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Terminal evaluation
of the project
“Sustainable forest
management under
the authority of
Cameroonian Councils”



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**Terminal evaluation of the project
“Sustainable forest management under
the authority of Cameroonian Councils”**

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Abstract

This report presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the terminal evaluation of the “Sustainable forest management under the authority of Cameroonian Councils” project (GCP/CMR/033/GFF; GEF ID: 4800). This project was financed by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) along with the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife, the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development, and the Association of Forest Communes of Cameroon (ACFCAM), as well as other national partners as executing agencies. Approved on 13 April 2015 for a period of four years, the project started on 5 April 2016 with an end date of 1 March 2019. Three subsequent extensions brought its end date to 31 December 2022.

FAO, the Republic of Cameroon, project beneficiaries, key informants and project partners participated in the evaluation through virtual means, in-person interviews and focus group discussions during field visits to 5 out of the 17 council forest areas targeted by the project, namely Mvangane and Akom II (South Region), Dzeng and Dimako (Eastern Region) and Ndikiniméki (Central Region). These primary data were analysed using NVivo 12, corroborated and triangulated with data gleaned from content analysis of secondary documentation.

The project was highly relevant to the needs of the national government and Cameroonian councils, FAO and the GEF, despite gender and Indigenous Peoples’ issues not being prioritized. Significant capacity building of local council officials, peasant forest committees (PFCs) and council forest cells (CFCs) was achieved on sustainable forest management (SFM) issues and carbon management. However, due to significant delays, internal governance conflicts and personal issues within FAO and between national government partners and executing agencies, there was no landmark paradigmatic change regarding a forest management approach that would allow for the integration of biodiversity conservation and carbon management components. Revised documents for 9 out of the 17 target council forests have been prepared for assessment by a national committee led by the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife. Only 3 800 ha of restoration and reforestation actions out of 56 200 ha planned were realized for lack of government cofinancing. None of the planned databases for biodiversity conservation and carbon management have been established. The project is considered inefficient and the failure to apply a results management approach means that action plans, budgets and recommendations from monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes have not been fully implemented. Project gains are likely to continue beyond the project, but this is contingent on actions to address financial, institutional, social and environmental risks.

The evaluation provides nine recommendations for FAO, the GEF, national government partners and local councils: (i) urgently engage in an inclusive, participatory process to develop the project’s exit strategy; (ii) consolidate the capacity building gains acquired to strengthen the pathway to the environmental and development impacts of the project; (iii) come to an agreement with government partners (Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development) – no effort should be spared in ensuring joint FAO and Ministry of Forests and Wildlife field supervision visits to assess and ultimately validate the progress of the nine revised plans; (iv) develop clear internal project guidelines to clarify the roles, scope and limits of the different actors intervening in the project; (v) FAO should review its matrix of responsibilities and clarify the modalities for addressing disagreements and conflicts within the Project Task Force (PTF); (vi) establish a mechanism for monitoring the technical delivery of projects by the PTF to address underlying project performance challenges; (vii) strengthen the management framework for delivering projects of this magnitude by means of an M&E team, a procurement plan, specific financial management procedures and guidelines for partners, as well as grievance

mechanisms through which individuals who feel aggrieved can register their complaints; (viii) explore opportunities for a follow-up phase of this project in order to capitalize on and develop the gains achieved through this pilot initiative; and (ix) the GEF should provide funding for a follow-up phase to guarantee impact.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ACFCAM	Association of Council Forests of Cameroon
BH	Budget Holder
Cam-Eco	Cameroon Ecology
CFC	council forest cell
CTFC	Council Forest Technical Centre
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FAOR	FAO Representative
FLEGT	Forest Lawn Enforcement Governance and Trade
FPC	forest protection committee
FTU	functional technical unit
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIZ	German International Cooperation
ICRAF	International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (also known as World Agroforestry Centre)
IITA	International Institute of Tropical Agriculture
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
LOA	letter of agreement
LTO	Lead Technical Officer
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MA&D	market analysis and development
NDC	nationally determined contribution
NTFP	non-timber forest product
OCD	Organization for Conservation and Development
PFC	peasant forest committee
PIR	project implementation report
PMU	Project Management Unit
PSC	project steering committee
PTCM	project technical consultative mechanism
PTF	Project Task Force
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation, plus the sustainable management of forests, and the conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks
SFM	sustainable forest management
VPA	Voluntary Partnership Agreement

Map of the Republic of Cameroon



Source: UN. 2020. *Map of Cameroon*. www.un.org/geospatial/content/cameroon

Executive summary

1. The “Sustainable forest management under the authority of Cameroonian Councils” project has been financed by the Least Developed Countries Fund and managed by the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The project cost is USD 21 423 333, of which there is a GEF allocation of USD 3 573 333 and cofinancing of USD 17 850 000 from partners. The project was approved on 13 April 2015 for a period of four years with an actual start date 1 June 2015. After significant delays, the project effectively started on 5 April 2016. The initial end date was 1 March 2019. Considering the delayed start, an initial project extension was granted until 29 February 2020. Following the mid-term evaluation in 2019, two other no-cost extensions were granted through 31 December 2022. The latest no-cost extension was approved in June 2022 when the terminal evaluation was fully underway.
2. The project’s global environmental objective is to reduce deforestation and forest degradation in council forests. The aim is to improve biodiversity conservation, reduce emissions and enhance carbon stocks. The development objective is to improve the livelihoods of local communities by promoting sustainable income generation. The project has been implemented through a direct execution modality with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), national government agencies and partner executing agencies focused on: (i) establishing council forests for sustainable forest management (SFM) and biodiversity conservation; (ii) capacity building to strengthen biodiversity conservation and the sustainable management of council forests; (iii) capacity building for forest carbon management; (iv) ecosystem restoration and the enhancement of carbon stocks in council forests; and (v) monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and the dissemination of information.
3. The evaluation assessed the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and coherence of the project. This involved performance factors, M&E, implementation and execution, gender, Indigenous Peoples, environmental and social safeguards, and progress towards impact. These criteria are further operationalized through nine evaluation questions.
4. To address these questions, the evaluation adopted a mixed methods approach. Over 75 participants were involved in online or face-to-face semi-structured interviews, as well as focus group discussions during field visits by the national consultant to 5 out of the 17 council forest areas targeted by the project: Mvangane and Akom II, South Region; Dzeng and Dimako, East Region; and Ndikiniméki, Central Region. The primary data was analysed using NVivo 12 and corroborated and triangulated with data gleaned from a content analysis of secondary documentation.

Findings

Evaluation question 1. Was project design/conception appropriate to reach intended results?

5. The theory of change was generally realistic and coherent, and the intervention logic was sound. The proposed risk management and assumptions have held. However, the mitigation measures highlighted in the risk analysis have not achieved the expected effects. In terms of the logic of intervention, several key gaps were identified. For instance, the link between project outcomes and developmental objectives could be further strengthened by an outcome that specifically focuses on the growth of local enterprises and income

generation by local communities, Indigenous Peoples and women. While the project foresaw support for starting community enterprises, this did not materialize.

6. In terms of responsiveness to national needs, the project fully aligned with the country's main development priorities: the 1994 Forest Law (Republic of Cameroon, 1994); the 2035 emergence vision (Republic of Cameroon, 2009); the biodiversity and climate goals under the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (Republic of Cameroon, 2012); the Growth and Employment Strategy 2010–2020 (Republic of Cameroon, n.d.); the commitment in Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), plus the sustainable management of forests, and the conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks strategy (Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, 2022); and commitments under the Paris Agreement, as illustrated by the nationally determined contributions (NDCs) (Republic of Cameroon, 2021). Despite alignment at design, the engagement of the project with these processes during implementation was limited.
7. A participatory process was applied during project design to ensure that the needs of different stakeholder groups were integrated. The project remained relevant over time, even after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. It continued to address the needs of councils and forest-dependent communities. This commitment involved the sustainable management of target council forests, the development of alternative income-generating activities, biodiversity conservation and carbon management. However, fostering gender empowerment and addressing inequality were not the primary objectives of this project. There was scant mention of gender in the project document, and the results framework was gender blind. Beyond national and community needs, the project was consistent with FAO and the GEF strategic frameworks for SFM, biodiversity conservation and climate change.

Evaluation question 2. To what extent has the intervention met or is expected to meet its objectives and outcomes?

8. After six years of implementation, with four no-cost extensions, the project is now on track to achieve its objectives. The following section presents the state of project progress. More details are available in the report itself.

Outcome 1

9. To develop a database of biodiversity in council forests, technical guidelines for their sustainable management – including biodiversity conservation – were developed and adapted. Biodiversity inventories were delivered in 13 out of the 17 target council forests, and a database expert was recruited to develop the database. Regarding the revision of forest management plans, the gazetting of forests in 15 out of the 17 were completed. The necessary documentation for validation of the management plans was available for 9 out of the 17 targets, but these were not finalized. Both the development of the biodiversity database and the revision of management plans were negatively impacted by an insufficient allocation of funds and disagreements between FAO and the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife on roles. This led to significant delays. Without achieving the validation of forest management plans, the designation of 56 200 ha of forest for conservation has not been achieved.

Outcome 2

10. Despite initial disagreements in legal terminologies between FAO and the government, the planned restructuring and training of the peasant forest committees (PFCs) and the council forest cells (CFCs) has been implemented. Various technical guidelines for biodiversity monitoring and reporting were developed and disseminated in 21 councils involved in the 17 target councils. Seventy-two forest protection committees (FPCs) with six representatives were effectively restructured and trained in forest management and monitoring above the 45 planned. Additionally, 17 CFCs were also restructured and trained in forest management and monitoring. Eighty-eight council forest staff from 11 councils were further trained in the development and implementation of forest management plans. One thousand fifty (556 female and 444 male) were trained on FAO's market analysis and development (MA&D) approach with the objective that those trained would produce an enterprise development plan for alternative forest income-generating activities, such as non-timber forest products (NTFPs), hunting and ecotourism. The main weaknesses were in the failure of the project to provide the further logistic and material support required for trainees to apply their learning. At the level of council units and staff, significant needs for materials and forest monitoring equipment remain unfulfilled.

Outcome 3

11. The methodology and approach for carbon monitoring, reporting and verification has been effectively developed and tested for council forests. Various studies were commissioned to assess the state of carbon in the target council forests to support the designation of carbon management areas. Unfortunately, this was marred by insufficient budgets and costly missteps in the coordination and procurement of data analysis services by the FAO team. It had been over a year before laboratory results were finally released to the project. Given delays and staff turnover, most of the trainings on carbon management for council officials, CFCs and PFCs took place in May/June 2022, meaning that beneficiaries had little time to practice the learning. Considering all the setbacks and lack of coordination of these activities, the carbon management database that was to be established at the level of the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development and the councils remains in the design phase. Stakeholders report not being fully aware of the plans for setting up and managing the database. The equipment required for the database has yet to be provided to the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development.

Outcome 4

12. The activities under this outcome were to be implemented by the government as part of its cofinancing for the project. As of 2021, a total of 3 821 ha of trees were effectively planted against the 56 200 ha planned, representing a 7 percent rate of achievement. There were no further reports from the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife regarding reforestation and restoration activities. Government officials reported that this low achievement was due to limited funding in the ministry.

Outcome 5

13. The project did not apply a results-based management approach. Action plans and budgets were developed but recommendations were rarely implemented in full. The structures expected to support project delivery were either not created or ineffective. Interpersonal conflicts, poor communication, ineffective stakeholder engagement and internal governance issues impacted project delivery. The mid-term and terminal evaluations were effectively commissioned. Mid-term evaluation recommendations were not implemented in full. No evidence exists that good practices have been documented or disseminated among external stakeholders.

Evaluation question 3. To what extent were the project's management and operational delivery efficient and have quality results been delivered on time?

14. The project was not sufficiently staffed in terms of numbers and quality and suffered a high turnover of Project Technical Coordinators. This was subsequently mitigated with the recruitment of national consultants to complement the Project Management Unit (PMU). Pervasive collaborative challenges, however, limited the team's productivity.
15. Additionally, the project budget was unrealistic with high dependence on cofinancing from national partners, which did not materialize. This negatively impacted project implementation. Planned activities could not be realized by national partners, including the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife. Considering the physical project output delivery rate and the expenditure rates as of 30 June 2022, the efficiency use rate of GEF resources is 0.79. This demonstrates a rather inefficient project that achieved over half of its outputs. Faced with multiple challenges, four project extensions were approved. Part of the redress strategy also included budget revisions and pivoting away from institutional partners to work with mainly national consultants. The approach helped to drive project implementation between June 2021 and June 2022.

Evaluation question 4. To what extent are project achievements likely to continue beyond the project and what risks could constrain extension, replicability and upscaling of this project?

16. Capacity building was a key part of this project. Following over a year of disagreements on terminologies, the project reorganized the PFCs and the CFCs. Training materials and guidelines were developed, and the PFCs, the CFCs, the council authorities and the local communities were trained on a wide range of subjects linked to the sustainable management of forests, biodiversity and carbon. Anecdotal evidence shows that community members tested their learning through NTFP processing and marketing and improved forest surveillance activities. One of the project's executing partners, the German International Cooperation (GIZ), will continue working in four council forests beyond project implementation, building on gains achieved in this action. The management plans, if validated, will provide the legal and institutional tools required for the future sustainable management of council forest resources.
17. Financial, institutional, and social risks threaten the sustainability of these achievements. On financial risks, there is no exit strategy for the project and a follow-up phase has not been secured to consolidate the achievements of the project beyond ongoing efforts by GIZ. If councils do not have income to recruit qualified staff to lead in these aspects, it is unlikely that the implementation of biodiversity conservation and carbon monitoring will be effective. Councils need revenue to acquire bikes and the necessary forest monitoring equipment and to cover the costs of operating biodiversity and carbon databases. The

financial model for the revised forest management plans remains unclear to mayors. Financial support to community groups was not provided, and none of the business plans developed following the MA&D trainings has been implemented.

18. The turnover and instability of elected council officials have been identified as key institutional risks for the sustainability of this project. Officials elected in 2020 have not been sensitized or involved significantly in the project. Therefore, if they understand the project and its buy-in, then this will strengthen the project. The project team failed to bring partners and government officials into the delivery of the project after September 2020. This negatively impacted ownership and appropriation. The government agencies, the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife, and the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development – which were expected to ensure the management of various biodiversity and carbon databases – report not being fully aware of plans nor being involved in the selection of service providers and their design.
19. In terms of social risks, there is a general feeling of being let down by FAO among local council officials and community members due to unmet promises. At the level of government officials, there was a perception of FAO personnel not being accountable to the government through arbitrariness and unilateral decision-making at different levels. Irrespective of the basis for such perception, the result of this situation is seen in partners expressing strong reservations about working with FAO on a future phase of the project.
20. This project was designed in part to tackle some of the underlying causes of the unsustainable management of council forest resources. However, the risks posed by climate change, forest fires, illegal deforestation and degradation are likely to continue as the pressures on forests increase due to national deforestation drivers.

Evaluation question 5. To what extent did the M&E design and implementation, and management and supervision mechanisms, affect project performance?

21. The project's M&E system required revision upon endorsement. This revision was effectively implemented through an operational plan in October 2018. The project indicators were overall specific, measurable and time-bound, but only 67 percent were relevant. The revised plan appeared cumbersome and impracticable in the absence of an assigned M&E officer. The budget appeared sufficient for the scale of the project. However, given the weaknesses in the design and setup of the M&E system, it was not implemented as planned. Field monitoring and supervision missions, steering meetings, and the mid-term and terminal evaluations have been implemented with recommendations that are not implemented in full.
22. In terms of management and supervision, it is important to restate that the project idea originated from the Association of Council Forests of Cameroon (ACFCAM) and the Council Forest Technical Centre (CTFC) and, due to fiduciary weaknesses, FAO was designated to serve as the implementing agency. The subsequent non-validation of the project document by the CTFC and national stakeholders led to significant delays after the launch and grievances throughout implementation. In its role as implementing agency, FAO ensured oversight and supervision through a Project Task Force (PTF), as well as the implementation of mid-term and terminal evaluations complemented by field missions. The effectiveness of this role was strained by internal governance and accountability challenges within the organization.

23. FAO effectively played a dual role as the GEF implementing agency and executing agency. For partners, the separation of both roles and documented procedures remained unclear. This put a strain on the relationships between FAO and the partners and led to execution challenges. Within FAO, the lines of responsibility and command remained tense and conflictual. Attempts to address the matter proved unsuccessful due in part to the lack of a clear procedure for doing so. At the level of financial management, the relationship between the technical and financial teams was not always coherent, leading to delays in the procurement of services and a consequent loss of efficiencies. The implementation of letters of agreement (LOAs) was characterized by quality issues and delays in validation and contract settlements. Unsatisfactory mobilization of cofinancing and little involvement of the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development impeded the discharge of their obligations under this project.
24. Regarding stakeholder engagement, the relationship between partners was fractious while the frameworks for stakeholder engagement were either not created (stakeholder committee and project technical consultative mechanism [PTCM]) or not effective (PFCs and CFCs) with negative consequences on ownership and project appropriation. Stakeholder engagement was partly hampered by poor operationalization of the project's communication strategy.

Evaluation question 6. To what extent were environmental safeguard concerns effectively identified and addressed during project implementation?

25. The project was correctly classified as Category C in FAO's environmental and social safeguards guidelines. The project addressed community needs and contributed to environmental protection. Principle 9 on Indigenous Peoples could have been triggered, but this was not undertaken considering the project impacts on this population. Revised forest management plans should, per design, integrate environmental and social safeguards.

Evaluation question 7. To what extent were gender, Indigenous Peoples, and vulnerable or marginalized groups involved in project implementation?

26. Gender was not a priority objective. Project design and implementation was generally weak regarding gender. There was no gender analysis, the proposed gender strategy was not implemented, and recruitment of dedicated personnel was not carried out. Women were targeted mainly through training on FAO's MA&D approach. They were consequently the most let down and disappointed with the project's inability to provide financial and start-up support for businesses. Thirty percent of participants in project steering committees (PSCs) were women. On the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's gender marker score, this project is considered zero (not targeted).
27. Regarding Indigenous Peoples, the project effectively reached indigenous communities in the project's intervention areas. However, free, prior and informed consent was not demonstrated as no specific plans or guidelines for targeting these communities were developed. Focus group discussion respondents as well as FAO personnel indicated that no specific actions were taken to enhance the participation of Indigenous Peoples and ensure no harm was committed. FAO's environmental and social safeguards Principle 9 on Indigenous Peoples could have been triggered.

Evaluation question 8. What evidence exists that activities are contributing to project and GEF strategic goals and targets?

28. There is evidence that the project improved the knowledge, skills and attitudes of council officials, CFCs, PFCs and communities on SFM, biodiversity conservation, alternative forest-based income opportunities and carbon management. This was demonstrated through reports of increased forest monitoring and a reported increase in denunciations of forest illegalities. Communities also reported reduced incursions into council forest areas for agriculture, as well as better awareness of the negative impacts of illegal artisanal logging. As a subject to the aforementioned risk mitigation measures, these could contribute to the project's environmental objectives, as well as FAO's and the GEF's strategic goals. This could be further strengthened once revised management plans are validated by the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and councils effectively use them for decision-making for the management of their forests.

Evaluation question 9. To what extent have the lessons learned been documented and made available to inform future project design on SFM projects?

29. No evidence was obtained regarding the project's documentation of good practices and lessons. However, at the time of evaluation, a lesson learning and capitalization expert had been commissioned to document project lessons.

Conclusions

30. The project was highly relevant to the needs of the national government and Cameroonian councils, FAO, and the GEF, despite gender and Indigenous Peoples' issues not being prioritized. Significant capacity building of local council officials, PFCs and CFCs was achieved on SFM issues and carbon management. However, due to significant delays, internal governance conflicts and personal issues within FAO and between national government partners and executing agencies, the landmark paradigmatic change in a forest management approach – where council forest management plans could integrate SFM – and the biodiversity conservation and carbon management components have not been achieved. Revised documents for 9 out of the 17 target council forests were being prepared for assessment by a national committee designated by the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife. Only 3 800 ha of restoration and reforestation actions out of the planned 56 200 ha were realized for lack of government cofinancing. None of the planned databases for biodiversity conservation and carbon management have been established. The project is considered inefficient and the failure to apply a results management approach meant that action plans, budgets and recommendations emerging from M&E processes were not fully implemented. Project gains are likely to continue beyond the project, but this is contingent on actions to address financial, institutional, social and environmental risks.

