and capacities that promote participatory planning and enable national and provincial institutions across agricultural landscapes to meet their relevant sustainable agriculture, rural	a) Number of county-level ILM and restoration plans in place.	0 Counties have general land use plans, but these do not incorporate integrated, landscape-level planning focused on SLM and restoration.	NPMO has hired agricultural policy/strategy development consultant and landscape and ecology consultant on ILM. Currently, the contract on policy development is being prepared.	6 - Shandong: 2 - Jiangsu: 1 - Jiangxi: 1 - Guizhou: 2	12 - Shandong: 4 - Jiangsu: 3 - Jiangxi: 2 - Guizhou: 3	**Achieved** 6 ILM and restoration plans reviewed by MTR team for the following locations: - Congjiang County, Guizhou - Liuhe County/city, Jiangsu - Rongjiang County, Guizhou - Laizhou City, Shandong	Outcome 1.1: Satisfactory	Integrated landscape management and restoration plans developed for six cities/counties; extensive training of government decision-makers and technical staff in ILM; high-quality work establishing monitoring systems in the target provinces (although

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Level at first PIR (self-reported) (30 June 2022)	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Mid-term (MT) level & assessment (colour-coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement rating**	Justification for rating
revitalization, land restoration and related climate and biodiversity targets.						- Qingyun County, Shandong - Xinyu City, Jiangxi Verified by viewing plans and confirming that they meet the intent of the indicator. NPMO reported that 14 plans completed. On track to meet the EOP target.		baselines for indicators not yet set); and the target under GEF Core Indicator 4 was achieved.
	b) Area under improved management plans: See Core Indicator 4.	-See Core Indicator 4 above-						
	c) Number of decision-makers and technical staff of national, provincial and local governments with increased capacity to apply ILM.	0	During the five provincial inception workshops, the national consulting team introduced the concept and application of ILM, more than 70 people (15 women) from provincial and county project management team attended the workshop.	150 (at least 50% women), of which: - Shandong: 40 - Jiangsu: 40 - Jiangxi: 30 - Guizhou: 30 - National: 10	300 (at least 50% women), of which: - Shandong: 80 - Jiangsu: 80 - Jiangxi: 60 - Guizhou: 60 - National: 20	**Achieved** 872 decision-makers and technical staff trained in the application of ILM. Gender disaggregated data only available for some training; of this, women accounted for 149 (34%) of 441 participants, although the absolute number of women trained (149) exceeds the		

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Level at first PIR (self-reported) (30 June 2022)	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Mid-term (MT) level & assessment (colour-coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement rating**	Justification for rating
						MT target of 50% of 150.		
	d) Number of new or improved monitoring systems in place and operational beyond project. (on land use, biodiversity, GHG emissions, climate change impacts)	0 Some monitoring is conducted at the local level, but not systematic and not integrated.	The National Consultant Team is working on project monitoring indicators and monitoring measures to support the development and improvement of the monitoring system.	4 (at least one per province)	8 (at least two per province)	**Achieved** 5 improved monitoring systems are established in the first 5 demonstration areas. Includes monitoring for integrated farmland landscape management, including a mobile app and management platform. Verified by receiving presentations and discussing with stakeholders for each. On track for EOP target.		
	e) Number of improved policies drafted and recommended for adoption.	0	0	0	5 (1 national and 4 provincial)	**No MT target** Reported that national-level policy research on sustainable crop production has been conducted and county-level policies have been promoted. Not		

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Level at first PIR (self-reported) (30 June 2022)	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Mid-term (MT) level & assessment (colour-coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement rating**	Justification for rating
						verified by the MTR team.		
Outcome 1.2: Innovative payment for agro-ecological services incentive mechanisms in place for sustainable, safe, and smart agri-food systems.	f) Number of improved/newly established payment for agro-ecological services incentive mechanisms.	0	The TOR for the payment for eco-compensation mechanism is drafted.	0	4 (1 per province)	**No MT target** Research on agricultural ecological compensation mechanisms has been included in the 2025 work plan at the national level, with research to be carried out in the second half of the 2025. County-level investigations and analyses of existing agricultural ecological compensation incentive policies have been conducted.	Outcome 1.2: N/A (no MT targets)	N/A
Outcome 2.1: Sustainable agricultural practices deployed and scaled up that enhance ecological functions, improve soil quality and fertility, mitigate	a) Area under improved practices/under GAP: See Core Indicator 4.	- See Core Indicator 4 above -					Outcome 2.1: Satisfactory	Work underway towards developing new or improved standards for green agricultural production, although target only partially achieved; monitoring results show strong trends
	b) Carbon sequestered or emissions avoided: See Core Indicator 6.	- See Core Indicator 6 above -						

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Level at first PIR (self-reported) (30 June 2022)	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Mid-term (MT) level & assessment (colour-coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement rating**	Justification for rating
GHG emissions and establish resilient agricultural production models.	c) Number of newly developed or improved standards (GAP/ climate-smart/organic/ green/sustainable agriculture)	0	NPMO hired the sustainable agriculture consultant and climate smart agriculture consultant.	At least 2.	At least 4.	**Partially achieved** Work is underway towards this indicator, through two "experiment and demonstration of new technologies" contracts signed in 2024. Technical procedures and model summaries will be provided by the end of 2025. Also, in the demonstration provinces, good agricultural production practices and technical procedures are being specified and will be submitted by August 2026. On track to achieve EOP target.		towards the targets for reduced chemical fertilizer use, reduced pesticide use, increased soil organic content, and increased average yield, and each of these MT targets is considered achieved; the mid-term target for Core Indicator 4 was achieved.
	d) Chemical fertilizer reduction in the project intervention area	Some general baseline data available in the agriculture report, but not specific for the project intervention area. Monitoring system, with detailed	Preparing the implementation plan, chemical fertilizer reduction measures and monitoring indicators for Yushui District (Jiangxi Province), Rongjiang	Reduce by 5%	Reduce by 10%	**Achieved** Monitoring is in place in each province and Table 4 (Finding 6) summarizes the results; the following % changes		

