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Final Evaluation of the Project "Integrated management of mangrove and associated wetlands and coastal forest ecosystems of the Republic of Congo"

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PROJECT EVALUATION SERIES

**Final Evaluation of the Project
"Integrated Management of Mangrove and
Associated Wetlands and Coastal Forest Ecosystems
in the Republic of Congo"**

**GCP/PRC/007/GFF
GEF project ID: 4083**

**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF EVALUATION
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Acronyms and abbreviations

ACP-FLEGT	EU <i>Forest</i> Law Enforcement, <i>Governance</i> and <i>Trade</i> Support Programme for <i>African</i> , Caribbean and <i>Pacific</i> countries
IGA	Income Generating Activities
AJVK	Association des Jeunes pour la Vie du Kouilou
AMFN	African Model Forest Network
CNC	Congo Nature Conservation
COMIFAC	Central African Forest Commission
PT	Project Team
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FAO CG	FAO Congo
GEF	Global Environment Facility
LoA	Letter of Agreement
IRF	National Forest Research Institute
IRSEN	Institut national de Recherche sur les sciences exactes et naturelles
MEFDDE	Ministère de l'économie forestière, du développement durable et de l'environnement
ND	Nature et développement
OCC	Congolese Coastal Observatory
OED	Office of Evaluation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
PNIU	National Emergency Intervention Plan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
PSG	Simple Management Plan
SNR	National Reforestation Service
UNS	United Nations system
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society

Executive summary

Introduction

1. The GCP/PRC/007/GFF project entitled "Integrated management of mangroves and associated wetlands and coastal forest ecosystems in the Republic of Congo", amounting to a total of USD 950,000, was implemented between July 2013 and December 2017 by the Government of the Republic of Congo and FAO. The main phase of the final evaluation of the project took place between July and August 2017. It covered all the activities carried out as part of the implementation of the project's various components.
2. The evaluation sought to answer three main questions: i) To what extent did the design of the project and its activities meet the needs identified? ii) To what extent were the effects of the project achieved? ; and iii) To what extent has the project made progress towards achieving its objectives, in particular: a) enhancing biodiversity conservation and reducing degradation in mangrove ecosystems; as well as b) strengthening and increasing the sustainability of livelihoods for communities in or around mangrove ecosystems?
3. The evaluation team was composed of two consultants: The Team Leader who is a Forest and Climate Change Expert, and a Monitoring and Evaluation Expert. The methodological approach consisted of a literature review, interviews with key stakeholders at national level, FAO staff in Congo and meetings with local authorities, communities and other beneficiaries at project sites.
4. This summary presents the key findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation.

Key Findings

5. The project is considered relevant because it was designed to test a new policy and institutional and legal framework for the conservation of mangrove ecosystems (which, prior to the implementation of the project, was very weak in Congo) on the one hand and the community-based forest resource management approach (absent in national legislation) on the other. The design of the project was the subject of a thorough diagnosis and involved the key actors working in mangrove management in Congo.
6. The evaluation found that the project influenced the legal framework for the management of coastal ecosystems in Congo, which was the first expected effect of the project. Moreover, the issues of mangroves and coastal ecosystems are being taken into account in revised forestry and environmental codes. A national strategy and action plan for an integrated management of mangrove ecosystem has been developed and validated, but at the time of the evaluation, its implementation had not yet begun. The project has also established a platform for intersectoral dialogue and coordination, but functionality has been limited and meetings have been sporadic.
7. With regard to stakeholders' capacity-building on monitoring biodiversity and mangrove ecosystem health and assessing the impacts of coastal projects (effect Two of the Project), the evaluation found that the National Coastal Observatory (OCC) had been established. At the time of the evaluation, this Observatory was not yet operational, but the process was quite

advanced. Updated information on ecosystem trends, conditions and threats had been published and was made available to decision-makers. NGO staff and civil servants have been trained on conducting environmental and social studies, but performance assessments of existing mitigation plans, which is an activity foreseen in the project design, have not been carried out.

8. Effect Three of the project aimed at building stakeholder capacity to support participatory management of mangrove ecosystems. NGO staff and civil servants in charge of conservation received training and have the necessary skills to support participatory management of mangrove ecosystems. However, the use of the knowledge acquired was limited by the unavailability of co-financing, which did not allow for the implementation of Simple Management Plans (PSG) developed by the communities.
9. Finally, the last effect of the project focused on a more sustainable management of mangrove resources by local communities and an improvement of their livelihoods. As mentioned earlier, the non-availability of co-financing did not allow the implementation of the Simple Management Plans (PSG). In general, discussions with beneficiaries showed insufficient understanding of the community-based management approach by the local populations targeted at the visited sites. In addition, the evaluation noted, as a limitation of this intervention, a lack of demarcation in community management areas. Indeed, the project did not provide for the signing of formal agreements between the communities and the Congolese State (even on a pilot basis) to secure these areas. Finally, the restoration of areas as foreseen within the logical framework was not carried out. At the time of the evaluation, restoration activities had been planned in Noumbi and Ngoumbi in the North Kouilou, as well as in Bois des Singes, south of Pointe Noire and Bas-Kouilou.
10. Gender mainstreaming in the project was insufficient. "Gender" issues were not taken into account when formulating the outcomes and key indicators of the project outputs; and the project's annual reports provide very little data and information on how the project involved women in various activities. Finally, although women have been involved in the development of PSGs, only one out of three plans includes women-oriented activities.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1. The project's conservation objective of "enhancing biodiversity conservation and reducing degradation in mangrove ecosystems" has been partially achieved. Although the project contributed to strengthening the legislative and institutional framework, questions arise about the implementation of all the documents produced since no strategy for mobilising and securing funds to deploy strategies and plans has been developed by the project.

Conclusion 2. The project's development objective of "strengthening and enhancing sustainable livelihoods for the communities living in and around mangrove ecosystems" was too theoretical although, at the time of the evaluation, a number of activities were being prepared through memoranda of understanding, which are currently being signed. No concrete activities to improve living conditions have been carried out. However, the evaluation noted that the project supported communities in delineating areas for community-based management, developing simple management plans, and organising communities into associations. Unfortunately, even though associations have been recognised and legalised by the Ministry of the Interior, management rights and responsibilities have not been transferred to local communities by the Ministry in charge of forests. Nevertheless, there is good awareness among communities of the importance

of mangrove ecosystems. This awareness, coupled with the enthusiasm of community leaders, is an important asset to capitalise upon for communities to engage in conservation, restoration and income-generating activities.

Conclusion 3. Concerning the capacity-building of local communities to sustainably manage mangrove resources and improve their livelihoods, the project could have improved its performance by testing several approaches of enhancing natural resources in order to provide more input for the future legislation (thus providing an ideal opportunity to test different community management approaches and learn from them) rather than replicating a similar approach across all sites. Unfortunately, the communities did not take ownership of this approach because they did not understand that they themselves were the key actors to boost local development. It is worth stressing that the successful development of Income-Generating Activities (IGAs) at the community level requires not only community commitment, but also multiform support, multi-sectoral accompaniment in order to guarantee sustainable results. Finally, the community management areas set up by the project were not formally secured, but advocacy actions had been carried out to develop a community-based forest management system in Congo.

Conclusion 4. The project was unable to set up an operational national coastal observatory with a clear mandate and sufficient resources (mobilised outside the project) and a long-term financing plan to ensure its sustainability. This structure should ensure the sustainability of the conservation objective pursued by the project.

Conclusion 5. In short, the project remained very ambitious despite the mid-term review in the sense that it had to make changes at a legal and institutional level (although these changes do not depend only on the project) and, at the same time, test these changes through concrete actions in the field.

Recommendations

To the FAO:

Recommendation 1. In order to benefit from the achievements made during the implementation of this project, it would be necessary to continue with a sustainability phase aiming at strengthening and consolidating the achievements of four years of implementation. Thus, FAO should:

- i. Lobby to ensure that the specificities of mangroves and associated ecosystems are taken into account in the forestry code currently being revised and in the implementing legislation;
- ii. Enhance the value of the donation granted to the Bas Kouilou community by converting the fishing group into a functional cooperative. In other words, a change of vision and paradigm is necessary to boost commercial fishing in this community.