Recommendations

To FAO

Recommendation 1. FAO needs to urgently engage in an inclusive, participatory process to develop the project's exit strategy.

31. FAO, in collaboration with the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife, needs to convene a PSC meeting and provide an opportunity for stakeholders to understand the project's state of progress. This is particularly important as most consider they have been left out since the

last meeting in September 2020. Weak stakeholder engagement and poor communication and collaboration among partners have been hallmarks of this project. This has impacted the level of ownership and future commitment. FAO needs to reinstate a collaborative environment and organize meetings with all partners involved to assess progress achieved and explore how project gains can be secured and sustained. It must also clarify the roles that different actors need to play in this exit strategy and ensure their ability and desire to play it. With six months left, this inclusive process could significantly enhance the commitment of partners and ensure ownership and continuity of project results. This is particularly relevant for the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife, the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development, and the CTFC, which remains the technical arm of the ACFCAM.¹

32. Partners have long suggested the need for joint visits to the field to collectively assess progress on the ground. As part of developing the project exit strategy, FAO could organize these requested joint missions by groups of actors to different council forests so that on-the-ground progress and challenges can be imparted to formulate recommendations. The newly recruited capitalization expert can also use these field missions to document project experiences and good practices, if any. There are several ongoing SFM, biodiversity conservation and carbon/climate-related initiatives and processes in the Republic of Cameroon. These include the Forest Lawn Enforcement Governance and Trade Voluntary Partnership Agreement (FLEGT VPA), REDD+, NDCs, the promotion of a domestic timber market and public procurement. With the latest six-month extension, the project management team needs to be assertive in its outreach towards these initiatives and to explore opportunities for the project gains to be embedded in or inform these other processes. The evaluation team also recommends that in line with Article 3 of the Cooperation Agreement with the government, the exit strategy could include discussions with the government regarding the transfer of project assets acquired from this project.

Recommendation 2. FAO should consolidate the capacity building gains in order to strengthen the pathway to the environmental and developmental impacts of the project.

33. There is need for a rapid assessment of the communities trained on MA&D approaches working with local councils. This would assess the short-term needs required to reinvigorate their business plan development. Further, this assessment could be implemented by a consultant and hence quantify the support required for starting up business enterprises. FAO should provide the necessary support to selected enterprises. This is important not only to kick-start the dormant business plans but also address the tarnished image of the project and FAO within these communities.
34. Local councils, PFCs and CFCs have been strengthened, but all still demonstrate weak capacities to be effective. In line with Recommendation 1, revisit a role for the CTFC to ensure the continuous monitoring of capacities. Also, assess the needs in terms of equipment and logistical support and coaching. This will inform the continuous coaching and mentoring mechanism for the project's target groups, such as council executive secretaries and leaders of councils over the long term. The biodiversity and carbon databases need to be finalized and tested in all target council forests. Stronger

¹ It is important to mention that part of the reason for disengagement of ACFCAM from the project was that they had won a new EU project and were no longer interested in an LOA. However, due to their strategic positioning, they could still play a role in the project's future. If this fails, then there is a need to explore other technical consultants or national support agencies to provide specific support.

engagement with the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development, and ACFCAM/CTFC is crucial for sustainability, management and use of the databases. With sufficient buy-in, these organizations could mobilize the resources required to update and maintain these databases.

Recommendation 3. FAO needs to come to an agreement with government partners (the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development). No effort should be spared in ensuring joint FAO and Ministry of Forests and Wildlife field supervision visits are organized to assess progress and ultimately validate the nine revised plans. For those that are incomplete, reallocate further resources to ensure that all 17 council forest management plans undergo revision.

35. The draft LOA proposed by FAO to the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife suggests that the project estimates 9 out of 17 management plans being ready for validation by the panel that approves forest management plans. Goodwill is needed from both sides to secure a viable agreement on the field missions. Considering this is a critical risk for the project, no effort should be spared to get the revised plans validated. Without this, the project impacts cannot be achieved and the image and credibility of FAO will be in jeopardy. While the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development has historically not benefited from an LOA, their role in monitoring carbon and biodiversity cannot be bypassed. Financial resources are required for the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development teams to monitor the implementation of the databases and revised plans on the ground. Whether these funds are mobilized through the project, the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife or the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development, they are a function of the goodwill and agreement that FAO can establish with these partners.

Recommendation 4. In future projects, FAO should develop clear internal project guidelines to clarify the roles, scope and limits of different actors intervening in the project. These guidelines need to be agreed upon at inception and will clarify information flows between actors and the mechanisms for addressing disagreements and conflicts.

36. It is important that future projects clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of actors and lines of communication within the FAO PTF and with partners. It is important that all actors understand their roles and responsibilities and the scope of their actions and reporting lines. These include lines for transmission and the validation of project deliverables, as well related quality standards between the PMUs and the PTF. This also involves the national partner agencies and project coordination units that integrate timelines and mechanisms for redress. These project-specific guidelines must be reviewed regularly to ensure that they remain fit for purpose. In time, and with practice, such specific guidelines could be made mandatory for all FAO projects, fully mitigating several of the situations witnessed here.

Recommendation 5. FAO should review its matrix of responsibilities and clarify the modalities for addressing disagreements and conflicts within the PTF.

37. The FAO PTF is governed by three principles, namely: decentralization and subsidiarity; the segregation of duties; and an effective skills mix. However, no governing principle clearly addresses a situation in which there are role overlaps or internal conflicts and disagreements within the PTF. Linked to Recommendation 4 above, specific operational guidelines could be developed to lay out how the team will work within the framework of the particular project. It will be the responsibility of the Budget Holder (BH) to develop

these guidelines, highlighting potential bottlenecks and mitigation measures. The working relationship between members of the PTF will be reviewed within agreed upon timelines to address any challenges. Where cases of a lack of accountability or other issues are identified, the BH has the responsibility and power to remove, replace or reorganize the members of the PTF to ensure effective project delivery. This project highlights the need for decisive action from the BH, who is ultimately responsible for the success of the action. Otherwise, performance challenges may fester and affect project performance.

38. In proposing members to the PTF, particularly the Lead Technical Officer (LTO) and the Chief Technical Advisor, the formulator/BH should ensure that the person has the requisite skills and experience in all key areas of project intervention, as well as the ability to provide comprehensive technical oversight in the project areas of intervention. In complex projects or when working on niche topics where expertise might be limited or dispersed, the formulator/BH may request additional complementary technical experts within the organization and beyond to join the PTF. The guidelines would therefore clarify the scope and limits of actions and lines of accountability within the PTF. The BH thus ensures that the skills mix is sufficient to support delivery, but also minimizes the risk of the centralization of power in any one pair of hands. The mechanism for operationalization of the roles and responsibilities would reside in well-designed action plans and budgets and in regular team meetings.

Recommendation 6. FAO should establish a mechanism for monitoring the technical delivery of projects by the PTF to address underlying project performance challenges.

39. FAO could explore the option of developing a system for monitoring the technical delivery of projects on the ground by drawing upon the existing mechanisms for tracking administrative performance.² The current administrative system uses an alert and early warning system based on the monitoring of key indicators such as spending, reporting, timelines for closure and the request for funds. With this alert system, the BH is regularly updated on the state of project progress and administrative bottlenecks that must be resolved swiftly. Once an issue has been addressed, the system no longer considers the project problematic, even if the administrative challenges reflect technical challenges.
40. To ensure that communication within teams takes place and the project implementation atmosphere is one of collegiality, a short scorecard/traffic light system could be explored through which the performance of designated PTF members is assessed and reported on by the BH on a monthly to quarterly basis. The scorecard would ask, in particular the BH, the LTO and the Chief Technical Advisor, to rank the overall project delivery on a scale of one to five or one to three. Key questions could focus on team collaboration, communication, the implementation of work plans and the implementation of steering committee or evaluation/review recommendations. This scorecard could be available to senior management at subregional and regional levels. Overtime, this could enable poor performing individuals to be identified and problems tackled before they fester. It could also contribute to a better allocation of resources within the organization, ensuring all talent is utilized for their strengths. For example, the BH could also use this scorecard as

² Project reports, evaluations and reviews play a role, but when issues are not addressed promptly and fester, as witnessed in this project, it could become too late to ensure effectiveness of proposed interventions. In fact, project progress reports often downplay the underlying factors for poor performance as was the case in this project.

reference in the selection and allocation of individuals to different projects. This scorecard should be very short in order to facilitate its use and application.

Recommendation 7. FAO needs to strengthen the management framework for delivering projects of this magnitude. It can do so through a dedicated M&E team, a procurement plan, specific financial management procedures and guidelines for partners, and grievance mechanisms where individuals who feel aggrieved can register their complaints.

41. The importance of having a dedicated M&E team and an operational M&E system that enables the project team to systematically collect, analyse and provide information for project decision-making cannot be overemphasized. If fully implemented, the M&E system also allows the team to keep track of key performance factors, such as communication, stakeholder engagement, levels of satisfaction, and ownership of project outputs and outcomes by stakeholders. It will also be critical to develop biennial procurement plans that allow for the technical and financial teams to have a common understanding of resource needs throughout the life of the project and avoid delays and inefficiencies. The same applies for specific financial and administrative procedures. These must be clearly understood by all partners to avoid confusion and misunderstandings that might negatively impact the project. With conflicts likely to emerge in complex projects, FAO should systematize the integration of grievance mechanisms in all projects. These should focus on not only environmental and social safeguard impacts but also harm, bullying, harassment and other unproductive workplace practices.

To the government

Recommendation 8. The government needs to explore opportunities for a follow-up phase of this project in order to capitalize on and develop the gains achieved through this pilot initiative.

42. Based on the results of this evaluation and other documented evidence of project performance and challenges, the government should seek to mobilize additional grant funding in order to support implementation and scale-up of the project gains. This could include exploring additional GEF funding or other climate and biodiversity funding opportunities under the Green Climate Fund or other donor financing.
43. Part of capitalizing on this project will also involve the integration of databases within relevant administrative units and departments, and designating sufficient human and material resources to operationalize the biodiversity and climate databases.

To the GEF

Recommendation 9. Provide funding for a follow-up phase or subsequent project to guarantee impact.

44. The key recommendation is for the donor to provide funding for a follow-up phase of this project or another project that would build on the results. This would enable the councils to fully embed the learning acquired and demonstrate the full impacts of this initial investment. This would also strengthen the strategic positioning of the GEF regarding the paradigm shift from traditional forest management to one that integrates biodiversity conservation and carbon.
45. The GEF should also implement due diligence mechanisms on cofinancing promises by executing or implementing partners. The experience of this project demonstrates that cofinancing promises are easy to secure. However, this represents a significant risk for

future projects if there are no mechanisms to ensure that partners effectively mobilize their planned contributions. For example, partners could be required to provide bank accounts or balance sheets that highlight their level of financial solvency or evidence of contracts (recruitments or property) being negotiated or signed.

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the evaluation

1. This terminal evaluation is a requirement of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF). It is used as a tool for accountability, reporting and learning for the Government of the Republic of Cameroon (the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development), FAO, the GEF, non-governmental organizations, the Association of Council Forests of Cameroon (ACFCAM) through its technical unit, the Council Forest Technical Centre (CTFC) and other participating institutions. It aims to assess the achievement of project objectives and performance in terms of results, efficiency, sustainability and impacts. The terminal evaluation identifies lessons learned that can inform future actions and enhance scaling up. Based on the findings, it will provide recommendations to maximize project gains and prospects for sustainability.

1.2 Intended users

2. All stakeholders involved in the project, as well as FAO (in the Republic of Cameroon and broadly), the GEF, and other United Nations agencies and donors, organizations and institutions interested in supporting or implementing similar projects may benefit from this evaluation. The Cameroonian government institutions at different levels (including relevant ministries and departments), councils and other partners that can use the evaluation findings and conclusions for planning future initiatives to support the project's achievements are also intended users of this report.

1.3 Scope and objectives of the evaluation

3. The terminal evaluation covers the project implementation period from June 2015 to June 2022, all five components, and target groups. It also covers the 17 councils concerned with the council forests targeted by the project: Djoum; Messondo; Dimako; Yokadouma; Moloundou; Gari-Gombo; Nanga Eboko; Dzeng; Mindourou/Messamena; Minta; Akom II/Efoulan; Mvangane; Yoko; Lomié; Ndikiniméki; SIKOP (Ndom, Nyanon, Ngambé); and Oveng.
4. The evaluation aims to assess the project's relevance, effectiveness and efficiency, as well as factors affecting project performance³ and cross-cutting dimensions. This includes considerations such as gender, indigenous and minority issues, and environmental and social and safeguards. The evaluation builds on the findings and recommendations provided in the 2019 mid-term evaluation as a relevant starting point. The GEF guidelines in terms of ranking the performance of key criteria are applied to: 1) relevance; 2) effectiveness; 3) efficiency; 4) sustainability; and 5) factors affecting performance. Other cross-cutting issues such as 6) environmental and social safeguards; 7) gender; 8) progress towards impact; and 9) lessons learned are also addressed, but these will not be scored or ranked in line with the GEF evaluation guidelines. The results and resulting lessons and

³ This involves monitoring and evaluation (M&E), quality of implementation, financial management and mobilization of expected match funding, partnerships and partnership engagement, knowledge management, communication and sensitization of the public.

recommendations drawn from the project will be useful in informing FAO's future work in the Republic of Cameroon and beyond.

5. The objective(s) of this evaluation are to:
 - i. examine the extent and depth of the project results and determine the likelihood of future impacts;
 - ii. provide an assessment of the project's performance and the implementation of planned activities and outputs against concrete results; and
 - iii. synthesize lessons learned that can assist in the design and implementation of future FAO and FAO-GEF initiatives, indicating future actions needed to (i) expand the existing project in subsequent phases, (ii) integrate and scale up its products and practices, and (iii) disseminate information to management authorities responsible for related issues to ensure the replication and continuity of processes initiated by the project.
6. To achieve this, the evaluation is based on the following nine evaluation questions as agreed upon in the terms of reference and further revised during the inception phase. The full list of evaluation subquestions by GEF criteria is presented in the evaluation matrix (see Appendix 5).

Box 1. Evaluation questions

1. **Relevance:** Was project design/conception appropriate to reach intended results?
2. **Effectiveness:** To what extent has the intervention met or is expected to meet its objectives and outcomes?
3. **Efficiency:** To what extent were the project's management and operational delivery efficient and have quality results been delivered on time?
4. **Sustainability:** To what extent are project achievements likely to continue beyond the project and what risks could constrain extension, replicability and upscaling of this project?
5. **Factors affecting performance:** To what extent did the M&E design and implementation, and management and supervision mechanisms, affect project performance?
6. **Environmental and social safeguards:** To what extent were environmental safeguard concerns effectively identified and addressed during project implementation?
7. **Gender:** To what extent were gender, Indigenous Peoples, and vulnerable or marginalized groups involved in project implementation?
8. **Progress towards impact:** What evidence exists that activities are contributing to project and GEF strategic goals and targets?
9. **Lessons to be learned to inform future programming:** To what extent have the lessons learned been documented and made available to inform future project design on sustainable forest management (SFM) projects?

Note: In Section 3, questions 6 and 7 are jointly addressed under Section 3.6 Cross-cutting concerns.

Source: Elaborated by the evaluation team.

1.4 Methodology

7. The evaluation used a participatory mixed methods approach. The evaluation team applied a three-phase approach: (i) inception phase, (ii) data collection and analysis phase; and (iii) closeout phase.
8. The evaluation team was composed of two consultants, one international and one national. The international consultant is a Professor of International Development, seasoned evaluation expert and researcher. The national consultant holds a PhD in Agricultural Economics with well-established research and evaluation experience.

1.4.1 Inception phase

9. The objective of this phase was to gain a common understanding between the project stakeholders and the evaluation team on the objectives and scope of the assignment. Starting with an initial meeting on 4 April 2022, this phase involved a series of remote exchanges with the FAO Evaluation Manager, the country project team members, the Lead Technical Officer (LTO) and the Funding Liaison Officer to exchange ideas and relevant documentation and reach an agreement on timelines and data collection tools. Following an initial review of the project documentation provided, the team produced an evaluation matrix. Additionally, the evaluation stakeholders were determined, as were their contact information, sites and dates for field visits.

1.4.2 Data collection and analysis phase

10. The evaluation team adopted a mixed method approach comprising a secondary data analysis, as well as a qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. A secondary documentary review commenced at inception and was pursued throughout data collection as additional evidence became available or was requested by the terminal evaluation team. The key documents reviewed included: the project document, the mid-term evaluation; project implementation reports (PIRs), steering committee meeting reports and financial reports. The full list of documents reviewed and analysed is presented in the bibliography. In addition to a content analysis of secondary data, the team relied on the 2022 PIR results matrix regarding the rate of the physical implementation of activities and outputs.
11. Primary data collection consisted of virtual/in-person interviews with identified project partners and stakeholders. Following initial interviews, other key stakeholders were further identified and interviewed to provide corroborative evidence and enhance the triangulation of emerging data. Field visits to a sample number of councils were conducted. Field data collection took place in 5 out of the 17 council forest areas targeted by the project, namely Mvangane and Akom II (South Region), Dzeng and Dimako (East Region), and Ndikiniméki (Central Region).
12. During these field visits, the national consultant held interviews and focus group discussions with beneficiary groups, local peasant forest committees (PFCs) and council forest cells (CFCs), which had been operational on each site. These zones were selected to ensure representativeness in terms of activities and realizations across our project components, and a diversity of actors and implementing partners/letters of agreement (LOAs) to achieve a balance between the zones that had been involved in the mid-term evaluation and those that had not. The selection process was implemented with the Project Technical Coordinator to ensure that there was a common agreement and ownership of

the choices made. Annex 3 shows the summary of the field sites and the key criteria for selection, while Appendix 1 presents the list of participants in the evaluation.

1.4.3 Data analysis

13. Content analysis techniques were applied in the review of the project's secondary documentation. The evidence was reviewed in line with the evaluation matrix and key evaluation criteria. Regarding primary data emerging from interviews and discussions, recorded interviews were transcribed, cleaned and readied for data analysis. NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software was utilized. The initial process consisted of creating parent codes in line with the evaluation criteria. Child codes were then allowed to emerge from the data. Following several rounds of coding and discussion between the evaluation team, the final emerging themes were agreed upon. The findings were then cross-referenced and triangulated with the secondary analysis to formulate conclusions and recommendations.
14. The findings are presented in accessible forms, including tables, figures, graphs and word clouds. All figures generated used Datawrapper, which enables high quality and potentially interactive graphics to be presented. Interview notes and quotes illustrate or support arguments while showcasing the lived experiences and perceptions of respondents. These are all anonymized in line with standard evaluation and research practice.

1.4.4 Closeout phase

15. Following submission of the first draft of the evaluation report to the Evaluation Manager, the results were presented to identified stakeholders on 28 July 2022. This provided an opportunity for the terminal evaluation team to present findings from the field and address any concerns from those involved, as well as share and validate findings to date. A draft of this report has been shared with FAO and relevant stakeholders for comments and suggestions. While the report reflects the views and opinions of the evaluation team and remains independent, all suggestions have been considered. A comments matrix is available upon request in which a justification as to why each suggestion was or was not integrated is provided.

1.4.5 Limitations

16. The limitations of the methodology involve assessments based on qualitative and quantitative tools. The evaluation team combined field visits, interviews and focus group discussions, therefore benefitting from the advantages of mixed methods. An additional strategy for mitigating the challenges identified was on the rigour of systematic triangulation of sources and data. The evaluation was carried out in the context of the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The evaluation team adhered to national preventive and social distancing measures to limit the risks of transmission between the national consultant and stakeholders.
17. The geographical spread of the target council forests and the conditions of roads to the region made field visits very challenging, as reported during the mid-term evaluation. Visiting all target areas would have required significantly more time than was available for field data collection. A representative sample of councils was therefore selected in line with the aforementioned criteria. Another key challenge was the availability of key informants to participate in the evaluation. While access was finally secured, lack of availability delayed

the data collection phase for well over two weeks. In the end, the National Project Director of Forests could not take part in the evaluation: following numerous unfruitful requests for interview over a period of two months,⁴ the Director was unwilling to allocate more than 30 minutes of his time. This was considered inadequate considering the role of the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife in the project and his role as the National Project Director.⁵

18. Additionally, the field visits were organized in the wake of the LTO's unexpected – as far the evaluation was concerned – mission to target council forest areas. All mayors in the target zones were no longer available for the evaluation since they had already allocated time for the LTO's mission. After weeks of effort and financial support from FAO Cameroon, the mayors were invited to Yaoundé to take part in the interview. The evaluation team is grateful for the assistance provided, but regrets the additional time required to complete the data collection phase.

