Mid-Term Review of the UNEP Project

Integrated Management of Wetland Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services for Water and Food Security
GEF ID 5132
March 2019 – March 2024

UNEP ECOSYSTEMS DIVISION/ GEF
Biodiversity and Land Degradation Unit
May 2024

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This report has been prepared by an external consultant as part of a Mid-Term Review, which is a management-led process to assess performance at the project's mid-point. The UNEP Evaluation Office provides templates and tools to support the review process. The findings and conclusions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of Member States or the UN Environment Programme Senior Management.

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Integrated Management of Wetland Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services for Water and Food Security
(Project number 5132)
(Date April 2024)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Mid Term Review was prepared for [UNEP Biodiversity and Land Degradation Unit, UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific by Dr Mark Infield, InField Conservation Consulting.

The reviewer would like to express their gratitude to all persons met and who contributed to this review, as listed in Annex 2.

The reviewer would like to thank the members of the Project Management Unit and in particular Ms Suchita Awasthi, Project Coordinator, for their contribution and collaboration throughout the review process. Sincere appreciation is also expressed to the National Project Director who took time to meet with the reviewer in his office. The evaluator would also like to thank officers of the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Climate Change, officers of the State Wetlands Authority, Kerela, and members of communities, civil society organisations and local government representing stakeholders in Sasthamkotta Lake RAMSAR site, and officers of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

The reviewer also thanks all those who reviewed the draft MTR report and provided comments.

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The review consultant(s) hopes that the findings, conclusions and recommendations will contribute to the successful finalisation of the current project, formulation of a next phase and to the continuous improvement of similar projects in other countries and regions.

BRIEF EXTERNAL CONSULTANT's BIOGRAPHY

Since graduating with a degree in Zoology in 1980, Dr Mark Infield has worked in various capacities in nature conservation. Mark has designed, managed and reviewed projects, advised government ministries and department, charities and community organisations, and undertaken and supervised research. He has worked on protected area and natural resource management, community engagement and participation and cultural values approach to nature conservation. He lived in Africa for twenty years and south-east Asia for ten. Mark currently resides in England where he works for the Conservators of Ashdown Forest, undertakes consultancies, is a director of ENV Validation Ltd., and sits on the Board of the Uganda Biodiversity Trust Fund and is a member of the UK Government Darwin Initiative's Expert Committee.

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Mark Infield

ABOUT THE REVIEW

Joint Review: No
Report Language(s): English
Review Type: Mid-term Review

Brief Description: This report is a management-led Mid Term Review of a UNEP project implemented between 2019 and 2024. The project's overall development goal is to enhance the management effectiveness of wetlands of national and global significance and their integration into developmental programming. The review sought to assess project performance (in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency), and determine outcomes and impacts (actual and potential) stemming from the project, including their sustainability. The review has two primary purposes: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote learning, feedback, and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UNEP, the GEF and the relevant agencies of the project participating countries.

Key words: India; Wetlands; Integrated management; Ecosystem Management; Ecosystems services; Biodiversity; RAMSAR; Participation; Sustainable use; Governance; Climate Change.

Primary data collection period: January to April 2024

Field mission dates: 3rd to 12th March 2024

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BES	Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
ES	Ecosystem Services
ESG	Environment, Society, Governance
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GoI	Government of India
GRACE	Guidance for Rapid Assessment of Cultural Ecosystem Services
IMWBES	Integrated Management of Wetland Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Project
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organizations
IWC	India Wetland Coalition
KWA	Kerala Water Authority
LTSA	Lead Technical Support Agency
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MTR	Mid-Term Review
MoEFCC	Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change
NEA	National Executing Agency
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NLCP	National Lake Conservation Plan
NPCA	National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems
NPD	National Project Director
NPSC	National Project Steering Committee
NWCP	National Wetland Conservation Programme
NWIA	National Wetland Inventory and Assessment Project
PES	Payment for Ecosystem Services
PIP	Project Implementation Plan
PIR	Project Implementation Review
PMU	Project Management Unit
ProDoc	Project Document
RAPPM	Rapid Assessment and Prioritization of Protected Area Management
RIS	Ramsar Information Sheets
SAC	Space Application Center
SACON	Salim Ali Center for Ornithology
SAGE	Site-Level Assessment of Governance and Equity
SAPA	Assessing Social Impacts of Protected and Conserved Areas
SMART	Specific Measurable Achievable and Attributable Relevant and Realistic Time-bound, Timely, Trackable and Targeted.
SWAK	State Wetlands Authority, Kerala
TESSA	Toolkit for Ecosystem Services Site Based Assessment
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNON	United Nations Office Nairobi
WI	Wetlands International
WISA	Wetlands International South Asia
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

PROJECT IDENTIFICATION TABLE

<table>
<tr><td>UNEP PIMS ID/SMA[1] ID:</td><td>N/A</td><td>Grant ID[2] (if applicable):</td><td>S1-32GFL-000617</td></tr>
<tr><td>UNEP Management (Division/Branch/Unit):</td><td colspan="3">UN Environment Programme
Ecosystems Division
GEF Biodiversity and Land Degradation Unit
Biodiversity and Land Branch</td></tr>
<tr><td>Implementing Partners:</td><td colspan="3">Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Government of India

Wetlands International South Asia (Lead Technical Support Agency)
State Wetland Authority Kerala (SWAK),
Bihar State Wetland Authority (Bihar)
Department of Forests and Wildlife Conservation, Punjab</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sources of Funding:</td><td colspan="2">Country[3](ies): India</td><td>Institution[4] Name/Type: MoWECC, GoI</td></tr>
<tr><td>Relevant SDG(s):</td><td colspan="3">Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss</td></tr>
<tr><td>MTS (all that apply):</td><td></td><td>UNEP approval date:</td><td>29 March 2016</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">POW Direct Outcome(s) number/reference (applicable for projects approved from 2022):

OR

POW Output(s) number/reference (applicable for projects approved pre-2022)</td><td>POW Direct Outcome:</td><td rowspan="2">MTS 2025 Outcome(s) number/reference (applicable for projects approved from 2022):

OR

POW Expected Accomplishment(s) number/reference (applicable for projects approved pre-2022):</td><td>MTS 2025 Outcome:</td></tr>
<tr><td>POW Output:

Nature action subprogramme</td><td>POW Expected Accomplishment:

(i) Number of national or subnational entities that, with UNEP support, adopt integrated approaches to address environmental and social issues and/or tools for valuing, monitoring and sustainably</td></tr>
</table>

[1] SMA refers to the ID provided by the Integrated Planning, Management and Reporting Solution (IPMR) system, which was introduced by UNEP in July 2023.
[2] For example, ID references from EC, IKI, UNDA, Adaptation Fund, GCF.
[3] Where applicable, list countries who have provided project funds and/or co-finance.
[4] Indicate where funding institutions are any/all of the following: Foundation/NGO; Private Sector; UN Body; Multilateral Fund; Environment Fund; Other.

			managing biodiversity
Sub-programme:	*Nature action subprogramme*	**Programme Coordination Project:**	
***Expected* start date:**	21 March 2019	**Actual start date:**	21 March 2019
***Planned* completion date:**	20 March 2024	**Actual operational completion date:**	TBD
***Planned* total project budget[5] at approval:**	USD 4,196,575	**Actual total expenditures reported as of [1/6/24]:**	USD 586,894
***Planned* Extra-budgetary Funds[6]:**	*Cash: USD* 2,150,000 *In-kind: USD 18,067,000*	**Secured Extra-budgetary Funds:**	*Cash: USD* 39,500 *In-kind: USD 10,199,771*
		Actual Extra-budgetary Funds expenditures reported as of [date]:	*Cash:*
First disbursement:	USD 500,000 on 24 August 2020	**Planned date of financial closure:**	*Estimated 1 year after operational completion.*
No. of formal project revisions:	0	**Date of last approved project revision:**	0
No. of Steering Committee meetings:	2	**Date of Last Steering Committee meeting:**	25 April 2023
Mid-term Review/ Evaluation *(planned date):*	31-Jan-24	**Mid-term Review/ Evaluation (actual date):**	Jan – May 2024
Coverage – Implementing Country(ies):	India	**Coverage – Implementing Region(s):**	South Asia
Dates of previous project phases:	N/A	**Status of future project phases:**	N/A

[5] Total budget may include; Regular Budget, Environment Fund, Extra-Budgetary, including 'softly-earmarked' etc.
[6] Extra-budgetary funds may include co-finance (cash/in-kind)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Mid Term Review object, objectives and scope

1. This MTR started in December 2023 and will terminate May 2024. It is a management-led Mid Term Review. The review assesses project relevance, effectiveness and efficiency and examines the quality and sustainability of outputs, outcomes and impacts resulting from project design and execution. The review seeks to meet accountability requirements, and promote learning, feedback and knowledge sharing. The review is guided by the Terms of Reference provided to the reviewer and related to UNEP MTRs. The reviewer has also responded to and followed the guidance, instructions and materials made available by UNEP's Evaluation Office as well as information and guidance provided by UNEP through the course of the MTR.
2. The reviewer has sought to represent the views of all stakeholders, collecting information respectful of ethics and human rights. Discussions remain anonymous and information collected and presented here is in accordance with the UN Standards of Conduct.

Project Background

3. The Integrated Management of Wetlands Biodiversity and Ecosystems Services Project is a 5-year project that formally started in March 2019 and formally ends in March 2024. With GEF funding of USD 4,196,575 and GoI co-financing of USD 20,217,000 this is a significant initiative. The project supports the Government of India's Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) to improve the management and conservation of its numerous wetlands of national and international importance.
4. The loss of nearly 30% of India's natural wetlands over the last 3 decades is attributed to the fragmentation of hydrological regimes, catchment degradation, pollution, invasive alien species, over-harvesting of resources and unregulated tourism.
5. Government institutions responsible for wetland conservation and management at national and state levels struggle to respond to these drivers of wetland loss and degradation. The project's development goal is to enhance the management effectiveness of wetlands of national and global significance and integrate wetlands into developmental programming. The project is designed to respond to 3 barriers identified as preventing this:
    - Knowledge Barriers: Research is too academic, site based, and technical to support decision-making to conserve and protect wetlands.
    - Capacity Barriers: State institutions lack capacity for integrated wetland management planning.
    - Institutional Barriers: State governments do not see wetland conservation as their responsibility.

Overall MTR Findings

6. The overall MTR rating of the project is ***Satisfactory*** – 4.99 overall score. Review ratings are provided in the summary table at the end of the Executive Summary and in Table 7. Project Performance Ratings.

7. The project has been implemented through a close and productive partnership between the Government of India's Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and Wetlands International South Asia (WISA). This partnership and indeed the project is based on a strong history of positive relations between institutions and individuals. These carried the protracted development process to successful conclusion and informs and supports implementation of the project. The strength of this partnership is perhaps the most significant contributing factor to the project's successes to date.
8. The project has overcome significant difficulties to deliver many high-quality outputs and process related outcomes. Significant progress has been made towards achieving the project's development objective. Government processes for wetland management have been strengthened, most particularly through streamlining and simplifying processes that were holding back formal notification of wetlands and the development of management plans needed to release government funding for wetlands. Systems for assessing and monitoring management and capacity to manage have been designed and promulgated. Development of government policies and strategies have been supported, most notably through the formation of State Wetland Authorities which establish a model for integrating wetland management into development through cross-sectoral institutions. Closely related to this has been the emphasis on and support for 'convergent budgeting', releasing funds for wetland management from other sectors such as tourism. Government emphasis on 'participation' and 'total delivery' has been integrated into project initiatives allowing for the rapid increase in the number of Ramsar sites to 80, and the registration of thousands of 'Mitras' – Friends of Wetlands. The project has also supported the production of many high-quality reports, papers, tools, training materials and communication materials as well as wetland management plans for the 3 pilots sites.
9. Less progress has been made at site level. The development and testing of best practices in wetland management has lagged at policy and strategic levels. Part of the reason for this was the difficulty of working at field level caused by the Covid 19 pandemic. Equally responsible, however, are the delays during project inception, delays in the release of funds through government institutions, both project and co-financing, and perhaps most important, insufficient early attention to the specific aspect of the project's design in which progress at institutional levels was to be driven and informed by practical interventions undertaken at the 3 pilot sites.
10. Indications of the lack of delivery of improved management at site level were apparent during the visit to Sasthamkotta Lake. This is not to suggest that the project could have resolved all or any of the problems observed. It does suggest, however, that improving management by working to develop and implement best practices at this site would contribute to project outcomes at site as well institutional levels.[7]
11. The primary impediment in supporting best practice development at site level is the absence of institutions at the site level (3 pilot sites). State Wetland Authorities, including SWAK, are creating positions for personnel with dedicated responsibilities for site level management and the development of wetland management plans supported by the project will make this easier. However,

[7] A visit to Ashtamudi Ramsar Site made during the course of the MTR revealed a range of management concerns related to unsustainable tourism and unplanned aquaculture developments indicating the importance of the project's support for Ramsar sites as well as the general imperative to improve practical management on the ground.

establishing formal institutions responsible for the day-to-day management of the wetlands remains important and continues to be a challenge.

12. The project and other stakeholders have recognised the need to establish and resource a body to undertake the day-to-day management of wetlands including engagement with local stakeholders including district, block and panchayat governments, Mitras, resource user groups and civil society, the enforcement of the 2017 Wetland (Conservation and Management) Rules, and monitoring of wetland values. Where wetlands lie within protected areas such as national parks, the park authority meets this need. For most wetlands, however, a management unit is a prerequisite for management on the ground. For the project their absence at the pilot sites represents a serious problem. It is also a problem for central and state governments. This was the key message conveyed to the reviewer by stakeholders at all levels during the MTR. The establishment of an institution for wetland management, tentatively called a Wetland Management Unit, has been proposed in the management plan currently being prepared for Sasthamkotta Lake. It is important to note that the establishment of these units is not part of the project concept, and their establishment will be the responsibility of MoEFCC and the State Wetlands Authorities.

13. It is understood that there are difficulties associated with IMWBES becoming closely involved with managing wetlands at field level, especially where this requires engagement with local stakeholders. Stakeholder engagement at site level is primarily the responsibility of State Wetland Authorities; the project's role in supporting this, however, is important). It is hard to see how improvements in management practices and the development of best practice can be practically achieved without greater levels of engagement at site level, and the IMWBES team should consider how to support State Wetland Authorities in this critical and complex endeavour through greater levels of 'handholding' State officers working at site level.

Summary of key strategic review questions

14. Detailed responses to key strategic review questions are provided in Annex X.

Question 1: What is the performance at the project's mid-point against Core Indicator Targets?
This GEF 5 project was developed before the core indicators were introduced by the GEF Secretariat .The project however has been able to identify 7,093 hectares of protected areas that are under improved management due to project interventions (core indicator 1.2), 18,612 metric tons of CO2 that has been sequestered or avoided in the Agriculture, Forestry, and Other Land use (core indicator 6.5), and 45 people (15f, 30m) that have benefited from the project thus far (core indicator 11).
Question 2: What has been the progress, challenges and outcomes regarding engagement of stakeholders in the project/programme?
Stakeholder engagement has varied in relation to the level of project engagement. A broad range of national and international organisations, interested parties and stakeholders have been engaged with and valuable partnerships forged with several. Relationships with State level stakeholders has also been strong and allowed for the development of wetland management plans at the 3 pilot sites. Stakeholder engagement at the 3 pilot sites has been more limited.
Question 3: What has been the progress, challenges and outcomes regarding gender-responsive measures and any intermediate gender result areas?
Gender and inclusiveness was not strongly articulated within the project design. There are, however, gender related indicators and targets within the Results Framework and

disaggregated information on gender participation is collected and reported on. Notwithstanding this, the project does not manifest as strongly engaged with gender. This may be in part because the project has not worked directly with stakeholders at site level.

Question 4: What has been the experience at the project's mid-point against the Safeguards Plan submitted at CEO Approval?

The ProDoc makes limited reference to safeguarding issues, focusing instead on the expected delivery of positive outcomes for the environment and society by the project. Safeguarding issues resulting from project interventions are inevitable and need to be addressed through appropriate project structures and capacities. A system for receiving and responding to complaints could be a valuable addition to the project.

The latest PIR's Project Management Risk Table indicates that the project's implementation schedule, financial management and capacity to deliver and considered as moderate risks. Performance at the point of the MTR indicate: a significant risk related to delayed implementation of the project as demonstrated by the low level of budget spend and the anticipated requirement for a two or three year no-cost extension; a significant risk of financial management impacting on project implementation resulting from delays in the release of funds through the MoEFCC's financial management systems, indicated as responsible for a number of activities not being undertaken as planned; a low level of risk related to the capacity to deliver, as the National Project Director and the PMU demonstrate great commitment and great capacity.

The consolidated project risk given in PIR was as follows:

Risk	Risk affecting Outcomes /Outputs	At PIR 3	At MTR
Project stakeholder	All outcomes and outputs	L	M
Operating environment	All outcomes and outputs	L	L
Implementing Agency	All outcomes and outputs	M	M
Implementation Schedule	Component 2	M	H
Financial Management	All outcomes and outputs	M	L
Capacity to deliver	Component 2	M	H
Consolidated project risk	All outcomes and outputs	M	M

Question 5: What has been the progress, challenges and outcomes regarding the implementation of the project's Knowledge Management Approach, including: Knowledge and Learning Deliverables.

Project performance with respect to knowledge generation, management and dissemination has been strong. A strong focus of the project has been on developing tools and methods for assessing wetland values and wetland management capacity. This information has been the basis for a range of communications.

Responses to specific UNEP questions

Question1: What evidence is available that the project activities are contributing to integrating ecosystem services, biodiversity assessments and management effectiveness into planning and management decision-making?

The project has performed well at raising understanding of and commitment to integrated wetland management and an ecosystem services approach for the management of wetlands. Government officers and officials reflects these approaches and are building them into national level strategies and processes. This is evidenced by a broad range of written materials and the discussions held at National Project Steering Committee meetings.

The rapid establishment of State Wetland Authorities in all States and Union Territories is further evidence that wetlands are increasingly understood in terms of ecosystem services and that integrated management is recognised as essential for wetland conservation and their contribution to sustainable economic development is also recognised.

Decision making at national and state levels has therefore been strongly influenced by integrated management concepts and the ecosystems services approach. It is less clear, however, that the same has been achieved at District, Block and Panchayet local government levels or is influencing planning and site level management decision-making by these bodies.

Question 2: What evidence is available to suggest that the project has increased the capacity and trained human resources for integrated wetland management and increase the levels of awareness of the importance of wetland biodiversity and ecosystem services across a range of sectors and stakeholders

A range of achievements of the project provide evidence of increased capacity and capability in integrated wetland management and ecosystems approaches. The Indian Wetland Portal's development is a significant achievement and recognised as a valuable resource by Knowledge Partners of the MoEFCC, and by officers of the Ministry and officers of State governments.

A range of training materials and activities have been undertaken which suggests but does not actually demonstrate that capacity and capability in wetland management has been strengthened.

The project has facilitated engagement with several government and private institutions leading to support for and investment in training and capacity development.

The phenomenal success of the project in attracting the interest of numerous national and local institutions and individuals in registering as Wetland Mitras – Friends of Wetlands - is evidence of a significant level of awareness across a broad range of stakeholders.

The multi-institutional make up of State Wetland Authorities is evidence that a broad range of sectors have been exposed to the importance of wetlands and recognise the need for their active participation to ensure the sustainable delivery of wetland services to their sector and area of responsibility.

Question 3: To what extent and in what ways is the project contributing to improved wetland management at project sites?

Problems with the delivery of Component 3, the demonstration of integrated wetland management and the development and testing of best practices in wetland management mean that there has been little improvement in the day-to-day management of the 3 pilot site wetlands.

The primary difficult stems from the bottle neck of government processes for the notification of wetlands, a prerequisite for the release of government funding for the

preparation of management plans, which are a prerequisite for the release of funds for active management of sites.

Central government and state funds are also necessary for the establishment and operations of wetland management institution for the 3 sites. The project has supported the development of management plans for the 3 sites, which are necessary for the formalization of management interventions, but the management institutions have yet to be established and funds released to them. Without this the project's contribution to improving wetland management at the 3 pilot sites remains minimal at the point of the MTR.

That said, it is noteworthy that State institutions are involved in activities at Sasthamkotta Lake, albeit without the anticipated increase in funding for management and a coordinating institution for day-to-day management.