Recommendation 2. In future interventions, FAO should plan an initial "Inception Phase" to train implementing partners at the beginning of this project in FAO project procedures and management, in order to avoid misunderstandings. During this phase, baseline studies should be conducted to provide the project with realistic indicators and a monitoring-evaluation

framework/plan to better monitor the project. It may be helpful during this phase for all parties to agree on the documents and versions to be used during implementation.

To the Congolese Government:

Recommendation 4. Draw upon the project's experiences to develop the revised forestry code not only on aspects related to mangroves and associated ecosystems, but also on community-based management of resources in areas allocated to communities.

Recommendation 5. Make the CCO operational.

Recommendation 6. Strengthen the technical, operational, organisational and financial capacities of local communities, especially women (prior to a gender situation analysis), for their effective engagement in sustainable mangrove management. In this way, community forests could be an approach to community-based management of mangrove resources that will promote issues relating to female entrepreneurship, securing mangrove areas, conflict management and land tenure security.

1 About this evaluation

1.1 Evaluation Objectives

1. The GCP/PRC/007/GFF project entitled "Integrated management of mangroves, associated wetlands and coastal forest ecosystems in the Republic of Congo", amounting to a total of USD 950,000, was implemented between July 2013 and December 2017 by the Government of the Republic of Congo and FAO. The final evaluation of the project took place in Congo from 23 July to 1 August 2017. The evaluation covered all the activities undertaken under the various components of the project from the beginning of the project's implementation.
2. According to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Evaluation Guidelines revised in 2017, the objective of the final evaluation is to provide a comprehensive and systematic account of project performance by assessing i) project design, ii) project implementation process, iii) project achievements against planned objectives, and iv) other potential outcomes. Consequently, a series of questions was developed by the Evaluation Team to better define the objectives of the evaluation. These questions are reported in the box below.

Box 1: Evaluation Questions

1. To what extent is the design of the project and its activities responsive to identified needs?
2. To what extent have project outcomes been achieved?
3. Progress towards impact: As far as possible, the evaluation will analyse the extent to which the project has made progress towards achieving its objectives, in particular: a) enhancing biodiversity conservation and reducing degradation in mangrove ecosystems; as well as b) strengthening and increasing the sustainability of livelihoods for communities in or around mangrove ecosystems?

3. In addition, according to the GEF evaluation guidelines, the evaluation also took into account: the materialisation of co-financing; the quality of the project's monitoring and evaluation as well as the quality of its implementation and execution. **Gender** and **Stakeholder involvement** were analysed in the report as cross-cutting themes.
4. Users interested in this evaluation include the Government of Congo, FAO, GEF, the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC), decentralised local communities, implementing partners and beneficiary communities. And their wishes and expectations are as follows:
 - a) The Government of Congo: receives the conclusions, recommendations, and lessons learned in order to prepare a second phase of the project;
 - b) FAO: assess its contribution to achieving its strategic objectives while supporting the country through its technical expertise;
 - c) GEF: have information about whether the funding made available to the project has contributed significantly to achieving the project objectives and conserving biodiversity;
 - d) COMIFAC: Draw upon lessons learned to develop a sub-regional project on mangroves in the Congo Basin;

- e) Civil Society Organisations (CSOs): Analyse their approach to intervention in the field and draw upon lessons learned to continue to contribute effectively to the sustainable management of mangroves in Congo;
 - f) Decentralised local communities: monitor the project's achievements and, if possible, mobilise additional funding for the implementation of integrated mangrove and coastal ecosystem development strategies and plans;
 - g) Beneficiary communities: monitor project achievements and, if possible, mobilise additional funding for the implementation of simple management plans and other community initiatives relating to integrated management of mangroves and coastal ecosystems.
5. At the time of developing the TORs, the Office of Evaluation in consultation with the GEF Unit had decided to conduct the evaluation of project GCP/CMR/030/GFF "Sustainable community-based management and conservation of mangrove ecosystems in Cameroon" in parallel with the evaluation of project GCP/PRC/007/GFF "Integrated management of mangroves, associated wetlands and coastal forest ecosystems in the Republic of Congo". Indeed, while being implemented in two different countries, the two initiatives had very similar objectives. However, at the beginning of the evaluation, it was decided to keep the two as separate processes with separate reports considering the very different context in the two countries (community forest management is an approach already well established in Cameroun while in Congo it is more at an early stage) and the different audiences the two reports were targeting. Indeed, stakeholders involved in these evaluations were mainly national partners interested in the results achieved at country level and the initiatives had two different project teams, one for each country.

1.2 Methodology

6. The evaluation approach consisted mainly of a literature review (the full list of documents collected and used by the evaluation team is attached herein) and individual and group interviews as well as direct observations in project intervention areas. In particular:
- In Brazzaville, individual interviews were conducted with FAO staff (Programme Officer, Administrative and Finance Officer), the National Project Coordinator, the national consultant hired to integrate mangroves into legal instruments. A group interview was held with representatives of the ministries involved in the implementation of the project, in particular the ministries of agriculture, livestock and fisheries, forestry economy, scientific research and environment.
 - In Pointe Noire, the evaluation team had working sessions with the Project Management Unit. It conducted interviews with representatives of the multi-stakeholder platform, the Pointe Noire municipality and the National Reforestation Service (SNR).
 - Field visits were conducted in Bas Kouilou, Noumbi and Conkouati. In these regions, the evaluation team had exchanges with representatives of partner Community-Based Organisations and beneficiaries of the project. It also met with the sub-prefect of Conkouati and the leaders of partner NGOs. It visited the areas marked out for restoration.

7. In Brazzaville, Pointe Noire and in the project intervention zones, the interviews involved approximately 55 people. It was observed that the participation of young people, especially women, in these interviews was low.
8. The data analysis highlighted the progress made or not in the implementation of activities, outputs and expected outcomes. It also highlighted factors that can undermine the sustainability of outcomes. The evaluation team ensured that data and information sources were triangulated to guarantee their reliability.
9. **Limitations** — the main limitation of the study was the time spent to triangulate all the information and data received. The data collection phase in the field lasted 3 days while the strategic data collection in Brazzaville and Pointe Noire lasted 4 days. Moreover, a fatal traffic accident experienced by executives of the Ministry of Forest Economy made it difficult to discuss about the evaluation with them. The second round of the legislative elections in Congo did not affect field visits, but in order to respect the precautionary principle, the team shortened its stay in the communities.

2 Context and Project Description

2.1 Background

10. The Republic of Congo covers 342,000 km². In 2017, the Congolese population was estimated at 5,092,127 inhabitants¹. Over the past three years, the economic situation in Congo has been characterised by a decline in economic growth. It was very weak in 2016 due to the fall in world oil prices. Indeed, from 2004 to 2014, economic growth averaged 5.4%. But it fell to -2.4% in 2016 from 2.6% in 2015. However, in 2015, Congo ranked 136th out of 188 countries with a Human Development Index of 0.591. According to the World Bank, poverty fell from 51% in 2005 to 41% in 2011, and fell to 36% in 2015. However, this rate is still higher than the average for comparable middle-income countries. With a Gini coefficient of 0.465, the economic and social situation continues to be marked by strong income inequalities. Unemployment affects a significant share of the labour force, especially women and young people aged 15-29.
11. Poor control of population growth, uncontrolled urbanisation, and human poverty despite its slight decline, constitute threats to the protection of the environment, particularly forest ecosystems. People exert heavy pressure on these ecosystems to meet their basic needs and create income opportunities. Mangroves, other associated wetlands and coastal forests are not immune to these human-caused pressures.
12. About 60% of Congo is covered by forests. These are a major component of the Congo Basin, which has about 230 Million Hectares of forests. This natural area is considered the world's second largest tropical forest. Mangroves, other associated wetlands and coastal forests cover a total area of 424,035 hectares. Mangroves, in particular, cover a total area of 7,468 hectares². These ecosystems are characterised by rich animal and plant biodiversity that provide livelihoods for the local population including fish, game, wood for domestic energy, timber and non-timber forest products. They are therefore of great ecological and socio-economic importance.
13. The Republic of Congo has ratified the main international, regional and sub-regional treaties and conventions on mangroves, other wetlands and coastal forests. Examples include the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the United Nations Convention to Combat Diversification, the Treaty on the Conservation and Sustainable Management of Forest Ecosystems in Central Africa and establishing COMIFAC.
14. Despite the ratification of these main international treaties and conventions, and the recognition of their ecological and socio-economic importance, mangroves, other associated wetlands and coastal forests continue to deteriorate alarmingly, particularly in the