1.5 Structure of the report

19. Following this introduction, Section 2 presents the background and context of the project. Section 3 presents the main findings for each evaluation question. Conclusions and recommendations are in Section 4, followed by lessons learned in Section 5. The report is accompanied by the following annexes:

Annex 1. Terms of reference of the evaluation

Annex 2. Revised theory of change visual

Annex 3. Summary of field visits and key criteria for selection

Annex 4. Status of communications activities

Annex 5. Evaluation framework

⁴ Requests were made to accommodate the Director's schedule through email, telephone or face-to-face appointments at his convenience (including opportunities for the interview to take place over the weekend or in the evenings) over a two-month period.

⁵ The evaluators do not doubt how busy the National Project Director was during the evaluation. However, for a coordinator of a USD 21 million project to be unable to allocate an hour for an interview over a period of two months raises questions about his interest and willingness to engage with the evaluation. This is not stated in a vacuum as the team is well aware that government officials were initially not allowed to engage with the evaluation in view of the standoff between FAO and the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife.

2. Background and context of the project

2.1 Brief description of the context and the project

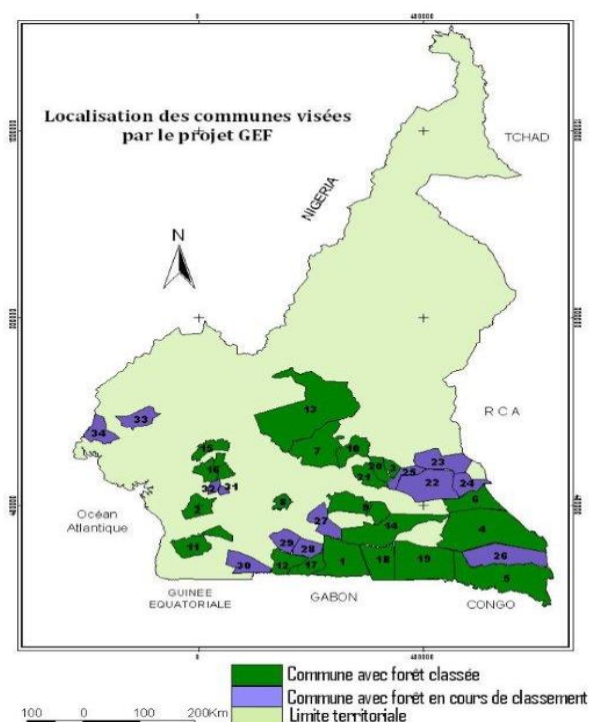
20. The Republic of Cameroon is located in Central Africa. It has a surface area of 475 442 km² and an estimated population of 27.23 million inhabitants – more than half of whom are under 18 years old⁶ (World Outlook, 2022). The population growth rate is 2.5 percent per year (UNFPA, 2022) with this rate reaching 4.3 percent in urban areas. As stated in the country's nationally determined contributions (NDCs) (Republic of Cameroon, 2021), the rate of urbanization increased from 52 percent in 2010 to 57 percent in 2019. Cameroon's gross domestic product in 2020 was USD 40.8 billion, or USD 3 666 per capita. In 2021, gross domestic product growth is estimated at 3.4 percent and forecasted at 4.0 percent in 2022 (Republic of Cameroon, Ministry of Finance, 2021).
21. In 2020, the Republic of Cameroon's economy was severely affected by the combined effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the persistent security and political crises (Anglophone and post-electoral), and the decline in world oil prices. Among Central African countries, the Republic of Cameroon was the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, both from a health and economic perspective (African Development Bank, 2021).
22. The forest sector plays a key role in the country's economic development of rainforest cover. It is approximately 46 percent of the national territory and accounts for 11 percent of the Congo Basin forest area (Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, 2022). The contribution of the forestry and wildlife sector to non-oil gross domestic product is estimated at 4 percent of the country's gross domestic product. This is in addition to providing significant sociocultural, environmental and climatic benefits to the country, particularly to forest-dependent people and Indigenous Peoples who rely on this resource for their livelihoods (Bassalang, 2018). This sector creates nearly 22 722 direct permanent jobs and contributes a total of CFA 64.2 billion to public revenue (Eba'a Atyi et al., 2013). Industrial timber production grew steadily from the 1960s until the second half of the 1990s when it exceeded 3.5 million m³. Between 2006 and 2015, the average timber production was about 2.3 million m³ (FAO/CIFOR, 2016), while in 2019 the marketing of promotional species involved 1.6 million m³ of raw timber, including 484 018 m³ of legally logged timber (Republic of Cameroon, Ministry of Finance, 2021).
23. As a result of the growing timber production, a new taxation system was also put in place as part of the legal requirement for exploiting state concessions: 10 percent of the new annual forestry fees are allocated to local communities; 40 percent to city councils; and 50 percent to the state. The 40 percent to councils is also meant to serve the development of communities. In reality, these taxes are often misappropriated by local bureaucracies and rarely reach local rural populations (Djeukam, 2009).
24. The Republic of Cameroon is grappling with the adverse effects of climate change and with increasing pressure on forests. These pressures are driven mainly by unsustainable large-scale and local small-scale slash-and-burn agricultural practices, ever increasing demand for timber and fuelwood, illegal forest exploitation and other land use demands for large-scale infrastructural developments, mining and urbanization. The rate of forest

⁶ This is based on World Bank data and demographic trends identified from 1976 to 2005, including the annual growth rate of 2.8 percent according to the last general population census.

cover loss has been on the rise, increasing from 0.9 percent between 1990 and 2000 to 1.1 percent between 2010 and 2020 (FAO, 2015; FLEGT IMM, 2002). This rate is expected to increase extremely due to greater demographic growth-associated demand for timber, fuelwood and non-timber forest product (NTFP), which mount pressure on forest resources. Illegal logging, enabled by poor forest governance and driven by trade, is a major contributor to deforestation (VPA Africa – Latin America Facility, 2022). This has damaging effects on the country's biodiversity as forests become exploited for these various uses.

25. The country's forest management is governed by Forestry Law No. 94/01 of 20 January 1994 (Articles 20–39) and implementing decrees, which provide for the division of forests into permanent and non-permanent domains (Republic of Cameroon, 1994). The legislation defines council forests as those belonging to councils with established boundaries and a management objective that takes into account the right of indigenous communities to enjoy the forest and its resources. It also requires the development of a management plan to guide activities in them. Despite this legislation, as noted in the project document, most of these forests do not have management plans nor the trained staff to implement them. Reliable data on forest resources, biodiversity status and carbon stocks are also lacking.
26. The project was designed to support the Cameroonian Government in addressing some of the aforementioned challenges. This would happen by empowering the decentralized administrative units (councils) to better manage their forests. It covers the selected intervention areas in the 17 councils concerned with forest councils targeted by the project, as well as the 9 councils for reforestation areas and 26 councils covering the 33 forest reserves.

Figure 1. Map of target areas for intervention in the Republic of Cameroon



Source: FAO. 2020. *Mid-term evaluation of the project "Sustainable management of forests (SMF) placed under the authority of Cameroonian municipalities"*. Rome. www.fao.org/3/ca8439fr/ca8439fr.pdf. Map conforms to UN. 2020. *Map of Cameroon*. www.un.org/geospatial/content/cameroon

27. Sustainable forest management (SFM) under the Authority of Cameroonian Councils project is financed by the Least Developed Countries Fund managed by the GEF. The cost of the project is USD 21 423 333, of which there is a GEF allocation of USD 3 573 333 and cofinancing of USD 17 850 000 from partners. The project was approved on 13 April 2015 for a period of four years with an actual start date of 1 June 2015. With significant delays, the project effectively started on 5 April 2016. The initial end date was 1 March 2019. Considering the delayed project launch, an initial extension was granted until 29 February 2020. Following the mid-term evaluation in 2019, two other no-cost extensions were granted for an end date of 31 December 2022. The latest no-cost extension was approved in June 2022 when the terminal evaluation was fully underway. The project budget was revised following the mid-term evaluation to address weaknesses identified in the budgeting of key project activities.
28. The global environmental objective of the project is to reduce deforestation and forest degradation in council forests to improve biodiversity conservation, reduce emissions and enhance carbon stocks. The development objective is to improve livelihoods of local communities by promoting sustainable income-generating activities. The project is structured into five components with corresponding outcomes as follows:
- i. Component 1: establishment of council forests for SFM and biodiversity conservation;
 - Outcome 1: increased area of forest managed for sustainable use, conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in non-protected ecological areas;
 - ii. Component 2: capacity building to strengthen biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of council forests;
 - Outcome 2: strengthened capacity of selected councils to manage council forests and conservation sites;
 - iii. Component 3: capacity building for forest carbon management;
 - Outcome 3: council forestry staff and the functional technical unit (FTU) have the tools and skills to monitor and manage carbon stocks in council forests;
 - iv. Component 4: ecosystem restoration and enhancement of carbon stocks in council forests;
 - Outcome 4: forest degradation reduced through restoration and reforestation of 56 200 ha of degraded forests; and
 - v. Component 5: monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and dissemination of information;
 - Outcome 5: project effectively and efficiently managed and monitored, and good practices and lessons learned disseminated.
29. The project targets 561 825 ha of forests, including 17 council forests totalling 416 901 ha and covering 21 communes, 33 forest reserves transferred to communes totalling 137 738 ha and nine reforestation areas in council forests totalling 7 186 ha. The project is implemented by FAO working with the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development, ACFCAM, and other national partners as executing agencies. The project has been implemented through a direct execution modality, and FAO assumes technical and

fiduciary responsibility for the achievement of the expected results. FAO is responsible for the supervision and technical guidance of the project during its implementation. It is responsible for the management of GEF resources and provides procurement and contracting services for the project in accordance with the rules and procedures of the organization.

30. Regarding human resources, the project has been implemented by a Project Management Unit (PMU) hosted within FAO. It involves a Project Technical Coordinator and two technical experts supported by national and international consultants. At the level of the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife, the national coordination is led by the Director of Forests and two assistants. At the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development, three staff members are involved, including the GEF focal point and two assistants. The level of achievement of cofinancing has been weak: only 32 percent was mobilized (see Annex Cofinancing Table in Appendix 4).

2.2 Theory of change

31. The theory of change is generally realistic and coherent, and the intervention logic is sound. The proposed risk management and assumptions have held, however, the mitigation measures highlighted in the risk analysis have not achieved the expected results. In terms of the logic of intervention, several key gaps have been identified and suggestions proposed. First, the link between the project outcomes and the development objectives could be further strengthened by an outcome that specifically focuses on the increased creation of local enterprises and income-generating activities by local communities, Indigenous Peoples and women. The assumption that trained local communities will improve local livelihoods depends on the availability of sufficient business incubation support and market access, which would lead to job or local enterprise creation. While the project foresaw support for starting up community enterprises, this did not materialize. The assumption that income from council forest revenue would translate to better services is based on the hypothesis of improved transparency and a lack of corruption, which is reported to be endemic in forest exploitation royalties in Cameroon (Republic of Cameroon, 2020). No actions were introduced to mitigate this matter, and the project failed to respond to decree No. 004/MINFI/DGI/LRI/L of 24 February 2016, modifying the allocation of forest exploitation royalties to councils and communities. This meant that councils would be allocated less of these revenues. In summary, the theory of change is as follows:

Box 2. Theory of change

IF the area of unprotected forest zones under the control of councils is effectively increased for biodiversity conservation and sustainable forest management with specific designation of conservation (10 percent of the total targeted area), enrichment and restoration (10 percent of the total targeted area), and SFM (80 percent of the targeted area), institutionalization of this distribution in forest management plans and a functional biodiversity and carbon monitoring and management systems are in place; and **IF** local council agencies, technical units and community groups are capacited in the sustainable management of forests, biodiversity and carbon; and **IF** local communities are strengthened to lead sustainable livelihoods through adoption of low impact economic activities and enterprises and their awareness of their impacts on forests; and **IF** government agencies deliver forest restoration and carbon enhancement in the council forests; and **IF** the activities and resources are efficiently managed and delivered; **THEN** this will contribute to reduced deforestation and forest degradation in council forests, improve biodiversity conservation,

reduce emissions and enhance carbon stocks as well as better livelihoods of local communities through engagement in sustainable income-generating activities; **BECAUSE** of the ownership and appropriation by local communities, council officials and agencies, and government departments, adoption of management plans and legal utilization of forest resources, improved transparency and less corruption in council forest management, political stability and maintenance of SFM, climate and biodiversity conservation and other national priorities show sustained coordination between agencies, sufficient funding and incubation support for forest enterprise development and market access, which allows communities to reduce their pressures on forests while enhancing their incomes and sustainable livelihood options. The visual is presented in Annex 2.

Source: Elaborated by the evaluation team.

3. Findings

3.1 Relevance

Evaluation question 1. Was project design/conception appropriate to reach intended results?

32. In assessing the relevance of the project, the evaluation focused on: the extent to which the project responded to the country's main development priorities, as defined in the country's development plan; FAO-GEF mandates; the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals; sectoral policies and international conventions; the needs of beneficiaries; and the consideration of gender development concerns. Based on the findings presented in the following sections, the evaluation team concludes that the relevance is **highly satisfactory**.

Evaluation subquestion. To what extent have the project objectives and design met the needs of the country/recipient and continue to do so in changing contexts/circumstances?

Finding 1. The project fully aligned with the country's main development priorities: the 1994 Forest Law (Republic of Cameroon, 1994); the 2035 emergence vision (Republic of Cameroon, 2009); the biodiversity and climate goals under the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (Republic of Cameroon, 2012); the Growth and Employment Strategy 2010–2020 (Republic of Cameroon, n.d.); the commitment in Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+), plus the sustainable management of forests, and the conservation and enhancement of forest carbon stocks strategy (Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, 2022); and commitments under the Paris Agreement, as illustrated by the NDCs (Republic of Cameroon, 2021).

3.1.1 Alignment with national priorities and evolving context

33. This project is entirely consistent with the Cameroonian 1994 Forest Law. The objectives of the 1994 Forestry Law include: rationalizing the use of forest land; providing local communities certain rights to use forest resources; improving transparency and efficiency in the attribution of logging rights; ensuring SFM practices and reforming the forest taxation system; and strengthening the participation of local communities and councils in the management of forests and forest-based resources, either through community forestry or through council forest management. The overall delivery of the country's forest policy is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife. By strengthening the engagement of decentralized authorities and local communities in the fight against illegal exploitation of timber in council forests, this project also aligned with other government initiatives aimed at promoting good forest governance, such as the Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade Voluntary Partnership Agreement (FLEGT VPA) (EU, 2011). The FLEGT VPAs promote transparency, support the fight against illegal logging and related trade, and advocate for stronger forest law enforcement and respect for the rights of forest-dependent people and indigenous populations.
34. The project was also fully aligned with the mandate of the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development, which is in charge of: defining conditions and guidelines for the rational and sustainable management of natural resources; defining environmental management measures in collaboration with the ministries and specialized organs concerned; monitoring environmental compliance in the implementation of major projects; providing information to the public to encourage participation in the management, protection and restoration of the environment and nature; and negotiating

international conventions and agreements regarding environmental and nature protection and their implementation. The ministry also oversees the National Observatory on Climate Change.

35. The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan of Cameroon was validated and adopted in 2012 (Republic of Cameroon, 2012). This project aligned with its strategic goals, namely Strategic Goal 1: reduction of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation in the short and medium terms and reversal of this trend in the long term; and Strategic Goal 3: development and strengthening of capacity for planning, implementation and monitoring of biodiversity programmes and projects.
36. By strengthening the technical capacity of councils to implement SFM and by conducting field activities to restore degraded forests and enhance carbon stocks in the council forests, the GEF project sought to contribute to efforts made by the government towards the reduction of carbon emissions from forests and land use changes. Therefore, the project is consistent with climate change objectives set out in the national REDD+ strategy, as well as the 2021 revised NDCs (Republic of Cameroon, 2021) (Projects 9 and 10) as part of COP26 Glasgow submissions to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This demonstrates that it has remained relevant over time.
37. In fact, the Republic of Cameroon intends to implement the following mitigation actions based on the guidelines and reduction options in line with the pillars of its National Development Strategy 2020–2030 (NDS30) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. In terms of climate adaptation, the project is aligned with the strategic axes of the National Climate Change Adaptation Plan and, more specifically, seeks to contribute to the implementation of the strategic recommendations of the National Climate Change Adaptation Plan's Forestry and Wildlife sector, notably: Measure 4.2 (Implementation of a forest fire monitoring, prevention, warning and management system); Measure 4.3 (Monitoring of forest cover dynamics including climate risks); and Measure 4.4. (Implement the REDD+ strategy including adaptation measures).
38. It is also aligned with the country's Growth and Employment Strategy 2010–2020 (Republic of Cameroon, n.d.) through its priority objective of modernizing the production apparatus. This provides for the sustainable management of natural resources through the implementation of actions in favour of the environmental management of rural activities, biodiversity management, resource enhancement and reforestation, as well as the development of forestry plantations. In 2016, the country elaborated a new Rural Sector Development Strategy to ensure alignment with the Growth and Employment Strategy Paper and Vision 2035 (Republic of Cameroon, Presidency, 2021). This emergence plan has four priority poles. The agricultural and environmental pole strongly focused on environmental protection, ecosystems preservation and agricultural revolution to usher in second generation agriculture. The strategy aims to ensure a successful transition of the rural sector towards green and inclusive growth based on the principles of sustainable development and provide the necessary platform for the Republic of Cameroon to attain emergence by 2035 (Nnah Ndobe, 2019).
39. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the forest sector and the lives of forest-dependent communities in the Republic of Cameroon. Emerging research reports increased forest and wildlife illegality and the loss of incomes and livelihoods of forest-dependent communities (FAO, 2020b). Considering the linkages between forest

degradation and the emergence of zoonotic diseases, the need for better forest management and biodiversity protection has never been more relevant. It is concluded that, in effect, the COVID-19 pandemic further amplified the need for the project's interventions, despite its disruptive impact on the delivery of project activities from government-imposed lockdowns. The project's alignment with government priorities is **highly satisfactory**.

3.1.2 Alignment with community needs

Finding 2. A participatory process was applied during project design to ensure that the needs of different stakeholder groups were integrated. The project remained relevant over time, especially with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. It addressed the needs of the councils and forest-dependent communities in terms of the sustainable management of target council forests, the development of alternative income-generating activities, biodiversity conservation and carbon management.

40. Workshops during project preparation, as well as meetings with administrative authorities, councils and local communities during field visits helped to identify and consult key project stakeholders and beneficiaries. This participatory process ensured that design was responsive to their needs. So when asked about the relevance of this project for them, mayors and members of the different PFCs, CFCs and beneficiary groups were unanimous in stating that this project responded to real needs.
41. For council officials, the project responded to the capacity building needs required to sustainably manage council forests for the benefit of local communities. Mayors also thought that this project would support them in boosting resource mobilization from SFM, biodiversity conservation and carbon credits. As stated by a project consultant, "The idea was to support councils to diversify their sources of income including through accessing international carbon markets while preserving their biodiversity and carbon stocks." It was expected that increased incomes at the level of councils would translate into not only better investment in sustainable resource management but also the provision of basic services, such as health, education, water and livelihood alternatives for communities.
42. For communities, the opportunity to diversify their livelihood and income through business and income generation support was identified. Focus group discussion participants in Dimako stated: "The project sought to address, in a comprehensive way, the poor engagement of communities in the management of their forest resources." The group also stated that the aim was to stop the abusive exploitation of their forests while addressing specific needs such as poverty alleviation in their community. In Akom II, focus group discussion participants stated that the project was needed to increase community awareness of their impact on forests and to collectively find ways to address the consequences. The needs from council officials and communities were fully captured under Outcome 2 of the project, which intended to strengthen capacities and enhance community-based enterprises. The relevance of the project to community needs is **highly satisfactory**.