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Level at first PIR (self-reported) (30 June 2022)	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Mid-term (MT) level & assessment (colour-coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement rating**	Justification for rating
		baseline, to be put in place at the beginning of project implementation.	County (Guizhou Province), Laizhou City (Shandong Province), Qingyun County (Shandong Province), Liuhe District (Jiangsu Province), and Fujin City (Heilongjiang Province).			were recorded in the target provinces: - Shandong: -5.9% - Jiangsu: -10.8% - Guizhou: +0.1% - Jiangxi: -4.2% - Heilongjiang: N/A Verified by analysing data received from NPMO. The baselines have not been formally set – this should be approved by the PSC in an updated results framework.		
	e) Pesticide reduction in the project intervention area	Some general baseline data available in the agriculture report, but not specific for the project intervention area. Monitoring system, with detailed baseline, to be put in place at the beginning of project implementation.	Preparing the implementation plan, pesticide reduction measures and monitoring indicators of the first demonstration sites.	Reduce by 5%	Reduce by 10%	**Achieved** Monitoring is in place in each province and Table 4 (Finding 6) summarizes the results; the following % changes were recorded in the target provinces: - Shandong: -9.6% - Jiangsu: N/A - Guizhou: -19.8% - Jiangxi: -10.1% - Heilongjiang: N/A		

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Level at first PIR (self-reported) (30 June 2022)	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Mid-term (MT) level & assessment (colour-coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement rating**	Justification for rating
						Verified by analysing data received from NPMO. The baselines have not been formally set – this should be approved by the PSC in an updated results framework.		
	f) Soil organic matter content in the project intervention area	Monitoring system, with detailed baseline, to be put in place at the beginning of project implementation.	Preparing the implementation plan. Soil organic matter will be an important monitoring indicator.	Increase by 3%	Increase by 6%	**Achieved** Monitoring is in place in each province and Table 4 (Finding 6) summarizes the results; the following % changes were recorded in the target provinces: - Shandong: +1.1% - Jiangsu: +28.8% - Guizhou: +14.8% - Jiangxi: +9.4% - Heilongjiang: N/A Verified by analysing data received from NPMO. The baselines have not been formally set – this should be approved by the PSC in an updated results framework.		

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Level at first PIR (self-reported) (30 June 2022)	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Mid-term (MT) level & assessment (colour-coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement rating**	Justification for rating
	g) Average yield per hectare in the project intervention area	Monitoring system, with detailed baseline, to be put in place at the beginning of project implementation.	Preparing the implementation plan. The yield will be an important monitoring indicator.	Increase by 3%	Increase by 6%	**Achieved** Monitoring is in place in each province and Table 4 (Finding 6) summarizes the results; the following % changes were recorded in the target provinces: - Shandong: +4.0% - Jiangsu: +2.0% - Guizhou: +4.1% - Jiangxi: +9.3% - Heilongjiang: N/A Verified by analysing data received from NPMO. The baselines have not been formally set – this should be approved by the PSC in an updated results framework.		
Outcome 2.2: Responsible, market-oriented agricultural value chains implemented and scaled up, including through government-private enterprise-farmer	a) Number of person-time (women and men) trained.	0	NPMO developed a training plan. Due to the impact of the pandemic, the training activities will be carried out in the second half of 2022.	15,000 (at least 50% women), of which: - Shandong: 5,000 - Jiangsu: 3,500 - Jiangxi: 3,000 - Guizhou: 3,500	50,000 (at least 50% women), of which: - Shandong: 17,000 - Jiangsu: 12,000 - Jiangxi: 9,000 - Guizhou: 12,000	**Achieved?** The total reported by the NPMO was 19,492 (7,854 women = 40.3%), but this is being revised at the time of this draft report. Still awaiting	Outcome 2.2: Satisfactory	Extensive farmer training activities undertaken and target met; increased farmer incomes reported, although reporting is incomplete; target for number of agri-

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Level at first PIR (self-reported) (30 June 2022)	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Mid-term (MT) level & assessment (colour-coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement rating**	Justification for rating
cooperative partnerships and capacity building.						updated statistics and evidence. Nevertheless, extensive relevant training has occurred and the MTR considers it likely that the MT target of 15,000 has been met.		food brans certified was met; and the target for number of farmer cooperatives with increased capacity to support responsible value chains was met.
	b) Increased farmer incomes from project supported agri-food value chains, disaggregated by gender.	Detailed baseline for participating farmers to be established at the start of value chain activities.	NPMO hired agricultural product value chain and standard consultant to provide professional guidance on baseline survey and economic assessment (with a focus on the target crops rice, maize and wheat).	5% increase in income for farmers benefiting from price premium and/or additional sales Estimated number of farmers: 500 (50% women) - Shandong: 150 - Jiangsu: 100 - Jiangxi: 100 - Guizhou: 150	10% increase in income for farmers benefiting from price premium and/or additional sales Estimated number of farmers: 5,000 (50% women) - Shandong: 1,700 - Jiangsu: 1,200 - Jiangxi: 900 - Guizhou: 1,200	**Partially achieved** Reporting against this indicator has been incomplete. The following income changes (Chinese RMB) were reported in the target counties, although insufficient evidence was provided to link this to the project's interventions: - Laizhou City, Shandong: 15,000 (2023) and 15,000 (2024) – no change - Qingyun County, Shandong: 10,000 (2023) and 10,800 (2024) – 8.0% increase		

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Level at first PIR (self-reported) (30 June 2022)	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Mid-term (MT) level & assessment (colour-coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement rating**	Justification for rating
						- Liuhe District, Jiangsu: 10,000 to 20,000 (2022) and 10,000 to 20,000 (2024) – no change - Rongjiang County, Guizhou: 14,750 (2022) and 15,320 (2024) – 3.9% increase - Yushui County, Jiangxi: 11,000 (2022) and 12,000 (2024) – 9.1% increase - Fujin City, Heilongjiang: no confirmed data available No reporting was received against the sub-target for 500 farmers. During interviews, the MTR team heard several anecdotal reports that farmer incomes had been increased through activities such as agricultural product brand promotion, assisted by farmer cooperatives.		