¹ <https://www.populationdata.net/pays/congo/>

² See National strategy for integrated and sustainable management of mangroves, associated wetlands and coastal forests - Ministère de l'économie forestière, du développement durable et de l'environnement (MEFDDE), Brazzaville, May 2017.

municipality of Pointe Noire. According to FAO, between 1980 and 2005, the loss of mangrove areas in Congo was about 60%. From 2000 to 2012, the area of mangroves decreased from 8,052 ha to 7,468 ha³. Available reports indicate that their degradation is caused by the following main factors: (i) The national policy framework is not adapted to the integrated and sustainable management of mangroves, other associated wetlands and coastal forests in Congo; (ii) The resources of mangroves, associated wetlands and coastal forests are not used in a sustainable manner; (iii) Low consideration is given to the proliferation of different types of pollution; and (iv) Knowledge management is inadequate.

15. This persistent and rapid degradation is the rationale for the project's objectives, which essentially aim at conserving biodiversity and increasing the sustainability of livelihoods for communities living in and around mangrove ecosystems, other wetlands and coastal forests.

2.2 Project description

16. Project GCP/PRC/007/GFF "Integrated management of mangroves, associated wetlands and coastal forest ecosystems in the Republic of Congo" had two main objectives:

- Conservation Objective: Strengthen biodiversity conservation and reduce degradation of mangrove ecosystems; and
- Development objective: Strengthen and increase the sustainability of livelihoods for communities living in and around mangrove ecosystems.

17. The project components were as follows:

- i. Legal and institutional strengthening;
- ii. Environmental monitoring and assessment;
- iii. Conservation Management Planning;
- iv. Sustainable management of mangrove resources;
- v. Project management, monitoring and evaluation.

18. The project is in line with FAO Strategic Objective 2 "To make agriculture, forestry and fisheries more productive and sustainable". It also contributes to Impact 2 of the Country Programming Framework, i.e. "natural ecosystems of degraded forests are partially restored, thus improving biodiversity in the four ecological zones".

³ Idem

3 Findings of the evaluation mission

3.1 To what extent has the design of the project and its activities been responsive to identified needs?

Key finding 1: The project is considered relevant because it was designed to test a new policy and institutional and legal framework for the conservation of mangrove ecosystems (which, prior to the implementation of the project, was very weak in Congo) on the one hand and community-based forest resource management (absent in national legislation) on the other. The design of the project was the subject of a thorough diagnosis and involved the key actors of mangrove management in Congo.

19. The conceptual phase of the project was carried out in a participatory manner. Project preparation activities included an initial workshop, baseline data collection and studies on several issues related to project design (analyses of policies, laws and regulations, institutional arrangements, stakeholders and local income-generating activities). The final project design was validated at a national workshop where stakeholders provided feedback on the project and approved its submission to the GEF. Contributions to the preparation of the project were provided by various governmental organisations, FAO, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), the Italian National Hydrocarbons Authority (ENI) Congo, Total Congo (Oil Company) and a number of local NGOs.
20. Stakeholders are diverse. They include the Government of Congo at the central and decentralised levels (Pointe Noire Municipality), international and national NGOs, the private sector and local communities. However, interests are more or less the same:
 - Increased awareness and understanding of the importance of mangrove ecosystems, leading to more rational decision-making.
 - Improved technical capacity for strategic planning, policy formulation and legal reform; improved knowledge of mangrove ecosystems; increased capacity to achieve participatory forestry and sustainable forest management.
 - Improved technical capacity to monitor the environment and promote sustainable livelihoods, community conservation and natural resource management.
 - Improved sustainability of fisheries resources and increased income from fisheries development activities.
 - Strengthening local control over resources for sustainable extraction of unprotected species (e.g. firewood, bivalves and medicinal plants)
 - Respect of local social and environmental obligations.
 - Maintaining ecosystem quality in important touristic sites.
21. The evaluation found that the interests of all groups both at the level of institutional implementing actors and beneficiaries have been taken into account. Thus, this project addressed three main issues:

- i) **The very poor institutional and legal framework for mangrove ecosystem conservation in Congo**⁴— Indeed for mangrove ecosystems were neither integrated into national coastal zone development policies nor sufficiently protected in the country's forest policies and laws. It is important to remember that these coastal wetlands in Congo are also central for economic development. The city of Pointe Noire and many other localities (like the city of Tandou Ngoma, for example) are built on coastal lagoons where their surroundings serve as natural ports and are excellent waterways for transport. In addition, they have productive fisheries and provide other exploitable resources.
- ii) **Lack of reliable information and meaningful dialogue among stakeholders** – In Congo, there was no framework for dialogue to promote integrated economic development planning and coastal conservation, nor a reliable system for monitoring mangrove ecosystem condition, pollution and other impacts of large-scale industrial activities. Thus, to meet the need for discussion between stakeholders working on the mangrove issue, one of the project's objectives was to create a platform. At national level, a platform existed already, the National Emergency Intervention Plan (PNIU), but this platform focused only on oil company pollution issues and was not accessible to all stakeholders. The establishment of a new platform, including the various stakeholders and taking into account the various issues related to the sustainable management of mangrove ecosystems, is therefore a relevant action item. The project was not able to build bridges with the PNIU because the oil industries that were initially interested in the initiative did not really engaged. As regards the monitoring of mangrove ecosystems, the project provided for the creation of an Observatory in Congo and the development of the necessary tools including an ecological monitoring plan and mangrove mapping.
- iii) Overexploitation of natural resources in mangrove ecosystems destroys biodiversity and weakens the sustainability of local livelihoods – the aim of the project was to test, through concrete experiences, community-based management of forest resources that was not practiced in Congo. The objectives of the project included the development of participatory management plans for four pilot sites, community structuring and the implementation of the plans. However, as detailed further in this report, the financing of these plans was to be done through co-financing, which was not provided in the end. Consequently, at Community level, the approach remained purely theoretical and was not really tested. However, the design remains valid although, given the difficulties in mobilising funding, it would have been more relevant to use it as a laboratory to test different approaches (indeed, the management plans developed are very similar) or to reduce the number of sites to allow the implementation of certain activities. In addition, the duration of the project, i.e. 3 years, was a limiting factor in relation to the expected socio-economic objectives.

⁴ In recent years, Congo's mangrove ecosystems have deteriorated and their acreage have significantly reduced. In its 2005 report on African mangroves, FAO reported that between 1980 and 2005 the mangrove area in Congo reduced from 20,000 to 8,000 hectares, i.e. a reduction of 60 percent. However, it should be noted that the actual acreage of mangroves scattered along the Congolese coast is not precisely known.

3.2 To what extent have project outcomes been achieved?

22. Out of a total of 23 expected outcomes, 10 were fully achieved, 9 were partially achieved and 4 were not achieved. This section presents an analysis of project outcomes for each component.

3.2.1 Developing the legal and institutional framework for mangrove ecosystem management

Key Finding 2: The project influenced the legal framework for the management of coastal ecosystems in Congo, which was the first expected outcome of the project. Moreover, the issues of mangroves and coastal ecosystems are being taken into account in the revised forestry and environmental codes. A national strategy and action plan for an integrated management of mangrove ecosystem has been developed and validated, but at the time of the evaluation, its implementation had not yet begun. The project has also established a platform for intersectoral dialogue and coordination, but its functionality has been limited and meetings have been sporadic.