Summary of conclusions

15. The project had high strategic relevance and was well designed with a strong logical narrative. It has been well implemented and well supervised and strong partnerships between key stakeholders has allowed it to be responsive and flexible in implementation. High levels of ownership and driven-ness were observed contributing to high expectations of sustainability of project outcomes.
16. There is reason to be concerned over delays in inception and delivery and with the low level of expenditure of funds, which will require development of a 2 or possibly 3 year no-cost extension. Improvements could be made in monitoring and evaluating project outcomes and impacts, which may require a review of the Results Framework. The project design was weak in its attention to potential human rights issues and to social and environmental safeguards. Project delivery has demonstrated that safeguards are attended to, and they are reported on in the PIRs. Safeguards have also been integrated into the wetland management plans the project has been instrumental in preparing. Nonetheless, the absence of safeguards in the project design is of concern.
17. The primary mechanism for delivering outcomes at policy and strategic levels as well as operational levels is the logic of the project design. Work undertaken in wetland pilot sites would allow for the development and testing of management practices. Lessons learned from this work would support the evolution of policies and strategies to address identified barriers to sustainable wetland management. These new systems and approaches would liberate additional financing, support training, build capacity and capability, and drive the formation of communities of practitioners employing best practice at all institutional levels. And ultimately, these institutional improvements would provide the platform on which improvements in the management of wetlands across the nation would be built.
18. Despite the excellent outputs and outcomes described above there are concerns that these will not deliver the positive impacts on wetland management and conservation so urgently needed at site level. The question of whether the project could deliver in practical terms is a concern for the project as implemented. If best practice in wetland management cannot be developed, tested and demonstrated at the 3 pilot sites in a timely manner, the strengthening of policy and strategy based on best practice may not be achieved, may not be rolled out to State governments for employment in notified wetlands, and may not inform the design of training programmes and materials.

19. Based on the findings from this review the project demonstrates performance at the '**Satisfactory**' level (a table of ratings against all review criteria is found below. The overall score of 4.99, calculated as an average of the 8 sector level scores, indicates the project achieved a satisfactory level of performance). Several lessons are drawn from these conclusions and recommendations are proposed to respond to concerns and opportunities.

Lessons Learned

Lesson 1: Identify key challenges early and work to resolve them early.

Lesson 2: Respond to issues with project design head on.

Lesson 3: Balance 'project visibility' against 'project deliverability'

Lesson 4: Ensure social and environmental safeguards and human rights issues are addressed appropriately during project development.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Prepare and submit a no-cost extension request.

***Recommendation 2*:** Reappraise activities based on implementation to date and with respect to time, remaining budget and priority in relation to delivering outcomes and impact by project end.

Recommendation 3: Work closely with pilot site State Wetland Authorities and newly established wetland management institutions to design, develop, deliver and assess management practices at pilot sites.

Recommendation 4: Investigate methodologies, methods and guidance for assessing values and practice relevant to wetlands management, participation and governance.

Summary of project assessment against review criterion

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating
A. Strategic Relevance	**Highly Satisfactory**	**6**
1. Alignment to UNEP's, Donors and Country Strategic Priorities		6
2. Complementarity with existing interventions/ Coherence		6
B. Quality of Project Design	**Satisfactory (**Scorings shown in Appendix VIII.)	**5.04**
C. Effectiveness	**Moderately Satisfactory**	**4.8**
1. Theory of Change		4
2. Availability of outputs		6
3. Progress towards project outcomes		4
4. Likelihood of impact		4
5. Adaptive management		6
D. Financial Management	**Highly Satisfactory**	**6**
E. Efficiency	**Moderately Satisfactory**	**4**
F. Monitoring and Reporting	**Moderately Satisfactory**	**4.5**
1. Monitoring of project implementation		4
2. Project reporting		5
G. Exit Strategy and Sustainability	**Satisfactory**	**5**
H. Factors Affecting Performance	**Moderately Satisfactory**	**4.62**

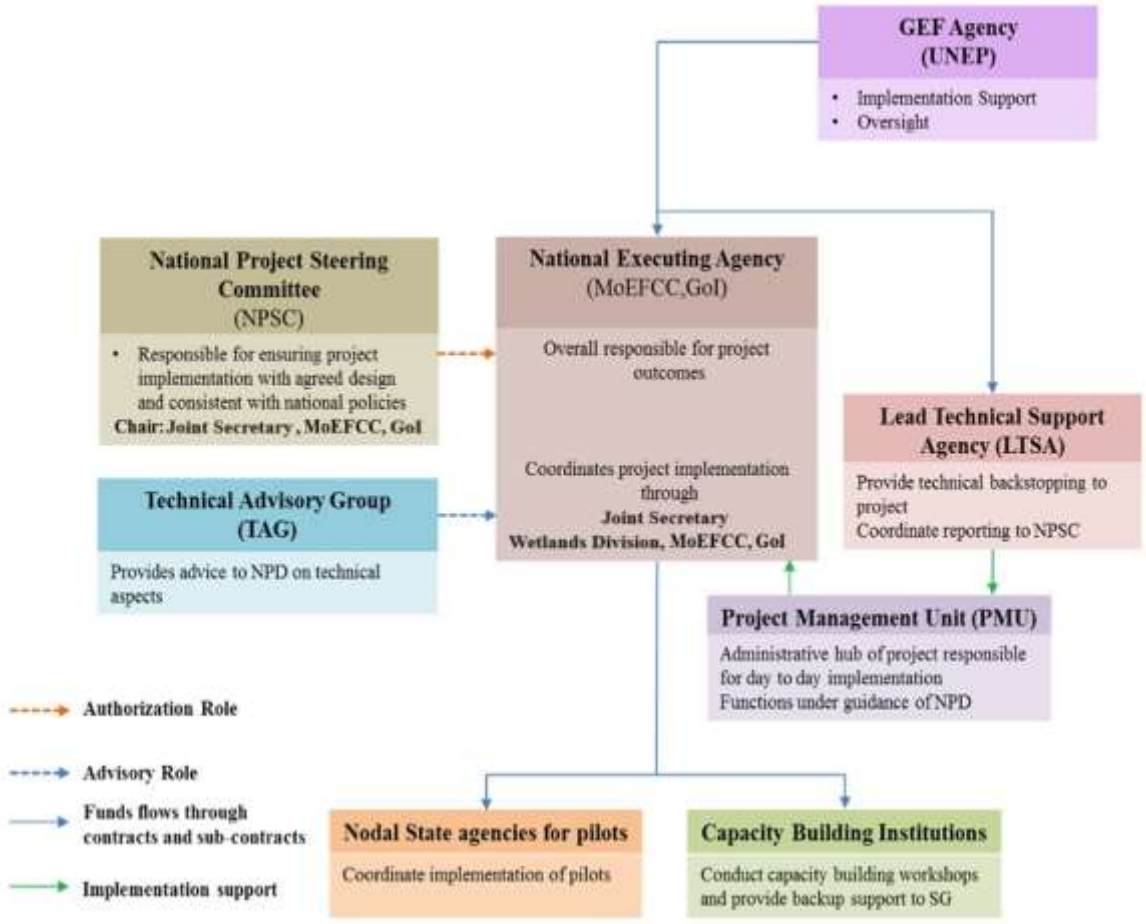
Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating
1. Project inception		3
2. Quality of project management and supervision		6
UNEP/Implementing Agency:		*(6)*
Partners/Executing Agency:		*(6)*
3. Stakeholders' participation and cooperation		4
4. Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality		4
5. Environmental and social safeguards		2
6. Country ownership and driven-ness		6
7. Communication and public awareness		6
8. Communications between finance and management		6
Overall Project Performance	**Satisfactory**	**4.99**

I. PROJECT OVERVIEW

Institutional context

20. The project under review is a Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) implemented project. The Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Climate Change, Government of India (MoEFCC) is the executing agency. Wetland International South Asia is the primary project partner.
21. Project implementation is under the UNEP Ecosystems Division, GEF Biodiversity and Land Degradation Unit, Biodiversity and Land Branch.
22. The Project Task Manager and Administrator operate out of UNEP's Regional Office in Bangkok while financial management is undertaken through the main UNEP Headquarters office in Nairobi.
23. The overall institutional arrangements for implementation and governance of the project as provided in the ProDoc and presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Institutional organogram



Problem statement

24. Wetlands, globally recognized for their ecological importance, are undergoing rapid degradation, and India mirrors this concerning trend. The loss of nearly 30% of natural wetlands in India over the last 3 decades is attributed to 7 drivers: Fragmentation of hydrological regimes; Catchment degradation; Pollution; Invasive Alien Species; Over-harvesting of resources; Unregulated tourism.

25. Underlying or root causes giving rise to the drivers of wetland loss are described as:
    - Increasing pressure on water and land resources from population increase and economic development.
    - Prioritization of food production and water provision over sustainability and over other values and services such as water regulation and local use.
    - Limited consideration of wetland ecosystem services and biodiversity values in sectoral development programming.
    - Insufficient holistic understanding of wetlands and ecosystem services at planning levels to understand implications of planning decisions.
    - Limited awareness and stakeholder participation in wetland planning and management.
26. Government institutions responsible for wetland conservation and management at national and state levels struggle to respond to these root causes. Three key areas of government response have been identified as barriers to improved wetland management:
    - Knowledge Barriers: Research is academic, site based, and technical (species, processes etc.) and not meeting the needs of decision makers or development.
    - Capacity Barriers: State level engagement demonstrates lack of capacity for integrated wetland management planning and engaging with decision makers.
    - Institutional Barriers: State governments do not see wetland conservation as their responsibility, looking to central government support.

Project parameters

27. Key project parameters taken from the ProDoc, and other relevant documents include:
    - Project duration: 60 months
    - Start date: 21 March 2019
    - Expected completion date: 20 March 2024
    - Date of first disbursement: 28 August 2020
    - Geographical scope: National plus 3 pilot sites in 3 states
    - GEF funding: USD 4,196,575
    - Co-financing: USD 20,217,000
    - Major agreed changes to the project: none
28. A comprehensive Results Framework was provided in the ProDoc. No formal changes to the project have been requested. Changes have been made, however, to the Results Framework. These were discussed and approved at the first meeting of the National Project Steering Committee in 2021. The approved amendments include scaling up of project interventions – e.g., including an assessment of funds flows to wetlands conservation from different ministries and line departments is carried out to identify convergence opportunities, development of a directory of trained personnel, and development of case studies on wetland restoration.

29. The ProDoc provides a detailed project description that articulates high level objectives, outcomes and outputs and presents them within a strong project narrative. These are also articulated in the Results Framework along with Mid-Term and End of Project milestones and targets. The ProDoc does not, however, articulate the project narrative in the form of either a Theory of Change diagram or a Logical Framework Analysis

30. Primary target groups and stakeholder analysis were derived from national and state level consultations as well as investigations undertaken during project development at the 3 pilot sites. A detailed mapping of stakeholders was presented in the ProDoc, a summary of which is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Stakeholder Mapping

Stakeholder	Functions
International Conventions	Secretariat of Convention on Biological Diversity; Secretariat of Ramsar Convention; Convention on Migratory Species CBD Strategic Plan and Aichi Targets guide action for conservation and sustainable use, including for wetlands. Ramsar Convention encourages national governments to promote wise use of wetlands. Implementation of Central Asian Flyways Programme is one of the important instruments for the Convention for fulfilling its objectives.
International wetland related networks	Ramsar Regional Centers, Wetlands Link International, Wetlands International Specialist Groups, IUCN Commissions Networks support identification and propagation of guidance and best practices related to wetland management.
National MoEFCC	Responsible for the overall programmatic approach to wetland conservation and management including policy and regulatory architecture.
MoWRRD	Influences integration of wetlands in water resources management. Operates national programme on restoration of waterbodies as irrigation infrastructure
MoA	Development of fisheries resources, natural as well as artificial wetlands as fish producing areas.
National NGOs	Wetlands International South Asia, SACON, BNHS, WWF-India, IUCN-India Support wetland conservation
Academic and Research Institutions	Wildlife Institute of India, Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute, Zoological Survey of India, Botanical Survey of India, Universities as IIT – Roorkee, Delhi University, JNU and others Provide scientific and management support to wetland conservation. Academic training related to wetlands (largely biophysical sciences orientation).
State Level	In most cases, wetlands conservation is administered through the Department of Forests/Environment.

Wetland Authorities	State governments designate wetland authorities as nodal agencies for management of sites.
State Biodiversity Boards	Constituted for the purpose of promoting conservation and preservation of habitats.
Capacity building and research and training centres	Wetland Research and Training Center (Odisha), Institute of Wetland Management and Ecological Design (West Bengal), Gujarat Ecological Education and Research Foundation (Gujarat)
Site Level Wetland communities	Wetland communities derive livelihoods through harvest of resources, as well as influence wetlands through activities.
Private Sector	Private sector operations influence wetlands. Models of wetlands conservation promoted by private sector.

External challenges

31. The project formally started in March 2019, but the first disbursement was not made until August 2020. The cause of this extensive delay was the introduction of new financial management systems within the MoEFCC. These needed to be institutionalized before external funding could be accepted. Covid 19 began to affect India from early 2020 with the first 'lock-down' starting in March 2020 with a further lock-down in April 2021. The lock-downs and other restrictions resulting from GoI responses to the Covid 19 pandemic created limitations on project implementation as designed. The PMU worked hard to mitigate these impacts.

Table 2: Project budget by component and outcomes

Components/Outcomes	GEF	Co-finance	Total
Component 1: National ecosystem services-based knowledge systems	$703,333	$1,700,000	$2,403,333
Outcome 1.1	$256,544	$680,000	$936,544
Outcome 1.2	$446,790	$1,020,000	$1,466,790
Component 2: National capacity building for integrated wetland management	$578,843	$3,497,000	$4,075,843
Outcome 2.1	$578,843	$3,497,000	$4,075,843
Component 3: Demonstration of integrated wetland management	$2,563,661	$11,975,000	$14,538,661
Outcome 3.1	$2,563,661	$11,975,000	$14,538,661
Component 4: Project monitoring, evaluation and outcome dissemination	$140,910	$1,995,860	$2,136,770
Outcome 4.1	$23,443	$609,000	$632,443
Outcome 4.2	$117,467	$1,386,860	$1,504,327
Sub-total	$3,986,747	$19,167,860	$23,154,607
Project Management Costs	$209,828	$1,049,140	$1,258,968
Project Total	$4,196,575	$20,217,000	$24,413,575

II. REVIEW METHODS

32. A range of methods were used to gather the information presented here in the assessment of the project's achievements, strengths and challenges, its outputs, outcomes and impacts, and in the formulation of recommendations. Methods employed included:
    - Formal interviews with individuals employing popular software solutions.
    - Formal face to face interviews with individuals.
    - Informal discussions with individuals and groups.
    - Small group discussions.
    - Larger, mixed group discussions.
    - Review of literature on wetland management relevant to the project.
    - Examination of written project outputs (reports, publications, etc.)
    - Direct observation
    - Triangulation of findings from different sources of information
33. The identification of stakeholders to be engaged during the MTR was based on the stakeholder analysis provided in the ProDoc and the assessment provided by the PMU of stakeholders and other interested parties most closely engaged with the project.
34. No formal criteria were used to select respondents for the MTR. Respondents were selected primarily on the basis of what was practical in the context of the timing of the MTR and the resources and time available. It should be noted that the MTR coincided with the Ramsar Convention of the Parties, meaning that many senior stakeholders were heavily engaged with this important event. It should also be noted that the MTR was held during the run-up to general parliamentary election which meant that many government officials and key Knowledge Partners were unavailable.
35. The MTR focused on one of the three pilot sites which was to some extent treated as a case study for the project. Consultations with local stakeholders at the site were coordinated by the State Wetland Authority, building on their ongoing management plan development consultation process . The reviewer had not input into this process and engaged with those stakeholders who attended the organised meetings.
36. Limitations in the reviewer's ability to gather information were experienced. These were primarily in relation to the duration of the review exercise overall, but also in relation to the duration of the field trip. Some difficulty was experienced in scheduling interviews with state officials and other relevant stakeholders due to problems with technology and availability.
37. It should be noted that only 1 of the states in which pilot sites were located could be visited within the time constraints of the MTR. This represents a limitation on the ability of the reviewer to generalise findings and lessons learned across pilot sites and places caveats around the conclusions reached..
38. Language barriers at site and community level created some degree of limitation for the reviewer in holding discussions with some stakeholders. Members of the

Project Management Unit and state officials provided translations where necessary.

39. Invitations to attend informal meetings during the field visit were extended by the PMU and SWAK officers to several groups including resource users, civil society and local government. A small number of people from these groups did attend a meeting and a vigorous discussion of historical state government interventions and current project activities was had, allowing the reviewer to gain valuable insights into stakeholder engagement and project impact. As is not infrequently experienced within rural communities, women and youth and were not present at the meeting.
40. Difficulty in scheduling interviews with some project stakeholders, most significantly State Wetland Authorities in 2 of the 3 pilot sites must be noted. Requests to join online meetings were extended to other Knowledge Partners working with the Ministry and to officials responsible for the project pilot sites in Punjab and Bihar. Except for GIZ, no meetings were held with other parties as they were not available. One meeting with Punjab officials was scheduled but cancelled at short notice due to official responsibilities. The reviewer followed up with emails to all groups suggesting that if meetings were hard to organise, any comments could be made by email, but none were received. It is important to recognise that government officials are generally busy and especially during period of political processes – a General Election was being prepared for – often required to attend at short notice to shifting government and state priorities.
41. Throughout this MTR process and in the compilation of the Final MTR Report efforts have been made to represent the views of mainstream and more marginalised groups. Data were collected with respect for ethics and human rights issues. Pictures were taken showing people or significant sites with permission. Meetings to gather information were initiated only after the purpose of the meeting was explained by the reviewer or members of the Project Management Unit and agreement to proceed given. All discussions remained anonymous, and all information has been collected and presented here in accordance with the UN Standards of Conduct'. Notwithstanding this context the limitations indicated above meant that gathering and representing the perspectives of local communities, women, and youth was less than ideal. This relates in part to issues around the low level of activity achieved at the 3 pilots sites.

42. The limitations under which the MTR operated have been referenced. Within these limitations efforts were made to verify information collected through interviews, group discussion and meetings with formal reports reviewed, and with the wide range of materials made available to the reviewer. These same reports and materials were used as the basis for setting questions and establishing the direction of interviews, group discussions and meetings.
43. Anomalies or areas requiring further questions were identified and presented to the PMU team and in some cases to MoWECC and SWAK officials. Follow up emails were sent and replies received and an online meeting set up with SWAK officials to clarify certain areas of wetland management at Sasthamkotta Lake.
44. Information gathered was recorded in the form of written notes, These were subjected to contextual analysis which formed the primary basis of the MTR. Data was extracted where relevant to inform specific elements of the review. Information was used more generally to form a *gestalt* of the project.

Table 3: Respondents' Sample

		# people involved (M/F)	# people contacted (M/F)	# respondent (M/F)	% respondent
Project team (those with management responsibilities e.g. PMU)	Implementing agency: GoI PMU	 2 M 5 F	 2 M 5 F	 2 M 5 F	 100% 100%
	Executing agency/ies UNEP UNON	 1 F 1M 1 F 1 M	 1 F 1 M 1 F 1 M	 1 F 1 M 1 F 1 M	 100% 100% 100% 100%
	# entities involved	# entities contacted	# people contacted (M/F)	# respondent (M/F)	% respondent
Project (implementing/ executing) partners. ***(receiving funds from the project)***	Kerala State Bihar State Punjab State	5 F 2 M N/A N/A	5 F 2 M 2 2	5 F 2 M 0 0	100% 100% 0% 0%
Project (collaborating/contributing[8]) partners. ***(not receiving funds from the project)***	GIZ	1 M	1 M	1 M	100%
Beneficiaries: ***Examples:*** **Duty bearers** **Civil society representatives**	 Kollam District Civil Society reps	 2 M 5 M 1 F	 2 M 5 M 1 F	 2 M 5 M 1 F	 100% 100% 100%

[8] Contributing partners may be providing resources as either cash or in-kind inputs (e.g. staff time, office space etc.).

III. THEORY OF CHANGE

Theory of Change at Review

45. The ProDoc provides a well-articulated intervention strategy and rationale with a detailed description of the project's goal and objective. The delivery of the goal and objective is through the implementation of 4 components.
46. The project's design is further articulated through a comprehensive results framework.
47. Though together these provide a strong narrative, this narrative is not formally presented in the form of either a Theory of Change diagram or a Logical Framework Analysis.
48. The absence of a formal ToC meant that causal pathways for project interventions acting to modify 'business as usual' projections were not developed or diagrammed within the ProDoc. The reviewer articulated pathways to change in the form of a dummy logical narrative presented in Annex XIII as a top order Logical Framework Analysis. This clarified the way that planned project interventions acted on the three primary barriers identified to sustainable wetland management in India.
49. Knowledge barriers would be addressed through site-based research that would go beyond the academic to frame wetlands and their management within an ecosystems services frame.
50. Capacity barriers would be addressed through a cyclical process by which best practice in wetland management designed and tested at site level would inform the development of policies and practices and the formation of a community of practitioners of integrated wetland management.
51. Institutional barriers would be addresses by connecting state and central government institutions for wetland management through processes linked to the notification of wetlands through formal planning processes.
52. Assumptions behind how project activities would strengthen wetland management were not rigorously tested. The MTR process did not provide an opportunity to work with project stakeholders to explore these through a formal facilitated engagement.
53. The identification of key actors in the proposed change process largely resulted from the familiarity with wetland management in India and the roles of key institutions, organisations and community groups gained over decades of engagement by Dr Ritesh Kumar, Director, Wetlands International South Asia, identified as Manager/Representative of the project.
54. No changes have been introduced to the original objectives and anticipated impacts of the project, or in the delivery of project activities. The reviewer generated a direct representation of the design presented in the ProDoc as understood by the reviewer and modified this to generate a representation of the project design in the form of a top order Logical Framework Analysis. The original language has been slightly modified to achieve this.