3.1.3 Alignment with GEF focal area strategies

Evaluation subquestion. Has the programme responded to the country's main development priorities as defined in the country's development plan, FAO-GEF mandates, Sustainable Development Goals, sectoral policies and international conventions?

Finding 3. The project is generally consistent with FAO and the GEF strategic frameworks for SFM, biodiversity conservation and climate change.

43. This project's goals and Outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 4 are fully aligned with and support delivery of the following GEF outcomes:
- i. *Biodiversity Outcome 2.1 (SFM and biodiversity conservation)*. The project will assist councils to develop and implement forest management plans, taking into account the need for biodiversity conservation in production areas and complying with the Republic of Cameroon's Forest Law requirements on SFM.
 - ii. *Biodiversity Outcome 1.1 (Management effectiveness of protected areas)*. The forest management plans developed will include areas that are set aside for biodiversity conservation (conservation sites) in each council forest, and the project will develop operational tools to facilitate the implementation and management of the conservation sites.⁷
 - iii. *Climate Change Mitigation Outcome 5.2 (Management for restoration and enhancement of carbon stocks in forests and non-forest lands)*. The project will adapt, test and implement a system for accounting and monitoring carbon in the council forests.
 - iv. *SFM/REDD Outcome 1.2 (Good management practices in existing forests)*. The project will contribute to this objective through the implementation of SFM on 449 425 ha of forests.

The alignment of the project with GEF focal area strategies is **highly satisfactory**.

3.1.4 Alignment with the FAO Strategic Framework and objectives

44. The new FAO Strategic Framework (FAO, 2013b) is comprised of five objectives. This project is linked to Strategic Objective 2: "Increase and improve provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner." The project's environmental and development objectives are fully aligned with Strategic Objective 2. Its Outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 4 will contribute to the achievement of the following outcome and output:
- i. Strategic Objective 2, Organizational Outcome 1: Producers and natural resource managers adopt practices that increase and improve the provision of goods and services in the agricultural sector production systems in a sustainable manner (Outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 4); and
 - ii. Output 1.1: Practices and approaches assessed, widely shared and their scaling up facilitated for the sustainable increase of production and the provision of environmental, social and economic goods and services (Outcome 5).

The project's alignment with FAO's Strategic Framework and objectives is **highly satisfactory**.

⁷ The term "conservation site" used in this project document refers to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Category IV of protected areas. As defined in the IUCN classification, such areas aim to protect particular species or habitats, and management reflects this priority. Also, as stated in the IUCN's classification, the primary objective of such protected areas is to maintain, conserve and restore species and habitats (Lausche, 2011).

3.1.5 Relevance to gender consideration: is the programme sensitive to gender development concerns?

Finding 4. Gender equality, the promotion of gender empowerment and addressing barriers were not the primary objectives of this project. There was scant mention of gender in the project document, and the results framework was generally gender blind.

45. The project document was gender blind: the word “gender” was mentioned twice. The key focus was to ensure equitable participation of men and women in training events and various forest management committees to be implemented by the project. The initial project results framework did not provide any gender disaggregated data. No gender analysis nor gender strategy was developed. Inclusion of gender consideration is **moderately unsatisfactory**.
46. With the exception of gender considerations, to which the project was unattuned, the project – both at design and throughout implementation – remained aligned with national priorities. It also adapted to a changing context based on community needs and FAO and the GEF strategies. The overall relevance of the project is deemed **highly satisfactory**.

3.2 Effectiveness

Evaluation question 2. To what extent has the intervention met or is expected to meet its objectives and outcomes, including differential outcomes between groups?

47. In evaluating project effectiveness, the team assessed the achievement of project outcomes and outputs, the factors affecting the achievement of results and the project’s added value to ongoing national efforts.

Finding 5. After six years of implementation characterized by four no-cost extensions, the project is now on track to achieve its objectives. A myriad of internal and external challenges impacted the project negatively. As a result, stakeholders and communities have not had a sufficient opportunity to exercise and apply learning. The project team has requested another extension, which could enable the team to finalize activities and provide opportunities for communities to practice their learning. This, however, is subject to having a clear exit strategy that can be appropriated by all stakeholders. Overall effectiveness is **moderately satisfactory**.

3.2.1 Outcome 1: Did the project increase the area under SFM in targeted council forests?

Finding 6. The landmark revision and validation of forest management plans that integrate SFM, biodiversity conservation and carbon management has not been successfully delivered due to an insufficient budget allocated under the forest management plan review. This has led to delays in implementation. Based on the proposed July 2022 LOA between FAO and the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife, 9 draft management plans will be submitted to the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife for validation out of the 17 planned. Achievement of Outcome 1 is, at the time of this evaluation (June 2022), **moderately unsatisfactory**.

3.2.1.1 Output 1.1.1 Database of biodiversity in the council forests

48. Technical guidelines for the sustainable management of council forests, including biodiversity conservation, have been developed and adapted for council forests. This includes criteria and indicators for the designation of conservation sites and the monitoring of biodiversity in councils. Part of setting up the database involves carrying out the inventory of biodiversity and identifying the necessary conservation sites. It must be stated

that as of 30 June 2020, key actions had yet to be established in the 17 council forests towards database creation according to the 2020 PIR. The implementation of these activities was delayed because of insufficient budgets allocated to the revision of forest management plans and institutional differences between FAO and the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife on the approach. Per the recommendations of the project steering committee (PSC) (September 2020 meeting), three LOAs were signed: on March 2021 with Monitortrust and the Organization for Conservation and Development (OCD), and on May 2021 with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Monitortrust worked to revise the management plans of the Akom2-Efoulan, Mvangane and Oveng communal forests, while OCD targeted the Minta, Nanga Eboko and Ndikiniméki communal forests and the IUCN focused on Dimako, Yokadouma and Gari-Gombo. An SFM expert was recruited to monitor the implementation of activities relating to the revision of management plans.

49. It appears that these LOAs, as of June 2022, have led to progress regarding the mapping and biodiversity inventories to be completed in 13 out of 17 council forests targeted by the project, namely: Ndikiniméki; Nanga-Eboko; Minta; Dimako; Gari-Gombo; Yokadouma; Lomié; Djoum; Messondo; Ngambé/Ndom/Nyanon; Mvangane; Oveng; and Akom II/Efoulan. In the four remaining council forests, the biodiversity inventories have been implemented in Messamena/Mindourou, Dzung and Yoko. The consultant responsible for the design of the database was recruited in May 2022 and equipment was procured. This includes 23 computers, inverters and hard disks to house the databases at the level of 21 councils and the two ministries targeted by the project. At the time of evaluation, eight councils had effectively received the equipment⁸ and the governmental departments had yet to receive them. This output is assessed as **moderately satisfactory**.

3.2.1.2 Output 1.1.2: Forest management plans integrating biodiversity conservation developed and implemented

50. It can be argued that this output was the most significant of all project outputs in that all other activities were built on its successful delivery. The documents needed for the revision of the management plans include: socioeconomic studies; forest maps; biodiversity inventories; and management inventory reports. To date, the socioeconomic studies have been finalized for all 17 council forests. Key activities under this output include: gazetting of 561 825 ha of council forest into three blocks (10 percent for conservation site, 10 percent for enrichment and restoration, and 80 percent for SFM) and revising all 17 management plans integrating biodiversity and their implementation.
51. The gazetting of forest into three blocks (10 percent for conservation site, 10 percent for enrichment and restoration, and 80 percent for SFM) has been conducted in 15 council forests: Ndikiniméki; Nanga Eboko; Minta; Dimako; Gari Gombo; Yokadouma; Lomié; Djoum; Messondo; Ngambé/Ndom/Nyanon; Mvangane; Oveng; Akom II/Efoulan; Moloundou; and Mindourou/Messamena. The development of forest management plans and integration of biodiversity conservation and carbon management have been carried out in 9 out of 17 council forests targeted by the project: Ndikiniméki; Nanga Eboko; Minta; Dimako; Gari Gombo; Yokadouma; Mvangane; Oveng; and Akom II/Efoulan. Like Output 1.1.1, the implementation of these activities was hampered by an insufficient budget allocated for the review of management plans and institutional issues. As suggested by the

⁸ This includes a computer screen, a desktop computer, an external drive, a GPS and a stabilizer/circuit breaker.

mid-term evaluation, a budget of USD 1 324 234.27 (including environmental impact assessments [EIAs]) or USD 1 036 720 (without EIAs) was required for the revision of the 17 management plans compared to the USD 389 048 budgeted (FAO, 2020c). Following the mid-term evaluation, no formal budget reallocation took place. Rather, USD 158 528 in cost savings on the contract budget line was allocated to hire consultants to carry out the planned activities. This represents 12 percent of the total amount required to revise the 17 management plans.

52. With the breakdown in the relationship between the FAO team and the CTFC, a decision to subcontract different agencies to support the revision of the forest management plans was made. The main reasons for the fallout involved the CTFC pulling out because the budget required for the activities was well below that allocated for the revision. There was also disengagement from the project following a new focus on a European Union grant. For these reasons, the OCD, the IUCN and Monitortrust were issued LOAs in 2021 to lead the revision of the management plans. These organizations were selected in May 2018 following a call for applications published in the daily Cameroon Tribune on 9 January 2018. While no improprieties were detected by the evaluation,⁹ a general perception from stakeholders regarding the credibility and transparency of this selection process and the subsequent issuance of LOAs three years later¹⁰ is reported. More than three participants knowledgeable on the subject raised questions over transparency and whether there had been a promise of contract following the 2018 process. Furthermore, despite efforts to do so, the evaluation found no Ministry of Forests and Wildlife or Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development staff involved in any phase of this recruitment process.
53. As the 2021 PIR highlighted, government officials and other stakeholders cautioned FAO on the need for selected partners to respect the legal and regulatory provisions regarding management inventories. This involves the fact that organizations engaged in the revision of these plans must be accredited formally by the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife. The minutes of the selection committee of the FAO team show that only Monitortrust had the relevant accreditation. When asked why the other two were selected, the team argued that it is normal practice for partners to sign LOAs and then subcontract the work to third parties, as highlighted in Article 6(c) of the LOAs. The emphasis for the project team appears to have been on identifying organizations with sufficient financial resources to prefinance activities in the field and avoid the problems faced early in the project where activities were delayed due to a lack of cofinancing.
54. Ultimately, the revised management plans must be received and validated by a commission led by the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife. Having not been involved in the monitoring of the activities of these organizations on the ground, the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife staff

⁹ The selection process was carried out following the FAO Manual Section 507, including the advertisement of an open request for applications through national media. It sought to select the most competent and competitive non-governmental organizations. The selection methodology was in line with FAO practices, and FAO did not receive any complaint from either the Yaoundé office or the office of the Inspector General. Nevertheless, explaining this process to all those involved could have mitigated the current negative perception.

¹⁰ The evaluation team is not casting aspersions. Rather, it is merely reporting on widespread concerns raised in both the project team itself and among different project partners that this perception negatively affects FAO and the project.

are concerned with the quality of the deliverables from these organizations.¹¹ Some raised concerns that by not holding the accreditation themselves, there might be issues with the validation of the outputs by these three organizations. There has also been disagreement between FAO and the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife on the funding of the monitoring missions linked to the validation of the revised management plans. Initially, FAO argued that GEF rules would not be respected if GEF funds were used for the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife statutory activities. Yet, the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife stated that it did not have funding to implement the missions. At the same time, it questioned the underlying explanation from FAO, especially since FAO is the lead executing agency. The evaluation also found disagreement within the FAO team on this matter. While some in charge of the project's technical aspects remained staunchly on the side of following procedures, others were more concerned that prolonged tensions and perceived conflict with the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife would likely damage goodwill and future collaboration with the government. Others still argued that this fomented an atmosphere of mistrust while tarnishing the FAO image among partners. Irrespective, clear, initial and ongoing communication on what was feasible and expected, what the procedures were, and how to move forward would have precluded these difficulties.

55. Through intervention from the FAO Representative (FAOR), it appears that dialogue has been re-established. A new LOA is being negotiated to target the reception and validation of nine council forest management plans (draft LOA seen in July 2022). The ultimate goal of this output was to have forest management plans revised and implemented, including gazettelement of the three allocated blocks (SFM, biodiversity and carbon storage). To date, these plans have been neither finalized nor formally approved. Concern remains among mayors over potential short-term income shortfall, but planned meetings with the administration and mayors following successive municipal elections (2018 and 2022) have not been organized to strengthen their understanding and buy-in. The evaluation considers the latest extension an opportunity to ensure mayoral buy-in by organizing these meetings that had been planned. This output is considered **moderately unsatisfactory**.

3.2.1.3 Output 1.1.3: 56 200 ha of conservation sites formally designated and established within the council forests

56. This output and its related activities are linked to Output 1.1.2 above. This output is contingent upon the reception and validation of the revised council forest management plans. It is thus considered **unsatisfactory**.

3.2.1.4 Review of progress towards Outcome 1

57. As of 30 June 2022, the level of contribution of outputs to this outcome is **moderately unsatisfactory**. The key weaknesses reside in the slow progress achieved in the revision and validation of forest management plans integrating SFM, biodiversity conservation and carbon management. The key weaknesses were due to insufficient budgets allocated for the activities and institutional differences between the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and FAO. The reallocation of funding for these activities following the mid-term evaluation of 2019 and the steering committee meeting of September 2020 enabled the project to recruit

¹¹ This is not to revisit the discussion of whether the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife should or should not carry out activities and monitoring. Its role is to monitor these activities. The Ministry of Forests and Wildlife staff raise concerns about the deliverables emerging from the assignment having not participated in the selection and vetting of the non-governmental organizations, and having not seen any of the outputs by the time of the evaluation.

three agencies to drive the implementation of activities. This has led to biodiversity inventories being completed in 15 out of 17 council forests and gazettelement actions conducted in 15. The six-month project extension provides an opportunity for the project to validate the nine completed plans and make further progress with the eight others.

3.2.2 Outcome 2: Has the project increased capacities of local councils to manage forests and conservation sites?

Finding 7. The project has successfully delivered the restructuring and strengthening of the PFCs and the CFCs in several areas of SFM and biodiversity management. Anecdotal evidence shows changes in behaviour and increased awareness of the multifunctional benefits of forests. One thousand and fifty community members have been trained on the market analysis and development (MA&D) approach – seven times above the number planned. No promised start-up financial and incubation support has been provided and, consequently, no enterprise development plan developed by communities has been implemented. Achievement of Outcome 2 is, at the time of this evaluation (June 2022), **moderately satisfactory**.

3.2.2.1 Output 2.1.1: Technical guidance and standards for SFM and biodiversity conservation in conservation sites developed and disseminated in the council forests

58. Technical guidelines and standards for SFM and biodiversity conservation in conservation sites, including criteria and indicators for the selection of conservation sites and biodiversity monitoring, and technical guidelines for monitoring and reporting on biodiversity, have been effectively delivered. These guidelines are expected to support council officials and various PFCs and CFCs to play their roles effectively in terms of the planning, monitoring and implementation of revised forest management plans. A communications expert was recruited to support the communication and dissemination of the project guidelines and support awareness raising. A communications strategy was developed, as well as an action plan with 13 activities. So far, six communications activities have been completed, six are ongoing and four have yet to be initiated. The project team reports that the technical guides were disseminated to 21 councils involved in the 17 council forests targeted by the project. This also includes dissemination to the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development, the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and key project partners and stakeholders. All members of the PFCs and the CFCs, including mayors, reported that these guidelines were effectively being used in addition to the leaflets and banners produced to sensitize and raise awareness in their communities. This output is **satisfactory**.

3.2.2.2 Output 2.1.2: Eighty-five local forest protection committees (FPCs) established and trained, and 170 local community leaders/change agents from the villages in and around the council forests trained in alternative livelihoods; and Output 2.1.3: Seventeen functional technical units (FTUs) established and 85 council staff members trained in the development and implementation of forest management plans

59. The implementation of these outputs was initially delayed due to disagreements between FAO and the government regarding the terminologies used in the project document to describe the local council forest institutions to be established and strengthened. According to the project document and FAO, the project was expected to establish FPCs and FTUs as opposed to PFCs and CFCs, as stipulated by the national forestry legislation. During this time, FAO authorized Cameroon Ecology (Cam-Eco) to start creating and training the committees stated in the project document. It was only in February 2018 that both parties

reached an agreement to use PFCs and CFCs. Unfortunately, this meant that resources spent by Cam-Eco were not utilized optimally as the work had to be revised to realign with the dispositions of the law.

60. In summary, 72 FPCs representing six per council were effectively restructured and trained in forest management and monitoring above the 45 planned. Additionally, 17 CFCs were also restructured and trained in forest management and monitoring. Eighty-eight council forest staff from 11 councils were further trained in the development and implementation of forest management plans. Focus group discussions and interviews with mayors and various CFC representatives reveal that the skills acquired through these trainings are effectively being utilized in different councils. For instance, respondents stated that increased awareness of the benefits of SFM had led many to change their practices. Participants from the PFCs reported an increase in their forest monitoring roles and help to dissuade and fight illegality in their council forests. Reportedly, improved signage and posters at different points in the council forests have also helped communities understand the limits of their forests and reduce incursions into the forest areas with agricultural activities. Trainings have also allowed CFCs and PFCs to practice the use of forest monitoring equipment such as GPS trackers. However, they reported that basic equipment and resources required to play their roles effectively, such as motorbikes and other protective equipment, were lacking.
61. A key component of Output 2.1.3 related to strengthening livelihood options for communities. Per the results framework, it was expected that 90 local stakeholders would be trained in SFM and alternative forest income-generating activities (NTFP, hunting and ecotourism). In the end, the 100 stakeholders (ten participants per council) coming from ten councils involved in the 17 council forests targeted by the project were trained in these income-generating activities. Significant effort was spent on the promotion of FAO's MA&D approach with the objective that those trained would produce enterprise development plans for alternative forest income-generating activities (NTFP, hunting and ecotourism). The MA&D approach consists of supporting local communities, from the identification and planning of forest enterprises to the sustainable management of their local environments and increased revenues. It spans two cycles and four phases. Phases 1 and 2 (Cycle 1) serve as a diagnostic process to identify opportunities and motivate participants. Phase 3 supports the preparation of the business plan, and Phase 4 supports the start-up of the business (Cycle 2). Overall, 1 050 participants (556 female and 444 male) were trained in Phase 1 (21 councils)¹² and 700 during Phase 2, covering 14 councils.
62. Those who took part in the first training were not always the same as the ones who took part in the second. Despite the long delay between the first cycle of the market analysis and development (MA&D) training and the second, participants remained enthusiastic and interested with the expectation that the enterprise development projects resulting from the training would receive support to kick-start activities. With so much delay between the first and the second cycle, the trainers and trainees stated that some notions were no longer fresh in their minds. The trainings did not provide training kits or manuals for participants. There was widespread disappointment from all project stakeholders interviewed in this

¹² It is unclear as to why so many people were trained and resources spent on this activity went way beyond the target set in the project document. For this many people to have been trained and then no business development support provided was probably not an optimal use of project resources, especially since none of the business plans had been effectively implemented by June 2022.

evaluation that the project did not follow up with the proposed support for enterprise creation. In fact, a budget was foreseen in the 2020 action plan to provide support, but it did not materialize. No incubation support was provided by the project to enable the start-up of enterprises. Given these factors, both the evaluation and the LTO field missions in June 2022 realized that none of the business development plans had been implemented.