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Level at first PIR (self-reported) (30 June 2022)	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Mid-term (MT) level & assessment (colour-coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement rating**	Justification for rating
						A detailed baseline has not been formally set – this should be approved by the PSC in an updated results framework. The methodology for measuring progress against this indicator should be clarified.		
	c) Number of green/ organic/ecological agri-food brands certified.	0	0	5, of which - Shandong: 1 - Jiangsu: 1 - Jiangxi: 1 - Guizhou: 2	15, of which - Shandong: 4 - Jiangsu: 4 - Jiangxi: 3 - Guizhou: 4	**Achieved** 5 new green / organic / ecological agri-food brands, as follows: - Guizhou: Xili Rice – Green Food - Shandong: Apple – Green Food - Shandong: Wheat and corn – Organic Products - Shandong: Xuehua Flour – Green Food - Jiangsu: Niqiao Fragrant Rice – Green Food Verified by viewing official certificates. The NPMO reported a total of 22 new brands certified,		

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Level at first PIR (self-reported) (30 June 2022)	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Mid-term (MT) level & assessment (colour-coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement rating**	Justification for rating
						although the MTR only verified 5.		
	d) Number of farmer cooperatives with increased capacity to support responsible value chains.	0	0	10, of which - Shandong: 3 - Jiangsu: 2 - Jiangxi: 2 - Guizhou: 3	20, of which - Shandong: 5 - Jiangsu: 5 - Jiangxi: 4 - Guizhou: 6	**Achieved** 12 cooperatives with increased capacity to support responsible value chains (see list in Appendix 9). Verified through discussions with NPMO and some cooperatives.		
Outcome 3.1: Enhanced conservation and restoration of agroecosystems and biodiversity.	a) Species and ecosystems indicators (details to be determined as part of Output 1.1.2)	Some general baseline data available in the biodiversity / ecosystems report, but detailed baseline for each county is yet to be compiled.	The landscape and ecology consultant is drafting monitoring indicators on biodiversity.	No reduction in plant and animal species Crop varieties increased by 2%	No reduction in plant and animal species Crop varieties increased by 5%	**Partially achieved** NPMO reported that data collected by local PMOs show "No reduction in plant and animal species", using a 2021 baseline. The MTR team did not receive data or baselines. Also, no reporting received against the sub-target for crop varieties increasing. Baselines have not been formally set – these should be approved by the PSC in an updated results framework.	Outcome 3.1: Moderately satisfactory	Little reporting has been received against the species and ecosystems indicators that were to be determined; mid-term data for Core Indicator 3 also contributes to Outcome 3.1, and this was partially achieved.

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Level at first PIR (self-reported) (30 June 2022)	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Mid-term (MT) level & assessment (colour-coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement rating**	Justification for rating
						Clear reporting against both sub-targets, with methodology explained, will be required for the terminal evaluation. Also, a stronger focus on biodiversity, species and ecosystems indicators is recommended.		
	b) Carbon sequestered or emissions avoided: See Core Indicator 6	- See Core Indicator 6 above -						
	c) Area of upland and farmland surrounding ecosystems under ecological restoration/ rehabilitation: See Core Indicator 3.	- See Core Indicator 3 above -						
Outcome 4.1: Effective knowledge management/information exchange and M&E.	a) Number of information dissemination platforms (smart-phone based app, internet portal, etc.) established (or existing platforms	0	The contract on information sharing platform has been drafted.	At least 1	At least 2	**Achieved** 1 platform established: a remote training platform, with 10 technical training courses that are publicly available.	Outcome 4.1: Satisfactory	Met the mid-term target to establish at least one new information dissemination platform, and met the target for the number of people

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Level at first PIR (self-reported) (30 June 2022)	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Mid-term (MT) level & assessment (colour-coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement rating**	Justification for rating
	improved) and operational.					Verified by a demo of the training platform. NPMO reports that the platform has had 1.62 million views, benefiting around 160,000 people (10%). Other existing platforms were used for dissemination, including national and provincial government websites, and media channels.		reached by information dissemination and knowledge exchange.
	b) Number of people reached by information dissemination and knowledge exchange.	0	The former National Project Director shared the project information online in the launch event of the global FOLUR IP in COP26 in Glasgow, UK. The Deputy Project Director shared the project information in the sub-event of COP15 in Kunming, China.	100,000	250,000 This may, in part, overlap with the 250,000 beneficiaries above (Core Indicator 11).	**Achieved** Reported 179,883 (82,636 females = 45.9%). See reporting and assessment under Core Indicator 11. More rigorous reporting, with accurate gender disaggregation, should be provided for the terminal evaluation.		

Indicator assessment key

Green = Achieved	Yellow = On target to be achieved	Red = Not on target to be achieved

***** As presented in the results framework in the original project document or subsequently updated by the Project Steering Committee (PSC) at project inception

Appendix 7. Co-financing table

[1] A dash indicates that no reporting was received for the identified co-financer..

[2] No evidence was available to enable the reported co-financing to be confirmed.