Project narrative drawn from the ProDoc by the reviewer using ProDoc language and structure.

Project goal	Conservation and wise use of wetlands for maintenance of biodiversity and sustained provision of their full range of ecosystem services.					
Project objective	To enhance management effectiveness of wetlands of national and international significance					
Project components	National wetland biodiversity and ecosystem services based knowledge systems		National scale capacity building for applying integrated wetland management	Demonstration of integrated wetland management	Project monitoring, evaluation and outcome dissemination	
Project outcomes	Increased national scale application of integrated wetland management planning tools and approaches	Wetland BES knowledge systems applied to improve management effectiveness of sites of national and international significance	Enhanced institutional capacity and trained human resources for integrated management of wetlands	Integrated wetland management applied in three protected wetlands	Project impacts and performance are measured	Evidence base on benefits of BES based-wetland management established

IV. REVIEW FINDINGS

A. Strategic Relevance

55. The strategic relevance of the project is considered by the reviewer to be high. The ways in which the project responds to GEF, UNEP and Government of India priorities are indicated below.

56. It is important to note, however, that the project's relevance results in great part from the close partnership between government officers and offices and the project proponents during the design and development phase in the first instance, and the ability of the project's implementers and executors to respond to the rapidly evolving institutional and policy framework of the host country, India.

57. This flexibility, enabled by close working partnerships and strong communications ensured that the project's relevance remained strong and even grew over time.

Alignment to UNEP's, Donors and Country (global, regional, sub-regional and national) Strategic Priorities

58. The project is closely aligned with the current GEF cycle (GEF 8) programme's impacts, goals and focus, in general terms, and with specific reference to the following:

- Halting nature loss and ensuring nature-positive world by 2030 – the project's work on improving the sustainable management of India's wetlands and the particular focus on Ramsar sites directly respond to slowing and eventually halting nature loss.
- Freshwater resources under sustainable management – the project is entirely relevant to this GEF goal.
- Increased area of protected land and water – the project is working to support the MoEFCC's mandate to protect wetlands through a formal process of registration to be followed by strengthened management. This process directly increases the area of protected and sustainably managed land and water.
- Supporting 'global good' – this is especially relevant to the focus of the project on Ramsar site development.

59. The project is closely aligned to UNEP's 2022-23 POW 2025 outcomes in both general terms and with specific reference to the following:

- An economically and socially sustainable pathway for halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem integrity is established.
- Sustainable management of nature is adopted and implemented in development frameworks.
- Nature conservation and restoration are enhanced.

60. The project is aligned with the UNEP Medium Term Strategy 2018 - 2021 despite being developed prior to it. It supports the priority areas and proposed outcomes of Healthy and Projective Ecosystems and of Environmental Governance.

61. The project is relevant to global, regional and sub-regional environmental priorities. Freshwater ecosystems are amongst the most threatened at all geographical scales and this project responds directly to the need to improve their protection and sustainable management.

62. The project is closely aligned to the programmes and priorities of the Government of India. The project is directly relevant to and supportive of the following national initiatives, campaigns and missions, some of which are central to the actions and policies of the MoEFCC.

- Mission LiFE – Lifestyle for Environment
- Mission Sahbhagita – Participation
- Amrit Dharohar – Elixir of Heritage

Complementarity/Coherence with Existing Interventions

63. The project has worked to support existing interventions of government and other supporting organisations and agencies. This complementarity has been achieved in part through the close engagement of project proponents during the design phase with the MoEFCC and in part through responsiveness to the evolving priorities and programmes of the ministry and their other partners. Key areas in which the project has integrated with existing or developing interventions include:

- National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Eco-systems (NPCA)
- Save Wetlands Campaign
- Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav - 75th Anniversary of Indian IndependenceAmrit Dharohar - Government initiative to preserve the natural beauty and diversity of wetlands
- GoI/GIZ Wetlands Management for Biodiversity and Climate Protection Programme
- Wetland Mitras – Friends of Wetlands

Composite scores for Strategic Relevance

Alignment to Strategic Priorities	6
Complementarity/Coherence	6
Average	**6**

Rating for Strategic Relevance: HIGHLY SATISFACTORY (6)

B. Quality & Revision of Project Design

64. The overall quality of the project design was found to be high. The overall score given below is derived from scores given for a range of characteristics detailed in Annex VIII and calculated using UNEP's weighting of these scores to generate an overall score.

65. Several key points were noted by the reviewer with respect to the quality of the project design.

66. Documents seen by the reviewer demonstrate the strength of the project design process which was carried out with great diligence and focus over several years.

67. In relation to this it is important to note that the GEF/UNEP design process and the length of time needed to navigate it represents a challenge to project relevance and timeliness. 'Time and tide wait for no man' and while development processes

are undertaken, the issues identified and the operating environment inevitably shift, often to such an extent that project relevance and effectiveness may suffer.

68. As noted above, despite the long development period, in this case project proponents and implementors were able to ensure that the project remained strongly relevant.

69. The identification and development of project results was strong and clear and based on the determined need to resolve 3 areas of weakness within the capacity and capability of India's government and state institutions, its civil society and its people to manage wetlands sustainably. The interventions designed to resolve these weaknesses provided for a strong theoretical causal relationship between actions to be undertaken and necessary impacts on wetland management.

70. The formal expression of this causality in the form of a Theory of Change and Logical Framework Analysis was, however, missing in the ProDoc, making some elements of project monitoring and evaluation less effective and transparent. This was in some degree mitigated by the strong Results Framework and the platform this provided for the robust monitoring of project implementation. It was not, however, able to fully provide for responsive project management in relation to project outcomes and impacts through M&E feedback mechanisms that a formal ToC and Logical Framework would have provided.

71. Social and environmental safeguards are analysed in the ProDoc, but in the view of the reviewer, in a rather cursory way. There appeared to be a general assumption that because the project was designed to improve the management of wetlands and improve the lives and livelihoods of communities, negative impacts would not result from project activities. Potentially negative environmental and social impacts can result from interventions and unintended consequences can result from otherwise positive project interventions, notwithstanding the intended impacts. The reviewer did not find any indication of this resulting from project activities but the weakness of the project design in this respect is noteworthy and the project team should be reminded of the need to carefully review project and project supported State interventions from the perspective of social and environmental impacts.

72. The work of the project to support the development and testing of best practice wetland management at 3 pilot sites would inevitably create social and environmental safeguarding challenges. Stronger analysis of these would have strengthened project design and delivery.

73. The project's primary anticipated impacts depended significantly on the model by which best practice, designed and tested at pilot site level, would feed into the development of policy and strategy at national level, which would lead to improvements at state level and ultimately at the level of the wetlands themselves.

74. Implementation of this design has experienced some difficulties, raising questions over the sustainability and replicability of the project and the delivery of its anticipated impacts and legacy.

75. Notwithstanding the commentary above, the project design is considered to have been of a high standard, the aggregate score of 5.04 giving a 'satisfactory' rating.

Rating for Quality & Revision of Design: SAFISFACTORY (5.04) see Annex XI

C. Effectiveness

Theory of Change

76. As noted above, despite the strong project narrative provided in the ProDoc, no formal Theory of Change or Logical Narrative Analysis was prepared. In the view of the reviewer, this has allowed a critical component of the project's design – the development of best practice through practical support and engagement with wetland managers at 3 pilot sites – to receive insufficient attention or focus, and for this lack of attention to persist.

77. The ProDoc summary states, "Component 3 will apply integrated and multi-sectoral wetland management approaches in 3 protected wetlands to facilitate learning and the development of best practices for up-scaling and wider implementation within State Governments." However, later and more detailed articulations of planned activities and anticipated outcomes and outputs elsewhere in the ProDoc do not consistently refer to the demonstration of best practice in integrated wetland management as the primary purpose of working at pilot sites – even though Component 3 took 61% of the total GEF project budget and 62% of GoI co-financing. Though the Results Frameworks refers to the availability of best practice guidance to wetland managers as a Mid Term target at project objective level, and the sharing of best practice is described as part of capacity building, there is no specific reference to the development of best practice in activities under Component 3.

Availability of Outputs

78. Analysis of the delivery of outputs is based on review of submitted PIRs complemented by an assessment of delivery against Mid Term Milestones undertaken by the Project Management Unit at the request of the reviewer (see Table 4).

79. The reviewer finds that the project has achieved an impressive level of delivery of project outputs. The reviewer also finds that the outputs delivered to be of exceedingly high production and content quality in most cases (Figure 2.).

80. In many cases the project has delivered significantly more outputs than those required in Mid Term milestones and targets.

81. For example, a Mid Term milestone from developing a tracking tool available was modified to establishing baseline scores using the tracking tool for all Ramsar Sites. At project inception there were 26 Ramsar sites in India. There are currently 80.

82. The project partnered with GIZ to develop the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) and has used it to prepare baseline scores for 19 Ramsar Sites at the time of the MTR. The reviewer was given to understand that achievement of the new milestone, to employ the METT at all Ramsar Sites was on track to be achieved.

83. Another example of significant over performance against Mid Term milestones relates to the establishment of State Wetland Authorities. The target was that these would be established in 3 additional states. At the time of review, all 36 states and territories have established State Wetland Authorities. The active role of the MWEFCC in this achievement is recognised by the reviewer and highly commended.

84. A similar achievement has been registered with respect to the formation of Wetland Mitras and the reviewer again commends MoEFCC on its leadership in bringing this achievement about. The Mid Term target was that Wetland Mitras would be registered in at least 3 states. At the time of the MTR nearly 18,000 have been registered across all states and territories. The milestone that Wetland Mitras should be contributing to wetland management planning and implementation is, however, more difficult to ascertain and the reviewer is not convinced that this is the case.

85. Inevitably, with a complex project such as IMWBES, not all designed outputs receive the same attention or are delivered as indicated in the ProDoc. It is also the case that not all described outcomes will be significant in the delivery of project outputs. Output 1.2B, for example, provides for a small grant programme as a mechanism for delivering improvements in wetland management effectiveness at site level. Implementation of this activity has been delayed by the complexities of releasing funds through the GoI's budgeting and financial control systems employed by MoEFCC as well as by changing government priorities. At the point of the MTR, therefore, though a call for proposals was made and proposals received, no grants had been issued. It is a valid question whether this planned output or others in similar circumstances should be further pursued and carried forward into the no-cost extension.

86. The reviewer was not aware of and did not observe any positive or negative effects of the project on disadvantaged groups, including those with specific needs due to gender, vulnerability or marginalisation (e.g. through disability). It has been noted elsewhere that the failure of the ProDoc to formally represent social and environmental safeguarding or human rights raised questions over the degree to which positive or negative effects of project activities would be identified and responded to.

87. The reviewer did not identify specific risks to the broad range of stakeholders with connections to the project resulting from activities undertaken by the project or outputs delivered. Nor did the reviewer identify risks to the reputations of GoI, WISA, UNEP or GEF resulting from the activities undertaken and outputs delivered.

Figure 2. Selected examples of materials produced by the project (see Annex III, Project Outputs - Overall for document references).

Progress Towards Project Outcomes

88. Assessing progress toward the achievement of the project objective and the outcomes necessary to achieve it is more difficult. Table 4 shows an assessment made by the PMU at the request of the reviewer of progress made towards project objectives and outcomes at the time of the MTR. This demonstrates that progress has been made against most Mid Term milestones. There are, however, exceptions which will need consideration when determining the content of a no-cost extension. The reviewer has responded to reported progress in the form of suggested revisions to the Results Framework, including changes to project activities, for consideration in a no-cost extension (see Annex XII).

89. The project objective is stated as "Enhanced management effectiveness of wetlands of national and international significance." Three indicators are put forward in the Results Framework. These are:

- Increasing number and area of wetlands being managed effectively using integrated management plans;
- Increasing number of states with cross sectoral institutional arrangements for wetland management; and
- Increasing number of states with enhanced institutional capacity for integrated wetland management, as measured by GEF Capacity Building Score Card

90. Progress has been made towards all 3 in terms of the Mid Term milestones. In particular, progress has been made on the development and use of tools for assessing ecosystems services, management effectiveness and climate risk. These are important achievements but it is not possible to say with assurance, based on the materials presented and on information gathered during the field trip, that the management of India's most significant wetlands has been enhanced in practical terms on the ground. It will be important to ensure that the potential created by these assessment tools and other processes and materials are converted into positive outcomes at site level during the anticipated no-cost extension.

91. There are reasons to suggest that the investments of time and resources made by the project in the institutional, political, social and cultural environment in which wetland management must be delivered will yield positive impacts at site level, and that general improvements could not be delivered without these investments. The reviewer has some concerns, however, that a gap remains between the work done and improving the management of wetlands on the ground.

92. A central component of the project is the design, delivery and testing of best practice in wetland management at site level. It is understood that despite the difficulties described elsewhere in this report for the project to work on the ground at the 3 pilot sites, best practices are being developed and employed by SWAs across the country and lessons learned are being gathered and shared at regional workshops organised by MoEFCC and supported by the project. The reviewer is concerned, however, that without more practical engagement to improve wetland management in the 3 pilot sites, project contributions to the development of best practice, or at least improved wetland management, will be hard to deliver.

Table 4. Progress towards Mid Term Milestones at the point of the MTR as assessed by the PMU.

Project objective	Objective level indicators	Baseline	Original Mid Term Milestones	Amended Mid Term Milestones	Progress towards midterm milestones
Project Objective: Enhanced management effectiveness of wetlands of national and international significance					
	O1 - Increasing number and area of wetlands of national and international significance being managed effectively using integrated management plans which secure biodiversity and ecosystem service values	O1.1 20% of national site network (which include 7 Ramsar sites) are managed based on integrated management plans	Methodologies, tools and best practices for integrated wetland management area available for use by wetland managers System for assessing management effectiveness of national network in place	Methodologies, tools and best practices for integrated wetland management area available for use by wetland managers System for assessing management effectiveness of national network in place Baseline METT scores for all Ramsar sites are established	Tools and methodologies for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Assessment, Management Effectiveness evaluation and Climate Risk Assessments are available. The best practices are included as case studies in the tools and methodologies. The tools are also pilot-tested in the demonstration sites as well as other wetlands of international importance. Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) has been developed and published in collaboration with GIZ India. Baseline METT Scores are available for 19 Ramsar Sites. The number of Ramsar Sites has increased from 26 (as mentioned in ProDoc) to 80 (as of February 2024). The project will continue conducting METT with a target of covering all Ramsar Sites by the end of the project.
		O1.2 Ad hoc approaches for prioritization of sites, mostly influenced by a limited range of wetland biodiversity values	Guidance for systematic prioritization of sites taking into account full range of biodiversity and ecosystem service values available for application by state governments	Guidance for systematic prioritization of sites taking into account full range of biodiversity and ecosystem service values available for application by state governments	A brochure on 'Identifying and Managing Wetlands of International Importance' has been prepared to guide state/UTs in the designation of wetlands as Ramsar Sites. The project supported the revision of NPCA guidelines for ensuring management planning of prioritised sites.

Project objective	Objective level indicators	Baseline	Original Mid Term Milestones	Amended Mid Term Milestones	Progress towards midterm milestones
	O2 - Increasing number of states with cross sectoral institutional arrangements for wetland management	O2.1 8 states have constituted wetland authorities as nodal policy and planning institutions for wetlands	In at least 3 additional states, state governments constitute wetland authorities as nodal policy and planning institutions for wetlands	In at least 3 additional states, state governments constitute wetland authorities as nodal policy and planning institutions for wetlands In at least 3 states Wetland Mitras are registered and contribute to management planning and implementation	State/Union Territory Wetland Authorities have been constituted for all States and UTs. After the launch of Mission Sahbhagita and Save Wetlands Campaign, supported by the project, 17781 Wetland Mitras have been registered across all States and UTs.
	O3 - Increasing number of states with enhanced institutional capacity for integrated wetland management, as measured by GEF Capacity Building Score Card	O3.1 Only 7 states demonstrated institutional capacity for integrated management of wetlands (Baseline capacity scores for three sites: Sasthamkotta Lake: 11; Kanwar Jheel: 14 and Harike Lake: 13)		In at least 3 states wherein direct project interventions have been carried out, enhanced institutional capacity for integrated wetland management leads to at least 20% increase in capacity scores over baseline A directory of trained personnel is developed	The baseline METT scores have been updated for the three sites. A training workshop has been conducted. A list of trained professionals has been prepared.
COMPONENT 1: National wetland biodiversity and ecosystem services-based knowledge systems					

Project objective	Objective level indicators	Baseline	Original Mid Term Milestones	Amended Mid Term Milestones	Progress towards midterm milestones
Outcome 1.1 Increased national scale application of integrated wetland management planning tools and approaches	1.1.1 Increase in number of sites in which management plans use BES inventory and assessment tools	In 15 sites of national and international significance, management is based on integrated management plans which take into account full range of wetland BES values		Biodiversity and ecosystem services assessment tool applied in at least 3 sites. A mobile/web application is scoped and developed to integrate citizen-science in conservation and management of biodiversity and ecosystem services of the wetlands	The Rapid Assessment of Wetland Ecosystem Services (RAWES) tool has been applied at the three demonstration sites and integrated into the management plans. The Ecosystem Services Shared Value Assessment (ESSVA) tool has been applied at the two demonstration sites, Kabartal in Bihar and Sasthamkotta in Kerala. Yet to be developed, delayed due to funds unavailability.
	1.1.2 Improved integration of climate change vulnerability and adaptation measures in wetland site management planning	Climate change vulnerability is not linked with management of any of the sites of national and international significance	In 6 sites, vulnerabilities induced due to climate change are assessed and response measures identified	In 3 sites climate vulnerability assessment is concluded	Climate risk assessments have been concluded for two demonstration sites, Sasthamkotta in Kerala and Kabartal in Bihar
Outcome 1.2 Wetland BES knowledge systems applied to improve management effectiveness of sites of national and international significance.	1.2.1 Increasing number of sites for which information on management effectiveness is used for revising management	Management plans for wetlands in India are designed and implemented on annual cycles, very limited integration of adaptive management approaches, weak on gender in	National and international methodologies and tools on management effectiveness, and gender collated, assessed and subsequently	National and international methodologies and tools on management effectiveness, and gender collated, assessed and subsequently	The METT tool has been developed and published based on the review of methodologies and stakeholder consultations. The METT has incorporated information on gender and social equity.

Project objective	Objective level indicators	Baseline	Original Mid Term Milestones	Amended Mid Term Milestones	Progress towards midterm milestones
		stakeholder interests & partnerships, or on evaluation of effectiveness of interventions.	reviewed by stakeholders Management effectiveness assessment and tracking of 50% of Ramsar Sites completed	reviewed by stakeholders Management effectiveness assessment and tracking of 50% of Ramsar Sites completed	Baseline METT Scores are available for 19 Ramsar Sites. The number of Ramsar Sites has increased from 26 (as mentioned in ProDoc) to 80 as of February 2024. The project will continue conducting METT with a target of covering all Ramsar Sites by the end of the project.
COMPONENT 2: National scale capacity building for applying integrated wetland management					
Outcome 2.1 Enhanced institutional capacity and trained human resources for integrated management of wetlands	2.1.1 Measured increase in wetland managers' capacity to apply integrated management approaches	Institutionalized courses and training opportunities on integrated management available in less than 5 institutions Limited availability of training opportunities on integrated management approaches. Baseline capacity survey to be designed during first project year and conducted at onset of each course.	In at least 4 additional institutions, wetland managers' training courses are established Wetland managers of 10 states trained and showing enhanced capacity in integrated wetland management	At least 5 States receiving training submit at least 10 integrated management plans in line with the national guidelines Wetland managers of 10 states trained and showing enhanced capacity in integrated wetland management	No physical training workshops were organised due to insufficient funds. Virtual training sessions were organised for State Wetland Authority Kerala No training workshops were organised due to insufficient funds.

Project objective	Objective level indicators	Baseline	Original Mid Term Milestones	Amended Mid Term Milestones	Progress towards midterm milestones
	2.1.2 Enhanced awareness of wetland ecosystem services values for integrated management	Project will design and conduct baseline awareness survey during YR 1 of project. National scale outreach on wetlands mainly through World Wetlands Day; Partial integration of stakeholder outreach in site management plans for < 25 sites of national and international significance.		Baseline awareness of wetland ecosystem services values for integrated management established	The project supported the Save Wetlands Campaign, an initiative of MoEFCC as a people's movement to celebrate, revive, and rejuvenate wetlands. The project developed documents and knowledge products for the same. Similarly, the implementation strategy for Amrit Dharohar, an initiative to promote the unique conservation of Ramsar Sites, and guidelines for developing an interpretation centre as a communication, education, and awareness hub have been drafted under the aegis of the project. The baseline awareness survey through Ecosystem Services Shared Value Assessment tool has been conducted for Kabartal in Bihar and Sasthamkotta in Kerala Outreach materials namely, India's 75 Amrit Dharohar- Ramsar Sites of India Factbook Wetlands Conservation and Wise-Use: The role of citizens Wetlands Conservation Approach and Initiatives. Four issues of Anup - a six monthly newsletter of MoEFCC Along with this, wetland themed social media posts, factsheets on 5 new Ramsar Sites and banners on 80 Ramsar Sites have been prepared as part of World Wetlands Day 2024.