63. While the MA&D approach seems to have benefits, there happens to have been a divergence of view between the LTO, the trainers, the participants and the authorities regarding the MA&D approach. The LTO argued that, according to the MA&D approach, support should only be provided to scale up enterprises as opposed to providing start-up support. This assertion assumes that impoverished communities, such as those targeted by the project, have start-up capital and business incubation support. Unfortunately, this was not the case in this project. On the contrary, consultants, mayors, beneficiaries and other FAO team members were of the view that start-up support should have been provided. The overall situation greatly tarnished the image of FAO, as stakeholders consider that the organization failed them. Irrespective of wrong or right, stakeholder expectations were not met due to a failure in communicating the approach and its limits clearly.
64. To mitigate the situation, the project could have leveraged the expertise of partner organizations, such as the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF) and Cam-Eco, which both delivered community forestry development projects in the country (ASB, 2016). However, this presupposes having been aware of the issue. Agroforestry and other income-generating activities proposed in the 2020 Plan de Travail et Budget Annuel (Annual Work Plan and Budget) included identifying priority species and their propagation options for 17 council forests targeted by the project and technical sheets for propagating priority species available. This involved: 500 people trained and 21 central agroforestry nurseries; 3 000 seedlings of improved agroforestry species produced per commune; a minimum 0.5 ha seed orchard/demonstration plot installed in the 21 council forests targeted by the project; and at least 21 material/equipment kits distributed to the communes targeted by the project. Sadly, none of these was implemented, furthering beneficiaries' feelings of disappointment and abandonment by FAO. The project extension is a further opportunity for FAO to provide the needed financial and incubation support to kick-start community business ideas. In case the MA&D approach does not foresee these types of support to forest-dependent communities, the evaluation team recommends a review of the model and its relevance and adapting it to contexts where start-up capital and incubation support are non-existent. In both Output 2.1.2 and 2.1.3, there was no mechanism implemented by the project to ensure further coaching and support to trainees. This is a key weakness considering that those trained had low levels of education and many of the concepts taught were new. Output 2.1.2 and Output 2.1.3 are deemed **moderately satisfactory**.

3.2.2.3 Overview towards achievement of Outcome 2

65. The achievement of Outcome 2 is **moderately satisfactory**. Despite initial disagreements in terminologies, the planned restructuring and training of the PFCs and the CFCs have been carried out. The main weaknesses were in the failure of the project to provide further logistic and material support required for trainees to apply their learning. At the level of the council units and staff, significant needs for materials and forest monitoring equipment remain unfulfilled as only one GPS was provided per council. Communities trained on alternative forest income-generating activities require start-up capital and enterprise

incubation support to kick-start initiatives. The project's development result is unlikely to be achieved if the project does not prioritize this incubation support during the not to exceed (NTE) period.

3.2.3 Outcome 3: Has the project strengthened the tools and skills of staff to monitor and manage carbon stocks?

Finding 8. The methodology and approach for carbon monitoring, reporting and verification has been effectively developed and tested. The shambolic management of the soil sample analysis means that the process of setting up and piloting the carbon monitoring system has not been implemented. Outcome 3 is considered **moderately unsatisfactory**.

3.2.3.1 Output 3.1.1: Existing accounting and carbon monitoring systems adapted to council forests and tested

66. The implementation of activities linked to this output was initially conferred to the ICRAF and the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) under LOAs signed in 2016. Based on their experience of the REALU: Reducing Emissions from All Land Uses project (ASB, 2022) and carbon monitoring expertise, both organizations worked together to adapt the methodology to council forests. This methodology included the technical guidelines and protocols for the measurement, monitoring and sustainable management of carbon stocks in council forests. This methodology was effectively tested in the field. The initial phase of these activities was marred by insufficient budget, disagreements between these organizations in terms of methodology and significant delays in the validation of the deliverables by the FAO project team and, subsequently, the LTO (FAO, 2020a).
67. The second phase of this activity required the project to carry out studies that would inform the designation and official recognition of the carbon sites in the target council. It emerged from interviews that despite the challenges faced during Phase 1, ICRAF and IITA remained interested in working on the project. However, when a call for expression of interest was advertised by FAO, these two organizations did not manifest interest. Key experts within both organizations had left, taking with them the limited national expertise in carbon monitoring. As a result of the call, three consultants were recruited to deliver on this next phase. This included carrying out training on carbon monitoring for FPCs and PFCs, mapping the carbon sites, and collecting soil samples to estimate the volume of carbon in the different forests. It was expected that the results would inform the final gazetting of the council forest to include the planned 10 percent allocation to carbon.
68. The management of this second phase appears to have been the most disorganized of the project. This relates to the management of the procurement for services process to implement soil sample analyses. It emerged that due process was not followed by the project's technical team in the selection of a national laboratory to analyse soil samples from the field. In fact, soil samples were taken to the IITA soil analysis laboratory without prior approval from the FAO finance team. The finance team then started a selection process that ultimately culminated in the same laboratory being selected. It is important to note that there is a highly limited number of laboratories in the Republic of Cameroon capable of delivering on this assignment. The result was an unnecessary delay in a process that was already late.
69. Considering how central these results were to the successful achievement of this project, the way in which project leadership managed the situation proved unsatisfactory. In fact, without these results, the carbon consultants could not write the inventory reports nor

propose the carbon management sites for the forest management plans. There was a lack of ownership and proactiveness from leadership.¹³ Consultants raised the issue as early as 27 January 2022, voicing concerns about the remaining samples stuck at IITA. They also questioned the validity of their contracts and the financial consequences for the project given that, without the sample, they could not complete their assignments nor be paid. No communication from the project team was forthcoming, despite several attempts on their part to get clarification. While a response provided on 1 February 2022 to the consultants suggested a meeting with the carbon expert of the project, it in fact did not take place. The meeting to address the issue was finally held on 10 February 2022, but without the consultants, who were not provided with any update. The consultants are unanimously dismayed at FAO's inability to manage the procurement process and communicate effectively.

70. The soil sampling process underwent an eight-month delay, and the evaluation team found no evidence of efforts by FAO to directly reach out to the leadership of IITA and address the situation. The hierarchy of IITA first became aware that the samples had remained at IITA with the laboratory management team during the evaluation. There was dismay as to the lack of communication¹⁴ at the highest level, even though both leaders had met on different occasions over the period in question. From the IITA side, the samples would have been released had the situation been brought to their attention on time. In the end, FAO issued the request for service (*bon de commande*) on 6 May 2022. The invoice from IITA was submitted on 10 June 2022. The soil analysis results were released to FAO on 13 June 2022 for onward transmission to consultants. It took a week to resolve after over eight months of standstill. As of 30 June 2022, the reports from consultants were still pending. The evaluation did not find any communication or agreement on a timeline for deliverables with the consultants regarding the reports.¹⁵ Likewise, there was no indication regarding their contracts, which had long expired.
71. Given the protracted delays, two additional activities under this output could not be initiated. They relate to the integration of carbon sites into the carbon database, application of the carbon accounting and monitoring system in the council forests, and the measurement, monitoring, and reporting of carbon in the council forests. The lack of engagement of the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development in the implementation of trainings or the development and testing of the carbon monitoring system raises concerns about the ownership and sustainability of the initiative. This is exacerbated by the fact that the database was expected to be set up at the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development. At the time of writing, no equipment had been provided to the ministries. Two meetings in February/March and June 2022 took place among the Director of Forest at the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and the Director of Conservation and Natural Resources at the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development, and the LTO. However, project focal points at the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development were unaware of any plans to have a database set up and the type of data

¹³ When asked about the situation of delayed soil samples at IITA, the FAOR was unaware of the situation on 13 June 2022 but reacted promptly. The standstill was resolved within a week. Two emails obtained by the evaluation team suggest that he had in fact been informed on 16 March 2022 and on 18 April 2022 about the need to address the matter, preferably before the terminal evaluation.

¹⁴ Such communication includes a common understanding of the procedure followed by FAO (Manual Section 502 selected to procure the soil analysis), as well as updates on the analysis itself.

¹⁵ This includes an informal timeframe or even a gentleman's agreement by both parties to finalize the work.

collected. Operating the council forest's monitoring, reporting and verification system regarding carbon also requires resources and equipment that the PFCs and the CFCs do not possess. Considering these factors, the achievement of this output is **moderately unsatisfactory**.

3.2.3.2 Output 3.1.2: Eighty-five FPCs and 34 FTU staff members trained in forest carbon management

72. Several trainings were effectively implemented to target PFCs and CFCs. Eighty-five participants representing PFCs from 10 out of 17 councils were trained on methods for carbon accounting and monitoring, approaches to conserve and enhance forest carbon in the council forest, and forest surveillance and protection to combat illegal logging and grazing. Additionally, 18 participants representing nine CFCs were also trained on the same topic.
73. Initial trainings were organized between 7 and 18 June 2021 in Dimako, Oveng and Ndikiniméki, targeting PFCs, CFCs, forest operation managers, and heads of forest and wildlife posts from Dimako, Mindourou, Messamena and Lomié (7–10 June 2021); Djoum, Oveng and Mvangane (16–18 June 2021); and Ndikiniméki, Minta and Nanga-Eboko (8–10 June 2022), respectively. The next round of trainings took place in May/June 2022. As with the first set of trainings, these were organized in Yokadouma, Messondo and Ebolowa from 27 to 29 May 2022 for participants from Yokadouma and Moloundou; from 23 to 25 May for participants from Ngambé, Nyanon, Ndom and Messondo; and from 23 to 25 June 2022 for participants from Ebolowa. Further training of communal forestry cell staff was provided by the consultant, Eddy Bitom, on understanding carbon site monitoring sheets and the use and completion of forest carbon databases. As can be seen from the dates, these trainings were organized during the terminal evaluation period and one year after the initial trainings were delivered.
74. With long delays between the training and the actual implementation of the carbon monitoring system, concerns were raised by consultants and council authorities about the ability of those trained to effectively fulfil their role. Refresher courses appear necessary to enable those trained to play their roles effectively. Considering that Output 3.1.2 was mainly about providing training to PFCs and CFCs, the achievement of the output is **moderately satisfactory**.

3.2.3.3 Brief assessment of progress towards Outcome 3

75. Progress towards the achievement of Outcome 3 is **moderately unsatisfactory**.¹⁶ The project successfully developed and tested the technical guidelines and protocols for the measuring, monitoring and sustainable management of carbon stocks in council forests. The main weakness in the delivery of these outputs was linked to delays in the realization of a soil sample analysis by the IITA laboratory in Yaoundé due to internal procurement failures at FAO. While PFCs and CFCs have been trained on various aspects of carbon monitoring, the databases for carbon monitoring and management linking council forests to the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development have not been established. The necessary equipment required for the management of an effective monitoring, reporting and verification system is yet to be provided to councils and the

¹⁶ The evaluators consider the contribution of Output 3.1.1 to the achievement of Outcome 3 to be more significant, hence the overall rating of moderately unsatisfactory.

government. The evaluators consider the contribution of Output 3.1.1 to the achievement of Outcome 3 as more significant. The overall rating is **moderately unsatisfactory**.

3.2.4 Outcome 4: Has the project increased forest restoration and reforestation in targeted degraded forest areas?

Finding 9. Government plans to restore and strengthen carbon stocks have not been achieved. Only 3 800 ha of restoration and reforestation have been successfully implemented out of the 56 200 ha planned due to a lack of funding from the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife. Outcome 4 is deemed **unsatisfactory**.

3.2.4.1 Output 4.1.1: Reforestation and restoration of 56 200 ha in the council forests (10 percent of total council forest and forest reserves targeted by the project)

76. The activities under this output were to be implemented by the government as part of its cofinancing for the project. Evidence from the 2021 PIR shows that a total of 3 821 ha of trees were effectively planted against the 56 200 ha planned, representing a 7 percent rate of achievement. There were no further reports from the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife regarding reforestation and restoration activities. Government officials reported that this low achievement was due to limited funding in the ministry. The output is considered **highly unsatisfactory**.

3.2.5 Outcome 5: What evidence exists that the project applied results-based management and good practices, and documented good practices?

Finding 10. The project did not apply a results-based management approach. Action plans and budgets were developed, but recommendations were rarely implemented in full. The structures expected to support project delivery were either not created or ineffective. Interpersonal conflicts, poor communication, ineffective stakeholder engagement and internal governance issues impacted project delivery. The mid-term and terminal evaluations were effectively commissioned. Mid-term evaluation recommendations were not implemented in full. No evidence exists that good practices have been documented or disseminated to external stakeholders. Outcome 5 is **moderately satisfactory**.

3.2.5.1 Output 5.1.1: M&E plan implemented and mid-term and terminal evaluations completed

77. The project had a broad M&E plan laid out in the project document. This was effectively revised and operationalized between September and October 2018 but proved to be too complex and ultimately unusable. Four PSCs were organized to review the action plans and budgets, even though their recommendations were rarely implemented in full. The last steering committee meeting took place in September 2020 instead of February 2020 due to COVID-19. A combination of COVID-19-related restrictions and delays in holding the PSC meeting meant that no new LOAs nor consultants were recruited. It also shows that for close to two years, the project teams have implemented the project without the required strategic oversight. This may explain, in part, the disbelief of certain stakeholders upon being informed of the project's terminal evaluation – especially since they had not been informed of any project progress nor been in any way involved since the September 2020 steering committee meeting.

78. The project also implemented the mid-term evaluation in 2019 with a one-year delay considering the slow project launch. The mid-term evaluation made five recommendations which have only been partially implemented. A communications expert was recruited to

work on the project in March 2020. A budgeted project communications strategy and action plan was developed but, unfortunately, this had yet to be fully delivered by the time of the terminal evaluation.

79. The 2019 mid-term evaluation also recommended that the project recruit an expert to document, capitalize on and support the dissemination of any emerging results. As stated, recruitment was only effective in May 2022 when the project was about to end (it was subsequently extended). The project's terminal evaluation was effectively commissioned per donor requirements, and this is the result. This output is considered **moderately satisfactory**.

3.2.6 Factors which affected the achievement of project outputs

80. The terminal evaluation finds that this project was affected by several factors: significant bottlenecks; capacity of partners; project internal governance; project design; stakeholder engagement; external coherence; the degree of materialization of cofinancing; and the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

81. The project was impacted by several key bottlenecks. According to respondents, poor communication – real or perceived – with partners, personal issues and conflicts within the FAO team, and mistrust among and disagreements with the government and partners were the most important implementation barriers. The project also suffered from a lack of foresight and proactivity, breaking contractual obligations under LOAs with partners and consultants (including delays in payments, often due to broken contractual obligations and deliverables in LOAs, as well as delays in communication) and insufficient budgets for key activities. Respondents were deeply disappointed with the level of communication between the project team, the government, partners, and external stakeholders. On different aspects of the project, one respondent said:

They never listened to us on the budget. Since the mid-term evaluation we have had no contact with FAO. It's not fair to be in the same country and not to be improving partner relations – and not to be informed – it is not good practice from the FAO side. After this proposal of a one-year extension, we never heard back officially from FAO, only that the project had been extended by six months. We have not been paid, we are not told what is happening and we cannot submit the report.
– *Interview with respondent.*

82. The issue of poor communication was in part a reflection of the internal turmoil within the project team as amply described in the mid-term evaluation. From the beginning of the project, one of the respondents mentioned that "there were too many conflicts, tensions between project team members." The overwhelming perception of external stakeholders is that they are not being given a voice – "You cannot direct a project as if you are working with children" – and that this comes from the LTO: "who doesn't like to be told when he is wrong. If two coordinators leave because of someone, then there is a problem or it's a personality issue. If he says no, it's no. He has no explanation to give anyone." Terms such as bullying, lack of goodwill and a lack of respect were also brought forward. These strong perceptions had very real, negative impacts on the project and became self-fulfilling prophecies as the high staff turnover experienced by the project illustrates.
83. The impact of the reported conflictual relationship between the Project Technical Coordinator and the LTO on project implementation was amply discussed in the 2019

mid-term evaluation. Responses from the terminal evaluation reaffirmed the historical view, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Internal Project Task Force relationship issues as perceived by stakeholders



Source: NVivo 12 data analysis output, elaborated by the evaluation team.

84. The evaluation team would like to clarify that it believes all actors had the best of intentions. While the mid-term evaluation advocated for a change in the LTO as possibly the fastest way to resolve reported conflicts and allow for project course correction, the responsibility for these conflicts and the fact that they were not promptly addressed is shared by all project team members.
85. There is, however, a need to nuance the conclusions of the mid-term evaluation regarding the technical oversight of the project. Respondents are likely to respond to the external manifestations of the relationships without necessarily understanding the underlying reasons. The PMU at inception was only comprised of a technical coordinator, an assistant and a driver. The workload and rigour imposed by the LTO on the validation of project deliverables resulted in poor relationships and subsequent departures. The first two coordinators¹⁷ were subsequently replaced by the latest (now former) coordinator who was brought in as a biodiversity expert on the project in February 2018.
86. The terms of reference for the Project Technical Coordinator (see Annex 6, numbers 10 and 11) require him/her to provide technical inputs, review project outputs, monitor the technical performance of partners, and supervise the preparation of reports and publications. Considering the complexity and novelty in some areas such as carbon, the Project Technical Coordinator did not necessarily have the expertise to review these documents. Without additional complementary expertise within the PMU to review these documents, the Project Technical Coordinator did not and could not review or provide the technical review required, through no fault of his own, and transmitted these reports directly to the LTO. The LTO raised concerns that either the Project Technical Coordinator was not allocating sufficient time to work on the partner reports and expected the LTO to

¹⁷ Reasons for quitting included low performance, payment issues and that the shortlisted candidates were not always the best choice.

implement their functions or was incompetent.¹⁸ Several communications on 26 June, 10 July, 22 July and November 2018 drew the FAOR's attention to the need to address this situation.

87. Consequently, the aforementioned situation led to delays in the validation of partner reports and their payments for services provided. The time that some partners needed for reviewing documents ranged between 4 and 12 months, e.g. more than 6 months for the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF) reports and 12 months for IITA (FAO, 2020a, p. 39). In fact, in some cases, partners were required to revisit their methodologies or go back to the field and collect complementary data. What emerges is a situation where the Project Technical Coordinator was expecting the LTO to play the Project Technical Coordinator's role because he could not, which the LTO ultimately refused to do. This contributed to the reported tensions and ultimately disserved the project, which would have benefitted from complementary expertise and more flexibility.
88. The FAOR reportedly organized several meetings to address the relationship issue. There had not been much success until 2021, when two additional experts were recruited to join the PMU. In October 2021, the PMU team was reorganized to not only strengthen the effectiveness of delivery but also deescalate the tense relationship between the Project Technical Coordinator and the LTO. It appears that the LTO started to play a more direct role in steering the project to address the perceived failings and competency gaps of the Project Technical Coordinator. This may explain the external perception that the LTO seems to be doing everything when faced with, often invisible to the eyes of external stakeholders, alleged poor performance from the Project Technical Coordinator, structural weaknesses, insufficient technical capability within the PMU and delays in project implementation by partners. All stakeholders involved after the mid-term evaluation agree that project performance significantly improved, and no reports of delays in the validation of partner outputs were brought to the attention of the evaluation team. Had the decision to reinforce and reorganize the team been taken decisively and earlier, the project could have achieved more and within a reasonable time.
89. The only person with the power to make ultimate decisions based on the performance of the Project Technical Coordinator and the reported role of the LTO in the overall performance of the project is the FAOR. The FAO's matrix of responsibilities articulates the roles and responsibilities of key project roles, such as the FAOR, the Funding Liaison Officer and the LTO. The perception within the project team and Country Office was that as the LTO combined the role of LTO and of Regional Forestry Lead, he was not answerable to anyone but himself, as highlighted by some of the quotes above. The LTO's expertise is, by design, separate from oversight by the FAOR. As a result, the FAOR is unable to take corrective action in case of technical issues. The FAOR's purview is strictly administrative, and the LTO's is strictly technical. Project implementation relied on their active collaboration. When this collaboration is no longer active, the project leadership breaks down. Reasons included fear of political ramifications, a sense that certain parties did not buy in to the need for a technical coordinator which, in turn, muddled the roles and responsibilities within the team, and the role of the LTO as designed in which no technical

¹⁸ The evaluation stresses that it cannot judge the alleged incompetence and that the FAOR does not share any assessment in this regard. However, the hierarchical nature of the LTO/Chief Technical Advisor functions must be reflected in the evaluation. Ultimately, the Chief Technical Advisor's capacity was what it was, and the internal resources within FAO to address whatever perceived gaps were not found until October 2021, as seen further in the report.

oversight or checks and balances exist. The system has no clear redress mechanism for internal team disagreements combined with an unwillingness to modify team composition, as was the case in this project where the FAOR, the LTO and project management teams disagreed. It also appears that the gravity of these conflicts and their impact on the project were largely downplayed in the annual reports to donors. Without close monitoring of the underlying reasons for underachievement at the FAO regional office level, beyond the administrative performance indicators that are closely monitored, there is limited visibility of the issues at stake. Consequently, decision-making was delayed and the situation was allowed to fester.¹⁹

90. This situation created a general feeling of mistrust and disagreement among stakeholders on different matters. This was seen in the validation of outputs from national partners and consultants, where there was a perception that the FAO teams did not trust their capacities and consequently acted unilaterally and arbitrarily. Feedback on project deliverables in some cases was extremely late (ranging from between four months to a year in the earlier part of the project). Government actors were often presented with already validated outputs without giving officials the opportunity to comment or provide feedback, creating the feeling that they were merely perfunctory figures in the project. Others stated that this gave the impression that “this was an FAO project.” This led to disengagement and a lack of interest from government officials and partners. Disagreements between FAO and the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife on the funding of field monitoring activities have been an ongoing issue of this project, ultimately delaying the validation of forest management plans. Earlier disagreements on project terminologies and the unwillingness of FAO to adjust led to delays of more than a year in project implementation. This set the stage for the current, tentatively collaborative environment.
91. The issue of budget also highlights the deficiencies in foresight and proactivity on the part of the project management team. PIRs revealed that successive action plans underestimated the real costs of crucial activities, such as the revision of forest management plans and the work on carbon, while others were overestimated. According to the estimate made by project partners, the budget required for an optimal revision, in line with legal requirements, is USD 1.3 million – more than three times the USD 404 208 foreseen by the project. A minimal review, that is, without an EIA for the 17 council forests, would cost USD 1 million, which is still more than twice the planned budget. According to the 1994 law and its implementing decree (Republic of Cameroon, 1994), changing the objectives of a management plan requires revision (FAO, 2020a). This questions the ability of the technical and financial teams to manage the project, allocate sufficient funds towards planned activities and abide by the Republic of Cameroon’s national regulations. It took until the mid-term evaluation to suggest a budget revision, and even thereafter, the revisions tended to be cosmetic. Potential project partners were often presented with unrealistic budgets and requested to work towards budgets as opposed to the other way around. This was the case in the recruitment of carbon experts, as well as in the negotiations with OCD, Monitortrust and IUCN as shared and confirmed by interviews carried out during the final evaluation and revision of contracts/LOAs.