Sources of co-financing	**Name of co-financer**	**Type of co-financing**	**Amount confirmed at CEO endorsement/ approval**		**Actual amount materialized as of 30 June 2025**[1]		**Actual amount materialized at mid-term or closure** (not confirmed by the MTR team)[2]	**Expected total disbursement by the end of the project**
			Cash	In-kind	Cash	In-kind		
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs	In-Kind		6,000,000		3,411,605	3,411,605	6,000,000
Recipient Country Government	Shandong Provincial and District Governments	In-Kind		10,000,000		5,143,714	5,143,714	10,000,000
Recipient Country Government	Jiangsu Provincial and District Governments	In-Kind		10,000,000		6,108,286	6,108,286	10,000,000
Recipient Country Government	Jiangxi Provincial and District Governments	In-Kind		10,000,000		5,606,686	5,606,686	10,000,000
Recipient Country Government	Guizhou Provincial and District Governments	In-Kind		10,000,000		4,233,586	4,233,586	10,000,000
GEF Agency	Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)	In-Kind		300,000		250,000	250,000	300,000
Private Sector	Nanjing Hengcheng Agricultural Development Co., Ltd.	Grant		400,000		230,000	230,000	400,000
Private Sector	Nanjing Junsheng Ecological Agriculture Co., Ltd.	Grant		400,000		300,000	300,000	400,000
Private Sector	Nanjing Tianwei Agricultural	Grant		400,000		190,000	190,000	400,000

	Technology Co., Ltd.							
Private Sector	Taicang City Donglin Village Farm Professional Cooperative	Grant		1,200,000		400,000	400,000	1,200,000
Private Sector	Fenyi Huayong Agricultural Machinery Specialized Cooperative	Grant		200,000		-	-	200,000
Private Sector	Fenyi Qunyuan Agriculture and Animal Husbandry Development Co., Ltd.	Grant		200,000		-	-	200,000
Private Sector	Fenyi Quanfeng Breeding Professional Cooperative	Grant		200,000		-	-	200,000
Private Sector	Fenyi Guigen Grain Planting Professional Cooperative	Grant		200,000		-	-	200,000
Private Sector	Jiangxi Jiafu Agricultural Technology Co., Ltd.	Grant		400,000		220,000	220,000	400,000
Private Sector	Jiangxi Zhenghe Ecological Agriculture Co., Ltd.	Grant		1,200,000		700,000	700,000	1,200,000
Private Sector	Laizhou Chenggang Road Weisong Plant Protection Professional Cooperative	Grant		1,200,000		450,000	450,000	1,200,000
Private Sector	Shandong Changrun Ecological Agriculture Co., Ltd.	Grant		1,200,000		360,000	360,000	1,200,000
Private Sector	Guizhou Rongjiangsha n Agricultural	Grant		1,000,000		670,000	670,000	1,000,000

	Development Co., Ltd							
Private Sector	Guizhou Yueliangshan Agriculture Co., Ltd.	Grant		1,000,000		580,000	580,000	1,000,000
Private Sector	Guizhou Liping Dongxiang Rice Production Co., Ltd.	Grant		1,000,000		-	-	1,000,000
		TOTAL		56,500,000		28,823,876	28,853,876	56,500,000

Appendix 8. GEF evaluation criteria rating table and rating scheme

Table A11.3 MTR ratings and achievements summary table

GEF criteria/sub-criteria	Rating[2]	Summary comments
A. STRATEGIC RELEVANCE		
A1. Overall strategic relevance	HS	See Section 4.1 "Relevance".
A1.1. Alignment with GEF and FAO strategic priorities	HS	Highly consistent with several GEF programming directions, especially the GEF-7 Food Systems, Land Use, and Restoration Impact Program strategy and three focal areas; strong contribution to the FAO Country Programming Framework (CPF) for China.
A1.2. Relevance to national, regional and global priorities and beneficiary needs	HS	Highly congruent with national environmental and development priorities, especially 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020), the National Plan for Sustainable Development of Agriculture (2015–2030), the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2023–2030), and China's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC).
A1.3. Complementarity with existing interventions	S	Project design was based on an exhaustive analysis of baseline initiatives, partnerships and data; during implementation, interaction occurred with other projects relating to agro-biodiversity conservation, especially after COVID-19 restrictions ended.
B. EFFECTIVENESS		
B1. Overall assessment of project results	S	
B1.1 Delivery of project outputs	S	The project is on track to deliver all project outputs by project end, although the quality of some key results would be optimized by a one-year extension of time available. See Section 4.2 "Effectiveness" and Appendix 6.
B1.2 Progress towards outcomes and project objectives	S	
- Objective	S	The project has made good progress towards the development objective "to support the innovative transformation of China's agro-landscapes and agri-food value chains towards environmental and ecological sustainability at scale in support of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), rural revitalization, ecological civilization, and climate resilience".
- Outcome 1.1	S	Integrated landscape management and restoration plans developed for six cities/counties; extensive training of government decision-makers and technical staff; high-quality work establishing monitoring systems in the target provinces; and the target under GEF Core Indicator 4 was achieved.
- Outcome 1.2	N/A	There are no mid-term targets for Outcome 1.2.

[2] See rating scheme in Table A11.4 at the end of this table.

- Outcome 2.1	S	Work underway towards developing new or improved standards for green agricultural production, although target only partially achieved; monitoring results show strong trends towards the targets for reduced chemical fertilizer use, reduced pesticide use, increased soil organic content, and increased average yield, and each of these mid-term indicators is considered achieved.
- Outcome 2.2	S	Extensive farmer training activities undertaken and target met; increased farmer incomes reported although reporting was incomplete; target for number of agri-food brands certified was met and the target for number of farmer cooperatives with increased capacity to support responsible value chains was met.
- Outcome 3.1	MS	Little reporting has been received against the species and ecosystems indicators that were to be determined; mid-term data for Core Indicator 3 also contributes to Outcome 3.1, and this was partially achieved.
- Outcome 4.1	S	Met the mid-term target to establish at least one new information dissemination platform, and met the target for the number of people reached by information dissemination and knowledge exchange.
- Overall rating of progress towards achieving objectives/ outcomes	S	
B1.3 Likelihood of impact	Not rated at MTR	
C. EFFICIENCY		
C1. Efficiency	S	The project has been implemented efficiently, with project start-up occurring efficiently despite the complexity of the project arrangements; COVID-19 had a very significant impact on this project and led to significant delays, although management responded effectively to this challenge; there is a significant underspend of the GEF allocation, largely due to COVID-19; the cost-effectiveness of the project is high and the timeliness is moderate. See Section 4.3 “Efficiency”.
D. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES		
D1. Overall likelihood of risks to sustainability	L	The project has undertaken a lot of excellent work that increase the likelihood of sustainability, especially by empowering provincial- and county-level stakeholders, establishing cross-departmental coordination, conducting extensive capacity building, closely involving farmer cooperatives, developing county-level ILM and restoration plans, and through knowledge management; the project faces significant challenges in achieving