23. **Activity description:** The objective of this component was to strengthen the legal and institutional framework for the management of mangrove ecosystems. The main outputs included:

- The development and validation of a national strategy and action plan;
- The drafting and forwarding to the government of proposals for measures and provisions to be included in the draft bill of the forestry code;
- The establishment of a multi-stakeholder platform for sustainable mangrove management and the organisation of a stakeholder forum;
- The training of fifty NGO and government conservation staff in planning, reporting and financial management and the implementation of new laws and regulations.

24. Concerning the first outcome, the project developed a national mangrove management strategy with an action plan. There is also an action plan relating to mangrove management designed for the city of Pointe Noire. These three documents were discussed with the partners and validated. However, the evaluation found that these documents were not sufficiently popularised and disseminated among key stakeholders and that the financial resources for their implementation were not secured. However, it was noted that the National Development Programme of Congo, currently under review, now takes into account the issue of mangroves following the importance of these ecosystems in mitigating climate change and the efforts made by the project to raise awareness among various key stakeholders.

25. At the time of the evaluation, the country was in the process of revising the forestry and environment code. A diagnostic study was conducted as part of the project to identify gaps and legal loopholes in forestry law and propose solutions. The outcomes of this study were integrated into the forestry code (in fact, the part of the draft law relating to mangroves and coastal ecosystems was inspired by the diagnostic study document). Despite the study recommendations were only partially integrated (given that not all of them are reflected in the draft law), this remains an important step forward. Indeed, according to the Congolese lawmakers, the implementing texts of the forestry code that will be developed thereafter should take into account other more specific aspects identified by the study that have not been incorporated yet into the draft law. It is worth underlining that the study identified

loopholes in mangrove management that concern also other sectors such as, for example, water and fisheries that are not controlled by the forest code and that should be taken into account in sector-specific legal texts. For this reason, there is a need to continue to monitor these activities through advocacy actions to ensure that the various issues identified by the study are taken into account in the implementing texts of the code as well as in sectoral legal texts.

26. The project set up a platform that was only legalised in March 2017. Late legalisation resulted from the unfavourable political context in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election. Consequently, it was difficult for this platform to carry out formal actions without itself being legally recognised. The platform's governing body has only one female member and its meetings were not regular, the platform met on an ad hoc and emergency basis. Consequently, its mandate to establish coordination and intersectoral dialogue could not be fully achieved.
27. Discussions revealed that the lack of financial means and the lack of willingness of some stakeholders to sincerely get involved in mangrove conservation are the main obstacles to sustainability. The new platform has tried, for example, to involve oil companies. Although these companies showed an interest at the beginning of the process, they did not really commit, despite the undeniable responsibility of this sector for pollution.
28. This platform is an important tool for the sustainability of the project provided that it is deployed effectively in the mobilisation of funding. Besides, the platform currently has a "traditional structure" with a president, a treasurer and a director with stakeholder participation on a voluntary basis. To ensure the sustainability of this platform, this structure should be reviewed. Thus, it would be relevant to organise it as an operational structure, with an executive board, a board of directors and staff working on the various relevant sectors (water, fisheries, pollution...), capable of mobilising resources to finance its operation. The representation of women in the platform's governing body should also be improved.
29. As part of the logical framework of the project, among the expected results of the platform as an indicator of dialogue between the different stakeholders for reducing the environmental impact of coastal projects, the establishment of two public-private community partnerships was included. These partnerships have unfortunately not been implemented.
30. A stakeholder forum (at national level) was successfully organised to set up the multi-stakeholder platform. The objective of this forum was to establish a diagnostic analysis of mangroves, associated wetlands and coastal forest ecosystems, and this was not achieved. The project should have taken advantage of the presence of all stakeholders to respect on the one hand the guidelines of the logical framework and on the other hand set up the platform. Indeed, the establishment of the platform was not the first expected result of this forum. The project communication plan was adopted and submitted to the FAO/Brazzaville Office (no action was taken - see mid-term evaluation report recommendations). In addition, thanks to the platform, the project facilitated the production of a series of policy briefs. The project also co-organised with the Cameroon FAO/GEF mangrove project a sub-regional⁵ Forum which

⁵ 1. The objectives of this forum were as follows: (i) share lessons learned from the implementation of the projects on sustainable mangrove ecosystem management in general and community-based management of the

allowed the various stakeholders to exchange lessons learned from the two projects and to organise, with COMIFAC, lobbying actions in favour of mangrove ecosystem management.

31. Finally, some fifty NGO and government staff members were trained in planning, reporting, financial management and on new laws and regulations under revision (forestry code and environmental law). According to the beneficiaries, this training brought added value in the daily functioning of civil servants and partner NGOs associated with the project. During interviews with the project management unit, it was reported that women's participation in training sessions was low.

3.2.2 Increased capacity of relevant stakeholders to monitor biodiversity and mangrove ecosystem health and assess the impacts of coastal projects

Key Finding 3: With regard to stakeholders' capacity-building on monitoring biodiversity and mangrove ecosystem health and assessing the impacts of coastal projects, the project set up a National Coastal Observatory (OCC). At the time of the evaluation, this Observatory was not yet operational, but the process was quite advanced. Updated information on ecosystem trends, conditions and threats had been published and was made available to decision-makers. NGO staff and civil servants were trained on assessing and monitoring environmental and social impact, but performance assessments of existing mitigation plans, which is an activity foreseen in the project document, have not been carried out.

32. **Activity description:** The objective of this component was to provide all stakeholders with the information and tools necessary for monitoring and assessing biodiversity and mangrove ecosystem health. The main outputs included:

- The setting up of a national coastal observatory.
- A detailed and updated map of the entire coastal zone.
- Biodiversity monitoring and assessment plan (to be implemented by the national coastal observatory).
- A minimum of three reports on current threats to mangrove ecosystems (lagoon siltation, timber harvesting and climate change).
- Newsletters on mangrove ecosystems published every six months by the national coastal observatory.
- 50 NGO and government members in charge of conservation have received training and have sufficient skills to conduct environmental impact assessment as well as environmental and social monitoring and assessment activities.
- Eight studies (one multi-resource study and one socio-economic study for each of the four target sites).

same in particular, in COMIFAC countries (ii) exchange on good options for capitalising on and sustaining project achievements, (iii) exchange on ways to share knowledge and other resources among stakeholders to tackle the issue of community-based management of mangrove ecosystems in Central African countries, and (iv) make recommendations to COMIFAC in the form of draft decisions which shall be submitted for consideration by the COMIFAC Council of Ministers.

33. One of the project's outputs was the creation of an operational Congolese Coastal Observatory (OCC) with a clear mandate and sufficient resources (mobilised outside the project) and a long-term financing plan to ensure its sustainability. At the time of the evaluation, the OCC was not yet functional, but discussions about its implementation (mandate, issues, operational unit and financing plan) were quite advanced. The OCC is located in the premises of the Institut national de recherche forestière (IRF) and placed under the dual scientific coordination of IRF and the Institut national de recherche sur les sciences exactes et naturelles (IRSEN).
34. The project had also provided for the development of certain tools to be made available to the OCC. Among these tools, there is the ecological monitoring plan, which is a technical document for monitoring the transformational dynamics of the environment of mangroves and coastal ecosystems on the human, ecological, environmental and economic levels, based on precise indicators. Unfortunately, the indicators developed in this ecological monitoring document have remained endogenous, i.e. focused at site level. The project did not consider linking these indicators to national and international mangrove monitoring. However, the evaluation commended the participation of the platform in the identification of indicators for the elaboration of the ecological monitoring plan.
35. In addition, the project produced 15 detailed maps of the entire Congolese coastal zone in order to grasp the different themes and facilitate decision-making on the management of mangrove and coastal ecosystems. These detailed maps are decision support tools (to improve mangrove management) that should be provided to the OCC if the latter was functional. Nevertheless, these maps are useful to many actors (NGOs, State, and FAO) for various purposes.
36. A newspaper on mangroves and a series of four policy briefs were produced by the platform through a LoA signed with FAO. These are: i) A better knowledge of mangroves means better protection; ii) Degradation of mangroves in the Republic of Congo: challenges involved in ensuring their future; iii) Departmental and municipal councillors taking action for Pointe Noire mangroves; iv) Interest of a multi-stakeholder platform for sustainable mangrove management in Congo. This information was disseminated to stakeholders.
37. The project trained 50 NGO and government staff in environmental and social impact assessment and monitoring. According to the project document, trained staff should have conducted performance assessments of existing mitigation plans, but this activity was not conducted.
38. Finally, the project completed more than the 8 expected studies, namely: A multi-resource inventory, stakeholder analysis and participatory diagnostics (i.e. 100% of output mentioned in 4.2 above). As each pilot site has its own specificity, the project was right to conduct site-specific studies to better assess the potential of natural resources, stakeholder potential, threats and opportunities. The information obtained from these various studies was compiled in a book on mangroves in Congo aimed at raising awareness and informing decision-makers about the importance of these ecosystems. Due to lack of financial support, the book is only available in soft copy for the moment.