¹⁹ The system in place for all regional-level monitoring, whether administrative, personal or other, relies on reporting by the FAOR. In this case, the FAOR was a party to the conflict, rendering it ineffective. Please see Recommendation 6.

92. Contract management has proved problematic. For instance, the carbon and communications experts were not utilized to their full potential following delays in the implementation of some project activities. For the carbon expert, for instance, the delays in the analysis of soil samples at IITA meant that the expertise was not fully utilized. By the time the soil results were released, the expert's contract had expired. He left the project and other consultants were brought in. For the communications expert, delays in delivery led to the member of personnel being reallocated to other assignments within FAO. Similarly, the forest management expert was asked to leave after nine months on the project, on 20 June 2022, just when a further extension was approved. The biodiversity expert and former technical coordinator also left the project in June 2022. The question therefore remains: who on the team will review the revised forest management plans and the reports from carbon consultants (once written) before passing them on to the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife for validation, as explained previously.
93. There was a disparity in the ability of project partners to deliver on their LOAs throughout the project. CTFC, which originated the project idea, did not possess the necessary financial management systems to deliver on the project. This subsequently led to FAO being designated the implementation agency for the project. This marked the beginning of disagreements because CTFC had expected to play a more prominent role. Other partners such as Cameroon Ecology (Cam-Eco) struggled to deliver on their mandates because of insufficient direction on their actions and perceived weaknesses in the quality of reports submitted for validation. Additionally, it emerged that some stakeholders that had promised cofinancing were unable to mobilize the funds to implement their activities (42 percent mobilized per Annex 4). There was no process to vet or monitor the ability of partners to deliver on their cofinancing commitments. The same applies to the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife, which subsequently failed to deliver on its reforestation and restoration goals. It is also important to highlight that the COVID-19 pandemic had a minor effect on field activities considering few activities were being implemented during the lockdowns.
94. The aforementioned failures also impacted the level of stakeholder engagement and participation in the project. The project did not have an M&E officer, which meant that data could not be collected and analysed for decision-making. An implication of this, for instance, is the fact that the project does not provide any evidence about capacity baselines for communities trained and whether the capacity building achieved meaningful change apart from the anecdotal evidence collected by this evaluation. Significant gaps between MA&D training cycles and the subsequent lack of support, which created a feeling of disappointment, have already been reported. The involvement of CFCs and PFCs played a very positive role at the local level to disseminate the trainings to communities. Local council officials – especially newly elected mayors – stated that they were interested in the project but had not been engaged, while the forestry administration remained mostly side-lined after the mid-term evaluation in 2019. There was a general perception of dissatisfaction in the level of participation among the initial partners, while those who held current LOAs were obviously appreciative of their engagement. There was no evidence of external coherence of this project or synergistic efforts with other ongoing initiatives and processes in the country related to SFM, biodiversity conservation and climate change. Interestingly, even actions led by FAO such as the FAO-European Union (EU) FLEGT programme cited in the project document were not capitalized on, particularly in independent forest monitoring. IITA's Congo Basin Institute, ICRAF's agroforestry expertise, Cam-Eco's expertise on gender, the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and

Sustainable Development's work on the country's NDCs and REDD+ initiatives, and curriculum development with local and national universities, among others, were not capitalized on. This is an unfortunate missed opportunity for sustainability.

3.2.7 Overall progress towards the delivery of project outputs and objectives

95. The project had five outcomes, ten outputs and 36 activities. The achievement of the project outcomes and objectives is overall mixed. Outcomes 1 and 3 are **moderately unsatisfactory**, while Outcomes 2 and 5 are **moderately satisfactory**. Outcome 4 is rated **highly unsatisfactory**. Based on activities implemented with GEF funding (Outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 5), the project is **moderately satisfactory** and on track to achieve a satisfactory rating if the recommendations proposed are addressed before the not to exceed project implementation period. However, when the assessment includes Outcome 4, the overall project is rated as **moderately unsatisfactory**. The achievement of project objectives was affected by the following: an insufficient allocation of budgets to critical activities (Outcomes 1 and 3); delays; internal relationship challenges within the FAO Project Task Force (PTF) and the PMU; inadequate internal redress mechanisms; limited partner capacities; non-materialization of cofinancing; and a failure to ensure external project coherence with national processes on SFM, biodiversity conservation, and carbon monitoring and reporting. Subject to implementation of terminal evaluation recommendations, the achievement of the environmental and development objectives is **moderately satisfactory**.

3.3 Efficiency

Evaluation question 3. To what extent have the project's management and operational delivery been efficient and have quality results been delivered on time?

Evaluation subquestion. Were the human and material resources sufficient in quality and quantity, and how did this inform delivery?

Finding 11. The project was not sufficiently staffed in terms of number and quality. This was subsequently mitigated with the recruitment of national consultants to complement the PMU team. However, management of the consultants has been suboptimal.

96. The efficiency of this project is **moderately unsatisfactory** for many of the reasons already described in Section 3.2.6. The staff turnover observed at the beginning of the project led to significant delays in the operationalization of the project compounded by inadequate human resources. The project did not have an M&E officer and the planned socioeconomist and gender specialists were never recruited. Staff shortages and power dynamics already discussed meant that it took longer to review and validate partner outputs – sometimes up to a year. This was subsequently addressed following the mid-term evaluation with the addition of two experts to the PMU, but pervasive collaborative challenges limited the team's productivity. External consultants commissioned to work on the project were hardly utilized to their full potential.
97. The project has been extended repeatedly due to poor performance and delivery. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic did not overly affect the project as there were few ongoing field activities. The PSC meetings were effectively held, albeit with delays. The last meeting took place in September 2020, and as of June 2022 no further meetings have been held. Action plans, budgets and recommendations emerging from these meetings have not been fully implemented.

Evaluation subquestion. To what extent was the project budget realistic and match funding mechanisms realistic, and how did this impact project delivery?

Finding 12. The project budget was unrealistic with high dependence on cofinancing from national partners, which did not materialize. This impacted the implementation of the project negatively in that planned activities could not be realized by national partners, including the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife. FAO operates a robust financial management system, but the lack of a long-term project-specific procurement plan and internal guidelines led to misunderstandings between partners and high transaction costs in the management of contracts.

98. The global project budget and cofinancing arrangements were not realistic. For instance, budgets for key activities such as the revision of forest management plans and the work on carbon were initially underestimated and led to significant delays. Most project activities were implemented with GEF subsidizing as the proposed match funding did not materialize. Consequently, project implementation has been negatively affected. The implementation of Outcome 4 under the responsibility of the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife is **highly unsatisfactory**. Responsibilities for field monitoring and supervision by the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development have not been realized due to lack of match funding. In terms of budget management, partners found the procedures applied on this project unclear and complicated. Upon request, the project team could not produce project-specific guidelines on financial management as shared with partners, many of whom did not have prior experience with FAO or the GEF funding procedures. Partners were referred to FAO's online handbooks while intentional, initial open communication could have prevented the frustrations, mistakes and at least some of the delays incurred. Note that this issue was already raised in the mid-term evaluation (FAO, 2020a, p. 61, paragraph 82).
99. FAO has a robust financial management system. The procurement of services generally followed a competitive selection process. The lack of a long-term procurement plan for the project meant that the timing of procurements did not always align with resource needs on the ground. The case in point is the fact that while another no-cost extension of the project was being requested in June 2022, the SFM and carbon expert contracts were being terminated. Small and dispersed contracts were awarded throughout, which increased the transaction costs of monitoring the different LOAs and contracts. Some of the contracts with external consultants were poorly managed due to internal failings within FAO. The case of soil samples has already been discussed. The budget line for consultants has been overspent while the contracts budget line remains largely underutilized. This is due to the fact that most of the management plan revision activities were carried out by the consultants and not by the partners through LOAs, as initially envisaged. After carrying out a call for proposals and analysing the offers received, it was considered not cost-effective to go through institutions and LOAs with limited added value as opposed to directly contracting qualified experts.

Evaluation subquestion. How did the project adapt to an evolving external context, and how did this affect implementation?

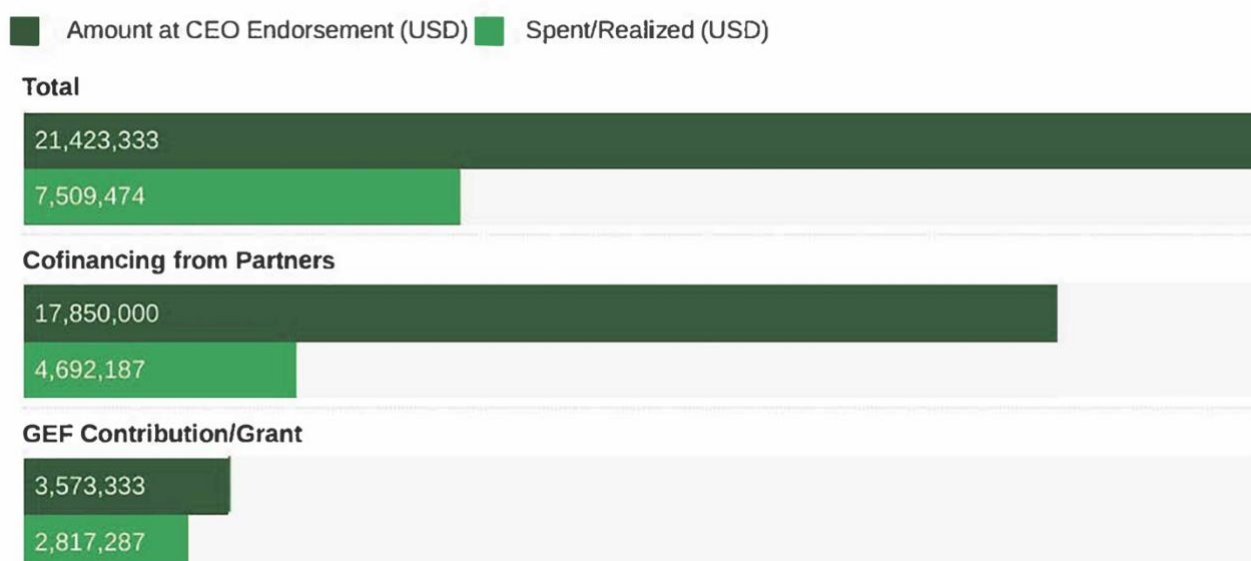
Finding 13. The project responded to delivery challenges by changing the institutional partners with national consultants. This helped to drive project implementation between June 2021 and June 2022. The final push to complete project activities was done with scant engagement with external project stakeholders, including partners such as the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development. This puts the

ownership and appropriation of gains at risk. Thus, the adaptation of the project to the evolving external context is **moderately unsatisfactory**.

100. The strategy of the project team to divert from institutional partners before the mid-term evaluation to work with individual consultants has been questioned. There was an argument following the slow start of the project to engage many more external partners and individuals who could demonstrate their ability to prefinance activities. New partners were brought in, but the issue of delays in the submission of deliverables was not eradicated. In any case, based on the progress report provided by FAO, significant progress was achieved between June 2021 and June 2022 because of the new partnerships developed. The evaluation team did not access the outputs delivered by partners during this period and cannot confirm their quality and effectiveness. While there was a push for the achievement of outputs, external communication and engagement with other project partners suffered, affecting the ownership and future scalability of the project.
101. Figure 3 presents findings from the 2022 PIR, which shows that USD 2 817 287 out of USD 3 573 333 mobilized from the GEF was spent by 30 June 2022. This represents an expenditure rate of 79 percent compared to 30 percent in September 2020. It also shows a 30 percent rate of mobilization of cofinancing from national partners. The overall expenditure rate (the GEF and cofunding spent) of the project is 40 percent.

Figure 3. Level of budget realization

[Level of budget realization]



Source: Elaborated by the evaluation team based on figures provided by the project team during PIR 2022 drafting.

102. The efficiency of resource use for GEF funding was determined by comparing the rate of implementation from the results framework and the expenditure levels as of 30 June 2022. The completion rate is obtained by assessing the median²⁰ rate of achievement of indicators (100) and the expenditure rate of 79. This provides an efficiency of resource use rate of 0.79, which corresponds to a situation where the project achieved at least half of its

²⁰ The median rate is used because of the wide gaps in the results achievement rates (ranging from 0 to 200). Using an average would skew the findings.

expected outputs according to the available budget (a low efficiency and effective project). When the overall project outcomes are compared with the overall spending of 40 percent, the project achieves a score of 0.4, representing a highly inefficient and ineffective project.²¹

3.3.1 Overall assessment of project efficiency

103. The rating of project efficiency is **moderately unsatisfactory**. The project started off with a high turnover of Project Technical Coordinators. The PMU was insufficiently staffed in terms of numbers and quality. This contributed to the delays experienced by the project, which were subsequently addressed through the recruitment of two additional experts and the reallocation of roles within the PMU. The project also changed strategy from working with institutional partners to hiring individual consultants. Such a move helped to drive implementation on the ground but increased the transaction costs due to the management of small individual contracts. Only 30 percent of planned cofinancing was effectively mobilized, leading to the **unsatisfactory** delivery of outcomes, particularly Outcome 4. The efficiency resource use rate is estimated at 0.79 when outcomes achieved with GEF funding are considered and falls to 0.4 when additional cofinancing is included.

3.4 Sustainability

Evaluation question 4. Are project achievements likely to live beyond the project's initial period?

Finding 14. The project was successful in training individual local council authorities, council forest management units and communities in a wide range of SFM, biodiversity conservation and carbon management techniques. Evidence that may emerge from the analysis of soil samples and existing methodological guidelines represent the framework for project sustainability. If approved by the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife, the draft management plans will provide the necessary institutional framework required by local councils for SFM, biodiversity conservation and carbon management.

104. Capacity strengthening was a central part of this project. Significant resources were expended on the training of council authorities, PFCs, CFCs and local communities in a wide range of subjects linked to the sustainable management of forests, biodiversity and carbon. Anecdotal evidence shows that community members tested their learning by processing NTFP and its marketing. Evaluation participants reported how their awareness of alternative income-generating activities had led them to explore other livelihoods away from illegal timber exploitation. Communities were more aware of the multiple benefits from their forests beyond timber.
105. The restructuring and training of the PFCs and CFCs also strengthened the institutional framework for the sustainable management of resources in the target councils. Evaluation respondents revealed that through the skills obtained they had increased the level of surveillance and monitoring of illegal forest activities: reports and the denunciation of forest illegalities to authorities now occur.
106. The project also produced training materials, technical guidelines and research on the management of carbon in council forests. All remain viable beyond the project's implementation period. The management plans, if validated, provide the legal and institutional tools required for future sustainable management of council forest resources.

²¹ This finding supports the overall rating of moderately unsatisfactory attributed by the evaluation team, given the multiple challenges and extensions realized. The rate of physical achievement is a global indicator that does not address underlying implementation issues.

The German International Cooperation (GIZ) will continue working on four council forests beyond the project implementation period, building on the gains achieved in this action. The project faces several key risks that are likely to impact the viability and continuity of project achievements.

3.4.1 Sustainability risks

Evaluation subquestion. What factors are likely to impact the sustainability of project achievements?

Finding 15. In project implementation, ownership, appropriation and continuity have been hampered by financial, institutional and social risks that, if not mitigated, will derail project sustainability. The sustainability of the project is **moderately likely**.

3.4.2 Financial risks

107. One of the key objectives of this project was to diversify the sources of income for local councils through access to carbon- and biodiversity-related funding. The revision and validation of the forest management plans was expected to lay the groundwork for increased incomes. Unfortunately, after six years of implementation, these management plans have yet to be completed and validated, jeopardizing the adoption of the paradigmatic shift expected from mayors in the management of the forest resources. In fact, interviews with mayors revealed that while they were happy to try the new forest management approach, they were concerned that in the short term this could reduce the amount of income available from the exploitation of forests. It must be noted that for most of the council forests, there are established partnerships between companies and councils for the exploitation of certain parts of the forests. These partners have not been involved in the revision of the management plans. Even if these management plans are validated, they might not align with existing exploitation contracts, putting the application of the dispositions outlined in the management plans at risk.
108. A key hypothesis of this project involved councils increasing access to revenue through the annual forest revenue from the Ministry of Finance. As part of the 2015 budget of the Republic of Cameroon, the Ministry of Finance issued the circular 004/MINFI/DGI/LRI/L of 28 January 2015 which redefined access to the forest royalties. This circular stipulates that the 10 percent that local communities used to receive as part of the redistribution of forest royalties is now destined for the Ministry of Finance officials and local councils, that is, 5 percent for each. This loss of income for councils does not promote or support the financial sustainability of the project, considering that these revenues are hardly used for local economic development projects. The project provided training on alternative income-generating activities for forest-dependent communities. As amply illustrated, none of the business development plans has been implemented due to a lack of promised financial and material support from the project. Without a mechanism to revitalize and provide start-up and incubation support to these groups, the development objective of the project is unlikely to be achieved.
109. While council officials, CFCs and PFCs have been trained, there is still significant need in terms of qualified staff, particularly around carbon management and biodiversity conservation within councils. Budgets were initially set aside to support these groups, but none materialized in the end. This means that despite the trainings received, they would not be able to play their role. If councils do not have income to recruit qualified staff to lead on these aspects, it is unlikely that the implementation of biodiversity conservation and carbon monitoring will be effective. Councils need revenues to acquire bikes and

necessary forest monitoring equipment and to cover the costs of operating biodiversity and carbon databases. The financial model for the revised forest management plans remains unclear to mayors. One of the mayors asked what the compensation for loss of income in the short term might be. Another stated: "I fully agree that there should be an increase in the percentages for biodiversity conservation and for carbon sequestration if there will be a quid pro quo of other mechanisms to offset the loss of income." This sentiment was observed in interviews with all mayors and could suggest that even if councils continue to obtain income from timber exploitation, there is no commitment to use part of this for biodiversity conservation and carbon management. It all sounds theoretical to authorities at this stage.

110. There is no follow-up project, but there are already disagreements within FAO and between partners on what a future project (if there is one at all) might look like and how it might be structured. No synergies were created with the REDD+ process in the country. Such engagement could have opened pathways for councils to access REDD+ funding. There was neither an exit strategy nor efforts to strengthen the ability of councils to mobilize biodiversity and climate-related international finance. Fortunately, in four of the councils, GIZ secured further funding for its activities in the area, including work on council forests. Without this commitment from GIZ for these 20 percent of council forests, financial sustainability would be unlikely. The evaluation team considers that financial sustainability is **moderately likely**.