Project objective	Objective level indicators	Baseline	Original Mid Term Milestones	Amended Mid Term Milestones	Progress towards midterm milestones
		National Capacity Building, Education and Awareness Strategy not formulated as an overarching guidance for stakeholder engagement in wetland management	Draft National Capacity Building, Education and Awareness Strategy formulated	Draft National Capacity Building, Education and Awareness Strategy formulated	As one of the significant policy shifts, the MoEFCC has launched the Save Wetlands Campaign to sensitise people on the values of wetlands and the need for conservation. The campaign includes communication and outreach activities such as developing knowledge products and conducting outreach events. The knowledge partners of the MoEFCC, including the LTSA, are engaged in developing the strategies and implementation of the campaign. Additionally, under the aegis of the Amrit Dharohar initiative, the MoEFCC envisages the development of an interpretation centre as a communication and outreach hub. The project team drafted the guidelines for developing and refurbishing the interpretation centre and shared them with the MoEFCC for further action.
	2.1.3 Increasing private sector participation in wetland management	Private sector participation in wetland management limited to < 5 sites	Opportunities for private sector engagement are identified in 6 sites	Opportunities for private sector engagement are identified in 6 sites	As part of the India Wetland Coalition, an outcome of the Sahbhagita workshop organised under the project, private sector opportunities have been identified for 18 Ramsar Sites. Wetlands International South Asia, the LTSA, is one of the founding members of the India Wetland Coalition.
	2.1.4 Measured increase in wetland managers' capacity to address gender aspects in designing and implementing	Gender dimensions are recognized and addressed in management plans at <5 sites.	Module on 'gender and integrated wetland management' is developed and	Module on 'gender and integrated wetland management' is developed and	Due to issues around document control resulting in two versions of the Amended Results Framework being used, this milestone from the original Results Framework was not included in the version guiding project implementation. This error

Project objective	Objective level indicators	Baseline	Original Mid Term Milestones	Amended Mid Term Milestones	Progress towards midterm milestones
	integrated wetland management		available for all wetland managers	available for all wetland managers	has been corrected and this milestone will be worked to going forward. The PMU responded to the information by stating that the milestone will be incorporated into later stages of the project
	2.1.5 Growing community of practice and gender-sensitive information base for sharing of knowledge, lessons and best practices	Lack of a platform for wetland managers to share lessons, methods and best practices for integrated management	i) National portal is scoped, developed and made functional to support sharing of knowledge, best practices and lessons, and also as a medium of stakeholder awareness of wetland BES values; (ii) community of practice identified and recorded – including based on gender disaggregated data.	The National portal is functional and provides tracking information on Ramsar sites and other sites supported under NPCA. At least 10 knowledge products are published using the information and data available on the portal.	The project provides regular support for the maintenance and updating of the portal. The portal has information on 1,276 wetlands, including 80 Ramsar Sites. Additionally, the health card information of more than 5000 wetlands is available—the project supported the provision of the information mentioned above for portal updating
Component 3: Demonstration of integrated wetland management					

Project objective	Objective level indicators	Baseline	Original Mid Term Milestones	Amended Mid Term Milestones	Progress towards midterm milestones
Outcome 3.1 Integrated wetland management applied in three protected wetlands	3.1.1 Improved wetland BES values in three demonstration sites	Management of sites is not based on integrated approaches for conserving biodiversity habitats and sustaining provision of ecosystem services Baseline value of key indicators for three sites: Sasthamkotta Lake, Kerala: Minimum inundation is at 60% of wetland area; Kanwar Jheel, Bihar: Peak inundation is restricted to 65% of wetland area, waterbird habitats 12 km2 is significant waterbird habitat area; Harike Lake, Punjab: Area under invasive species is 25% of open water surface	Integrated management plans for securing biodiversity and ecosystem service values endorsed by MoEFCC are available, including being specific on gender disaggregation, such as proportion of time spent by women on wetland management activities or women's involvement in decision-making	Management plans for the three demonstration sites (incorporating BES, climate risks, gender and equity dimensions) are approved by SWAs. Management plans are approved by MoEFCC under NPCA SWAs commit at least 40% convergence funds.	The management plans of Kabartal and Harike are approved by the respective SWA. The management plan of Sasthamkotta has been shared with the SWA for further action. The management plans have allocated 40% of the funds from convergent sources. However, the SWAs have not yet submitted the management plans to the MoEFCC for endorsement, and thus, the implementation is delayed.

Project objective	Objective level indicators	Baseline	Original Mid Term Milestones	Amended Mid Term Milestones	Progress towards midterm milestones
	3.1.2 Cross-sectoral institutional arrangements and use of integrated management approaches increase site management effectiveness	Cross sectoral institutional arrangements have not been established for the demonstration sites: Baseline METT Scores: Sasthamkotta Lake, Kerala: 83; Harike Lake, Punjab: 48; Kanwar Jheel, Bihar: 25)	Wetland Authorities constituted as nodal policy and planning agencies for 3 demonstration sites METT Scores Site 1, 2 and 3 increased with 15%	Wetland Authorities constituted as nodal policy and planning agencies for 3 demonstration sites METT Scores Site 1, 2 and 3 increased with 15%	A METT tool for Indian wetlands has been developed under the project. The baseline METT scores of the three sites have been revised using the tool Sasthamkotta- 50, Kabartal- 48, and Harike- 71. The tool will be applied biennially; therefore, the results will be updated by 2025.
	3.1.3 Improved gender equity in community institutions engaged in managing wetlands	Overall women participation in key community institutions managing wetlands in the three sites is < 15%		Wetland Mitra networks established at the 3 demonstration sites at least have one third women membership	The established Wetland Mitra networks at the demonstration sites have at least 33% female representation.
	3.1.4 Improved livelihoods of wetland dependent communities	Nearly 35,000 communities depend on wetland resources for sustenance. At least 50% of these have been impacted adversely due to decline in wetland BES values	Wetland management planning at the three sites identifies measures for livelihood improvement for all wetland dependent communities	Wetland management planning at the three sites identifies measures for livelihood improvement for all wetland dependent communities	Due to issues around document control resulting in two versions of the Amended Results Framework being used, this milestone from the original Results Framework was not included in the version guiding project implementation. This error has been corrected and this milestone will be worked to going forward.

Project objective	Objective level indicators	Baseline	Original Mid Term Milestones	Amended Mid Term Milestones	Progress towards midterm milestones
	3.1.5 Increasing financial resources for integrated wetland management	***Available budget for three sites: ~ US$ 100,000;*** site management plans not fully funded; Site budgets not linked/integrated with development programmes of local and national governments.	10% increase in available management funding; At least 60% of management plan resources are generated through convergence with developmental programmes	At least 10% increase in resources available for implementation for the three demonstration sites At least 40% of management plan resources are generated through convergence with developmental programmes.	The implementation of the management plan has not begun. The SWAs are yet to submit the management plans to the MoEFCC for their endorsement, after which the implementation of the plans will be initiated. The implementation of the management plan has not begun. The SWAs are yet to submit the management plans to the MoEFCC for their endorsement, after which the implementation of the plans will be initiated.
Component 4: Project monitoring, evaluation and outcome dissemination					
Outcome 4.1 Project impacts and performance are measured	4.1.1 Use of project monitoring and reporting system to assess project performance and impacts	Project monitoring and reporting systems described within FSP	Mid-term review of project performance and impact is used to adapt project implementation	Mid-term review of project performance and impact is used to adapt project implementation.	The MTR is planned in March 2024
Outcome 4.2 Evidence base on benefits of BES based-wetland management established	4.2.1Increased use of BES based monitoring systems to assess maintenance and restoration of wetland ecological character, and livelihoods for wetland dependent communities	In 5 sites, monitoring systems to assess changes in ecological character and livelihood outcomes are defined and applied	In additional 6 sites, monitoring systems to assess changes in ecological character and livelihood outcomes are defined and applied	In 3 demonstration sites, BES monitoring systems are functional.	The monitoring systems are defined in the integrated management plans of the three demonstration sites. The application of the monitoring system will begin after the approval of the management plans. The delay in the preparation of management plans is due to lags in funds flow to the State Wetland Authorities and a lack of trained staff for the same. The LTSA prepared the management plans for the two sites, Sasthamkotta and Kabartal and is with the State Wetlands Authority for further actions.

Project objective	Objective level indicators	Baseline	Original Mid Term Milestones	Amended Mid Term Milestones	Progress towards midterm milestones
	4.2.2 Increasing number of practitioners with knowledge and application of the national Guidance document on integrating biodiversity and ecosystem service values and climate vulnerability in wetland management	To be determined during inception phase based on sampling of stakeholders	National Guidance document produced to enable up-scaling of improved management effectiveness of wetlands of national and international significance by integrating biodiversity and ecosystem services, including climate vulnerability assessment protocols, across India	National guidance document produced and communicated to all wetland authorities, Ramsar site managers, NPCA site management implementing agencies and other stakeholders	Tools and methodologies for BES assessment, Management effectiveness evaluation and climate risk assessments have been published. The tools are pilot-tested at demonstration sites, and national workshops are planned to train wetland managers on the application of the aforementioned tools.

93. It will be important for the project to ensure the opportunity provided by the no-cost extension is used to review interventions and investments in administrative and institutional systems to ensure they are converted into practical improvements in all aspects of management at wetland level. A key requirement for this would seem to be the establishment of institutions for the day-to-day management of wetlands in the 3 pilot sites. The project has made steps in this direction by including a proposal for such an institution for Lake Sasthamkotta in the management plan being prepared for this important Ramsar site.

94. If this is accepted by SWAK and MoEFCC, this idea may provide a platform for the creation of equivalent institutions at the other 2 project pilots sites and eventually, nationally. The concept responds to the trajectory of decentralisation of wetland management which has seen the creation of State Wetland Authorities and District Wetland Committees.

95. A similar proposal has been included in the Vembanad Kol Wetland Management Plan prepared by SWAK with the support of WISA.. The plan which remains under the SWAK review process prior to submission to MoEFCC proposes the creation of the Vembanad Kol Wetland Authority which will take on responsibility for the integrated management of the wetland under the authority of SWAK.

96. Table 4 raises some concern that the slow release of funds has led to certain Mid Term targets being missed. This will need to be addressed. The planned development of a phone/web application, for example, for integrating citizen science into wetland management has not been undertaken to date and it may be that this activity will not be a priority for the no-cost extension.

97. Certain capacity development activities were prevented or delayed by the Covid 19 pandemic and delays in the release of funds. The no-cost extension will need to review whether these can be undertaken within the remaining time and resources.

98. Revisions to the results framework were requested by the LTSA. These were presented to the National Project Steering Committee at the 1st meeting of the committee in 2021. The approved amendments include scaling up of project interventions – e.g., including an assessment of funds flows to wetlands conservation from different ministries and line departments is carried out to identify convergence opportunities, development of a directory of trained personnel, and development of case studies on wetland restoration. . Agreed changes were recorded in the minutes of the meeting. The process of revision, however, led to the inadvertent removal of an indicator of integrated wetland management being applied at the 3 pilot sites: “Improved livelihoods of wetland dependent communities” (Table 4). This error has not been rectified, and this indicator is now included (Table 4). The importance of this indicator is reflected in assessing progress towards establishing an evidence base for the benefits of integrated wetland management, which includes the livelihoods of wetland dependent communities. Livelihood activities have been integrated into MoEFCC’s Amrit Dharohar initiative and relevant activities have been highlighted in the strategy document and reports..

99. The reviewer was not aware of and did not observe any positive or negative effects of the project on disadvantaged groups, including those with specific needs due to gender, vulnerability or marginalisation (e.g. through disability). It has been noted elsewhere that the failure of the ProDoc to formally represent social and environmental safeguarding or human rights raised questions over the degree to

which positive or negative effects of project activities would be identified and responded to.

100. The reviewer did not identify specific risks to the broad range of stakeholders with connections to the project resulting from the progress made towards project objectives as reported here. No risks to the reputations of GoI, WISA, UNEP or GEF were identified resulting from the reported progress made towards the delivery of project outcomes.

Likelihood of Impact

101. Of all elements of a MTR, assessing the likelihood of impact is probably the most difficult. This is because it is impossible to see what the future will bring. The reviewer must therefore use their best judgement to determine, based on their gathered knowledge of the project and its operating environment, what future impacts of project interventions are 'likely'.

102. As noted above, the ProDoc did not provide a formal Theory of Change meaning that causal pathways and assumptions for necessary change were not articulated and thus not amenable to formal review and analysis. The review therefore follows a less formal process to articulate the likelihood of impact.

103. The close relationship between the different parties to the project has been noted and is considered central to the livelihood of impact with cental government, state government and civil society parties playing various strategic roles in the delivery of change in capacity and practice for delivering sustainable improvements in wetland management.

104. The way the project's development and implementation has responded to critical elements of government strategy and approach to government is a positive indicator of future impact.

105. The high levels of engagement and interest in the project amongst senior officials demonstrated to the reviewer, both within the MoEFCC and the State Wetlands Authority of Kerala (SWAK), was a strong indicator of the 'driven-ness' and ownership that is so critical to the institutional sustainability which is perhaps the most important predicator of future impact.

106. The close relationship between MoEFCC officials, state parties and the Project Management Unit is another powerful indicator of future impact.

107. As noted above, however, the reviewer perceives a gap between the project's support for policy, process, administrative aspects and communications of wetland management at ministerial, state and institutional levels, and practical improvements in management at wetland site level. This gap raises concerns over the likelihood of the project making real and tangible impacts on wetland management and conservation.

108. Both the project goal and the project objective include statements committing the project to positive practical improvements in wetland management ("*… conservation and wise use of wetlands…"* and "*… enhance[d] management effectiveness of wetlands …*" respectively. These high order statements of impact are to be delivered by improving capacity and capability at all levels of government and community, but the bottom line requires practical improvements to be demonstrated at the field level. Perhaps the most direct improvement required to

achieve this will be the development of operational institutions for the day-to-day management of wetlands.

109. No unintended negative effects of the project were identified though the reviewer raised concerns over the potential for these to occur due to the weakness of the ProDoc with respect to social and environmental safeguards. The potential for project activities to result in negative or unintended consequences can be mitigated by certain actions including:

- Raising awareness amongst project partners working to implement the project of the key role that social and environmental safeguards play in protecting the environment and communities.
- Providing training in the design of social and environmental safeguards and using the training to draft a set of safeguards for the project's No-Cost Extension.
- Putting in place a complaint handling mechanism for the project.

Adaptive Management

110. The project has demonstrated highly effective adaptive management. Though there have been no substantive modifications to the project or budget since inception, there have been numerous adjustments to respond to opportunities and needs.

111. Some suggested adjustments were put forward through the National Project Steering Committee and were discussed during meetings and documented in the minutes of committee meetings. Other adjustments were developed through discussion within the Project Management Unit and with the National Project Director before being put forward to the UNEP Task Manager.

112. An assessment of the project's performance from a risk perspective is provided in relation to GEF key strategic questions (Annex 10) drawn from risk assessments provided in the 3 PIRs submitted. Of most concern to the reviewer is those related to delays in project implementation which have been discussed above. These risks will be addressed through the development of a No-Cost Extension.

113. The reviewer did not identify specific risks to stakeholders resulting from project activities though concerns related to the weakness of attention to environmental and social safeguards in the ProDoc. The reviewer did not identify specific reputational risks to project parties including GoI, WISA, UNEP or GEF but has suggested that a formal complaint handling mechanism for the project might be considered for the No-Cost Extension period.

114. The reviewer noted that the strong engagement of government senior officials at national and state levels was a strong positive indicator of the endurance of project achievements. It was also noted, however, that the low levels of engagement and activity at pilot sites was an area of concern to be addressed by the No-Cost Extension.

Composite scores for Effectiveness

Theory of Change	4
Availability of Outputs	6

Progress Towards Outcomes	4
Likelihood of Impact	4
Adaptive Management	6
Average	**4.8**

Rating for Effectiveness: Moderately Satisfactory (4.8)

D. Financial Management

Adherence to UNEP's/Donor Financial Policies and Procedures

115. The reviewer found no evidence of failures to adhere to UNEP's financial policies and procedures. The Project Implementer, being GoI, has strong systems for financial management and control. Similarly, Wetland International South Asia, which provides the Project Management Unit, has strong financial systems in place.

Completeness of Financial Information

116. The reviewer was satisfied that the PMU and the National Project Director have a strong understanding of the systems required to satisfy the financial reporting requirements of all parties and has been providing this information.

117. The reviewer has been provided with information showing project expenditure against GEF budgets established for project outcomes in the ProDoc. These are presented in Table 5. This demonstrates that financial information is complete, up-to-date and accurate. It also shows that the rate of spend against GEF budget lines is generally low, and especially low against Outcome 3.1 at 10.1% of budget expended. As this is by far the largest budget, this low rate of spend has a strong influence on the overall rate of spend. Expenditure against Outcomes 4.1 and 4.2 is almost three times the rate of spend of Component 3.1.

Table 5. Figures presented for expenditures between May 2020 and December 2023 (in USD.)

Component/ Output	Estimated cost at design	Actual Cost/ expenditure	% of actual expenditure against cost at design
Component 1.			
Outcome 1.1	256,544	40,809	15.9%
Outcome 2.2	446,790	71,072	15.9%
Component 2.			
Outcome 2.1	578,843	122,121	21.1%
Component 3.			
Outcome 3.1	2,563,661	258,817	10.1%
Component 4.			
Outcome 4.1	23,443	6,288	26.8%
Outcome 4.2	117,467	31,507	26.8%
PMC	206,828	56,280	27.2%
Total	**4,196,575**	**586,894**	**14.0%**

118. Discussions with the WISA administration and financial management team confirmed the impression of strong systems being in place.

119. Discussions with the UNEP team confirmed that the project had performed well with respect to financial reporting and other related requirements. The submission of quarterly financial reports was timely and with good levels of accuracy. Annual audit reports were submitted in good time and were without significant issues. Annual financial reports for GEF funds and GoI co-financing were received as required. Requests for disbursements were appropriate to levels of expenditure made. Some delays were experienced with the submission of equipment inventories but were not considered significant. Table 6 shows the reviewer's scoring of Financial Management based on information collected during the MTR process.

120. A key area of financial management relates to the programming, release and expenditure of project funds. This is because problems here can result in problems for the timely delivery of the project, the articulation of different project components, and related impacts on the quality of project performance. The rate of project expenditure against budget is low at 14% at the end of 2023 (Table 4). Underspend against budget is a not uncommon occurrence though this project's rate of spend was considered low by UNEP officers. Reasons for the low rate of spend have been discussed in relation to delays in project inception processes, delays experienced in funds being released through the complex GoI budget and financial control and management systems, and delays in building operational and wetland management capacity at the 3 pilot sites. Provisions to respond to these concerns should be considered in the design of the No-Cost Extension. Of particular relevance here is the articulation between activities to be undertaken at the 3 pilot sites and their contribution to project support for the integration of best practice into central and state government institutions, policies and practices.

121. Over the same period, however, reporting on GoI co-financing indicates that over 40% has been expended. Significant co-financing has been spent on wetland management plan develop through contracting third parties. Important though putting integrated wetland management plans in place to facilitate the process of wetland notification is, this does raise questions marks over the degree to which best practice developed through the project is part of these plans.

Table 6. Financial Management

Financial management components:		**Rating**	**Evidence/ Comments**
1. Adherence to UNEP's policies and procedures:		**S**	
Any evidence that indicates shortcomings in the project's adherence to UNEP or donor policies, procedures or rules		No	No evidence of shortcomings; strong systems in place for financial management and control
2. Completeness of project financial information:			
Provision of key documents to the reviewer (based on the responses to A-H below)		**S**	
A.	Co-financing and Project Cost's tables at design (by budget lines)	Yes	High level of detail provided in ProDoc budget appendixes
B.	Revisions to the budget	N/A	None indicated
C.	All relevant project legal agreements (e.g. SSFA, PCA, ICA)	Yes	GEF and GoI letters of commitment

D.	Proof of fund transfers	No	Not requested by the reviewer
E.	Proof of co-financing (cash and in-kind)	No	Not requested by the reviewer
F.	A summary report on the project's expenditures during the life of the project (by budget lines, project components and/or annual level)	Yes	Spending summary report at Output Level
G.	Copies of any completed audits and management responses *(where applicable)*	N/A	Audits discussed with WISA Finance Manager; no request made to view audit reports Project funds are being channelled to state governments through the ministry, and to the technical partner. While an audit report for Wetlands International has been submitted, the ministry is yet to submit an audit report.
H.	Any other financial information that was required for this project (list):	N/A	No additional financial information was requested by the reviewer
3. Communication between finance and project management staff		**S**	
Project Manager and/or Task Manager's level of awareness of the project's financial status.		S	Discussions between the reviewer and relevant project, WISA and UNEP officers were satisfactory
Fund Management Officer's knowledge of project progress/status when disbursements are done.		S	Discussions between the reviewer and relevant project, WISA and UNEP officers were satisfactory
Level of addressing and resolving financial management issues among Fund Management Officer and Project Manager/Task Manager.		S	Discussions between the reviewer and relevant project, WISA and UNEP officers were satisfactory
Contact/communication between by Fund Management Officer, Project Manager/Task Manager during the preparation of financial and progress reports.		S	Discussions between the reviewer and relevant project, WISA and UNEP officers were satisfactory
Project Manager, Task Manager and Fund Management Officer responsiveness to financial requests during the review process		S	Discussions between the reviewer and relevant project, WISA and UNEP officers were satisfactory
Overall rating		**S**	

122. Differences in the rate of spend on GEF funds and GoI co-financing as noted above will require some attention during the design and implementation of the required no-cost extension.