		widespread scaling up. (See Section 4.4 Sustainability.)
D1.1. Financial risks	L	Risk that provincial and county governments will stop supporting the project after it ends. If this occurs, it is unlikely that cooperatives, farmers and other local stakeholders would continue the project's results independently. This risk is considered low, because all provincial and county governments indicated that they would continue to support the existing sites and the associated cooperatives and farmers.
D1.2. Sociopolitical risks	L	Risk that cooperatives will not continue to be involved; this would make it difficult for the project to continue the large-scale activities that are underway. This risk is considered low, because they have shown their commitment through contributing co-financing, their business models are based on working sustainably with farmers on developing value chains and marketing strategies, and they show a strong commitment to continuing after the project ends
D1.3. Institutional and governance risks	L	The level of ownership of the project by government agencies is very high. Also, the cross-departmental coordination mechanisms have improved governance arrangements and increased the likelihood of the results being sustainable.
D1.4. Environmental risks	L	Climate change and extreme weather events represent a threat to all crops and agri-ecological systems, including those established under this project. Project design mitigates this by developing innovative and climate-smart approaches to crop production and restoration, and the project applies adaptive management underpinned by detailed monitoring systems. The risk is therefore considered lower than for most crops. The project is focused on developing environmentally friendly practices, such as reducing chemical pesticide and fertilizer use and reducing GHG emissions.
D2. Catalysis and replication	MU	There are various significant challenges to scaling up results to new provinces and counties, including some of the original project barriers still being present in those locations; the need for knowledge management and capacity building; the need to convince new farmers and cooperatives of the benefits; the likely need for funding to provide financial support; the need to transfer lessons learned about brand, marketing and value chains; and the need to foster new partnerships with cooperatives. See Finding 11.
E. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE		
E1. Project design and readiness	HS	The project is complex but well designed, with clear and coherent logic and a focus on sustainability of the results; the project's

		readiness for delivery was high, and the OP put in place required arrangements efficiently in late 2021 / early 2022, despite the challenges of COVID-19; the project design has little substantive content on how results will be scaled up after the project
E2. Quality of project implementation	S	
E2.1 Quality of project implementation by FAO (BH, LTO, PTF, etc.)	S	FAO effectively delivered on its role and responsibilities as the GEF Agency. The PTF meets regularly and FAO staff are responsive in providing support and proactively addressed challenges during implementation. FAO also provided important technical input to the project. See Finding 21.
E2.1 Project oversight (PSC, project working group, etc.)	S	The PSC was established early in accordance with the project document, has met four times and is operating effectively. See Finding 18
E3. Quality of project execution	HS	
E3.1 Project execution and management (NPMO and executing partner performance, administration, staffing, etc.)	HS	MARA was highly effective in discharging its role and responsibilities related to the management and administration of the project and has shown very strong ownership of the project. See Finding 18.
E4. Financial management and co-financing	MS	The main financial challenge for the project is low expenditure of the GEF allocation, mainly due to the impacts of COVID-19 restrictions; approximately half of the committed co-financing has materialized to 30 June 2025, and government and private-sector co-financing has been central to the project's success and achievements. See Findings 19 and 20.
E5. Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement	S	Partnerships with the private sector have been central to the design and implementation of this project and are a strength; also partnerships with government officials at all levels, and partnerships with experts and practitioners. See Finding 22.
E6. Communication, knowledge management and knowledge products	S	Knowledge management is a focus of the project's design and implementation; a remote training platform was established, and other existing platforms and methods were used to disseminate knowledge; project representatives participated in many knowledge exchange activities, including international exchanges; it is not clear whether communication with individual smallholder farmers and with the general public was effective. See Finding 23.
E7. Overall quality of M&E	S	
E7.1 M&E design	S	The M&E system at the time of project endorsement was generally practical and sufficient, with the project's technical monitoring delivered through Output 1.1.4 and funded from outside the M&E budget; six indicators did not have baselines in the endorsed results

		framework, and these are to be developed during implementation. See Finding 24.
E7.2 M&E plan implementation (including financial and human resources)	S	The M&E system is generally operating as per the M&E plan and information has been gathered in a systematic manner; information generated by the M&E system has been used to inform and improve project planning and execution. However, baselines have not been set for the indicators in the results framework that required baselines, and several indicators require improved monitoring protocols to ensure monitoring and reporting are consistent and systematic. See Finding 25.
E8. Overall assessment of factors affecting performance	S	
F. CROSS-CUTTING CONCERNS		
F1. Gender and other equity dimensions	S	Gender considerations were taken into account adequately during project design and are being appropriately considered during implementation, including through the engagement since 2022 of a gender consultant, appointment of gender focal points, review of the Gender Action Plan in 2025, and preparation of gender-specific knowledge products. Finding 27.
F2. Human rights issues	S	Attention to human rights issues during implementation has been adequate, although human rights were not considered in project design.
F2. Environmental and social safeguards	S	Consideration of environmental and social concerns has been appropriate during project design and implementation; the current overall risk rating of moderate is still valid. See Finding 28.
Overall project rating	**S**	