3.4.3 Institutional risks

111. The turnover and instability of elected council officials has been identified as a key risk for the sustainability of this project. For instance, municipal elections held in 2018 and 2020 led to changes at the helm for many target council forests. Those who were elected in the 2020 elections were not sensitized or significantly involved in the project. Bringing them to understand and strengthen buy-in can only benefit the project. It must be said that each mayor comes in with their own agenda and might not always follow or respect commitments taken by the leaders before them. Furthermore, and outside the strict purview of this evaluation, the issue of corruption and fraud in the allocation of forest management permits and the lack of capacities within councils to tackle the issue were also raised. It is worth noticing that corruption in the council forest area is the fourth most important factor cited nationwide (Republic of Cameroon, 2020). The evaluation would like to highlight that further communication with incumbent mayors in an effort to secure continuous buy-in of the project and its intended impacts is a prerequisite to ensure the project's success.
112. The evaluation team identified that the project team had failed to bring partners and government officials into the delivery of the project after September 2020. As highlighted, partners felt uninvolved and disengaged with the project. Disagreements and distrust between FAO, national partners and government agencies did not help to build ownership of the project. This all led to the perception that it was an FAO project rather than a government-led project funded by the GEF. The central risk here is a lack of ownership and appropriation by government partners. A key example is the design of databases for carbon and biodiversity monitoring that were supposed to be hosted at the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development. The evaluation revealed that, as of 30 June 2022, neither of the ministries had been involved in the selection of consultants nor the design of databases. Despite two

meetings (February/March and June 2022) reported by FAO, the focal points and staff in both ministries reported that they were unaware of plans to set up such databases. The same applies to the recruitment of national partners to support the revision of forest management plans. The Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development were not involved in the monitoring of activities in the field.²² At the time of the evaluation, no plans had been agreed upon or validated. The project participated in activities to revise the Republic of Cameroon's NDC for COP26 by presenting FAO initiatives related to the NDC, including the council forest project with its carbon and biodiversity inventory activities. It also participated in the Readiness Programme funded by the Green Climate Fund with its activity to strengthen the National Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory System of Cameroon (*Système d'Inventaire National des Émissions de Gaz à Effet de Serre [Sni-Ges]*). Project teams took part in the following meetings:

- i. workshop to launch the review process of the Republic of Cameroon's NDC, Yaoundé, 27–28 May 2021;
 - ii. partner coordination meeting for the update of the Republic of Cameroon's NDC, 6 May 2021;
 - iii. restitution and validation workshop of the studies carried out as part of the revision of the Republic of Cameroon NDC, Douala, 24–27 August 2021; and
 - iv. restitution and validation workshop of the results of the study on the modelling of greenhouse gas emission projections within the revision of the Republic of Cameroon's NDC, Mbalmayo, 6–7 September 2022.
113. Despite FAO leading the FAO FLEGT Programme, the project was not anchored to FLEGT VPA processes. It also failed to leverage the comparative advantage of many partners. For instance, the leadership of Cam-Eco has some of the best gender specialists in the country. However, plans to develop a gender strategy were never implemented and gender issues were treated on an ad hoc basis. At design, the involvement of the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife staff and the CTFC at the local level was expected to ensure the flow of technical support to the councils beyond the project. Regrettably, the relation between FAO and the CTFC has collapsed: CTFC leaders say they remain open to discuss the sustainability of the project, but there is no such evidence from the FAO side. An institution such as ACFCAM/CTFC, at the origin of the project and with strong institutional anchoring in council forests, has not been consulted or involved in the planning of the exit strategy. This is a missed opportunity. In fact, there has not been any steering meeting nor workshop to bring together all stakeholders and discuss the project's future. There are different trends emerging at FAO – one group is already discussing the possibility of a follow-up project with the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development instead of the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife. At the same time, others are categorical that there will not be a second phase structured in the same way, involving FAO or elements of the current project team. Unclear details are to be expected at this stage. However, this

²² After the September 2020 steering committee meeting, the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife proposed a plan for the activities it was to carry out as part of its LOA. On the one hand, several exchanges took place on this draft LOA between FAO and the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife. On the other hand, there were internal exchanges between the project's technical coordination and the LTO. The LTO's stand on the content of the LOA activities was to remove all activities with potential conflicts of interest. This led to the LTO's proposal to retain only field monitoring activities for an amount of USD 8 000 instead of the USD 92 104 requested by the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife. The failure to reach a consensus on the amount of the LOA did not facilitate the monitoring of the activities on the field.

evaluation aims to highlight that while the details remain unclear, the need to continue supporting council forests remains apparent to all actors, as evidenced by the section on relevance.

114. The replicability and scalability of this project is in doubt. Time was not enough for various trainings to be fully embedded or internalized. At design, it was clarified that the partnership built between government agencies and the association of council forests in the Republic of Cameroon, and national and international non-governmental organizations would facilitate the exchange and scaling up of successful management approaches for biodiversity conservation and the enhancement of carbon stocks. The breakdown of this relationship did not allow this to happen. A proposed review of the fiduciary capabilities planned midway through the project was never implemented, and no capacity strengthening support was provided for the organization to play its role more effectively. The project has failed in documenting, communicating and ensuring the visibility of its actions to national, regional and global platforms. The project's communications strategy has not been fully implemented. The newly recruited capitalization expert may support project results for a wider public. Institutional risks are deemed **moderately likely**.

3.4.4 Social risks

115. Project implementation has contributed to tarnishing the image of FAO and led to a loss of goodwill from partners, council leadership and communities. Internal conflicts and the inability of FAO to address the issues have raised concerns about the effectiveness of the organization and its internal systems. Unmet promises made to councils and communities resulted in disappointment and a feeling of being let down by the project. For government officials, there was a perception of FAO personnel not being accountable to the government through arbitrariness and unilateral decision-making at different levels. The result of this situation is seen in partners expressing strong reservations about working with FAO on a future phase of the project.
116. The management of forests is characterized by practices of poor governance and corruption in the Republic of Cameroon, suggesting that revenues from forest exploitation or other uses are highly unlikely to ultimately benefit communities on the ground (FAO, 2014; Chatham House, 2020; VPA Africa – Latin America Facility, 2022; Le Rural, 2022). In fact, according to the 2020 report by the National Anti-Corruption Commission, denunciations of corruption in the area of forestry royalties are ranked fourth, with 110 denunciations received by the commission representing a share of 3.24 percent of all complaints received for the year (Republic of Cameroon, 2020). This does not support project sustainability. Social risks are deemed **moderately likely**.

3.4.5 Environmental risks

117. This project was partly designed to tackle some of the underlying causes of the unsustainable management of council forest resources. However, the risks posed by climate change, forest fires, illegal deforestation and degradation are likely to continue as the pressures on forests increase due to national deforestation drivers. As of June 2022, 9 out of the 17 target councils have received tools such as laptops and GPS trackers that could support forest monitoring, yet much needed mobility resources are lacking (see Appendix 8 for details; as of October 2022, 16 councils had received the equipment as promised). Council forests are likely to continue experiencing these environmental risks. The environmental sustainability risks are deemed **moderately likely**.

3.4.6 Overall assessment of project sustainability

118. Project sustainability is rated as **moderately likely**. The evaluators assess that the skills acquired by various stakeholders are likely to be applied beyond the project's initial period. Various technical guides, methodologies and training materials could be applied in SFM, biodiversity conservation and carbon management subject to the approval of revised forest management plans and the operationalization of biodiversity and carbon databases. The continuation of the project gains is affected by financial, sociopolitical, institutional and environmental risks.

3.5 Factors affecting performance

Evaluation question 5. To what extent did the M&E design and implementation, and management and supervision mechanisms, affect project performance?

3.5.1 M&E system

3.5.1.1 M&E design

Evaluation subquestion. To what extent did the M&E design affect project performance?

Finding 16. The project M&E system at endorsement required revision. This revision was effectively implemented through an operational plan in October 2018. The project indicators were overall specific, measurable and time-bound, but only 67 percent were relevant. The revised plan appeared cumbersome and impracticable in the absence of an assigned M&E officer. The budget appeared sufficient for the scale of the project. The M&E design is assessed as **moderately satisfactory**.

119. The product document provided a detailed presentation of the project M&E framework at endorsement. The hierarchy of objectives in terms of vertical and horizontal logic were generally sound as presented in the project's results framework. The M&E roles and responsibilities and the M&E routine activities were detailed in terms of data collection, reporting and usage of M&E information for decision-making. M&E activities were to follow FAO and the GEF M&E policies and guidelines. The M&E plan was budgeted at USD 133 850 (GEF funding). It was made clear at endorsement that the operational plan would be revised in a participatory manner at inception. The project's M&E operational system was expected to be established within the first six months of project implementation. While this was not done within this timeframe, the operational plan was finally developed with the support of a national M&E consultant, David Ngoh Essoh, in October 2018.
120. An analysis of the results framework is presented in Annex 5. It shows that, overall, 83 percent of all stated indicators and targets were specific and measurable, while only 67 percent were relevant. All of them, however, were measurable and time-bound. The key issue with relevance is that indicators were not suitable for the level of the targeted objective. For the development objective (improving the livelihoods of local communities by promoting sustainable forest-based income-generating activities), the target was "number of people trained". For Outcome 2, instead of focusing on the improved behaviours based on strengthened capacities, the indicators focused on percent improvements in capacity scores (though not measured).
121. The operational plan, however, was detailed in terms of methodological approach, roles and responsibilities and the various M&E routines. The day-to-day monitoring of the project implementation was the responsibility of the PMU charged with the preparation

and implementation of annual work plans, budgets and six-month project progress reports. The roles of the PSC, national coordination, FAO technical personnel and the Budget Holder (BH) were clearly articulated regarding oversight, the organization of field monitoring and missions, the validation of annual plans and budgets, and the preparation of annual PIRs for donors. Council officials also had a role to play in terms of monitoring and reporting on the progress of activities on the ground, regular collection of information on biodiversity, and forest and carbon management via established databases. The M&E plan also included the implementation of both a mid-term and a terminal evaluation, and documentation of good practices and their dissemination. Overall, the operational plan proved highly academic (a tick box exercise), complex and cumbersome (FAO and GEF, 2020). One of the respondents stated that the plan "was technically sound but not applicable."

3.5.1.2 M&E implementation

Evaluation subquestion. To what extent did the M&E implementation, as well as the management and supervision mechanisms, affect project performance?

Finding 17. The M&E plan was neither revised on time nor implemented as planned. Field monitoring and supervision missions, and steering committee meetings were held, and mid-term and terminal evaluations were done, but the recommendations were not implemented in full. M&E implementation is considered **moderately satisfactory**.

122. As cited, the project M&E system looked good on paper but was not practical. As stated in the 2020 PIR, "the M&E system was cumbersome and not easy to use, rendering the monitoring of slow progress difficult and providing project managers with little information to act upon" (FAO and GEF, 2020). A project of this scale did not have a dedicated M&E officer. The role of the Project Technical Coordinator included aspects of project monitoring. However, given the technical challenges and complexities of this project, this coordinator was unable to fulfil the role. The 17 target councils are geographically dispersed, the data collection needs complex, and project partners and consultants were expected to play different roles and required someone to coordinate the data collection and analysis. The amount allocated to M&E from GEF funding was available, but the expected M&E cofinancing from the government did not materialize. This limited the effectiveness of government monitoring and supervision in the field.
123. The project team and the LTO organized field missions to assess progress on the ground. The most recent was organized between 16 May and 3 June 2022. The objective of this mission was to evaluate the technical effectiveness and quality of activities implemented. It also aimed to attest to the technical conformity of activities implemented in line with the LOAs signed with partners, in light of project closure on 30 June 2022. In hindsight, it would have been a unique opportunity for the lessons learned to be compiled by the communications expert and to also document progress on the ground and capitalize on the results. This could still take place considering the project's latest extension.
124. The project organized its statutory steering committee meetings where project action plans, budgets and strategic direction and guidance were provided to project teams. It emerged that these meetings were often rife with tension as different parties tried to maintain or defend their positions and interests. Most respondents felt that while these meetings were helpful in terms of information about project progress and challenges, recommendations emerging from them were rarely implemented in full. As highlighted in the mid-term evaluation, there was a perception that FAO decided on which recommendations to apply and which not to, leading to a sense of frustration from

partners. Interviews with participants confirmed this perception and that these meetings were characterized by walkouts, power games and blame avoidance. This situation impacted the project negatively.

125. Progress implementation reports were prepared and submitted to donors as required. The mid-term evaluation was effectively implemented, but not all recommendations have been fully addressed nor have they been effective, as seen in Table 1. The project's terminal evaluation was effectively commissioned.

Evaluation subquestion. Were the recommendations provided by the mid-term evaluation implemented, and what was the impact of this implementation (or lack of it) in the implementation of the project?

126. The following table presents actions taken in response to the mid-term evaluation. Table 1 shows that out of the five recommendations, two recommendations on budget (2 and 3) have been implemented, two others initiated (1 and 5) and one not implemented (4).

Table 1. Mid-term evaluation recommendations and actions undertaken in response

Mid-term evaluation recommendations	Actions undertaken
<p>Recommendation 1. FAO, through the country representative and in collaboration with the government, must re-establish a climate of trust and collaboration between the various partners of the project: the PMU, the National Project Coordinator, the ACFCAM and the implementing and cofinancing partners.</p>	<p>A session was effectively organized to brief partners on FAO-GEF procedures in October 2017. However, the project itself did not develop or disseminate specific guidelines for the project.</p> <p>A collaboration framework was to be put in place, including the Support Program for the Forests Environment Sector Program (GIZ-ProPSFE), the Debt Reduction and Development Contract (C2D), the Special Fund for Intermunicipal Equipment and Intervention (FEICOM), the National Community-driven Development Programme, the CTFC, etc. to hold quarterly meetings and/or to contribute to and capitalize on the project when needed. Stakeholder meetings and the project technical consultative mechanism (PTCM) frameworks were not implemented. The evaluation team only found evidence of synergistic efforts with GIZ and FEICOM.</p> <p>On the matter of clarity in the terms of reference, the newly awarded LOAs provide more details in terms of deliverables, payment schedules and obligations.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2. FAO, in consultation with the GEF, should carry out a budgetary revision to enable the planned forest management plans to be implemented.</p> <p>If this revision cannot be decided and made effective one year before the end of the project, then proceed with an extension of the project to achieve the results.</p>	<p>No formal budget revision was undertaken. However, concerns remained that the revision did not extend available funds to cover all management plans in the 17 council forests to be revised. However, cost savings from the contracts budget line to the tune of USD 158 528 have enabled FAO to hire consultants to carry out activities planned to be conducted through contracts with implementing partners. Notwithstanding, this represents only 12 percent of the amount required to perform the comprehensive review recommended by the mid-term evaluation.</p> <p>Other key budget lines linked to contracts and consultants did not meet the same expected level of attention.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3. The steering committee, in consultation with FAO,</p>	<p>The action plan required completing the activities of the project and was developed in line with the revised budget. This was effectively approved by</p>

Mid-term evaluation recommendations	Actions undertaken
should make decisions – especially on the proposed budget revision (Recommendation 2) in order to ensure the results of the project.	the PSC of September 2020 that requested a one-year no-cost extension. The action plan was not followed, so the budget revision was not implemented. A change of strategy led to overspending on consultants while the contracts budget line remains underspent. The government requested a one-year extension in December 2021 and FAO decided on only a six-month extension. At the time of this evaluation, an official response as to why only six months were approved had yet to be shared with the government. Of note, days before this evaluation’s end to its field data collection phase, a new six-month no-cost extension was requested by the FAO Country Office and approved.
Recommendation 4. FAO should improve its internal project management system and processes with particular emphasis on creating a healthy, collaborative and non-confrontational working environment.	The recommendation to bring in a P3- or P4-level consultant to work on the review and validation of project outputs was not approved by the steering committee. Two new experts on carbon and forest management were added to the team. To address the conflictual working environment and role overlaps, an internal reorganization was implemented in October 2021. So far, this has had mixed results. Crucially, the role of Project Technical Coordinator was eliminated and its functions redistributed. A new role in the administration and operational management of the project was introduced. The lines of accountability within the project remain unclear, leading to silo working, demotivation and dissatisfaction in some areas.
Recommendation 5. FAO must, through the PMU, capitalize on all the achievements of the project, put them in synergy with the interventions of other partners on council forests and disseminate them to sensitize and support political decision-makers, communal leaders, forest operators, development actors and beneficiaries in a perspective of sustainability of the achievements.	At the time of this evaluation, the capitalization expert had just been recruited (May 2022) and work on documenting project experiences had not started. However, some project outputs, such as training reports, have been edited by the project communications consultant and distributed by project teams during field visits. The project has not been successful in its documentation of good practices, knowledge management and engagement with external stakeholders, as set out in the project’s communications strategy.

Source: FAO. 2020. *Mid-term evaluation of the project “Sustainable management of forests (SMF) placed under the authority of Cameroonian municipalities”*. Rome; and FAO. 2022. Final evaluation team analysis based on PIRs and stakeholder interviews.

3.5.1.3 Overall assessment of project M&E design and implementation

127. Overall M&E design and implementation is considered **moderately satisfactory**. The M&E at design was **globally satisfactory** and needed revision during the project inception period. This was done two years later, but the operational plan was complex and impracticable. While sufficient budget was allocated, no M&E personnel was recruited and at the time of the evaluation, planned actions to document good practices or lessons learned had not taken place. The mid-term evaluation was effectively implemented, but recommendations have not been fully applied. The terminal evaluation was also commissioned and this report provides the evidence of progress made towards achieving the project’s objectives, its challenges and lessons learned.

3.5.2 Quality of implementation

Evaluation subquestion. To what extent did FAO provide project identification, concept preparation, appraisal, preparation, approval and start-up, monitoring, and supervision (technical, administrative and operational)?

Finding 18. The project idea originated from ACFCAM/CTFC. Because of fiduciary weaknesses, FAO was designated to serve as implementing agency. Subsequent non-validation of the project document by CTFC and national stakeholders led to flaws being pertuated by FAO. This caused significant delays at start-up and grievances carried throughout implementation.

3.5.2.1 Project identification, preparation, approval and start-up

128. Within the GEF partnership, GEF agencies are involved in activities related to a project's identification; concept preparation; appraisal; preparation of detailed proposal; approval and start-up; oversight; supervision; completion; and evaluation. To assess the performance of GEF agencies, the evaluators assess the quality of implementation as the supervision and backstopping provided by FAO (the BH, the LTO, the Funding Liaison Officer and other PTF members). The evaluators assess how well risks were identified and managed by the GEF.
129. The project idea originated from ACFCAM through its technical unit and the CTFC. ACFCAM is a non-governmental institution created in 2005 to assist local council members with administrative and technical issues related to the creation and management of council forests. The CTFC was created in 2008 to provide technical assistance to councils regarding the development and implementation of forest management plans, the training of council staff on SFM and governance, and the valuation and marketing of timber and NTFP. At design, the organization had been implementing the Support Programme to Council Forests of Cameroon (PAF2C) 2008–2014. This project was therefore intended to build on this experience: reshape the institutional frameworks surrounding council forests and support the contribution of council forests to climate and biodiversity goals while strengthening local capacities for sustainable management. This project idea was endorsed by the Ministry of Environment to be presented for GEF funding.
130. CTFC approached FAO to explore options for collaboration. ACFCAM and FAO collaborated in preparing the grant proposal. Workshops and consultations with stakeholders were organized. The consultations also included missions led by international consultants to potential council forests in order to identify the needs and help shape the full proposal. Box 3, gleaned from the mid-term evaluation, presents the process for design, approval and start-up.

Box 3. Process for design, approval and start-up

The project partners were consulted in June 2014 to consider their comments and suggestions in the final version of the project document. However, the validation of the final project document by FAO was not preceded by a national workshop, which would have identified some of the weaknesses and non-conformities that existed in the document. For example, the project planned to develop management plans in the council forest whereas, in effect and by law, these were to be revised. The costs related to this activity were grossly underestimated, failing to include all the mandatory activities foreseen by the legal procedure and requirements for such revision of management plans.

The terminologies "*Unité Technique Opérationnelle (UTO)*" (Technical Operational Unit) and "*Comité de Protection des Forêts*" (Forest Protection Committee) were wrongly used in the project document, as was the creation of these bodies, which was unnecessary as they already

existed under a different name within the council forest. These problems led to the suspension of some activities, a revision of the terms of reference and delays in the production and validation of reports.