3.2.3 Increased capacity of stakeholders to support participatory management of mangrove ecosystems

Key Finding 4: Outcome three of the project aimed at building stakeholder capacity to support participatory management of mangrove ecosystems. NGO staff and civil servants in charge of conservation received training and have the necessary skills to support participatory management of mangrove ecosystems. However, the use of the knowledge acquired was limited by the non-provision of co-financing, which did not allow the implementation of Simple Management Plans (PSG) developed by the communities. In addition, the evaluation noted, as a limitation of this intervention, the lack of legal documents linking these zones to communities. Indeed, the project did not provide for the signing of formal agreements between the communities and the Congolese State (even on a pilot basis) to secure these areas.

Activity description: The objective of this component was to build local capacity for conservation management planning and participatory approaches to natural resource management. The main outputs included:

- 108 NGO and government staff in charge of conservation trained in participatory approaches to natural resource management instead of the 50 planned.
- Four participatory management plans (one for each of the four target sites of the project).
- A mangrove restoration plan in the Pointe Noire urban area.

39. The term "participatory management" (which refers to the same concept as co-management or joint or mixed management, multi-partner management or joint management agreement) describes a form of partnership whereby all interested stakeholders agree to share management functions, rights and responsibilities over a portion of land or a range of resources. In Congo, community-based management of natural resources is still very underdeveloped and is not yet supported by an official legal framework. The project has made participatory management one of the important pillars of its intervention strategy in order to reverse the current trends of accelerated degradation of these coastal and mangrove ecosystems. For example, the project trained 108 (instead of the 50 planned) NGO and government conservation staff in participatory approaches. Unfortunately, there were no community zones formally acquired by the communities to guarantee the implementation of training.

40. With regard to participatory management of mangrove resources, the lack of guidelines and standards for the development of simple community management plans and the lack of an appropriate legal and regulatory framework did not facilitate project actions. In the absence of guidelines and standards, the project had to demonstrate methodological pragmatism in developing plans with the support of networks of national and international consultants.

41. The project contributed to the drafting of four simple management plans, of which 3 (Bas-Kouilou, Conkouati and Noubi) were validated; the fourth plan is taken into account in the Pointe Noire mangrove restoration plan. Simple Management Plans were not among the results indicators of Component 3 according to the logical framework. These simple management plans include both conservation and development objectives. They define the ecological and social vision of the community in the medium and long term and provide for the introduction of new institutional arrangements to better regulate and guarantee access to natural resources (including community structuring).

42. These simple management plans were developed for the four sites, with the support of an international consultant. They are very similar and do not seem to take into account the multi-resource inventories carried out as part of the project. Indeed, any plan should indicate how the resources available at a specific site should be managed. To this effect, plans should define "management rules" based on the resources that are abundant and those that are in deficit (for example, rules on the types of timber exploitation...). Furthermore, given the pioneering and pilot nature of this project, the team could have used the project's available resources to test and compare different approaches at the 4 sites.
43. The evaluation found that there are no legal documents linking these zones to communities and communities to resource management. Indeed, it would have been very useful to include an agreement with the government (and the various State institutions concerned) for the targeted sites on a pilot basis to enable the implementation of the plans.
44. It must be acknowledged that if these plans are not "framed" or supported by an appropriate and adapted legal and regulatory framework, it is most likely that the new institutional arrangements provided for under the PSGs will not be implemented or respected. The main risk would then be that simple management plans would not be adopted by all stakeholders. Preventing this risk entails defining the rights, roles and responsibilities of local communities in the management of natural resources through an appropriate legal and regulatory framework as well as the implementation of guidelines and standards for the development of simple community management plans. However, the project was unable to work on these issues in the absence of a legal framework creating an appropriate participatory forestry scheme. This scheme now appears in the draft bill. In the absence of this prerequisite, which is the responsibility of the Congolese State and not that of the project, this activity on the guidelines and standards could not be carried out. It is worth noting that the project conducted an evaluation of participatory forestry schemes in Congo to contribute to the advocacy for the inclusion of a community forestry scheme in the draft forest law.

3.2.4 Local communities living in the target sites are managing their mangrove resources more sustainably and their livelihoods have improved

Key Finding 5: The last effect of the project focused on a more sustainable management of mangrove resources by local communities and an improvement of their livelihoods. As mentioned earlier, the non-provision of co-financing did not allow the implementation of the Simple Management Plans (PSG). In general, discussions with beneficiaries showed insufficient understanding of the community-based management approach by the local populations targeted at the visited sites. Finally, the restoration of areas as foreseen in the logical framework was not carried out (at the time of the evaluation, restoration activities were being projected in Noubi and Ngoumbi in the North Kouilou, as well as in Bois des Singes, south of Pointe Noire and Bas-Kouilou).

45. **Activity description:** The objective of this component was to support the long-term implementation of participatory management plans for the four target sites. The expected outputs included:
 - Local participatory management structures set up in the four target areas of the project;
 - A minimum of 175 ha of mangrove forests restored and managed with the participation of local communities;
 - Five improved fish smoking facilities built and operating;
 - Feasibility study on the possibility of introducing modern cooking stoves;

- Assistance provided to eight fishing villages for income-generating fishing activities, including fish and shrimp farming trials (fisheries studies, testing of improved fishing techniques, microfinance mechanisms for aquaculture investments, etc.)
46. Overall, this fourth component did not produce any convincing results. The project had included among its indicators an improvement in people's livelihoods through sustainable production techniques. Meanwhile, when the project was set up, it was foreseen that the PSGs would be financed by co-financing, which was not provided in the end.
47. Following the development of the management plans, the project created a favourable environment by setting up producer groups and management committees. Indeed, the project implementation team complied with the project document which provided for support to the organisation of local communities and the establishment of common interest groups enabling community members to develop their own action plans for local sustainable development.
48. At the level of communities encountered during the evaluation, it was not well understood that project actions would be stopped at the development of management plans and support to community structuring through the creation of groups. FAO worked with communities through NGOs. Still at the level of these NGOs, the evaluation found that this information was not clear and that these structures did not have a good understanding of the project vision on IGA funding. Indeed, these NGOs did not understand that the activities of this component will be carried out through co-financing provided by community development projects supported by the private sector, and that GEF resources will only be used to support the integration of biodiversity conservation into these activities.
49. It would have been useful to develop a vision document for the project on community management financing for a better understanding of all stakeholders. This vision document would have enabled the project and NGOs to reflect on realistic ways to mobilise this co-financing and meet the needs of local communities. This is a new approach that should be popularised and well thought out in order to obtain results especially from a private sector that has not been active during the implementation of this project. Indeed, the private sector was one of the potential sources of funding to implement PSGs.
50. The evaluation found that the communities (including support structures) adopted an attitude which suggested that their development, wealth generation and consequently the improvement of their living conditions were exogenous actions from FAO. It is worth stressing that the community structuring model presented during the discussions with the project and put in place by the expert in charge of community issues, could produce results if it was understood by NGOs and communities. Indeed, the common interest groups set up by the project should generate their own wealth and these groups are headed by a management committee, which should guarantee their supervision. So far, this model has not worked, and communities have not understood that their own development would come from local impetus.
51. Nevertheless, with regard to improving livelihoods, the project provided 8 villages and neighbourhoods in the Bas-Kouilou community area with a 5 Kw electricity generator, 2 freezers, four outboard motors, four high-capacity monoxyl dugout canoes (these actions are actually part of special support from the FAO Country Office). However, at the time of the evaluation, the allocations were not used. The non-use of these allocations confirms a lack of

synergy and strategic reflexion between the project team, the support structures and the beneficiary communities.