Communication Between Finance and Project Management Staff

123. The reviewer had discussions with 3 institutional levels with roles relevant to the financial management of the project and for the necessary interactions between staff responsible for project implementation and staff responsible for financial management and control. These were:

- The National Project Director
- The Project Management Unit
- WISA's Finance and Administration Team

124. The reviewer found there to be good communications between these and a good understanding of the importance of collaboration between them to ensure sound and cohesive implementation of the project, Communications that combine and integrate technical and administrative perspectives of project implementation are a critical element of good practice and practical project administration and in this project have allowed a responsiveness to changing circumstances and operational needs.

125. Financial tables relevant to this section can be found in Annex V

Composite scores for Effectiveness

Adherence to UNEP policies	6
Completeness of financial information	6
Communications between finance and project team	6
Average	**6**

Rating for Financial Management: **Highly Satisfactory (6)**

E. Efficiency

126. UNEP's guidance for MTRs indicates that efficiency of project implementation comes through a combination of 'cost effectiveness' and 'timeliness.'

127. Cost effectiveness is hard to assess without a forensic analysis of project accounts which is beyond the remit of the MTR and the expertise of the reviewer. The strength of the financial management systems employed as described by the WISA team and employed by WISA and GoI suggests that cost-effectiveness in terms of procurement and contracting as well as tracking and oversight of expenditures will have contributed to cost effective implementation and deployment of the project budget. GoI and WISA have robust procurement procedures for purchases and contracts above specified thresholds that require advertisement and competitive bidding, collection of 3 quotes, or justifications for sole procurement decisions where this is appropriate.

128. The project has focused on working through existing institutional structures rather than developing new or parallel structures. The project's support for the national creation of State Wetland Authorities and the holding of regional meetings for state and civil society institutions has been particularly valuable. In some cases, working with existing structures has entailed identifying problems within processes and working to improve them or resolve specific issues. An important intervention has been working with MoEFCC to streamline processes for the notification of wetlands, thus allowing government funding to be allocated for their management.

129. The project has provided valuable support for and contributions to existing GoI institutions and developed partnerships to allow existing government and non-government institutions to collaborate. The project's engagement with and support for the Indian Wetlands Portal, a powerful online hub for information on India's wetlands, has been particularly important in this regard.

130. Timeliness refers to project delivery within the designed timeframe of the project. Timeliness problems have created negative impacts on cost-

effectiveness due to delays in project design, approval and inception processes. The project development process was lengthy. The original letter of endorsement of the project written by GoI to UNEP is dated September 2012, following what will have been a lengthy development process. GEF wrote to UNEP in April 2013 stating that the project would be funded subject to appropriate responses to GEF comments. The project was formally endorsed by the GEF CEO in March 2016. The development process therefore took 3 years, 6 months. Further delays resulted from GoI procedures and internal restructuring delayed project implementation to 2019 with a further 1-year delay for the release of the first disbursement of funds which signals the practical start of project activities. Delays in implementation also resulted from the Covid 19 pandemic. All together these delays, which total approximately 9 years, inevitably introduced problems for efficiency as the operating environment inevitably shifts, creating inefficiencies as all parties work to respond to these.

131. In addition to procedural delays, there have also been periodic delays in the release of funds from the MoEFCC to the Project Management Unit and participating government entities. These have led to delays in the implementation of some project activities.

132. It should be noted that officials at the MoEFCC and the Project Management Unit have worked hard to overcome the problems caused by these various delays, working in partnership to push implementation forward and responding with flexibility to problems that resulted. WISA has been particularly positive and supportive and has at times undertaken activities using its own financial resources.

133. Notwithstanding this, it is of concern that by December 2023, just 14% of the project budget has been expended. The project will require a no-cost extension, the development of which is in process.

Rating for Efficiency: **Moderately satisfactory (4)**

F. Monitoring and Reporting

Monitoring of Project Implementation

134. The ProDoc describes how project implementation will be monitored based on UNEP protocols.

135. The ProDoc provides a detailed Results Framework which is the primary tool for monitoring and evaluation of the project. The National Project Steering Committee has played an important role in reviewing the content of the Results Framework and modifying both Mid Term and End of Project targets.

136. Indicators for project implementation are strong and based on the requirements of SMART indicators. Progress against these is clearly indicated in formal reports based on ongoing performance monitoring undertaken by the PMU.

137. The Results Framework provides clear statements of the baseline against which achievements of the project are to be assessed and measured. Mid-term and Project-end milestones and targets are provided. Where appropriate, progress towards milestones and targets is indicated in numerical terms. Where more useful, statements of project achievements are noted.

138. Though project implementation has been closely monitored against milestones and targets, the reviewer did not see evidence that this data was used

to inform adaptive management processes. It is noteworthy that the slow rate of project expenditure and delays in the implementation of certain activities (for example the small grants programme) did not lead to proactive review and adaptation of these issues. Improvements could be made in using data from the monitoring and evaluation system to strengthen management decision making by modifying reports to include textual commentary on the data with accompanying suggestions for practical responses to the information provided.

139. Gender disaggregated data on project activities is provided where relevant.

140. Reporting against high order project objectives is more difficult to assess. The Mid Term indicator against the objective of "… enhanced management effectiveness …" is "… increasing number and area of wetlands … being managed effectively using integrated management plans …". The project has good metrics on increase in numbers and areas of wetlands that have completed the notification process and been declared as wetland sites, sites gazetted as Ramsar sites, and wetlands where the Management and Effectiveness and Tracking Tool (METT) has been employed. The METT tool creates the potential for tracking over time of improvements to the management of specific wetlands. Wetlands that have integrated management plans can be tracked. It is not clear, however, that the system in place is delivering data on actual management of wetlands or collecting information on improvements to the status of individual wetlands.

141. The Mid-Term targets for this objective are that suitable methods and tools for best practice are "… available for use and methods for assessment are … in place." Neither of these target indicators speak to practical improvements in management by wetland managers.

Project Reporting

142. The reviewer has seen evidence that project reporting is up-to date and of the required quality. Three PIRs and all 6-monthly reports have been seen by the reviewer and provide complete and up-to-date information on project implementation.

Composite scores for Monitoring and Reporting

Monitoring of implementation	4
Project reporting	5
Average	**4.5**

Rating for Monitoring and Reporting: Moderately satisfactory (4.5)

G. Exit Strategy & Sustainability

Exit Strategy

143. As noted above, the reviewer is confident that despite the concerns identified, enduring benefits from the project will be delivered. The reviewer believes that the key area which needs to be strengthened to ensure impact beyond the life of the project relates to strengthening engagement in the design and delivery of best practice at site level and ensuring its integration into central and state government policies and practices while building a community of informed and supported wetland management practitioners.

144. The ProDoc makes no reference to an exit strategy, which may be thought surprising. This does not mean that the project team have not been considering this throughout the process of development and implementation. This should be addressed in the No-Cost Extension. Of particular relevance will be ensuring the establishment and development of appropriately resourced wetland management institutions.

145. WISA is aware of the importance of reducing levels of project funding for their support to MoEFCC but note that funding through the ministry itself is significant and rising. That central and state governments are prepared to use government budgets to contract NGOs such as WISA to strengthen government capacity to management wetlands represents a powerful indication that the end of GEF funding will not signal the end of government initiatives on wetland conservation or the role of civil society.

Socio-political Sustainability

146. At the time of project inception, 8 states had State Wetland Authorities, in place meeting the indicator for what are described in the Results Framework as "… cross sectoral institutional arrangements for wetland management." The Mid Term target to increase this number by 3 has been exceeded as all 38 States and Union Territories have established these.

147. It is important to note, however, that considerable variation exists in the level of development and effectiveness of these institutions and the degree to which they can engage in a practical way with improving the standards of wetland management and conservation in their areas of responsibility. Available information indicates significant variation in the number of dedicated or part time staff working for State Wetland Authorities. The date of the establishment of different authorities also varies. Anecdotal information provided by project team members and partners indicated that the capacity and capability of staff of different authorities also varies as does the degree to which they receive funding from State budgets.

148. Existing and new community institutions are being supported and engaged with through project supported activities. Perhaps the most important of these are the Mitras – Friends of Wetlands. This concept forms the core of government's drive to ensure community participation.

149. It would be fair to note, however, that there is some uncertainty over the current and future effectiveness of Mitras in delivering practical stakeholder and, especially, community engagement.

150. The reviewer was impressed by the degree to which central and state government institutions appear to be deeply involved in and committed to the project's objectives of improving wetland management.

Financial Sustainability

151. National and State government budgets at significant levels suggests financial sustainability, at least in the short to medium term.

152. The close attention paid by MoEFCC and State Wetland Authorities to the concept of 'convergent budgeting' is important and creates enormous potential to increase funding for improved wetland management and conservation. Key to this development is the idea supported by the project of redefining wetland values in economic, development and cultural terms, i.e. taking a strong ecosystems services approach, rather than focusing on biodiversity and conservation values.

Combined with the creation of the cross-sectoral Wetland Authorities pursuing integrated wetland management approaches, this integrated approach that highlights the developmental values of wetlands and requires cross-sectoral engagement in their management has the potential to open funding for wetland management from existing central and State government budget pots for example, from agriculture, tourism and health departments.

153. The National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic ecosystems, NPCA – MoEFCC's flagship scheme - has been investing in projects aimed at securing wetland resources and ecosystem services. For example, MoEFCC and the Ministry of Tourism have invested together to establish nature tourism at Ramsar sites. The two ministries have jointly organised training workshops for local communities to work as nature tourist guides.

154. Central Government has provided significant co-financing of project activities, creating the potential for continuing and expanding flows of government and state financing of wetland management. Many wetland initiatives are jointly funded through central and state government budgets on a 60/40 ratio.

155. Wetlands International South Asia has a long-term commitment to wetlands in India and has the capacity and intention to continue support to government for wetland management through parallel projects. As an institution, WISA is solely focused in operational terms on wetlands in India.

156. An MoU has been signed between the Confederation of India Industries and MoEFCC to strengthen private sector engagement in wetland conservation and management. This initiative as led to the formation of the India Wetland Coalition (IWC). WISA, the LTSA, is one of the founding members of the coalition under the aegis of the IMWBES project. Workshops and meetings have been held between representatives of the private sector, MoEFCC, and other interested parties to prepare an action plan for IWC.

157. The project has initiated discussions with several Indian corporations to engage them in partnerships that can deliver sustainable financing of wetland management. The project has made efforts to identify private sector partners at all Ramsar Sites and the PMU reports that at some sites including Khijadia and Vembanad Kol Ramsar Sites and Sultanpur National Park, private sector partners are actively engaged in supporting the implementation of management actions.

Institutional Sustainability

158. As noted above, State Wetlands Authorities have been established in all states and territories. This is relevant to institutional sustainability as well as socio-political sustainability, as the State Wetlands Authorities will have primary responsibilities for engaging with local government and civil society institutions working within the ambit of wetland management.

159. State Wetland Authorities, working under the framework of integrated wetland management and with the encouragement of GoI's championing of participation will work with all levels of local government including districts, blocks and panchayats. They will also engage with and support the participation of registered 'Mitras', with existing civil society organization, local NGOs and Community Based Organisation. It is expected that these will include and formalize the participation of wetland resources user groups.

160. Within Kerala, which hosts one of the 3 pilot sites, the Chief Minister holds the environment portfolio. This gives additional strength to the State Wetland Authority

of Kerala (SWAK) and provides a model that might be pursued in other states and territories.

161. Institutional relationships are being developed at national and state level for delivery of integrated wetland management and community participation. The government's clear commitment to community participation is demonstrated through its national Mission Sahbhagita – Mission Participation. This represents an important opportunity for and contribution to institutional sustainability.

162. The MoEFCC's work to register 'Mitras – Friends of Wetlands' across India and to form them into practical institutions for channelling local support for and expertise in wetlands is important. Mitras present potentially valuable and sustainable institutions to support practical actions to protect and management. Nearly 18,000 Mitras have already been registered.

163. The MoEFCC with project support is developing a range of relationships at national and state level with institutions that have the capacity to develop training materials and deliver capacity and capability building programmes. This includes work on the development of education curriculums as well as more finely targeted training materials.

164. A key element of the project design requires development of best practice at site level. This has been impeded by the lack of wetland management institutions at site levels responsible for the day-to-day management of the sites. Though recommendations for the establishment of such institutions have been made in wetland management plans prepared with project support, that they do not currently exist must be considered a concern for institutional sustainability.

Composite scores for Sustainability

Exit strategy	3
Socio-political sustainability	6
Financial sustainability	6
Institutional sustainability	5
Average	**5**

Rating for Sustainability: Likely (5)

H. Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues

Project Inception

165. The lengthy processes of project development and delays in the project inception process together contributed to placing a total of nearly 8 years between the first formal steps of applying for funding and the start of work, and as much as 10 years from the first discussion of the project.

- From submission of original project concept – following a development process of at least a year – to date of GEF CEO endorsement: ***3 years, 6 months.***
- From GEF endorsement to start of implementation – the delay due to introduction of a new Indian Government financial management system: ***3 years.***

- From start of implementation to first financial disbursement: ***1 year, 5 months.***

166. The reviewer wishes to emphasise the likely impact on the project of the three-year delay between project endorsement by GEF and signoff by the project implementer, the GoI. This delay will have compromised the immediate relevance of the project's design to the reality on the ground. Many things change over three years. The further delay in disbursement of funds can only have added to this. However, the protracted approval process that lasted 3 and a half years following submission of the project concept will have aggravated the disconnect between the original conception and the operating environment.

167. Once the first disbursement of funds was received in 2020, the project inception period began. Progress during these early months of the project was slowed by the time taken to put the Project Management Unit in place and to ensure this was working smoothly with the National Project Director's team and the National Project Steering Committee.

168. Due to the delayed project inception process, a MoEFCC workshop, held under the aegis of the IMWBES project, was used to meet the requirements of a formal Inception Workshop., This provided an opportunity for broad stakeholder engagement across the national, state and pilot site levels at which the project was designed to operate. The 157 participants that attended included wetlands managers from 70 wetlands of international and national importance, 24 representatives from State and UT Wetland Authorities, 14 private sector parties, 13 wetland champions, 5 NGOs, 6 knowledge partners, 3 experts from the National Wetlands Committee and 4 officials from the wetlands division of the Ministry. The Sahbhagita ("Participation"): Workshop for Conservation and Wise Use of Wetlands was held in Chennai in May 2022 and focused on the government's priority of community participation, a key element of the project and the design of best practice in wetland management. It should be noted, however, that the workshop was held 6 months after the first meeting of the National Project Steering Committee and 3 years after the official start of the project. It may be questioned if the expected results of an inception meeting could be met in this way and at that time.

Quality of Project Management and Supervision

UNEP:

169. UNEP has demonstrated strong supervision throughout project implementation. This has been achieved despite a change in the incumbent Task Manager which can sometimes prove to be a challenging transition.

170. The Task Managers have attended all meetings of the National Project Steering Committee, remotely or in person.

171. There has been regular engagement between the Project Management Unit and UNEP officers responsible for supervising the project.

Partners/Executing Agency:

172. Strong management systems exist within both WISA and MoEFCC. These have ensured that technical requirements for project implementation including budget control and procurement and financial management have been well addressed.

173. Communications between WISA and MoEFCC have been strong. The PMU have a team member posted within MoEFCC which helps deliver collaboration and early identification and resolution of issues.

174. The reviewer observed the close working relationship between the Project Coordinator and the National Project Director, a critical contribution to the achievements of the project. The close relationship and mutual respect between the WISA Director and the MoEFCC were also apparent to the reviewer.

Stakeholders Participation and Cooperation

175. The number and range of stakeholders in the project make it hard to give an assessment of participation and cooperation. It would be fair to suggest that levels of participation and cooperation vary between stakeholders.

176. As noted above, strong and positive cooperation and participation between central and state government teams and the project team was observed during the MTR, with the government teams showing strong ownership and enthusiastic engagement.

177. Participation and cooperation of stakeholders at pilot site level was more difficult to assess, especially of local government, civil society and community players. Only 1 of the 3 pilots sites was visited due to limitations on the time and resources of the MTR. This was Sasthamkotta Lake in Kerala. Several members of local government and civil society attended an informal meeting with the reviewer. It was hard, however, to assess their knowledge of and attitudes towards the project and harder to determine whether these were representative of the wider community. The sole representative of the panchayat government who attended and the two members of a local civil society organisation had a history of conflict that the reviewer was not aware of at the time of the meeting. Different local conflicts over several years between different groups with interests in Sasthamkotta Lake seem to have been quite politically charged at times, even to the extent of individuals going on hunger strike and receiving considerable attention in the local press. There were also strong differences of opinion on appropriate improvements of lake side infrastructure, especially with respect to tourism related developments. It is not clear that everyone felt able to express their positions openly or whether opposing views held represented the views of the wider community of stakeholders in relation to the management of Sasthamkotta Lake.

178. Discussions with representatives of local governments and civil society at Sasthamkotta Lake suggested that it was difficult for them to separate their personal history of relations with state authorities responsible for the wetland and their perceptions of their performance, from an understanding of the role of the IMWBES project in current and planned activities to improve management of the wetland. This was, in part at least, because engagement with communities and local government in the process of developing a management plan for the wetland did not highlight the role of the project.

179. The degree to which an external, internationally funded project should be seen to be leading interventions at site level is a challenging question. There are certainly difficulties associated with projects taking on high profile roles and establishing independent relationships with community level stakeholders. This is in part because improved participation of communities, especially resource users, needs to be linked to closer relationships with the responsible authorities, not with a project. However, it is the view of the reviewer that the project needs to have stronger engagement in site level activities to support the development of best

practice, a key objective of the project. Achieving this will require the project team to engage more actively at the 3 pilot sites and to ensure that the 3 State partners understand and support this. An adjustment of the Results Framework is proposed to bring this about (see Annex IV)

Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality

180. The ProDoc makes no specific reference to human rights of how the project would respond to areas of activity that might conflict with human rights. The emphasis of government and the MoEFCC on community participation, and the development of Mitras – Friends of Wetlands, as a vehicle for engagement strongly suggests an umbrella understanding of and commitment to human rights. Frequent reference to contributions by the project to human wellbeing and welfare also indicate the broad understanding that the project is supportive of communities. It is important to note, however, that this does not reduce the need for the project to have clear and implementable polices and practices related to ensuring human rights are not compromised, knowingly or inadvertently.

181. Though the pilot site visited in Kerala did not raise any concerns related to the engagement of Indigenous Peoples, the reviewer is aware that there are many significant infringements of the specific rights of Indigenous Peoples in India, not infrequently with respect to the management of national parks and other protected areas. Given this it would have been valuable for the project to put policies in place responding directly to actual or potential issues related to Indigenous Peoples and wetlands.

182. Free and Prior Informed Consent is referenced once in the context of community participation in wetland management planning but is not highlighted as a generally applicable principle for the project.

183. These observations notwithstanding, the reviewer would like to stress that they observed nothing but a sensitive and inclusive approach being manifested by members of the project team.

184. Direct reference to and attention to gender issues in the ProDoc and in project implementation is strong. Data on project activities is disaggregated in terms of gender as are indicators and targets. The Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool, for example, developed in partnership with GIZ and employed by the project as a primary tool of project implementation, collects gender disaggregated data.

185. The reviewer notes, with specific reference to performance on gender related issues, that a high order activity that made specific reference to building capacity to address gender in the design and implementation of wetland management plans was inadvertently removed from the Results Framework during revisions (see Table 4.). The Mid Term indicator for this is “Module on ‘gender and integrated wetland management’ is developed and available for all wetland managers” The Project Coordinator has assured that this error will be corrected and that capacity to ensure gender is properly addressed in the management of wetlands will be guaranteed.

Environmental and Social Safeguards

186. As noted above, the ProDoc makes limited reference to safeguarding issues, tending to focus on the project as the deliverer of positive outcomes for the environment and society. This does not, however, ensure the absence of safeguarding issues that the project needs to be aware of and potentially address.

187. An example of where this might be the case relates to the develop of tourism at Sasthamkotta Lake, one of the project's pilot sites. Though not funded by the project the development of a Visitor Shelter (Figure 3) was undertaken within the context of the project's work at the site and within community consultations on the management of the wetland supported by the project. The construction was opposed by some sectors of the community while being supported by local government. Other suggested developments with even greater likely impacts on the environment and the community were not implemented. The example is given, however, to emphasise that projects can create unintended outcomes with unexpected impacts.