Table A11.4 How to assess ratings for specific criteria

Rating	Description
Highly satisfactory (HS)	*Level of outcomes achieved clearly exceeds expectations and/or there were no shortcomings*
Satisfactory (S)	*Level of outcomes achieved was as expected and/or there were no or minor shortcomings*
Moderately satisfactory (MS)	*Level of outcomes achieved more or less as expected and/or there were moderate shortcomings*
Moderately unsatisfactory (MU)	*Level of outcomes achieved somewhat lower than expected and/or there were significant shortcomings*
Unsatisfactory (U)	*Level of outcomes achieved substantially lower than expected and/or there were major shortcomings*
Highly unsatisfactory (HU)	*Only a negligible level of outcomes achieved and/or there were severe shortcomings*
Unable to assess (UA)	*The available information does not allow an assessment of the level of outcome achievements*

Source: GEF (2017c)

In line with similar guidance on the assessment of ratings for GEF terminal evaluations (GEF, 2017c), the overall rating of the outcomes of the project should be based on performance on the criteria of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency. The calculation of the overall outcome rating will consider all three criteria, of which relevance and effectiveness are critical. The relevance rating will determine whether the overall outcome rating is in the unsatisfactory range (MU to HU = unsatisfactory range). If the relevance rating is unsatisfactory, the overall outcome will be unsatisfactory as well. However, where the relevance rating is satisfactory (HS to MS), the overall outcome rating could, depending on its effectiveness and efficiency rating, be either satisfactory or unsatisfactory.

Table A11.5 Factors affecting performance *(assess each element separately; M&E is treated differently)*

Rating	Description
Highly satisfactory (HS)	There were no shortcomings and quality of design and readiness/project implementation/project execution/co-financing/partnerships and stakeholder engagement/communication and knowledge management and results exceeded expectations.
Satisfactory (S)	There were no or minor shortcomings and quality of design and readiness/project implementation/project execution/co-financing/partnerships and stakeholder engagement/communication and knowledge management and results meet expectations.
Moderately satisfactory (MS)	There were some shortcomings and quality of design and readiness/project implementation/project execution/co-financing/partnerships and stakeholder engagement/communication and knowledge management and results more or less meet expectations.
Moderately unsatisfactory (MU)	There were significant shortcomings and quality of design and readiness/project implementation/project execution/co-financing/partnerships and stakeholder engagement/communication and knowledge management and results were somewhat lower than expected.
Unsatisfactory (U)	There were major shortcomings and quality of design and readiness/project implementation/project execution/co-financing/partnerships and stakeholder engagement/communication and knowledge management and results were substantially lower than expected.

Highly unsatisfactory (HU)	There were severe shortcomings in quality of design and readiness/project implementation/project execution/co-financing/partnerships and stakeholder engagement/communication and knowledge management.
Unable to assess (UA)	The available information does not allow an assessment of the quality of design and readiness/project implementation/project execution/co-financing/partnerships and stakeholder engagement/communication and knowledge management.

Table A11.6 Monitoring and evaluation design or implementation ratings *(Overall M&E design, design and implementation assessed separately)*

Rating	Description
Highly satisfactory (HS)	There were no shortcomings and quality of M&E design or M&E implementation exceeded expectations.
Satisfactory (S)	There were no or minor shortcomings and quality of M&E design or M&E implementation meets expectations.
Moderately satisfactory (MS)	There were some shortcomings and quality of M&E design or M&E implementation more or less meets expectations.
Moderately unsatisfactory (MU)	There were significant shortcomings and quality of M&E design or M&E implementation somewhat lower than expected.
Unsatisfactory (U)	There were major shortcomings and quality of M&E design or M&E implementation substantially lower than expected.
Highly unsatisfactory (HU)	There were severe shortcomings in M&E design or M&E implementation.
Unable to assess (UA)	The available information does not allow an assessment of the quality of M&E design or M&E implementation.

Table A11.7 Sustainability

Rating	Description
Likely (L)	There is little or no risk to sustainability.
Moderately likely (ML)	There are moderate risks to sustainability.
Moderately unlikely (MU)	There are significant risks to sustainability.
Unlikely (U)	There are severe risks to sustainability.
Unable to assess (UA)	Unable to assess the expected incidence and magnitude of risks to sustainability.

Appendix 9. List of cooperatives with increased capacity

The following cooperatives have increased capacity to support responsible value chains (provided by NPMO):

1 榕江县丰源农机农民专业合作社

- Fengyuan Agricultural Machinery Farmers' Professional Cooperative, Rongjiang County

2 榕江幸福家园家庭农场（榕江县鸿雁种养殖农民专业合作社）

- Xingfujiayuan Farm (Rongjiang County Hongyan Breeding Farmers' Professional Cooperative), Rongjiang County

3 榕江县金秋种养殖农民专业合作社

- Jinqiu Breeding Farmers' Professional Cooperative, Rongjiang County

4 榕江县阳光蔬菜种植农民专业合作社

- Sunshine Vegetable Planting Farmers' Professional Cooperative, Rongjiang County

5 新余德隆农业农民专业合作社

- Delong Agricultural Farmers' Professional Cooperative, Xinyu City

6 新余市根兰种养农民专业合作社

- Genlan Breeding Farmers' Professional Cooperative, Xinyu City

7 富锦市上街基镇诚信村股份经济合作社

Shangjieji Town Chengxin Village Share Economic Cooperative, Fujin City

8 富锦市东北水田现代农机专业合作社

Northeast Water Field Modern Agricultural Machinery Professional Cooperative, Fujin City

9 富锦市砚山镇连生村股份经济合作社

- Yanshan Town Liansheng Village Share Economic Cooperative, Fujin City

10 莱州市新力农业专业合作社

- Xinli Agricultural Professional Cooperative, Laizhou City

11 莱州市城港路维松植保专业合作社

- Chenggang Road Weisong Plant Protection Professional Cooperative, Laizhou City

12 莱州市琅琊岭小龙农产品农民专业合作社

- Langyaling Xiaolong Agricultural Products Farmers' Professional Cooperative, Laizhou City

Appendix 10. Recalculation of Capacity Development Scorecard data and baseline

This appendix provides background information to the collection of baseline and mid-term data for the Capacity Development Scorecard. Refer to the following embedded MS Excel file "Overview sheet - Mid-term Capacity Building Score Sheet 2025 - GEF065", prepared by the MTR team by adapting the overview worksheet from the Capacity Development Scorecard provided by the NPMO.