52. Finally, reforestation was not carried out on the expected 175 ha of mangrove forests (the project document provided for at least 175 ha of mangrove forests to be restored, with 85 percent of seedlings survival, and arrangements in place for their long-term protection and management). The project indicates that it has secured 7,319 ha through community forest PSGs, but these community forests are not recognised by forest law. Besides, conventions have not been signed between the communities and the Congolese State even on a pilot basis.
53. In short, the implementation of component 4 should have required the development of a vision or guidance document by the project, the training of support NGOs on the vision, the development of communication tools to get the message across to beneficiary communities and tripartite working sessions between the project, NGOs and communities to define strategies to be deployed in order to mobilise co-financing not only from the private sector. Moreover, the project should have mobilised a consultant to work with the private sector to search additional financing. The mid-term review of the project should have identified a lack of funding for component 4 and proposed solutions.

3.3 Progress towards impact

54. The evaluation of the impact of projects and/or programmes is based on a simple principle: to measure a difference between two situations: that resulting from the implementation of the project on the one hand, and that which would have prevailed if the project had not been implemented on the other hand - as mentioned in most books and manuals on project evaluation methods. At this stage, it is difficult to talk about impact assessment, but as stated in the subtitle, evaluation gives an assessment of the progress made towards achieving the impacts.
55. The indicators at the target level were:
- a) The area and condition of mangrove forests;
 - b) Mangrove conservation objectives integrated into large-scale coastal infrastructure and hydrocarbon extraction projects;
 - c) The national strategy and action plan for the integrated management of mangrove ecosystems;
 - d) Draft laws and regulations in support of the national strategy and action plan for integrated mangrove ecosystem management;
 - e) The effectiveness of intersectoral dialogue on minimising the impact of coastal works on mangrove ecosystems;
 - f) The availability, accuracy and use of information on mangrove ecosystems in Congo;
 - g) The capacity of NGO and government staff in charge of conservation to conduct environmental impact assessment and monitoring;
 - h) The capacity of NGO and government staff in charge of conservation to support participatory management of mangrove ecosystems;
 - i) The area of mangrove ecosystems managed by local communities on the basis of formally recognised co-management agreements with all stakeholders;
 - j) The acreage and quality of restored mangrove forests;

- k) The level of adoption of sustainable production techniques and practices by communities in the target areas of the project;
 - l) Number of people benefiting from income-generating activities supported by the project and increase in their income.
56. At the institutional level, as seen earlier, the project was able to record several achievements. The main ones were the production of a national strategy and action plan for the integrated management of mangrove ecosystems and the integration of mangroves into the forestry code under revision. The evaluation found an improvement in the knowledge of all stakeholders on mangrove issues. Despite its late creation and empirical structuring, the platform nevertheless fostered intersectoral dialogue and contributed to making information on mangroves in Congo available. The project also laid the foundations for the creation of the OCC and for the development of tools that will allow better monitoring of mangrove ecosystems (monitoring and evaluation plan, mapping, etc.). Several lobbying actions have been carried out by the project, Congo has integrated into its new draft forestry code the issue of community forests and mangroves, as evidenced by the report of the Commission in charge of revising the forestry code. However, the evaluation noted that mangroves have not been included in hydrocarbon extraction and infrastructure projects on the coastal level, as foreseen in the project document.
57. At the community level, the evaluation found that no activity has been carried out or is in progress under the PSGs. Consequently, there are no results in terms of improving people's incomes or adopting techniques and practices for sustainable fisheries management. Pressure on mangrove lands is particularly persistent in Pointe Noire for the city's urbanisation needs. The community-based management approach has been introduced but not really tested. However, during the final evaluation, some LoAs were being prepared for signature with 2 local NGOs (Nature et Développement (ND) and Congo Nature Conservation (CNC)) and the SNR. These LoAs aimed at carrying out income-generating activities, mainly by providing support to communities to set up nurseries and plantations of fruit trees, oil palms and fast-growing species that could be used as firewood. The objective of these LoAs should be to implement certain PSG activities. Given the late signing of these LoAs, it will be difficult for FAO to assess the effects of these actions in terms of income generated.
58. In short, the reduction of mangrove degradation is not yet noticeable, as long as the relevant documents have not been implemented. At this stage, progress towards positive impacts will depend on several conditions, including: i) the revision of the forestry code and its implementing texts in order to integrate the consideration of mangroves and associated ecosystems, ii) strategies and action plans (including PSGs) are implemented, i.e. the related financing is guaranteed, iii) a real local development strategy based on the valorisation of natural resources is implemented at community level, iv) continued efforts to coordinate stakeholders through the platform; and v) the setting up of the observatory for the monitoring of mangrove ecosystems.
59. In addition, the designation of Bas Kouilou Yombo (56,534 ha including 1,773 ha of mangroves) as Ramsar site is an added value to be included in the project's sustainability strategy. Indeed, a study for the designation of the Bas Kouilou site – Bas Kouilou sub-prefecture, Kouilou department – as a wetland of international importance (Ramsar site) was carried out in May 2017 by the project. Project personnel compiled the file and filled in the registration form. The new status of the site will allow better understanding in development projects and will open opportunities to mobilise resources for the protection of the site.

3.4 Gender

60. Gender or gender equality was not taken into account while formulating the results and key indicators of the project outputs. The project's annual reports provide very little data and information on gender.
61. Simple management plans were developed on a participatory and inclusive basis that promoted the effective involvement of women and youth, according to information gathered in the field during the evaluation. Actually, only one out of the three PSGs includes women-oriented activities. It was Axis 3 of the Noumbi PSG, which provides for the "Revitalisation of small-scale farming" with activities concerning cassava production mainly managed by women.

4 Project Management

4.1 Quality of monitoring and evaluation

62. Project monitoring and evaluation were guided by FAO procedures. They were ensured by the Project Steering Committee, the National Coordinator, the FAO Country Office and the Project Management Unit. A monitoring and evaluation plan was developed with the support of the project's Technical Adviser. A total budget of US\$ 223,275 was earmarked for monitoring and evaluation activities, including US\$ 94,275 from GEF and US\$ 129,000 from co-financing.
63. Operational monitoring was effective. The management unit conducted regular field visits documented in reports. It also produced annual reports for review and approval by the Steering Committee, which held regular annual meetings. The mid-term review of the project was conducted from 30 November to 11 December 2015. The review report was used by the evaluation team. The final evaluation of the project began on 22 July 2017. Financial monitoring of the project was carried out by the FAO office, which regularly produced annual financial reports.
64. The operational monitoring analysis noted that the unit reported on progress in the implementation of activities and outputs, but did not assess incremental changes induced in communities. For example, the impacts or repercussions of awareness, training and support actions that can be observed in communities were not supported with evidence.
65. The management unit did not monitor the risks and assumptions outlined in the project document. It would have been interesting on the one hand to provide data on the occurrence or not of the risks identified and the management unit's response and on the other, to have information in order to assess whether or not the assumptions had been fulfilled and their contribution to the implementation of the project. The management unit did not also systematically document and share lessons learned and good practices.