188. The reviewer understands that mechanisms for receiving and responding to grievances related to wetland management have been established at State level. Site level stakeholder engagement also provides opportunities for grievances to be raised. Furthermore, WISA as the LTSA shares information and provides opportunities for issues to be raised through emails, their website and one-to-one meetings. To address concerns over safeguarding and other issues that may arise from ongoing project interventions at site level, as well as developments such as the development of a visitor shelter described above arising independently but linked nonetheless to wetland management and therefore the project, a complaints management mechanism for the project could be valuable. A suggested revision of the Results Framework to include this has been made in Annex IV.

Figure 3. Visitor shelter constructed on the margins of Sasthamkotta Lake wetland and Ramsar Site

Country Ownership and Driven-ness

189. The reviewer observed high levels of ownership and driven-ness in the project, at both central government and state level. This can be attributed to the project is being a GoI project, implemented by the MoEFCC, with oversight provided by a Joint Secretary within the ministry and all funding being channelled through government.

Communication and Public Awareness

190. The project has communicated effectively with central and state government and with the public. As noted above, numerous high-quality publications have been prepared and shared by the project. In addition, a Wetlands of India Portal (https://indianwetlands.in) provides a useful source of information and a strong statement of government interest in and attention to wetlands.

191. More traditional forms of communication may be less effective. For example, the sign erected by the project on the shore of Sasthamkotta Lake may contribute little to public awareness (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Interpretation sign at Sasthamkotta Lake

Links Between UNEP, UNON and the PMU

192. The reviewer had discussions with 4 institutional levels with roles relevant to the financial management of the project and for the necessary interactions between staff responsible for project implementation, staff responsible for financial management and control and UNEP and UNON officers responsible for oversight and overall management of the project. These were:

- The Project Management Unit
- WISA's Finance and Administration Team

- The UNEP Task Manager
- UNON Team members

193. The reviewer found the level of interaction and engagement in all directions to be strong and positive. This has been a significant contributing factor to the achievements of the project and to the flexibility with which the project has been implemented.

Composite scores for Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues

Rating for Preparation and Readiness	3
Rating for Quality of Management and Supervision	6
Rating for Stakeholders Participation and Cooperation	4
Rating for Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality	4
Rating for Environmental and Social Safeguards	2
Rating for Country Ownership and Driven-ness	6
Rating for Communication and Public Awareness	6
Rating for Links between project and UNEP team management	6
Average	**4.6**

Rating for Factors Affecting Performance and Cross Cutting Issues: Moderately satisfactory (4.6)

Responses to specific UNEP questions

Question1: What evidence is available that the project activities are contributing to integrating ecosystem services, biodiversity assessments and management effectiveness into planning and management decision-making?
The project has performed well at raising understanding of and commitment to integrated wetland management and an ecosystem services approach for the management of wetlands. Government officers and officials reflects these approaches and are building them into national level strategies and processes. This is evidenced by a broad range of written materials and the discussions held at National Project Steering Committee meetings. The rapid establishment of State Wetland Authorities in all States and Union Territories is further evidence that wetlands are increasingly understood in terms of ecosystem services and that integrated management is recognised as essential for wetland conservation and their contribution to sustainable economic development is also recognised. Decision making at national and state levels has therefore been strongly influenced by integrated management concepts and the ecosystems services approach. It is less clear, however, that the same has been achieved at District,

Block and Panchayet local government levels or is influencing planning and site level management decision-making by these bodies.

Question 2: What evidence is available to suggest that the project has increased the capacity and trained human resources for integrated wetland management and increase the levels of awareness of the importance of wetland biodiversity and ecosystem services across a range of sectors and stakeholders

A range of achievements of the project provide evidence of increased capacity and capability in integrated wetland management and ecosystems approaches. The Indian Wetland Portal's development is a significant achievement and recognised as a valuable resource by Knowledge Partners of the MoEFCC, and by officers of the Ministry and officers of State governments.

A range of training materials and activities have been undertaken which suggests but does not actually demonstrate that capacity and capability in wetland management has been strengthened.

The project has facilitated engagement with several government and private institutions leading to support for and investment in training and capacity development.

The phenomenal success of the project in attracting the interest of numerous national and local institutions and individuals in registering as Wetland Mitras – Friends of Wetlands - is evidence of a significant level of awareness across a broad range of stakeholders.

The multi-institutional make up of State Wetland Authorities is evidence that a broad range of sectors have been exposed to the importance of wetlands and recognise the need for their active participation to ensure the sustainable delivery of wetland services to their sector and area of responsibility.

Question 3: To what extent and in what ways is the project contributing to improved wetland management at project sites?

Problems with the delivery of Component 3, the demonstration of integrated wetland management and the development and testing of best practices in wetland management mean that there has been little improvement in the day-to-day management of the 3 pilot site wetlands.

The primary difficult stems from the bottle neck of government processes for the notification of wetlands, a prerequisite for the release of government funding for the preparation of management plans, which are a prerequisite for the release of funds for active management of sites.

Central government and state funds are also necessary for the establishment and operations of wetland management institution for the 3 sites. The project has supported the development of management plans for the 3 sites, which are necessary for the formalization of management interventions, but the management institutions have yet to be established and funds released to them.

Without this the project's contribution to improving wetland management at the 3 pilot sites remains minimal at the point of the MTR.

That said, it is noteworthy that State institutions are involved in activities at Sasthamkotta Lake, albeit without the anticipated increase in funding for management and a coordinating institution for day-to-day management.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusions

Strengths and achievements

194. The project has created numerous high quality material outputs – tools, assessments, analysis, reports, communications, etc. These play an important supporting role in building awareness of and attention to wetlands at all levels and capacity and capability to improve their management.

195. WISA and other Knowledge Partners have provided consistent and strong support, guidance and engagement to the project, working closely and in a positive partnership with the MoEFCC, the project implementers.

196. The National Project Steering Committee – the primary project governance entity – has met regularly, given close attention to project direction and delivered important guidance. The role of the National Project Director/Joint Secretary MoEFCC in this has been critical and it is clear they have engaged strongly and positively with project and with the PMU.

197. The project has pursued and developed functional and practical links to and collaborations with other stakeholders, knowledge partners, institutions and programmes that have facilitated the project and enhanced its capacity to operate and deliver outcomes and impacts.

198. The project's work in helping to streamline administrative requirements to formalize wetland notification and the development of management plans, both required to pave the way for budget support and practical management at site level, has been of significant value.

199. Strong 'buy in' to key aspects of the project's approach, especially about developing integrated cross-sectoral management approaches based on ecosystems services analysis is apparent amongst government partners. This stems from or perhaps delivers the strong 'ownership' and 'driven-ness' of the project apparent amongst national and state project partners.

200. The close institutional and personal relationships between WISA, PMU and MoEFCC must be considered a key achievement of the project team and a critical element in the project's success to date and anticipated positive impact in the future.

201. Finally, the reviewer believes that the responsive and flexible approach to project implementation and delivery taken by all parties to the project has been and will continue to be a key strength of the project and a significant contributing factor in the project's success.

Challenges

202. Complex government systems related to wetland management notification and ultimately the release of funds for their management have created a degree of dislocation in the implementation of project as designed. Most importantly, the best practices to be developed with project support at the 3 pilot sites which were to inform policy and strategy at government and state institutional level, to stimulate and facilitate improvements in site level management has not really been able to operate.

203. The development of best practice for wetland management at the pilot sites was envisaged as being central to developing national policies, building capacity and capability and convening communities of practitioners. This has been constrained by operational, financial and practical constraints raising concerns that practical wetland management on the ground may not be greatly improved unless the project can overcome these.

204. The delays in designing and implementing improved management at the 3 pilot sites means that there is little time for them to mature, demonstrate potential contributions to best practice and become sustainable in operational terms. Without this platform of evolving best practice, the project is constrained in its capacity to inform policy, process and strategy within national and state institutions.

205. The lack of operational institutions for the management of wetlands at the 3 pilot sites hinders the delivery of wetland management on the ground, which slows development of best practice management. The project was not designed to undertake wetland management activities itself, but the lack of organisations charged with the day-to-day management of the pilot site wetlands represents a major challenge for the project.

206. Stakeholder engagement at site level can be complex and challenging due to the history of local and community engagement in wetland management and politicization of wetlands at local government and civil society levels. The lack of capacity at state level to respond to these challenges exposes the project to becoming embroiled in these potential conflicts. It is necessary, however, for more direct engagement of the project in these process on the ground to support the design and testing of management practices that can contribute towards the development of best practice management.

207. Greater attention to formal aspects of social safeguarding in the next phase of the project will help overcome the deficiencies in this regard in the ProDoc and the question marks this raised over whether sufficient attention has been paid to human rights and gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) to date.

208. The complex multi-step administrative processes of central and state governments and of MoEFCC to establish and fund institutions responsible for the management of wetlands has been a significant challenge for the project. Such institutions are required to deliver practical improvements on the ground. This challenge continues despite the significant simplifications of official processes championed and delivered by the project.

Table 7: Project Performance Ratings

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating
Strategic Relevance	**Highly Satisfactory**	**6**
1. Alignment to UNEP's, Donors and Country (global, regional, sub-regional and national) Strategic Priorities	Project purpose and results were strongly and directly relevant to GEF, UNEP and GoI strategic priorities and programmes	6
2. Complementarity with existing interventions/ Coherence	Project activities and interventions were crafted and delivered to maximise complementarity with other interventions and projects.	6

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating
Quality of Project Design	**Satisfactory** The multiple elements of project were found to be well designed and together, provide for an overall well-prepared project. Some elements could have been stronger, however. See calculations in Appendix VIII for scoring.	**5.04**
Effectiveness	**Moderately Satisfactory**	**4.8**
1. Theory of Change	The absence of a formal ToC and/or Logical Framework Analysis was noted, and despite the strongly articulated project narrative, this was found to weaken the project's robustness during implementation	4
2. Availability of outputs	Evidence of project outputs was strong with many high-quality outputs available for review and, more importantly, available project stakeholders.	6
3. Progress towards project outcomes	Progress towards project outcomes has been strong on many levels. The reviewer noted, however, concerns with the level of work carried out at pilot sites to develop, implement and test best practices to support development of national policies and strategies.	4
4. Likelihood of impact	The difficulty of demonstrating improvements in wetland management on the ground including the establishment of institutions for the management of wetlands raises concerns over the likelihood of strong and sustainable impacts.	4
5. Adaptive management	All project partners have demonstrated strongly adaptive management practices.	6
Financial Management	**Highly Satisfactory** The review found all aspects of financial management to be strong with good systems and strong communications between parties	**6**
Efficiency	**Moderately Satisfactory** Delays prior to and during project implementation had impacts on both cost effectiveness and timeliness.	**4**
Monitoring and Reporting	**Moderately Satisfactory** Despite a detailed Results Framework, targets and milestones do not make monitoring or progress towards achievement of project outcomes but are more focused on project outputs. Some gaps were found in formal reporting requirements.	**4.5**
1. Monitoring of project implementation		4
2. Project reporting		5
Exit Strategy and Sustainability	**Satisfactory** Despite the lack of a formally stated exit strategy the project was found to have high likelihood of sustainable outcomes and impacts and scored well on all elements of sustainability.	**5**
Factors Affecting Performance	**Moderately Satisfactory**	**4.43**
1. Project inception	Delays in project inception and prior to inception are problematic for the project's connection to the operating environment which evolves continuously.	3
2. Quality of project management and supervision	The quality of management, oversight and supervision was found to be strong at all institutional levels.	6
2.1 UNEP/Implementing Agency:		6
2.2 Partners/Executing Agency:		6

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating
3. Stakeholders' participation and cooperation	Stakeholder participation and cooperation at higher institutional levels was strong but question marks exist on the level of community engagement and participation at pilot sites	4
4. Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality	The project document was weak in its treatment of human rights, through strong on gender equality. These strengths and weaknesses were reflected to some extent in project implementation	4
5. Environmental and social safeguards	The project document made little reference to environmental and social safeguards and rested on assumptions of the project's positive impacts.	2
6. Country ownership and driven-ness	The reviewer found country ownership and driven-ness to be strong at all institutional levels.	6
7. Communication and public awareness	The communication programme had supported large numbers of excellent material including the online Wetland Portal, all contributing towards strong government and public awareness of the important of wetlands.	6
Overall Project Performance Rating at Mid-Point	**Satisfactory**	**5.02**

B. Lessons learned

Lesson Learned #1:	**Identify key challenges early and work to resolve them early**
Context/comment:	The challenge of developing best practice at pilots sites to inform government policies and strategies, provide the basis of training programmes, and building communities of practitioners has been referenced above. This challenge might have been identified during the project development phase and should have been evident early in the project's implementation. This structural problem could have been addressed in several ways that would have required a degree of modification of the project. Reviewing this basic element of the project design would have created the potential to provide a more achievable set of project interventions based around a stronger project narrative. For example, the project could have focused on national level systemic change based on international examples of best practice carefully selected for their relevance. Alternatively, the project could have focused on the development of best practice at site level and facilitating communication and sharing of lessons learned, leaving adoption of best practice to existing central government institutions.

Lesson Learned #2:	**Respond to issues with project design head on**
Context/comment:	The lack of functional institutions for the management of pilot site wetlands is an example of a critical issue of project design that should have been responded to proactively. The lack of such institutions represents a fundamental challenge for the delivery of the project as designed. The complex institutional process for establishing site level institutions for the day-to-day management of wetlands under the auspices of the newly

	created State Wetland Authorities may not have been understood at the point of project development but should have been evident early on. At the time of project inception, the lack of institutions with direct authority for wetlands was recognised, leading MoEFCC to engage energetically with the development of State Wetland Authorities. As the project developed, the need for bodies responsible for the management of wetlands on the ground was recognised and the critical role of such bodies with adequate human and financial resources has been highlighted in management plans for the 3 pilots sites developed with the assistance of IMWBES. Notwithstanding the energetic response of the MoEFCC and the project team, the reviewer believes that the absence of functional institutions working to undertake wetland management at site level with which the project could engage has been a significant problem for the effective delivery of the project as designed. A direct and early response by GEF and/or UNEP to major challenges in project design is necessary. The difficulties of identifying critical design problems during project development processes or during early stages of implementation are less problematic than continuing to implement projects with fundamental design flaws.

Lesson Learned #3:	**Balance 'project visibility' against 'project deliverability'**
Context/comment:	There is a fine balance to be found between the interest of donors and implementers of projects for profile and visibility with technical needs of effective project delivery. The basis for deciding to highlight contributions project make to activities or initiatives should be determined by whether this will strengthen the achievement of project outcomes and impacts. In the IMWBES project, a reluctance to involve the project directly in wetland management at site level was expressed by the PMU. Though the development of best practice is a key element of the project, direct engagement at site level is not clearly indicated in the project design as a key element of implementation. By working with State institutions rather than directly with local stakeholders, capacity development of State institutions would be stronger, and the project would be less exposed to local conflicts and complexities. However, without strong practical engagement at site level, working with both site managers and local stakeholders, opportunities to design and test best practices are limited. The understandable concerns of the PMU over the challenges of engaging on the ground and the impact this might have on the development of important links between local wetland managers

	and local communities need to be balanced against the importance of achieving key elements of the project – in this case the development and testing of best practice.

Lesson Learned #4:	**Ensure social and environmental safeguards and human rights issues are addressed appropriately during project development.**
Context/comment:	The IMWBES ProDoc pays insufficient attention to social and environmental safeguards, human rights related issues or Free and Prior Informed Consent. Assumptions that projects focused on improving environmental management and community wellbeing will have only positive outcomes for these must be guarded against. Unintended consequences of interventions must always be considered, and suitable process put in place to prevent or mitigate them. Similarly, human rights must be protected, including the right to reject interventions despite their good intensions. This can only be ensured if FPIC processes are adhered to. UNEP and GEF partners and reviewers working on project proposals must work closely with project proponents during the development process to ensure these elements are appropriately articulated in the final project proposal.

C. Recommendations

Recommendation #1:	**Prepare and submit a no-cost extension request and undertake a no-cost proposal development process.**
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	Delays in project implementation mean that the project is scheduled to cease operations in March 2024, but significant funds remain unspent, and activities remain to be undertaken. A formal request for a no-cost extension should be submitted as soon as possible. This should be for at least two years with operations running to March 2026, with project closure in September 2026. In parallel a detailed no-cost extension proposal should be developed, ideally through a facilitated and participatory process. The no-cost extension proposal should review the logical narrative and the Results Framework and determine whether areas of activity should be continued or terminated, and whether additional activities should be introduced. Engaging in such a process may require changes to the budget and the Results Framework.
Priority Level:	High
Type of Recommendation	Partner / Project
Responsibility:	PMU to engage with MoEFCC to draft No-Cost Extension Proposal.

	MoEFCC to submit proposal. UNEP Task Manager to review proposal.
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Immediately

209. It is evident from information provided in the ProDoc and PIRs that the project has significant unexpended funds and activities still to undertake. Table 5 shows that by December 2023, US$ 586,894 (14%) of the GEF budget had been expended. The lowest level of expenditure was recorded for Component 3, developing best practice at pilots sites, with just 10% of the budget expended. This level of underspend creates a challenge for the project and the design of a no-cost extension.

210. Delays in project implementation caused by the Covid 19 pandemic and delays during project inception have been discussed. However, accepting that low levels of activity linked to significant expenditure could have been made during the first years of the project from March 2019 to mid 2022, disbursements and expenditures have continued to be low in the second half of 2022 and throughout 2023.

211. The need for a no-cost extension is clear and its design will need to be carefully considered. No-cost extensions can have consequences for cost effectiveness but should be regarded as an opportunity to fine tune activities and strengthen project delivery.

Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:

Section C. Effectiveness. Progress Towards Project Outcomes
Section E. Efficiency

Recommendation #2:	**Reappraise activities based on implementation to date and with respect to time, remaining budget and priority in relation to delivering outcomes and impact by project end.**
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The project design is ambitious. Considerable achievements have been made since inception in 2019. It is apparent, however, that several targets will be challenging to deliver, and some are unlikely to be achievable by project end. It is also possible that some activities as designed have not delivered significant or useful outcomes or are unlikely to achieve significant impacts in the future. Equally, some activities may have demonstrated positive impacts and there may be interest in expanding them. The requirement for a no-cost extension creates an opportunity to investigate implementation to date, to appraise project activities, and reappraise priorities for interventions under the existing project components.

	For example, the small grants component is a complex activity to implement to a high degree of excellent and its purpose could be met by other activities. This activity could be reviewed to assess its contributions to project objectives to date and determine its place within a no-cost extension. Annex IV presents suggested revisions to the Results Framework with changes to activities put forward to respond to modified indicators and end of project targets.
Priority Level:	High
Type of Recommendation	Partners and Project
Responsibility:	MoEFCC, PMU, WISA and other Knowledge Partners
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Immediately

212. The project has made considerable progress towards Mid Term milestones and targets and demonstrated capacity to deliver outputs of high quality and to a high degree.

213. The ProDoc describes large numbers of project activities and interventions. At this point in project implementation, with a No-cost Extension in the process of being requested and considered, the opportunity to review whether all activities can or should play roles in the remaining time frame for the project needs to be considered.

214. For example, the reviewer found little evidence that the small grants component described in the ProDoc (Output 1.2B: Small grant programme administerd to support wetland managers in improving site management effectiveness) had played a significant role in the project to date and notes the complex requirements for developing and managing a small grants component. Questions can be asked around the sustainability of a project developed small grants programme and how it would fit within a GoI institutional framework.

Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:

Section C. Effectiveness. Theory of Change
Section C. Effectiveness. Availability of Outputs
Section C. Effectiveness. Progress Towards Project Outcomes
Section E. Efficiency
Section H: Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues, Stakeholders Participation and Cooperation

Recommendation #3:	**Work closely with pilot site State Wetland Authorities and newly established wetland management institutions to design, develop, deliver and assess management practices at pilot sites.**
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	Central to the design of the project is the project narrative by which the design and testing of best practice in aspects of wetland management at 3 pilot sites informs the development of policy, strategy and the formulation of communities of

	practitioners, which strengthens the application of best practice across India's wetlands. Best practice in wetland management exists internationally and nationally and MoEFCC supports the development of best practice at sites across the country. Lessons learned are then shared through regional workshops and integrated into the national wetlands management programme. Nonetheless, the level of capacity of State officers at the 3 pilot sites and within State Wetland Authorities generally does not allow for the development and implementation of a cohesive set of best practices in a coordinated and collaborative fashion or the assessment of their effectiveness which the project as designed was to undertake. To overcome this limitation is necessary for the project to become more closely engaged in the design, delivery and testing of best practice at the 3 pilot sites than has been the case to date. This will require some significant changes to activities undertaken by the project team, some of which have been suggested in Annex IV.
Priority Level:	High
Type of Recommendation	Partners
Responsibility:	WISA, PMU
Proposed implementation time-frame:	During no-cost extension

The centrality of the circle of influence process to the project design and therefore its success has been referenced and is implicit in the review of the ProDoc and project implementation. It is also central to the conclusions reached.

Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:

Section C. Effectiveness. Theory of Change
Section C. Effectiveness. Progress Towards Project Outcomes
Section D. Financial Management; Completeness of Financial Information
Section H: Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues, Stakeholders Participation and Cooperation

Recommendation #4:	**Investigate methodologies, methods and guidance for assessing values and practice relevant to wetlands management, participation and governance.**
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The project has worked with government and Knowledge Partners to develop tools and guidance for wetland management. The project has also worked on the ground and supported state wetland authorities to assess wetland values and the perspectives of local communities, civil society and resources users.

	It is not always necessary to develop new methods or processes. There are existing tools and processes for a range of activities relevant to the project that the PMU team could investigate and if found useful, modify for use locally.
Priority Level:	Medium
Type of Recommendation	Partners
Responsibility:	WISA, PMU
Proposed implementation time-frame:	During no-cost extension

Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:

Section C. Effectiveness. Progress Towards Project Outcomes

215. Considerable experience with and capacity in exists in assessing values and practices relevant to wetlands. Greater use of available tried and tested approaches could be made. Examples include:

- Ecosystem services assessment (e.g. Toolkit for Ecosystem Service Site-based Assessment (TESSA) - https://www.birdlife.org/news/2022/05/12/tessa-a-tool-to-assess-the-benefits-of-nature/
- Cultural ecosystem services assessment (e.g. Guidance for the Rapid Assessment of Cultural Ecosystem Services (GRACE) – https://www.fauna-flora.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/FFI_201508_Guidance-for-the-rapid-assessment-of-cultural-ecosystem-services.pdf
- Governance and equity assessment (e.g. Site-level assessment of governance and equity (SAGE) - https://www.iied.org/site-level-assessment-governance-equity-sage

216. The PMU could explore available materials and bring them to the development of best practice at the 3 pilot sites and the evolution of national and state policies and strategies.

217. Relevant to this recommendation would be to explore synergies with and lessons learned by India's Joint Forest Management programme to develop community-based wetland management approaches.

ANNEX I. RESPONSE TO STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS

Table 1: Response to stakeholder comments received but not (fully) accepted by the reviewers, where appropriate

Page Ref	Stakeholder comment	Reviewer Response
	Project Management Unit	
	Greater and more consistent reference to the central role of MoEFCC should be made where appropriate.	References have been made to the critical inputs made by MoEFCC.
	Careful consideration needs to be taken with respect to suitable and appropriate roles for the project and those that are the responsibility of State Wetland Authorities.	Adjustments have been made to unsure that the boundaries of responsibility between the project and GoI/States/UTs are appropriate
	Lack of context in various areas of the report give rise to inappropriate or incorrect impressions of project actions and interventions.	More context has been provided to ensure that the report reflects accurately the many positive and effective interventions made by the project and provides the necessary information to allow readers to understand problems encountered by the project that may have resulted in reduced levels of performance.
	Specific errors were identified, for example the statement that not all 6-month reports had been submitted by the PMU.	All identified errors have been corrected. Any remaining errors are those of the reviewer.
	Concerns were raised around the reviewers comments related to the way social and environmental safeguards were addressed in the project proposal and the potential for these to have led to reduced attention to these during project implementation.	More context for identified concerns around the treatment of social and environmental safeguards has been provided.
	The reviewer's concern over the engagement of the project team at site level need to respond to the operational context of the project and to note that alternative mechanisms for developing best practice in wetland management have been employed.	Changes to the report have been made to reflect these concerns. At the same time, the reviewer's concern over the development of best practice as envisaged in the project design have been retained through articulated within a more complete explanation of the circumstances.
	The proposal to develop a complaints handling mechanism did not take account for the existing mechanisms at State level and the way the PMU and WISA is able to respond to complaints or issues raised to it.	The report has been modified to include reference to existing State and WISA processes while retaining the suggestion that the project could benefit from a

Page Ref	Stakeholder comment	Reviewer Response
		dedicated complaint handling system.
	UNEP Evaluation Unit	
	Requests for additional material and elaboration of MTR analysis presented in the Quality Assessment of the Mid-Term Review Report	Additional analysis provided against specific requests. Additional text and paragraphs added to the MTR report
	Requests for format changes and restructuring of some sections	Changes as indicated made.
	Request to complete and present all required annexes	Annexes completed as required by the MTR format

ANNEX II. PEOPLE CONSULTED DURING THE REVIEW

Table 1: People consulted during the Review

Organisation	Name	Position	Gender
UNEP	Dr Kavita Sharma	GEF Task Manager, GEF Biodiversity and Land Degradation unit,	F
UNEP	Mr Peerayot Sidonrusmee	GEF Programme Management Assistant, Asia Biodiversity and Land Degradation unit	F
UNEP	Paul Vrontamitis	Fund Programme Management Officer	M
UNEP	Serah Shaiya	Finance Assistant	F
Wetlands International South Asia	Ms Suchita Awasthi	National Project Coordinator, IMWBES Project	F
Wetlands International South Asia	Ms Diana Datta	Programme Associate, IMWBES Project	F
Wetlands International South Asia	Ms Bhuyashee Rajkumari	Programme Associate, IMWBES Project	F
Wetlands International South Asia	Ms Sakshi Saini	Programme Associate, IMWBES Project	F
Wetlands International South Asia	Ms Aditi Patial	Programme Associate, IMWBES Project	F
Wetlands International South Asia	Dr Ritesh Kumar	Director	M
Wetlands International South Asia	Mr Harsh Ganapathi	Senior Technical Officer, Ecohydrology	M
Wetlands International South Asia	Mr Arghya Chakrabarty	Technical Officer, Biodiversity	M
Wetlands International South Asia	Mr Sauryajit Chaudhuri	Manager, Operations and Partnerships	M
Wetlands International South Asia	Mr M L Khan	Administration and Finance Officer	M
GIZ	Mr Kunal Bharat	Forestry and Biodiversity Advisor, Wetlands Management for Biodiversity and Climate Protection	M
MoEFCC, GoI	Dr Sujit Kumar Bajpayee	Joint Secretary	M
MoEFCC, GoI	Mr Motipalli Ramesh	Scientist, Wetlands Division	M

Organisation	Name	Position	Gender
Kollam Birding Battalion	Poly Joseph	Founding Member	M
National College, Kollam,	Dr PJ Sarlin	Associate Professor	F
State Wetland Authority Kerala	Mr Suneel Pamidi	Member Secretary	M
Directorate of Environment and Climate Change, Govt. of Kerala	Dr. John C Mathew	Environmental Programme Manager	M
State Wetland Authority Kerala	Dr Junaid Hassan S.	Wetland Specialist	M
State Wetland Authority Kerala	Mr. Arunkumar P.S.	Wetland Specialist	M
State Wetland Authority Kerala	Ms. Nivedhitha M.P.	Wetland Analyst	F
State Wetland Authority Kerala	Mrs. Akshara Asok	Wetland Analyst	F
State Wetland Authority Kerala	Mrs. Amritha K.M.	Project Scientist	F
State Wetland Authority Kerala	Mrs. Selvi T.R	Project Assistant	F
State Wetland Authority Kerala	Ms. Akhila V. Ashok	Project Assistant	F
Soil Conservation Department, Sasthamkotta, Kollam	Mr Arunkumar S	Assistant Director	M
Soil Conservation Department, Sasthamkotta, Kollam	Mr Baiju M.S	Overseer, Soil Survey	M
Kayalkoottayma Panchayat	Mr. Dileep Kumar	Former Ward Member	M
Kayal Protection Council	Mr. Hari Kurissery	General Convenor	M
Kayal Protection Council	Dr. Kamalasanan	Vice Chairman	M
Kayal Protection Council	Mr Ram Kumar	Member	M

ANNEX III. KEY DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

Project planning and reporting documents:

- GEF PROJECT IDENTIFICATION FORM (PIF); Integrated management of wetland biodiversity and ecosystem services for water and food security, 2013
- Integrated Management of Wetlands Biodiversity Ecosystems Services (IMWBES) Project Document, 2019
- Integrated Management of Wetlands Biodiversity Ecosystems Services (IMWBES) Project Document Appendixes
- GEF India Project, Review, Undated
- UNEP GEF PIR Fiscal Year 2021; Reporting from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021
- UNEP GEF PIR Fiscal Year 2022; Reporting from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022
- UNEP GEF PIR Fiscal Year 2023; 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023
- United Nations Environment Programme, Half Yearly Progress Report: 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021
- United Nations Environment Programme, Half Yearly Progress Report: 1 July 2022 to 31 December 2022
- Record of discussions of the first meeting of National Project Steering Committee of GEF-MoEFCC-UNEP Integrated Management of Wetland Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Project held on December 2, 2021, at Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, New Delhi
- Record of Discussions of the Second Meeting of National Project Steering Committee of GEF-MoEFCC-UNEP Integrated Management of Wetland Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Project held on April 25, 2023, at Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, New Delhi
- Implementation of Integrated Management of Wetland Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Project in Kabartal wetland; Field Visit Report (6-9 September 2021)
- Implementation of Integrated Management of Wetland Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Project in Sasthamkotta, Kerala; Field Visit Report (30 November 2022 – 04 December 2022)

Project outputs – Overall

- Summary report on ESSVA)Ecosystem Services Shared Value Assessment) in Sasthamkotta Lake, IMWBES Project Report, WISA, 2023
- Sasthamkotta Lake: An Integrated Management Plan for Conservation and Wise Use. WISA. 2024
- Kabartal: An Integrated Management Plan for Conservation and Wise Use. WISA. IMWBES / GIZ. 2023.
- Amtir Dharohar (Essence / Nectar of Heritage) Implementation Strategy Brochure – An initiative of promote unique conservation values of Ramsar Sites
- Capacity and Training Needs Assessment: State/Union Territory Wetlands Authority; IMWBES Project Report. November 2022.
- Standard Operating Procedures on Mission Sahbhagita (Participation); Project Report.
- Integrated Wetland Management: Training Manual; Module 3. Water Quality for Wetlands, Project Output.

- Conservation and Wise Use. IMWBES Report. 2024
- Wetlands Conservation and Wise Use: The Role of Citizens. Project Output. Date?
- Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) for Indian Wetlands: Practitioner's Guide. GIZ, 2024
- Amrit Dharohar; Implementation Strategy. MoEFCC. 2023
- Wetlands Conservation: Approach and Initiatives. MoEFCC. Undated. Project supported Output
- Identifying and Managing Wetlands of International Importance. MoEFCC. Project supported Output
- Anup, Issues 1, 2, 3 and 4. Project supported outputs
- Wetlands of NCT – Delhi. Fold out pamphlet. Project supported output
- Project Brochure; A4 4-page project summary

Reference documents

- National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems (NPCA): Guidelines. Wetland Division, MoEFCC, GoI. 2024
- Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules 2017, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change Notification, New Delhi, 26th September 2017
- National Plan for Conservation of Aquatic Ecosystems (NPCA): Guidelines. Wetland Division, MoEFCC. 2024
- Space Based Observation of Indian Wetlands. Space Application Centre, Indian Space Research Organisation, 2021
- Vanya; Lifeline of Kuhu. WISA Publication, undated
- Managing Climate Risks in Wetlands: A practitioner's guide. GIZ. 2023.
- Gokul Jalashay Wetland Complex: Integrated Management Plan, 2022 – 2026. WISA
- Rejuvenating Wetlands: A Transformative Idea of the Government of India's 100 Days Programme. MoEFCC, 2019.
- India's 75: Amrit Dharohar; Ramsar Sites of India Factbook. MoEFCC.
- Vemabanad – Kol Wetlands - An Integrated Management Planning Framework for Conservation and Wise Use. Technical Report submitted to IUCN and MoEF, New Delhi. Wetlands International South Asia, New Delhi, India. 2017.
- Workshop Report, Sahbhagita: Workshop for Conservation and Wise Use of Wetlands, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, National Center for Sustainable Coastal Management, Chennai, May 21, 2022
- UNEP MTR guidance documents
- MTR Tools Description
- UNEP Glossary of results definitions, December 2023
- MTR List of Documents for MTR, 31.01.2024
- MTR Main Report Template FOR USE BY CONSULTANT, 31.01.2024
- MTR Criteria Ratings Table, 31.01.2024
- MTR Criterion Rating Descriptions Matrix, 31.01.2024
- MTR Inception Report Structure and Contents FOR USE BY CONSULTANT, 31.01.2024

- MTR Main Review Report, Structure and Contents FOR USE BY CONSULTANT, 31.01.2024
- MTR TOC Reformulation Justification Table, 31.01.2024
- MTR Stakeholder Analysis Guidance, 31.01.24
- MTR Review Methodology Guidance, 01.2024
- MTR Gender Methods Guidance, 31.01.2024
- MTR Safeguards Assessment Template, 1.01.2024
- MTR Use of Theory of Change in Project Reviews, 31.01.2024
- MTR Financial Tables, 31.01.2024
- MTR Recommendations Quality Guidance Note, 31.01.2024.
- MTR In Report Template Presenting Recs and LL, 31.01.2024.

ANNEX IV. REVIEW ITINERARY

Mission 3 MARCH – 13 MARCH 24	Schedule:
4 – 8 MARCH 24 In Delhi, India	MTR meetings and interviews in Delhi • PMU team • Other members of WISA team • WISA Finance and Administration team • Director, WISA • GTZ India team • Joint Secretary; National Project Director
8 – 13 MARCH 24 In Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala	Field Visit – Ashta Mudi RAMSAR Site Field Visit – Sashtamkotti Lake RAMSAR and project pilot site • SWAK Member Secretary • SWAK team (Names and participants in meetings provided in Annex II)

ANNEX V. PROJECT BUDGET AND EXPENDITURES

Table 2: Expenditure by Outcome/Output between May 2020 and December 2023 in USD.

Component/ Output	Estimated cost at design	Actual Cost/ expenditure	% of actual expenditure against cost at design
Component 1.			
Outcome 1.1	256,544	40,809	15.9%
Outcome 2.2	446,790	71,072	15.9%
Component 2.			
Outcome 2.1	578,843	122,121	21.1%
Component 3.			
Outcome 3.1	2,563,661	258,817	10.1%
Component 4.			
Outcome 4.1	23,443	6,288	26.8%
Outcome 4.2	117,467	31,507	26.8%
PMC	206,828	56,280	27.2%
Total	**4,196,575**	**586,894**	**14.0%**

ANNEX VI. FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Table 3. Financial Management

Financial management components:		**Rating**	**Evidence/ Comments**
Adherence to UNEP's policies and procedures:		**S**	
Any evidence that indicates shortcomings in the project's adherence[9] to UNEP or donor policies, procedures or rules		No	No evidence of shortcomings; strong systems in place for financial management and control
Completeness of project financial information[10]:			
Provision of key documents to the reviewer (based on the responses to A-H below)		**S**	
A.	Co-financing and Project Cost's tables at design (by budget lines)	Yes	High level of detail provided in ProDoc budget appendixes
B.	Revisions to the budget	N/A	None indicated
C.	All relevant project legal agreements (e.g. SSFA, PCA, ICA)	Yes	GEF and GoI letters of commitment
D.	Proof of fund transfers	No	Not requested by the reviewer
E.	Proof of co-financing (cash and in-kind)	No	Not requested by the reviewer
F.	A summary report on the project's expenditures during the life of the project (by budget lines, project components and/or annual level)	Yes	Spending summary report at Output Level
G.	Copies of any completed audits and management responses *(where applicable)*	N/A	Audits discussed with WISA Finance Manager; no request made to view audit reports
H.	Any other financial information that was required for this project (list):	N/A	No additional financial information was requested by the reviewer
Communication between finance and project management staff		**S**	
Project Manager and/or Task Manager's level of awareness of the project's financial status.		S	Discussions between the reviewer and relevant project, WISA and UNEP officers were satisfactory
Fund Management Officer's knowledge of project progress/status when disbursements are done.		S	Discussions between the reviewer and relevant project, WISA and UNEP officers were satisfactory
Level of addressing and resolving financial management issues among Fund Management Officer and Project Manager/Task Manager.		S	Discussions between the reviewer and relevant project, WISA and UNEP officers were satisfactory
Contact/communication between by Fund Management Officer, Project Manager/Task Manager during the preparation of financial and progress reports.		S	Discussions between the reviewer and relevant project, WISA and UNEP officers were satisfactory
Project Manager, Task Manager and Fund Management Officer responsiveness to financial requests during the review process		S	Discussions between the reviewer and relevant project, WISA and UNEP officers were satisfactory

[9] If the review raises concerns over adherence with policies or standard procedures, a recommendation maybe given to cover the topic in an upcoming audit, or similar financial oversight exercise.

[10] See also document 'Criterion Rating Description' for reference.

Overall rating	**S**	

ANNEX VII. COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH TOOLS

Communications and outreach tools used during the MTR process were limited to emails requesting meetings or interviews. The reviewer did not share communications or outreach materials for stakeholder meetings though discussion guides were used to support and channel interviews and discussions.

The reviewer prepared a PowerPoint presentation to support discussion of preliminary MTR findings.

The full PowerPoint is available on request.

ANNEX VIII. BRIEF CV OF THE REVIEWER

Name

Profession	Nature Conservationist
Nationality	British
Country experience	• Europe: Romania, Switzerland, United Kingdom • Middle East: Yemen, Jordan • Africa: Cameroon, Egypt, Kenya, Liberia, Namibia, South Africa, Uganda, Zimbabwe • Asia: Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Philippines, Viet Nam, • Oceania: Australia,
Education	• BSc, Zoology Hons; Durham University, UK • MSc; Natural Resource Use Management; Institute of Natural Resources, University of Natal, South Africa • PhD; Cultural values and Protected Area Management; School of Development Studies, University of East Anglia

Short biography

Dr Mark Infield is an independent consultant working in the fields of nature conservation, protected area management and natural resource use. Since graduating with a degree in Zoology in 1980, Mark has worked in various capacities in nature conservation. He has designed, managed and reviewed projects, advised government ministries and department, charities and community organisations, and undertaken and supervised research. He has worked on protected area and natural resource management, community engagement and participation and cultural values approach to nature conservation. Mark lived in Africa for twenty years and south-east Asia for ten. He currently resides in England where he works for the Conservators of Ashdown Forest, undertakes consultancies, and is a director of ENV Validation Ltd., sits on the Board of Trustees of the Uganda Biodiversity Trust Fund, and is a member of the Darwin Expert Committee of the UK Government's Darwin Initiative.
Key specialties and capabilities cover:

- **Project management**
- **Project development**
- **Project evaluation and assessment**
- **Protected area design and management**
- **Community participation and engagement**
- **Biodiversity conservation**
- **Buffer zone design and management**
- **Natural resource management**

Selected assignments and experiences relevant to project reviews/evaluations:

- UN Environment: Team Leader; Mid-Term Review of the HERD Project implemented by IUCN in Egypt and Jordan, undertaken remotely due to Covid pandemic restrictions. 2021
- World Bank: Technical support; Review and preparation of sustainable management plan for Kalagala and Isimba Falls Dams biodiversity offset. 2021
- UN Environment: Team Leader; Mid-Term Review of the Socotra Biodiversity and Development Project. 2019
- Chemonics International: investigated perceptions of the effectiveness of community engagement in biodiversity conservation; presenting findings to support design of a programme on community engagement. Kenya and Uganda;2 018 / 2019.

- Ramsar Secretariat: Team Leader; Ramsar Advisory Mission to Uganda, visiting wetlands, reviewing threats to their status, and providing recommendations to the government and Ramsar Secretariat. 2018
- Chemonics International: Bid advise for Climate and Environment lot of an International Multi-Disciplinary Programme Framework Agreement advertised by the British Department for International Development. 2018
- Luc Hoffman Institute: Analysed ideas and opportunities for attracting expertise to the Institute to review the conservation movement and propose innovative means to strengthen performance. 2018
- Food and Agriculture Organisation: Supported Ugandan Government to develop a proposal for the Green Climate Fund to implement Uganda's Forest Investment Programme. 2018
- Cross Cultural Foundation of Uganda: Team Leader, Institutional assessment of first 10 years of operations. 2015
- UNDP: Team Leader, Terminal evaluation, Biodiversity Project, Yemen, July 2003
- CARE International: Team Member, Integrated conservation and development assessment, Uganda, December 2001
- UNDP: Team Leader, Terminal evaluation, Fisheries Project, Yemen, April 2001
- UNDP: Team Leader, Mid-term evaluation, Biodiversity Project, Yemen, , September 2000
- UNCDF: Team Member, Project feasibility study, Simen Mountains NP, Ethiopia, May 1995

ANNEX IX. REVIEW TORS (WITHOUT ANNEXES)

beneficiaries to be involved in the MTR,

• Draft the MTR Review Report, ensuring that the review report is complete, coherent and consistent with the ToR as well as Task Manager guidelines both in substance and style

• Liaise with the Task Manager on comments received and finalize the MTR Review Report, ensuring that comments are taken into account until approved by the Task Manager

• Prepare a Response to Comments annex for the main report, listing those comments not accepted indicating the reason for the rejection; and

Managing relations, including:

• Maintain a positive relationship with stakeholders, ensuring that the review process is as participatory as possible but at the same time maintains its independence

• Communicate in a timely manner with the Task Manager on any issues requiring its attention and intervention.