Overview%20sheet%
20-%20Midterm%20(

Background

When the capacity development baselines were set in 2019 during the PPG phase, data were collected from eight locations originally scheduled as the first batch of demonstration sites to be constructed. The overall baseline (51 percent) was set using the average % score for the eight sites.

As described under Finding 12, the scheduled batches were changed in response to COVID-19 challenges, and the first batch was changed from eight to six. Of these six, two were not originally scheduled in the first batch: Fujin (Heilongjiang) was added to the project at project inception and Qingyun (Shandong) was originally planned for the second batch. This means that baseline data were not collected for these sites, so 2019 baseline data is only available for four first-batch sites: Laizhou, Liuhe, Yushui and Rongjiang.

As part of the mid-term data collection, data were collected for Fujin and Qingyun, although 2019 baseline data is not available for them.

Baselines and targets

Given these changes, for this MTR the overall baseline must be recalculated using only the four first-batch sites.

A revised baseline should also be set for the remainder of the project. The NPMO should consult with Capacity Development Scorecard experts to determine whether it is valid to include the mid-term data for Fujin and Qingyun when calculating the new overall baseline (so that six sites are included), or whether only the four 2019 baseline datasets will be included. The revised baseline should be formally approved by the PSC.

In addition, when the new baseline has been determined, the end-of-project target should also be reconsidered, given that the end-of-project target in the results framework is for a 10 percent increase from the baseline. Any proposed change to the end-of-project target must be approved by the PSC.

Mid-term reporting

It is important that mid-term reporting against the overall baseline and target should only include the four sites that were part of the 2019 baseline. However, the mid-term Capacity Development Scorecard received by the MTR team used all six current demonstration sites to calculate the mid-term scores.

The MTR team has recalculated the mid-term overall scores to consider only the four sites included in the revised baseline (highlighted yellow in the embedded MS Excel file).

Calculation methodology

In the Capacity Development Scorecard template in MS Excel, the grand total %max is calculated as the average of the %max for the different sites. In the Scorecard received by the MTR team, this value had been calculated as the average of the five Capacity Results (CRs), which generates slightly different results. Accordingly, the MTR team has recalculated these baseline and mid-term grand totals (highlighted yellow in the embedded MS Excel file).

Appendix 11. Risks to achieving project outcomes

The following table has been completed in accordance with the provided template "Risks to achieving project outcomes". The identified risks are from Section 5 of the project document.

Risks to Achieving Outcomes

Summarize risks that might affect the achievement of desired outcomes and the mitigation measures which are planned or already undertaken to address these. The risk rating should reflect the *residual* risk to achieving outcomes after considering the implementation of mitigation measures. The rating scale is: High, Substantial, Moderate, Low. See the *GEF Risk Appetite* document (GEF/C.66/13) for more information and its Annex B for a description of each risk category. Note that the rating for the "Environment and Social" category should be the same as the risk rating for Safeguards.

RISK CATEGORIES	RATINGS	ASSESSMENT AND MITIGATION MEASURES
		CONTEXT
Climate	Substantial	Risk: Impacts of climate change on crop production during or after project implementation lead to a decrease in yields or crop losses and thus reduce the positive impact of the project. In June-July 2020, the project provinces of Jiangxi, Jiangsu and Guizhou were affected by severe floods caused by torrential rains, affecting the livelihoods of millions of people. Assessment: Impact – High, Probability – Moderate Mitigation: The innovative and climate-smart approaches to crop production and restoration to be scaled up under the project are aimed at increasing the resilience of production systems and farmer livelihoods. The project will build on ongoing efforts by government and research institutions in China to promote climate change adaptation in farming systems. It will aim to promote climate-resilient crop varieties and climate-resilient production techniques such as for pest control, water management, diversified cropping and establishing vegetation buffers. An analysis of climate change impacts and projected crop suitability in the GEF-7 target provinces was conducted during the project design phase (see following section). This will be further discussed and refined with local stakeholders during the preparation of ILM plans during implementation (as part of Output 1.1.2). Impacts of climate change on crop production will be carefully monitored during the project implementation, and capacity will be developed among local institutions and stakeholders to implement adaptive measures. The project will apply adaptive management to adjust to new developments in the target counties.
Environment and Social	Moderate	Risk: Demographic changes lead to farmers abandoning farmland in the project target areas Assessment: Impact – Moderate, Probability – Moderate Mitigation: The project is aimed at increasing incentives for sustainable agricultural production through enhanced value chains and access to finance. It is, therefore, anticipated that the project will address some of the causes of abandonment of cropland. The project will also aim to strengthen implementation of efficient land transfers. Moreover, recent

		trends show that, due to the slowing of economic development in urban areas, young people in some areas choose to return to rural areas and resume farming activities. Nevertheless, the project will carefully monitor demographic trends and changes and periodically review its intervention strategy.
Environment and Social	Moderate	Risk: Pesticide Management 5.1 – Would this project procure, supply and/or result in the use of pesticides on crops, livestock, aquaculture or forestry? Yes 5.2 – Would this project provide seeds or other materials treated with pesticides (in the field and/or in storage)? Yes Mitigation: An Integrated Pest Management Plan was prepared in line with the concept of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and was included as Annex O in the project document. Activities to reduce the use of chemical pesticides have been incorporated into the project design. GEF-7 project funds will not be used to purchase chemical inputs. However, the project may issue technical guidelines and recommendations for improved, low-impact chemical use and application, in line with the overall aim of reducing the use of chemical pesticides.
Environment and Social	Moderate	Risk: Ethnic Minorities / Indigenous Peoples (Guizhou only) 9.1 – Are there indigenous peoples living outside the project area where activities will take place? Yes. However, the project activates will not influence any facets of their life. 9.2 – Are there indigenous peoples living in the project area where activities will take place? Yes Mitigation: Ethnic minorities are present in the target counties of Guizhou Province. Consequently, a Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) procedure was prepared during the project preparation phase in line with FAO Environmental and Social Management Guidelines and GEF Indigenous Peoples Principles and Guidelines. Measures to mitigate risks and enhance opportunities were also elaborated as part of the FPIC report. The FPIC process was described in Annex J in the project document.
Political and Governance	< Select rating >	< Insert text >
		INNOVATION
Institutional and Policy	Moderate	Risk: Lack of inter-sectoral collaboration among agencies at the local, provincial and national level Assessment: Impact – Moderate, Probability – Low Mitigation: Through the leadership of MARA and the participating provinces and counties, different sectors will be engaged and their interests taken into account. The project supports national and local priorities in various sectors by contributing to sustainable agriculture, restoration, poverty alleviation and rural revitalization goals. In addition, the project will bring together different agencies and stakeholders through the integrated landscape management (ILM) approach and the national and provincial food and land use collaboration mechanisms.