4.2 Quality of implementation and execution

66. The institutional and project implementation arrangements provided for in the project document have been put in place. The ministry in charge of forest economy and environment fully played its role in the strategic steering, direction and coordination of the project. In particular, the Directorate General for the Environment (DGE) and the operational focal point of the GEF, and the Directorate General for Forest Economy (DGEF) have been involved in the functioning of the project steering committee. They provided technical support for strategic activities such as the development and validation of the national strategy, action plans, ecological monitoring plan and simple community area management plans.
67. The project management unit led by a National Technical Assistant supported by a driver was operational. It regularly developed its annual work plans and produced annual reports. The project steering committee held regular annual sessions to review and approve the project work plans and annual reports. The management unit benefited from the support of the National Project Coordinator, appointed by the minister in charge of Forest Economy and Sustainable Development, and representatives of other partner ministries for the implementation of these activities.

68. The project start-up was considerably delayed. This delay was due in part to the fact that partner NGOs were not familiar with FAO procedures. For the implementation of several specialised and field activities, FAO concluded subcontracting agreements as follows: there are three partner NGOs committed through LoA ("Letters of Agreement") to support local communities in integrated mangrove management: Association des Jeunes pour la Vie du Kouilou (AJVK); Nature et Développement (ND) and Congo Nature Conservation (CNC). The work of these partner NGOs was also well monitored, which is why AJVK had its contract withdrawn in view of the quality of its results, and its activities were handed over to the platform for execution. Concerning mapping and multi-resource inventory at project sites, FAO signed a memorandum of understanding with the Centre National d'Inventaire et de l'Aménagement des ressources forestières et fauniques (CNI AF) of the Ministère de l'économie forestière, du développement durable et de l'environnement (MEFDDE), in order to develop simple management plans.
69. Overall, the technical quality of subcontractors' work was satisfactory and weaknesses in administrative management were addressed, after a difficult start, through several support missions by the FAO Finance Officer in Brazzaville. The internal FAO mid-term review already noted that in order to achieve the expected results of the project, it was essential that FAO's management of contracts with partner NGOs in Brazzaville be more flexible. This mid-term review also recommended the recruitment of a consultant who will work part-time for 12 months to strengthen the institutions and processes set up by the project ("exit strategy"), but this was not done.

5 Evaluation of the project against GEF criteria

70. In conclusion to all the above analysis, the evaluation notes the success of the project against the criteria for GEF agencies reported in the table below.

Table 1: Evaluation of the project against GEF agency criteria

Evaluation criteria	Rating	Comments
Evaluation/Rating of Project outcomes:		
Highly Satisfactory (HS), Satisfactory (S), Moderately Satisfactory (MS), Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU), Unsatisfactory (U), Highly Unsatisfactory (HU), Unable to rate (UR)		
a) General evaluation		
Component 1: Developing the legal and institutional framework for mangrove ecosystem management		
a. Relevance	S	The component was relevant as a whole, especially with regard to the strategic documents it had to produce: The strategy and its action plan, the contribution to the drafting of bills, capacity building and the promotion of inter-sectoral dialogue through the platform and various communication tools.
b. Efficiency	S	The project achieved the majority of the expected results for this component, although the platform did not operate regularly. Public-private partnerships have also not been established.
c. Efficiency	S	As the financial data were not organized by component, the evaluation team was unable to provide an opinion on the efficiency of each particular component. The report presents in its various sections findings concerning the efficiency of the project as a whole that is considered satisfactory.
Component 2: Increased capacity of relevant stakeholders to monitor biodiversity and mangrove ecosystem health and assess the impacts of coastal projects		
a. Relevance	S	Overall, this component was relevant.
b. Efficiency	MS	This component generated a set of information and tools needed for monitoring and assessing biodiversity and mangrove ecosystem health, laid the foundation for the creation of the OCC and also contributed to capacity building of stakeholders. However, the OCC has not yet been created.
c. Efficiency	S	As the financial data were not organized by component, the evaluation team was unable to provide an opinion on the efficiency of each particular component. The report presents in its various sections findings concerning the efficiency of the project as a whole that is considered satisfactory.

Component 3: Increased capacity of stakeholders to support participatory management of mangrove ecosystems.		
a. Relevance	S	This component was relevant as a whole.
b. Efficiency	MS	Management plans have been developed and training provided. However, in the absence of funding for the implementation of PSGs, the approach developed by the project remained theoretical and therefore not tested in the field.
c. Efficiency	S	As the financial data were not organized by component, the evaluation team was unable to provide an opinion on the efficiency of each particular component. The report presents in its various sections findings concerning the efficiency of the project as a whole that is considered satisfactory.
Component 4: Local communities living in the target sites are managing their mangrove resources more sustainably and their livelihoods have improved		
a. Relevance of outcomes	S	This component was relevant in view of the expected effects
b. Efficiency	I	This component was to be financed through co-financing which was not executed. No expected results had been achieved at the time of the evaluation. LoAs were being prepared/signed for conducting income-generating activities, but the result will only be visible after the end of the project. This lack of results is also due to the fact that the communities did not understand that they themselves had to boost their own development without relying on GEF funds.
c. Efficiency	S	As the financial data were not organized by component, the evaluation team was unable to provide an opinion on the efficiency of each particular component. The report presents in its various sections findings concerning the efficiency of the project as a whole that is considered satisfactory.
Sustainability Evaluation/Rating:		
Likely (L), Moderately likely (ML), Moderately unlikely (MU), Unlikely (U), Unable to rate (UR)		
a) General sustainability evaluation		
a. Financial resources	MU	The project did not allow the mobilisation of resources after the end of the project to continue the implementation of activities: The State and CSOs associated with the project did not mobilise specific resources.
b. Socio-political risks	ML	The socio-political and institutional stability of the country was fragile during the implementation of the project. The national coordinator is part of the Ministry of Forest Economy in charge of mangrove management, but this ministry has not taken any concrete action to ensure the sustainability of the project although the project has produced policy briefs on sustainable mangrove management for policy makers.
c. Institutional risks	ML	

		Moreover, the project's actions have increased awareness of the importance of mangrove resources and participatory community management approach within the beneficiary communities
d. Environmental risks	ML	Insofar as there could only be a positive influence of the project on the environment, the mission did not note any contrary outcome or dynamics.
M&E Evaluation/Rating:		
Highly Satisfactory (HS), Satisfactory (S), Moderately Satisfactory (MS), Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU), Unsatisfactory (U), Highly Unsatisfactory (HU), Unable to rate (UR)		
b) General M&E Quality Assessment		
a. Design of the monitoring and evaluation system	S	The M&E system was appropriate and implemented as originally planned. Missions to monitor the national coordination project based in Brazzaville were conducted regularly.
b. Implementation of the monitoring and evaluation system	S	
Implementation and execution Evaluation/Rating:		
Highly Satisfactory (HS), Satisfactory (S), Moderately Satisfactory (MS), Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU), Unsatisfactory (U), Highly Unsatisfactory (HU), Unable to rate (UR)		
c) Quality of implementation	MS	The project did not adapt to the difficulties encountered during implementation. The team gave the impression that it lacked a real strategic vision to document problems and find more or less adequate solutions.
d) Quality of execution	MS	The project did not adapt to the difficulties encountered during implementation. The team gave the impression that it lacked a real strategic vision to document problems and find more or less adequate solutions.

71. The project was funded by a GEF grant of **US\$ 950,000** and financial contributions from other stakeholders (Government, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), IUCN, FAO, African Model Forest Network (AMFN), EU Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade Support Programme for African, Caribbean and Pacific Countries (ACP-FLEGT), Youth Association) amounting to **US\$ 2,394,200**. The evaluation found that co-financing did not fully materialise. The table below shows the co-financing pledged at the approval of the project.