The consultant will prepare the following documents, in consultation and collaboration with the Project team:

1. Inception Report: containing an assessment of project, project stakeholder analysis, review framework and a tentative review schedule.
2. Preliminary Findings Note: typically, in the form of a PowerPoint presentation, the sharing of preliminary findings is intended to support the participation of the project team, act as a means to ensure all information sources have been accessed and provide an opportunity to verify emerging findings.
3. Draft and Final Review Report: containing an executive summary that can act as a stand-alone document; detailed analysis of the review findings organized by review criteria and supported with evidence; lessons learned and recommendations and an annotated ratings table.

The consultancy will be home-based with one field visit to India.

Ultimate result of service

Mid-term review Report of the "Integrated Management of Wetland Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services for Water and Food Security (India IMWBES)"

Travel Details

Travel will be organized by UNEP.

Travel	Per Diem	Other	Total
7938	2140	50	10128

Output/Work Assignments

Tentative schedule for the review Milestone and Indicative Time frame:
- MTR review: 5 months, 1 December 2023 – 30 April 2024
- Inception report & work plan by 10 December 2023
- Regular e-mail updates to UNEP/PMU by 1 December 2023 – 30 April 2024
- Draft consolidated Mid Term Review Report (ver.1) by 20 January 2023
- Draft final summary on Findings and Recommendations/PowerPoint presented to Project PSC by 8 February 2024 (virtual meeting, organized by project, including minutes on response by Project Steering Committee)
- Final 2nd Draft Consolidated MTR Report (ver.2), by 15 March 2024
- Final Consolidated MTR Report to UNEP (ver.3 Final) by 5 April 2024
- Consultancy completion report by 30 April 2024

Indicative level of remuneration:
The total remuneration payable for this service is US$ 20,000 (Level B) upon delivery of outputs as outlined in below.

Funding
Source of Funds Regular Budget Extra-budgetary X

Budget Line
M99/11207/14AC0003/GFL-11207-14AC0003- SB-012159.06-S1-32GFL-000617

Schedule of Payment for the [Consultant]:

Deliverable	Percentage	Payment
Approved Inception Report	20%	$ 4,000
Approved 1st Draft Consolidated MTR report	30%	$ 6,000
Approved Final Main Evaluation Report	50%	$ 10,000

Contract Duration

Overall Contract Duration:	5 months
Estimated amount of actual time to worked (days, weeks, months):	4 months
Regular Working Hours (if applicable):	N/A
Total Remuneration:	20,000
Payment Terms:	To be processed upon delivery of outputs

Qualification Requirements/Evaluation Criteria

Education:

- Minimum of a least MSc level or equivalent degree in environmental sciences, international development or other relevant political or social sciences area is required

Language:

- Fluency in oral and written English is required.

JFQ/JSQ:

- At least 8 years of technical / evaluation experience is required
- Preferably including evaluating large, regional or global programmes and using a Theory of Change approach; is desirable.
- A track record of a minimum of 6 years of project development and evaluation experience, including internationally funded projects (experience in the evaluation of GEF funded projects is desirable.)
- Knowledge of the International organization is desirable.
- Professional work experience in South Asia is desirable.

Supervisor Name: _____

Title: _____

ANNEX X. GEF PORTAL INPUTS (FOR GEF FUNDED PROJECTS)

Table 1: GEF portal inputs

Question 1: What is the performance at the project's mid-point against Core Indicator Targets?
This GEF 5 project was developed before the core indicators were introduced by the GEF Secretariat. The project however has been able to identify 7,093 hectares of protected areas that are under improved management due to project interventions (core indicator 1.2), 18,612 metric tons of CO2 that has been sequestered or avoided in the Agriculture, Forestry, and Other Land use (core indicator 6.5), and 45 people (15f, 30m) that have benefited from the project thus far (core indicator 11). **Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:** Section C: Effectiveness: Progress Towards Project Outcomes
Question 2: What has been the progress, challenges and outcomes regarding engagement of stakeholders in the project/programme?
Stakeholder engagement has varied in relation to the level of project engagement. At government and ministry level, stakeholder engagement has been strong and responsible for some of the most important achievements of the project. A broad range of national and international organisations have been engaged with and valuable partnerships forged with several of the Ministries' Knowledge Partners. Relationships with State level stakeholders has also been strong and allowed for the development of wetland management plans at the 3 pilot sites. Stakeholder engagement at the 3 pilot sites has been more limited. The ProDoc does not provide a strong analysis of these stakeholders indicating that this will be achieved during the inception process. Engagement with local stakeholders was part of the management planning processes. However, the low level of direct project engagement at the pilot sites has limited the level and strength of engagement with site level stakeholders including local government bodies, civil society, community-based organisation and wetland resource user groups. The great success of the registration of Wetland Mitras (Friends of Wetlands) at the national level may have to some extent overshadowed the perceived need to engage with local communities at site level. **Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:** Section H: Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues, Stakeholders Participation and Cooperation
Question 3: What has been the progress, challenges and outcomes regarding gender-responsive measures and any intermediate gender result areas?
Though India remains a patriarchal society, especially within rural communities and with respect to female empowerment and equality, leadership roles amongst

women are widely accepted. It is somewhat surprising that gender Inclusiveness was not strongly articulated within the project design. There are, however, gender related indicators and targets within the Results Framework. In conformity with these, disaggregated information on gender participation is collected and reported on. Notwithstanding this, the project does not manifest as strongly engaged with gender. This may be in part because the project has not worked directly with stakeholders at site level. Stronger direct engagement with community groups including wetland resource user groups and delivering practical activities supporting livelihood improvements directly would have required stronger and clear emphasis on gender related issues.

It should be noted, however, that PMU members have strong understanding of and commitment to gender inclusiveness and strong gender related indicators were written into the Results Framework, specifically: Component 2 – "Measured increase in wetland managers' capacity to address gender aspects in designing and implementing integrated wetland management"; and Component 3 – "Improved gender equity in community institutions engaged in managing wetlands" and associated Mid Term targets. That the Component 2 indicator and target was inadvertently dropped from the revised Results Framework and that this was not noticed perhaps indicates insufficient attention to gender inclusiveness as a governing principle for project design and implementation.

Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:

Section H: Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues, Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality

Question 4: What has been the experience at the project's mid-point against the Safeguards Plan submitted at CEO Approval?

The ProDoc makes limited reference to safeguarding issues, focusing instead on the expected delivery of positive outcomes for the environment and society by the project. Safeguarding issues resulting from project interventions are inevitable and need to be addressed through appropriate project structures and capacities. A system for receiving and responding to complaints could be a valuable addition to the project.

Increased levels of activity at the 3 pilot sites, especially any related to livelihood improvements and wetland resource management are likely to create environmental and social safeguarding issues.

The latest PIR's Project Management Risk Table indicates that the project's implementation schedule, financial management and capacity to deliver and considered as moderate risks. Performance at the point of the MTR indicate: a significant risk related to delayed implementation of the project as demonstrated by the low level of budget spend and the anticipated requirement for a two or three year no-cost extension; a significant risk of financial management impacting on project implementation resulting from delays in the release of funds through the MoEFCC's financial management systems, indicated as responsible for a number of activities not being undertaken as planned; a low level of risk related to the

capacity to deliver, as the National Project Director and the PMU demonstrate great commitment and great capacity.

The consolidated project risk given in PIR was as follows:

Risk	Risk affecting Outcomes/Outputs	At PIR 3	At MTR	Notes
Project stakeholder	All outcomes and outputs	L	M	Stakeholders well engaged. But not all will benefit at proposed levels. Focus on gender and livelihoods needs strengthen ing
Operating environment	All outcomes and outputs	L	L	Operating environment remains robust
Implementing Agency	All outcomes and outputs	M	M	Agency's procedures struggle to deliver required administrative and financial systems and performance
Implementation Schedule	Component 2	M	H	High risk for delays in delivery for Components 2 and 3
Financial Management	All outcomes and outputs	M	L	PMU has strong systems and is working closely with Implementing Agency
Capacity to deliver	Component 2	M	H	Capacity to deliver Component 3 is a high risk factor for the project
Consolidated project risk	All outcomes and outputs	M	M	

Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:

Section H: Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues, Quality of Project Management and Supervision, Environmental and Social Safeguards

Question 5: What has been the progress, challenges and outcomes regarding the implementation of the project's Knowledge Management Approach, including: Knowledge and Learning Deliverables.

Project performance with respect to knowledge generation, management and dissemination has been strong. A strong focus of the project has been on

developing tools and methods for assessing wetland values and wetland management capacity. This information has been the basis for a range of communications. The Indian Wetland Portal website has been a significant and powerful tool that has greatly strengthened the management and sharing of information. The project has also supported the preparation and sharing of a wide range of well-prepared written materials on wetland values as well as training materials.

Cross-reference(s) to rationale and supporting discussions:

Section C: Effectiveness, Progress Towards Project Outcomes

ANNEX XI. QUALITY OF PROJECT DESIGN SCORING

Quality of Project Design					
Highly Unsatisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Moderately Unsatisfactory	Moderately Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Highly Satisfactory
< 1.83	>= 1.83 < 2.66	>=2.66 < 3.5	>= 3.5 <= 4.33	>4.33 <= 5.16	>5.16

SECTION	RATING (1-6)	WEIGHTING	TOTAL (Rating x Weighting)
Operating Context	5	0.4	2
Project Preparation	5	1.2	6
Strategic Relevance	6	0.8	4.8
Intended Results and Causality	6	1.6	9.6
Logical Framework and Monitoring	4	0.8	3.2
Governance and Supervision Arrangements	6	0.4	2.4
Partnerships	6	0.8	4.8
Learning, Communication and Outreach	4	0.4	1.6
Financial Planning / Budgeting	6	0.4	2.4
Efficiency	5	0.8	4
Risk identification and Social Safeguards	3	0.8	2.4
Sustainability / Replication and Catalytic Effects	4	1.2	4.8
Identified Project Design Weaknesses/Gaps	6	0.4	2.4
			SCORE: 5.04 SATISFACTORY

ANNEX XII. SUGGESTED RESULTS FRAMEWORK REVISIONS

Original End of Project Outcomes, Indicators and Targets	Suggested Revisions	Discussion	Activities for consideration under No-Cost Extension
COMPONENT 1: National wetland biodiversity and ecosystem services-based knowledge systems			
Outcome 1.1 Increased national scale application of integrated wetland management planning tools and approaches			
Indicator 1.1.1 Increase in number of sites in which management plans use BES inventory and assessment tools	Increase in number of wetlands of national and international importance in which management is undertaken using management plans incorporating inventory and assessment tools for the full range of BES values.	The target refers to the actual management of wetlands being based on the full range of BES values. The indicator needs to express the same level of expected practical action at site level.	
Target: At least 10 additional sites of national and international significance are managed based on integrated management plans which secure full range of BES values		Site level activities should emphasise the full range of BES wetland values and best practices in the management and conservation of these values. Great emphasis is needed on a range of practices to inform national policies and strategies based on approaches tested at field level.	Working with communities on: a. wetland governance b. sustainable resource use c. community engagement d. livelihoods e. resource user group empowerment f. working with women's and youth groups
Indicator 1.1.2 Improved integration of climate change vulnerability and adaptation measures in wetland site management planning			

Target: In 6 sites, response measures for climate change are integrated in site management			
Outcome 1.2 Wetland BES knowledge systems applied to improve management effectiveness of sites of national and international significance			
Indicator 1.2.1 Increasing number of sites for which information on management effectiveness is used for revising management			
Target: Management effectiveness assessment and tracking system formally defined and applied for 6 states – including on gender sensitive stakeholder approaches, interventions and investments.			
Target: At least 10 Ramsar Sites have revised management plans in response to assessment and tracking of management effectiveness			
COMPONENT 2: National scale capacity building for applying integrated wetland management			
Outcome 2.1 Enhanced institutional capacity and trained human resources for integrated management of wetlands			
Indicator 2.1.1 Measured increase in wetland managers' capacity to apply integrated management approaches			
Target: In at least 4 additional institutions, wetland managers' training courses are established			
Target: Wetland managers of 20 states / UTs trained and demonstrate measurable		The Mid Term target was for wetland managers in 10 states to have enhanced capacity due to	Intensive training, including practical field-based training and training on the job should be

enhancement in capacity for integrated wetland management		training. Table 4 shows that training for state level wetland managers was not undertaken. Training in integrated wetland management is particularly important for progress to be made at the 3 pilots sites in developing and testing best practice. If the project is extended as recommended, the Results Framework target may remain unchanged, though additional focus and resources will be required to achieve the necessary capacity within the time frame.	undertaken for state wetland managers in the 3 pilot sites.
Indicator 2.1.2 Enhanced awareness of wetland ecosystem services values for integrated management			
Target: Increase in awareness levels on set parameters against baseline with an average of 25%.			
Target: National Capacity Building, Education and Awareness Strategy endorsed by GoI and integrated in NPCA implementation			
Indicator 2.1.3 Increasing private sector participation in wetland management			
Target: In at least 6 additional sites , private sector participation		Private sector opportunities have been identified at 18 Ramsar Sites	Explore private sector engagement through both

in site management, and outreach is achieved		and institutional progress has been made by through the India Wetland Coalition. However, there has been little practical engagement of private sector partners in wetlands and none in the 3 pilot sites. Working at site level will support the development of best practice in engaging with the private sector and demonstrate practical development. There has been little engagement with Payment for Environmental Services (PES) approaches, a valuable mechanism for engaging private sector players in conservation. Wetlands are particularly suitable for PES approaches where downstream users pay upstream suppliers of environmental services. Sasthamkotta Lake provides a large part of the water supply to the nearby city of Kollam. There has been nascent discussion on the idea of payment of 'royalties' between the Kollam Water Authority and SWAK.	Corporate Social Responsibility projects and Environment, Society, Governance approaches that build on the business case for engaging in sustainable wetland management. Engage with the Kollam Water Authority to explore opportunities for a Payment for Environmental Services (PES) scheme with Sasthamkotta Lake authorities.

		There is potential for this idea to be further pursued. Developing a PES at this project pilot site could provide a model for similar approaches to be developed elsewhere, potentially improving sustainable financing for wetlands management and conservation.	
Indicator 2.1.4 Measured increase in wetland managers' capacity to address gender aspects in designing and implementing integrated wetland management		This indicator and associated target were not included in the revised Results Framework (see Table 4). The no-cost extension should remedy this and ensure a robust set of activities is undertaken to ensure practical work is undertaken at the 3 pilot sites.	Training in Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) provided to site level wetland managers. Design and implementation of GESI sensitive activities at the 3 pilot sites.
Target: Wetland managers of 20 states / UTs trained and demonstrate measurable enhancement in capacity for addressing gender dimensions in integrated wetland management	Wetland managers of 20 States/UTs, with special emphasis on managers of the 3 pilots sites trained and demonstrate measurable enhancement in capacity for addressing gender dimensions in integrated wetland management		
Indicator 2.1.5 Growing community of practice and gender-sensitive information base for sharing of knowledge, lessons and best practices			
Target: National portal on wetlands is widely used (at least 0.5 million visitors as measured by web data counter; and at least 1,000 registered members) as	**Additional Target:** Project team mentoring and 'hand-holding' support of staff of newly created institutions	Indicator 2.1.5 includes reference to "growing a community of practice" which is not reflected in the given target. Responding to the proposed additional target will	Develop programme of work for site-level training and capacity development

means for sharing and disseminating datasets, information, best practices and lessons related to wetland management – showing gender specific approaches, lessons or practices.	responsible for day-to-day management of 3 pilots site wetlands and SWA officers	focus attention of the project team on supporting the development of practical capacity and capability to manage wetlands. This in turn will support the development and testing of best practice, a key objective of the project which has proved to be difficult to deliver as discussed in Section C. Progress Towards Project Outcomes, above.	Recruit additional local staff if required. Mentor teams working in the 3 pilot sites to implement the management plans, focusing on the development and testing of best practice interventions.
Component 3: Demonstration of integrated wetland management			
Outcome 3.1 Integrated wetland management applied in three protected wetlands			
Indicator 3.1.1 Improved wetland BES values in three demonstration sites			
Target: Implementation of management plans leads to improved biodiversity and ecosystem services values as assessed through indicators identified within site management: End target of key indicators for three sites: Sasthamkotta Lake, Kerala: Minimum inundation is maintained at 80% of wetland area; Kanwar Jheel, Bihar: Peak inundation improves to 100% of wetland area, habitats used by waterbirds increase to at least 30 km2; Harike Lake, Punjab: Area			

under invasive species is restricted to 10% of open water surface)			
Indicator: 3.1.2 Cross-sectoral institutional arrangements and use of integrated management approaches increase site management effectiveness			
Target: Over 50% increase in GEF METT Scores at 3 demonstration sites including being specific on gender disaggregation, such as proportion of time spent by women on wetland management activities or women's involvement in decision-making,			
Indicator: 3.1.3 Improved gender equity in community institutions engaged in managing wetlands			
Target: At least 50% increase in participation of women members in key decision making within community institutions managing wetlands			
Indicator 3.1.4 Improved livelihoods of wetland dependent communities **Target:** At least 50% of communities have improved livelihoods as a result of integrated management	Livelihood improvement activities designed, implemented and tested at 3 pilot sites	The end of project target is not considered deliverable in the context of the project as implemented up to the point of the MTR. The no-cost extension should focus on identifying practical projects that can be implemented	Scope opportunities for practical engagement with wetland resource users. Design engagements to improve livelihoods based on sustainable resource use at 3 pilot sites.

		that will demonstrate best practice in empowering communities, especially wetland resource users, to improve livelihoods through sustainable management of wetland resources.	Develop a project complaint handling mechanism to strengthen environmental and social safeguards.
Indicator 3.1.5 Increasing financial resources for integrated wetland management		Table 4 shows that increased financial flows to the 3 pilots sites has yet to be achieved from MoEFCC or through convergent budgeting as the State Wetland Authorities have yet to submit wetland management plans. Until these have been submitted, they cannot be endorsed by MoEFCC and without endorsement, funding for the implementation of the plans cannot be released. Emphasis during the no-cost extension should be focused on achieving this as the development of wetland management institutions and capacity as well as the design and testing of best practice at site level depends on it.	Support SWA's to finalize and submit management plans for the 3 pilots sites. Work with MoEFCC to streamline endorsement processes and the release of funds for wetland management. Support SWAs to establish institutions for the day-to-day management of the 3 pilot sites as proposed in the management plans.
Target: A 25% increase in site management budgets (average 3 sites); Site Management plans are fully funded			
Component 4: Project monitoring, evaluation and outcome dissemination			
Outcome 4.1 Project impacts and performance are measured			
Indicator 4.1.1 Use of project monitoring and reporting system			

to assess project performance and impacts			
Target: End term review of project performance and impact is used to establish integrated management approaches in NPCA sites			
Outcome 4.2 Evidence base on benefits of BES based-wetland management established			
Indicator 4.2.1 Increased use of BES based monitoring systems to assess maintenance and restoration of wetland ecological character, and livelihoods for wetland dependent communities			
Target: In additional 15 sites (over baseline), monitoring systems to assess maintenance of wetland ecological character and livelihood outcomes are used to refine site management			

ANNEX XIII. CONSTRUCTED AND RECASTED LOGICAL NARRATIVE

To assist the MTR the reviewer has attempted to take information from the ProDoc and use it to construct a logical narrative that represents the structure of the project.

In order to assist in the analysis the reviewer then recast the elements of the project narrative to suggest a clarified logical narrative that assisted in the process of review and which may be useful to the project team in thinking about a no-cost extension.

Project narrative drawn from the ProDoc by the reviewer using ProDoc language and structure.

Project goal	Conservation and wise use of wetlands for maintenance of biodiversity and sustained provision of their full range of ecosystem services.					
Project objective	To enhance management effectiveness of wetlands of national and international significance					
Project components	National wetland biodiversity and ecosystem services based knowledge systems		National scale capacity building for applying integrated wetland management	Demonstration of integrated wetland management	Project monitoring, evaluation and outcome dissemination	
Project outcomes	Increased national scale application of integrated wetland management planning tools and approaches	Wetland BES knowledge systems applied to improve management effectiveness of sites of national and international significance	Enhanced institutional capacity and trained human resources for integrated management of wetlands	Integrated wetland management applied in three protected wetlands	Project impacts and performance are measured	Evidence base on benefits of BES based-wetland management established

Project narrative presented as a logical framework with changes in language and formulation.

Supra goal	**To strengthen the conservation and wise use of India's wetlands**		
Project goal	To enhance the management of India's wetlands for the maintenance of biodiversity and sustained provision of ecosystem services.		
Project objective	Integrated wetland management based on community participation and ecosystem services approach applied to India's wetlands of national and international significance		
Outcomes	Ecosystems services knowledge systems strengthened and applied to wetland management	Institutional and human resources capacity for integrated wetland management strengthened	Best practice in integrated Ecosystems Services based wetland management demonstrated at 3 pilot projects and communicated