Institutional and Policy	Substantial	Risk: Market and other incentives are insufficient to support the long-term shift towards sustainable practices Assessment: Impact – High, Probability – Moderate Mitigation: Close attention will be paid to the socio-economic benefits of project interventions, as these are a prerequisite for the adoption and sustainability of improved practices. The project interventions will aim to reduce input costs for farmers, reduce occurrence of pests and diseases, increase yields, introduce payments for agro-ecological services, and increase the value and quality of agricultural products, and thus should provide sufficient incentives for the adoption of sustainable practices and restoration of degraded lands.
Technological	Moderate	Risk: Further shift towards high-value crops cancels out the benefits gained in the project's target crops (rice, wheat and maize) Assessment: Impact – Moderate, Probability – Low Mitigation: Through its landscape approach, the project will look not only at the main staple crops, but at sustainable land use and restoration of degraded land holistically. Strategies to reduce chemical inputs can be replicated in other crop areas, such as vegetables and fruit, and economic plantations such as oil trees. Also, based on current government policies, it is unlikely that there will be a significant reduction in grain crop areas.
Financial and Business Model	< Select rating >	< Insert text >
EXECUTION		
Capacity for Implementation	< Select rating >	< Insert text >
Fiduciary	< Select rating >	< Insert text >
Stakeholder	< Select rating >	< Insert text >
Other	< Select rating >	< Insert text >
Overall Risk Rating	Moderate	Risk: COVID-19-related risks (i) Impacts of COVID-19 may lead to a delay in implementation, a delay in the realization of co-financing, and/or reduced ability to conduct face-to-face interactions with stakeholders. Furthermore, national technical experts may not be able to travel to the project sites if COVID-19 restrictions are reinstated. (ii) Impacts of COVID-19 may delay or negatively affect the realization of co-financing. (iii) COVID-19 may lead to negative impacts on the poor and vulnerable groups. (iv) Potential migration to rural areas due to economic crisis may increase pressure on natural resources. (v) Opportunity to support green agricultural development, as well as improvement of agricultural supply chains, as part of the COVID-19 recovery. Assessment: Impact – High, Probability – Moderate

		Mitigation: (i) Impact on project implementation. At present, the office works, transportation, meetings, training, etc. have all returned to ordinary work. According to the national epidemic prevention regulations, areas with sudden outbreaks will be blocked, but with the continuous improvement of epidemic monitoring and prevention and control measures, the range of blocked areas are expected to become smaller and smaller. If an epidemic occurs in individual areas of the project, activities such as conference and technical training can be carried out through online networks. The virtual communication systems have been popularized by grassroots governments and farmers. During the project design phase, remote communication via email, video conference and phone was used increasingly to adjust to the new situation. The co-financing letters that were issued already reflect the new situation based on COVID-19. During implementation, the project will apply adaptive management. The work plan and stakeholder engagement plan would be adjusted, if necessary, and submitted to PSC for approval. In case of travel restrictions, local facilitators or officials would be briefed remotely, and would be in charge of ensuring adequate engagement of local stakeholders (including implementation of FPIC and the gender action plan). (ii) Impact on project co-financing. The impact of COVID-19 on China's national and local economies has been significant, but the situation is gradually improving. As the province most affected by COVID-19, the Chinese Government has established a special fund for Hubei to help it resume economic development as soon as possible. In other regions, economic growth has been affected, but there has been no significant reduction in investment in agriculture and the ecological environment. Thus, it is not anticipated that co-financing support from relevant development partners and the private sector would be significantly reduced. The co-financing letters that were issued already reflect the new situation based on COVID-19. (iii) Impact on target beneficiary communities. Most of the project areas are rural areas. Due to scattered residence and low mobility, the occurrence of COVID-19 in these areas is low. China's national and local governments have a relatively well-developed system for ensuring the supply of basic necessities in areas at high risk of COVID-19, as well as corresponding assistance policies for poor and vulnerable groups. In its interventions, the project will also focus on strengthening the resilience of agricultural supply chains in the face of COVID-19 and potential future similar crises. Additionally, the project will assist communities to continue to undertake preventive measures to stop the spread of COVID-19, including through social distancing and other public health measures such as minimizing large meetings. Finally, the project will contribute to the country's COVID-19 recovery by strengthening investments in sustainable agriculture, food security and environmental protection of natural resources. (iv) Migration to rural areas. Long-term demographic changes will be monitored by the project and the project intervention strategy would be revisited if the project context changes, to

		ensure any potential pressures on natural resources are addressed and opportunities such as increased labour availability taken into account. (v) Food security has become a priority in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. By improving traceability and supply chains, the project will make an important contribution to improving agricultural distribution systems and making them more resilient in the face of potential similar crises in the future. The State Council promulgated the opinions on the protection and utilization of agricultural resources, which remains a priority. The project will contribute to post-pandemic recovery by investing in green agricultural development. Importantly also, by supporting agricultural emissions reduction, the project will contribute to the recent commitment by President Xi to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060.