Table 2: Co-financing pledged at the approval of the project

Name of the co-financier (source) Classification Type Project %	Classification	Type	Project	%
Government of the Republic of the Congo	National Government	In-kind	900,000	38
FAO	GEF Agency	In-kind	75,000	13

ACP-FLEGT support programme		Grant	300,000	7
Mechanism for National Forest Programmes		Grant	150,000	3
UNDP	Multilateral	Grant	69,200	12
IUCN	Multilateral	In-kind	300,000	17
AMFN	Multilateral	In-kind	400,000	4
Youth Association	CSO	In-kind	100,000	4
Total co-financing			2,394,200	100

6 Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1: The project's conservation objective of "enhancing biodiversity conservation and reducing degradation in mangrove ecosystems" has been partially achieved. Although the project contributed to strengthening the legislative and institutional framework, questions arise about the implementation of all the documents produced since no strategy for mobilising and securing funds to deploy strategies and plans has been developed by the project.

Conclusion 2: The project's development objective of "strengthening and enhancing sustainable livelihoods for the communities living in and around mangrove ecosystems" was too theoretical although, at the time of the evaluation, a number of activities were being prepared through memoranda of understanding, which are currently being signed. No concrete activities to improve living conditions have been carried out. However, the evaluation noted that the project supported communities in delineating areas for community-based management, developing simple management plans, and organising communities into associations. Unfortunately, even though associations have been recognised and legalised by the Ministry of the Interior, management rights and responsibilities have not been transferred to local communities by the Ministry in charge of forests. Nevertheless, there is good awareness among communities of the importance of mangrove ecosystems. This awareness, coupled with the enthusiasm of community leaders, is an important asset to capitalise upon for communities to engage in conservation, restoration and income-generating activities.

Conclusion 3: Concerning the capacity-building of local communities to sustainably manage mangrove resources and improve their livelihoods, the project could have improved its performance by testing several approaches of enhancing natural resources in order to provide more input for the future legislation (thus providing an ideal opportunity to test different community management approaches and learn from them) rather than replicating a similar approach across all sites. Unfortunately, the communities did not take ownership of this approach because they did not understand that they themselves were the key actors to boost local development. It is worth stressing that the successful development of Income-Generating Activities (IGAs) at the community level requires not only community commitment, but also multiform support, multi-sectoral accompaniment in order to guarantee sustainable results. Finally, the community management areas set up by the project were not formally secured, but advocacy actions had been carried out to develop a community-based forest management system in Congo.

Conclusion 4: The project was unable to set up an operational national coastal observatory with a clear mandate and sufficient resources (mobilised outside the project) and a long-term financing plan to ensure its sustainability. This structure should ensure the sustainability of the conservation objective pursued by the project.

Conclusion 5: In short, the project remained very ambitious despite the mid-term review in the sense that it had to make changes at a legal and institutional level (although these changes do not depend only on the project) and, at the same time, test these changes through concrete actions in the field.

6.2 Recommendations

Recommendations

To the FAO:

Recommendation 1: In order to benefit from the achievements made during the implementation of this project, it would be necessary to continue with a sustainability phase aiming at strengthening and consolidating the achievements of four years of implementation. Thus, FAO should:

- iii. Lobby to ensure that the specificities of mangroves and associated ecosystems are taken into account in the forestry code currently being revised and in the implementing legislation;
- iv. Enhance the value of the donation granted to the Bas Kouilou community by converting the fishing group into a functional cooperative. In other words, a change of vision and paradigm is necessary to boost commercial fishing in this community.

Recommendation 2: In future interventions, FAO should plan an initial "Inception Phase" to train implementing partners at the beginning of this project in FAO project procedures and management, in order to avoid misunderstandings. During this phase, baseline studies should be conducted to provide the project with realistic indicators and a monitoring-evaluation framework/plan to better monitor the project. It may be helpful during this phase for all parties to agree on the documents and versions to be used during implementation.

To the Congolese Government:

Recommendation 4: Draw upon the project's experiences to develop the revised forestry code not only on aspects related to mangroves and associated ecosystems, but also on community-based management of resources in areas allocated to communities.

Recommendation 5: Make the CCO operational.

Recommendation 6: Strengthen the technical, operational, organisational and financial capacities of local communities, especially women (prior to a gender situation analysis), for their effective engagement in sustainable mangrove management. In this way, community forests could be an approach to community-based management of mangrove resources that will promote issues relating to female entrepreneurship, securing mangrove areas, conflict management and land tenure security.

7 Appendices

Appendix 1. Profile and competences of team members

Ananie Cyrille EKOUMOU ABANDA is a Cameroonian Water, Forestry and Hunting Engineer with extensive experience in natural resource management issues, climate change/REDD+ and project evaluation. He has carried out several missions as a consultant for major international organisations (African Development Bank (AfDB), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), UNOPS, German International Development Cooperation Agency (GIZ), Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV), Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and FAO), the private sector (Rougier Group) and some consulting firms such as Eco Consult, Louis-Berger, UNIQUE and Eureval. For 17 years, he has been working in the ten COMIFAC countries, Tunisia and Burkina Faso. From 2010 to 2012, he held the position of Forestry Specialist at the World Bank based in Yaoundé, Cameroon after working for the Thanry Group, WWF and TFT.

Daniel MIKAYOULOU is a Congolese national (Republic of Congo). He has a PhD in economics from the University of Paris X Nanterre and a post-graduate diploma (DESS) in management and finance control from the Institut Supérieur de Gestion (ISG) of the University of Paris XII. From 1984 to 1998, he worked as a teacher-researcher at the Institut Supérieur de Gestion of the Marien Ngouabi University in Brazzaville. From January 2001 to March 2011, he was Programme Adviser at the UNDP office in Congo Brazzaville. From 2011 to 2015, he was Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist in the Office of the UNS Resident Coordinator in Guinea Bissau. From 2016 to date, he is an expert consultant in strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, public policy development and analysis, consulting and results-based management training. He currently resides in Haiti where he supports the UN team.

Appendix 2. Mission Programme

Date	Location	Activities	Participants
22-23 July 2017	Brazzaville	Working session between the two team members to discuss the preliminary analysis of the documents made available before starting the interviews.	Evaluation team
24-25 July 2017	Brazzaville	Interviews with FAO office staff, institutions and possibly other stakeholders in Brazzaville.	Evaluation team FAO Office Stakeholders at the national level
26 July 2017	Pointe Noire	Working Session with the Project Team; Familiarisation with the project and chronogram; Briefing of the mission; Working session with the members of the multi-stakeholder platform.	Evaluation team Project Team Consultants Evaluation team Members of the platform
27 July 2017	Pointe Noire	Working session with partner NGOs associated with the project (CNC, ND, etc.); Working session with private partners: Consultants, CR2PI, Council, Port autonome de Pointe Noire, SNR, NGO écologie, DD (fisheries, forest, environment, etc.).	Evaluation team Partner NGOs Private Partners / Consultants
28 July 2017	Field visits (Noumbi community area)	Meetings with local stakeholders potentially involved in mangrove management.	Evaluation team Project Team Communities
29 July 2017	Field visits (Bas-Kouilou community area)	Meetings with local stakeholders potentially involved in mangrove management.	Evaluation team Project Team Communities
30 July 2017	Pointe Noire	Wrap-up meeting and departure for Brazzaville.	Evaluation team Project Team

Appendix 3. Bibliography

GEF, FAO. 2012. *Project Document, Integrated management of mangroves, associated wetlands and coastal forest ecosystems in the Republic of Congo.*

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Multi-stakeholder Mangrove platform. 2017. *Policy Brief, Les indicateurs pour gérer durablement les mangroves, Un outil d'évaluation mis en place en République du Congo.* N.01, July 2017.

The literature review also took into account:

- the minutes of the meetings of the Technical Steering Committee and the Multi-stakeholder Mangrove Platform;
- the documents developed in relation to the implementation of the Multi-stakeholder Mangrove Platform, including the Platform Charter, the annual action plans and the assessment of the level of action plan achievements;
- memoranda of understanding signed with implementing partners and progress reports produced by these partners;
- FAO staff mission reports;
- other documents produced by the project, in particular PSGs of the community areas of Noumbi, Coukouati and Bas-Kouilou, participatory diagnostics for the preparation of PSGs, the inventory report on mangrove resources and the detailed mapping of mangroves in Congo.