The preparatory analysis for the institutional setup of the project established the leading role to be played by the CTFC drawing from its established experience in the development and strengthening of council forests. Two options were considered: the CTFC or FAO as the implementing agency for the project. FAO as the project's implementing agency was discussed during the project preparation workshop in June 2013, but no final choice was made. In the second option, FAO would implement the project by subcontracting certain activities to national technical organizations as need be. A variant of this second option was to have FAO as the national implementing agency but with increased responsibilities for the CTFC.

The institutional and fiduciary analysis of the CTFC commissioned by FAO in 2013 found weaknesses in the organization and functioning of the CTFC, disqualifying it from a potential role as implementing agency in favour of FAO. The CTFC was nevertheless positioned in the project document as a key implementing partner, when in effect it became a project partner like any other. This institutional setup of the project generated discussions that contributed to the delay at the start of the project and negatively affected the collaboration and trust between FAO, CTFC and ACFCAM.

Source: FAO. 2020. *Mid-term evaluation of the project "Sustainable management of forests (SMF) placed under the authority of Cameroonian municipalities"*. Rome.

131. According to CTFC, the FAOR from headquarters and Libreville came to discuss the two-year stalemate. CTFC let their concerns be known, including the fact that they had designed the project with the mayors. CTFC remains aggrieved as they assert that FAO effectively took over "their" project and failed to deliver on its promises.
132. According to the project document, two years after the start of project implementation, another independent fiduciary assessment of the technical unit of ACFCAM (CTFC) was supposed to have been conducted. The implementation arrangements had to be reviewed based on the results of the second fiduciary assessment. No capacity building plan was put in place to support ACFCAM/CTFC that would address the gaps identified and nurture it to play its role effectively in the long term. In the view of the evaluation team, FAO had a duty to ensure the institutional sustainability of this project.
133. In addition to CTFC, the project identified the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development as executing agencies with the PMU hosted within the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife. The PSC, stakeholder committees and the PTCM were to be established to ensure strategic direction in terms of administration and technical delivery, and to strengthen stakeholder engagement and local ownership at the level of local councils. The failure of the steering committee to play its role effectively and the non-creation of the PTCM and related stakeholder committees led to shortcomings, as discussed in previously.

3.5.2.2 Oversight, supervision, completion and evaluation

Finding 19. FAO ensured oversight and supervision through a PTF and the implementation of mid-term and terminal evaluations complemented by field missions. The effectiveness of this role was tainted by internal governance and accountability challenges within the organization. The overall implementation is **moderately satisfactory**.

134. The role of FAO as the GEF agency was to maintain project oversight to ensure that GEF policies and criteria are adhered to and that the project meets its objectives and achieves the expected outcomes in an efficient and effective manner. The FAOR in the Republic of Cameroon was the BH responsible for the timely operational, administrative and financial management of the project. The BH, working closely with the PMU, the LTO and the Lead Technical Unit, was responsible for:
- i. management of GEF resources in accordance with the project document, approved annual work plans and budgets;
 - ii. procurement of goods and contracting of services for the project and financial reporting in accordance with FAO rules and procedures;
 - iii. preparation of annual/six-month budget revisions, as required, for submission to the LTO, the Lead Technical Unit and the GEF Coordination Unit;
 - iv. preparation of six-month financial reports to be submitted to the GEF Coordination Unit and shared with the executing partners and the PSC; and
 - v. representing FAO on the PSC.
135. In this project, FAO served as both the GEF agency and the executing agency. Given that the project was implemented through a direct implementation modality, the FAO internal guidelines and procedures were applied. The separation of roles between FAO and partners was not always known and accepted. This led to misunderstandings that festered into frustrations and disagreements. The procurement of goods and services for the project in many cases was carried out without consultation with project partners. For instance, the recruitment of organizations involved in the revision of forest management plans and consultants was done without the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife. The FAO Government Cooperation Programme (Article 6) states that FAO may, in consultation with the government, execute part or all of the project by subcontract (FAO, 2013a, p. 42). The selection of subcontracts shall be made after consultation with the government. The absence of detailed procedures specific to the project in terms of functioning bodies (the PSC, the National Project Coordinator and the PTF) with the levels of responsibility of each actor was a key challenge, despite several calls by the steering committee to mitigate the risk of conflict and poor coordination.
136. In terms of project management, the PTF performed the following tasks: it informed the implementing partners of the expected quality standards; developed a monitoring framework; informed the national authorities of GEF objectives, requirements and procedures, and facilitated discussion on the content of the project components, project implementation mechanisms, institutional arrangements, and cofinancing. The PTF (through the LTO) and the GEF Coordination Unit conducted project supervision missions and participated in the various PSC meetings. The Funding Liaison Officer, for instance, took part in PSC meetings, including those in 2017 and 2019. The role ensured formal communication between the project and the GEF, providing support in case of requests for project extensions while advising on the procedures. The LTO supervised the preparation

of the project progress report and the PIR. He also implemented visits to the field to assess progress – the latest being in June 2022. Like in the 2016 field missions (minutes of 7 July 2016), there was the need to organize joint field missions with all partners. The latter reported that they were not aware of or involved in what was then the final project field mission (May–June 2022).

137. The project mid-term and terminal evaluations were effectively commissioned. A management response was provided following the mid-term evaluation but, as mentioned previously, the recommendations have not been fully implemented. In terms of completion, the LTO made a country visit between May and June 2022 to monitor project progress and the quality of deliverables on the ground. There was no exit strategy developed and no engagement with project partners. Further, there had been no steering committee meeting organized for two years. Part of the project exit strategy could have involved – and still may involve – discussions with the government regarding the transfer of project assets, as highlighted in the Cooperation Programme (Article 3) (FAO, 2013a, p. 42). In view of the aforementioned analysis, FAO's project implementation was **moderately satisfactory**.

3.5.3 Quality of execution

Evaluation subquestion. How effectively did FAO carry out its role and responsibilities in the management and administration of the project?

Finding 20. FAO played a dual role as the GEF implementing agency and the executing agency. Without clarity of separation of both roles and documented procedures for partners, relationships within FAO and between partners led to execution challenges. The implementation of LOAs was characterized by quality issues, delays in validation and the settlement of contracts. Unsatisfactory mobilization of cofinancing and poor involvement of the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development impeded the discharge of their obligations under this project. The quality of execution is **moderately unsatisfactory**.

138. Within the GEF partnership, executing agencies are involved in the management and administration of the project's day-to-day activities under the overall oversight and supervision of the GEF agencies. The executing agencies are responsible for the appropriate use of funds, and the procurement and contracting of goods and services to the GEF.
139. The project experienced several problems, as articulated previously, related to the management of relationships within the FAO team and among FAO and national partners and the forestry administration. Within FAO, lines of responsibility and command remained tense and conflictual. Attempts to address the matter, due in part to no clear process to address the issue, did not prove successful. Project oversight at the regional level is ensured by the Regional Programme Officer. With hundreds of projects at the subregional level, detailed action on an individual project would only be taken if brought to the project portfolio reviews by the FAOR. Requests for information as to why actions were not taken at the regional level to remedy the situation were unsuccessful. At the regional level, efforts are concentrated on the administrative tracking of projects in terms of finance and compliance with donor requirements. In this project, the only issue flagged by the system was "urgent call for funds" over a period of close to 100 days from November/December 2021. Once the issue was addressed, the project was deemed fully compliant with the oversight mechanism in place. Part of the challenge is that technical oversight and administrative oversight of the project are under the responsibility of the FAOR and of the LTO, respectively. Disagreements between the administrative and technical needs hindered the effective implementation of the project. While switching LTOs could have, as suggested

in the mid-term evaluation, been a potential solution, the organization struggled to fill the position based on the perception that there are not enough LTOs to go around. This may, in part, explain why the mid-term evaluation's recommendation was not implemented as the FAOR would have had to espouse the recommendation, raise the issue, been heard and, in the process, risk a period in which the project remained without an LTO. Of note, the LTO's Cameroonian nationality of origin was raised, unprompted, by more than four key informant interviews as a reason for the difficult relationship with the local team, but there is no reliable evidence to that effect.

140. The relationship between the national project coordination (Ministry of Forests and Wildlife) and technical coordination remained fractious from the beginning to the end of the project. There was a general perception of a lack of accountability to the national coordination and project focal point by the project's technical team. Similarly, the lack of consultation and response on major decisions such as project closure and extensions revealed a perceived lack of transparency, sense of unilateral decision-making and arbitrariness of FAO by the national project coordination. For instance, communication seen by the evaluation team include threats from the government writing directly to FAO headquarters to seek responses to concerns that were not being addressed or communicated. In other reported cases, recommendations from steering committees, action plans and budgets were never fully implemented. The PSC report of 22 February 2019 shows that only one out of six recommendations was completed, while four are ongoing and one was not initiated. The PSC report of 2017 shows that only three out of seven recommendations were implemented.
141. The Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development were the government counterparts in this project. The proposed match funding of USD 9 500 000 was supposed to cover: (i) the salary of a part-time national project focal point and the salary of the national project coordinator; (ii) the cost of staff time for government officers and technicians working with project-funded consultants and other staff directly engaged in implementing project activities; and (iii) the provision of appropriate office space to host the PMU at the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife, related office operational costs and local transportation costs. Under (ii) above, collaboration would focus on support to documentation, norms, procedures on biodiversity conservation, carbon management, support for the collection of data and monitoring activities related to biodiversity monitoring and conservation, and carbon accounting and management. With the challenges faced in mobilizing the match funding, project staff were effectively allocated to the project and expected administrative roles were played. However, technical activities were not optimal due to poor coordination with the technical project unit, lack of funding and disengagement. Only the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife signed an LOA with FAO which seemed to prioritize the ministry's role in the revision of forest management plans. Without an LOA, the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development largely played a figurehead role despite being responsible for all aspects linked to biodiversity conservation, carbon and national climate engagement towards the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in the country. All respondents from the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development and the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife were largely dissatisfied with their level of participation and engagement in this project. At the time of the evaluation, a new LOA was being negotiated with the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife. No such development of an LOA was underway with the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development.

142. FAO subcontracted the delivery of project activities to contractors and consultants in line with its mandate using the LOA modality. The management of LOAs has been overall mixed. All LOAs signed at the start of the project to December 2020 had varying problems ranging from poor delivery of outputs by implementing partners, insufficient technical staff within the PMU in terms of numbers and quality²³ and lengthy delays in the validation and settling of payments. The LOAs signed in 2016 were fully paid three years later, as in the case of Cam-Eco. Following the mid-term evaluation, this situation continued with all three carbon consultants, which was partly due to lengthy procurement processes at FAO. The management of project consultants has also been suboptimal in terms of value for money and timeliness in their recruitment and termination. In terms of timeliness, some of the consultants did not have much to do with project delays and, in some cases, their contracts ended when they were expected to be the most useful for the revision of project outputs.²⁴ The inability to address the internal issues and project risks led to significant delays (from four years to six and a half years) in execution and, consequently, to the low consumption of budget as of 30 June 2022. While there has been a significant push to deliver on project outputs in the past 12 months, as shown in the results matrix, the evaluation considers project execution to be **moderately unsatisfactory**.

3.5.4 Financial management and mobilization of expected cofinancing

Evaluation subquestion. To what extent did the expected cofinancing materialize, and did this affect the project results?

Finding 21. FAO applied its internal financial management procedures to ensure wise use and value for money. The relationship between the technical teams and finance teams was not always coherent, resulting in procurement delays and the consequent loss of efficiencies in project delivery. Expected cofinancing was not fully mobilized nor regularly monitored, leading to the whole project being almost entirely delivered with GEF funding. See Finding 12.

3.5.5 Partnerships and stakeholder engagement

Evaluation subquestion. Which stakeholders were involved in the design and/or implementation of the project? What was the effect of this involvement on the project results and to what extent do the project results belong to the stakeholders involved?

Finding 22. Collaboration among partners in this project has been fractious, while the frameworks for stakeholder engagement were either not created (stakeholder committee and PTCM) or were not effective (PFCs and CFCs) with negative consequences on ownership and project appropriation.

143. The Government of the Republic of Cameroon, through the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development, was expected to participate in the project at three levels: political, technical and financial. At the political level, the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife was designated as the lead ministry and served as chair of the PSC, while the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development was vice chair. The Ministry of Forests and Wildlife as lead ministry also appointed the national coordination of the project led by the Director of Forests and two assistants, while the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development appointed a project focal point. At the technical level, both ministries were expected to raise awareness among political decision-makers of the

²³ This was subsequently mitigated through the recruitment of two national consultants on forest and carbon management in 2021.

²⁴ The SFM and biodiversity expert (former technical coordinator) was terminated in June 2022 when the fourth extension was approved. This is when the service providers submitted outputs from the revision of forest management plans.

importance of the sustainable management of council forests. This involved their contribution to biodiversity conservation and carbon enhancement in the country while improving the livelihoods of the local communities. Government counterparts' key responsibility was also to monitor that project activities follow rules and procedures in the Republic of Cameroon for the sustainable management of ecosystems and biodiversity conservation. The Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development, as the national GEF focal point, would also facilitate the coordination of the GEF project with other relevant GEF-funded activities in the Republic of Cameroon. At the local level, the decentralized services of the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development had to be involved in project implementation as representatives of these ministries at regional and council levels, providing first-hand technical support to the councils on issues related to biodiversity conservation and SFM. In terms of finance, the government committed USD 9 500 000 to the project. This was expected to cover the necessary human resource costs of its staff in the project, as well as the provision of office space for the PMU.

144. According to interviews with all government officials, they consider that their participation has not been effective. Local officials of the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife were involved in different trainings offered by the project but did not play an effective role in areas such as: support to documentation; norms; procedures on biodiversity conservation; carbon management; support to the collection of data and monitoring activities related to biodiversity monitoring and conservation; and carbon accounting. No specific guidance or additional resources were provided to these decentralized agents to provide the first-hand support expected by the project. In any case, the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife appeared to have been more involved in the project than the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development. Many regretted that the latter did not secure an LOA to intervene in the project, despite its potential role in the delivery of Outcome 3. The degree of ownership and appropriation of project achievements is very low.
145. The project successfully provided various trainings to local council authorities, PFCs and CFCs with the objective of strengthening their technical capacities to allow for the sustainable management of forests under their responsibility. The restructuring and training provided was reported to have enhanced institutional capacity and the ability of responding officials to play their roles despite other challenges in terms of equipment and logistics. In some cases, the lapse between trainings and practice had impacted the mastery of various skills.²⁵ The two-day training events on forest carbon and forest monitoring in Yokadouma (27–29 May 2022), Messondo (23–25 May 2022) and Ebolowa (23–25 May 2022) were only implemented at what was then the end of the project. This failed to provide any time for practice. The latest extension may thus be seen as a silver lining. The turnover of mayors at the council level means that their participation in the project was mixed. A recommendation has been made to work more closely with council secretaries who are appointed and have more stable mandates than the local mayors. Mayors and local council units remain motivated about this project despite the various challenges faced. Council executives have long expected FAO to provide direct support to enable them to support implementation and the monitoring of activities on the ground. This was not achieved as FAO stated that internal procedures did not allow the organization to sign LOAs with

²⁵ Initial trainings on MA&D started in Mbalmayo (October 2016) and led to the selection of 21 facilitators. The second cycle took place in Douala (April 2017) with these 21 facilitators. One thousand fifty people were trained in Cycle 1 in 2019, and 750 people were trained on Cycle 2 two years later.

councils. Despite promises to explore alternatives, none materialized. Ownership of this initiative therefore remains fragile with significantly more support required to ensure sustainability.

146. The project planned to strengthen the participation of local communities through the creation of stakeholder committees. It was expected that at least four project stakeholder committees would be established, with each committee having four members representing four council forests, but this was not achieved. Nevertheless, communities surrounding the target council forests benefited from this action in different ways. First, through participation in awareness raising and training events. Second, from wages secured through individual services provided to executing partner organizations and consultants. The challenges faced included lapses between trainings, no consistency in the provision of training kits to participants and the non-materialization of promised support in terms of funding and equipment. With insufficient human resources at the level of the project, there was no mechanism in place for monitoring and backstopping trainees following the withdrawal of trainers and facilitators. During the evaluation, community representatives were generally satisfied with the support provided by the project but regretted the lack of closer backstopping and support for their committees and business development plans.
147. National and international non-governmental organizations were also implicated in the project. The key project partners ACFCAM/CTFC, Cam-Eco, ICRAF and IITA all signed LOAs with FAO and were involved until the mid-term evaluation of 2019. Participation was through the implementation of their LOAs, the provision of cofinancing (Cam-Eco) and participation in the PSC meetings. The partnerships faced several challenges, including poor quality of some deliverables, delays from the validation of outputs, a lack of adherence to timelines and agreements, demotivation, and a subsequent disengagement from the project. Despite stating a continued interest in engaging with the project, some did not respond to new calls for applications by FAO. They questioned why reapplication would be needed when they had already been named partners in the project document or at endorsement. For the various reasons highlighted above and to overcome these challenges, a decision was made at the level of FAO to prioritize working with individual consultants. The project strengthened its collaboration with GIZ through its ongoing Support Program for the Forests Environment Sector Program (GIZ-ProPSFE). New LOAs were signed in 2021 with the OCD, Monitortrust and IUCN to support the revision of the forest management plans. These new partnerships helped drive progress towards the achievement of Outcome 1. While heavily committed to provide cofinancing for the project, the National Community-driven Development Programme and FEICOM's engagement was limited to participation in PSC meetings.²⁶ Apart from GIZ, which is likely to continue activities through its programmes, there is no commitment among any of the other partners beyond the project's implementation period.

²⁶ FEICOM (*Fonds Spécial d'Équipement et d'Intervention Intercommunale* – Special Fund for Intermunicipal Equipment and Intervention) and FAO signed an agreement in October 2021. The promotion of productive and sustainable agriculture, forestry and fisheries is one of the main axes of this agreement. This axis involves the management of communal forests. As far as other respondents are concerned, the internal turmoil in the project led to disinterest and non-commitment.

Finding 23. The project has not succeeded in working with external partners and projects nor in anchoring the project in national and regional processes on SFM, biodiversity conservation and carbon management, putting in doubt the replicability and scalability of the project. Partnership and stakeholder engagement is deemed **moderately unsatisfactory**.

148. The planned engagement of national and international specialist institutions did not fully materialize. Engagement with national training institutions also failed in boosting the sustainability of the project. On behalf of the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development, the project focal point was expected to follow the GEF project issues related to biodiversity conservation and carbon management (biodiversity monitoring, environmental impact assessment and ecosystem restoration). Specifically, this involved the following: i) ensure regular communication between the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development, the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife, ACFCAM, the PSC and all project partners; ii) prepare, compile and monitor the contributions of all cofinancing agencies on these issues; iii) review annual work plans and the budget prepared by the Project Technical Coordinator and provide any additional inputs before submission to FAO and the PSC for approval; iv) provide general guidance and supervision on the implementation of project activities; and v) promote close collaboration between the project and relevant ongoing and planned government and non-government initiatives related to biodiversity and REDD+. This proved ineffective due to weak coordination between the PMU and the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development, as well as the lack of project resources (materialization of cofinancing) allocated. From the FAO and the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife side, there was no evidence provided on how the project engaged with the EU FLEGT VPA programme of the forest and farm facility.
149. The evaluation team finds that the project design was realistic in that it foresaw the creation of different multistakeholder committees to enhance partnership and stakeholder engagement. These instances include the PSC, the PTCM and stakeholder committees, the FTUs, and the FPCs. The role of the PMU, the national coordination and the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development focal points were critical to ensure the effective operation of these consultative committees. Unfortunately, the project started with disagreements between FAO and the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife on the legal groundings of the FTUs and the FPCs, delaying the effective start of activities by a year. The PSC operated as planned, but recommendations developed during meetings were hardly applied. The PTCM and stakeholder committees were not operationalized, even following the recommendations of the mid-term evaluation. At the same time, communication links between the PMU, the national project coordinator, and the project focal point were ineffective. For these reasons, participation and stakeholder engagement in this project are considered **moderately unsatisfactory**.

3.5.6 Communication, knowledge management and knowledge products

Evaluation subquestion. How does the project evaluate, document and share its results, lessons learned and experiences, and to what extent are communication products and activities likely to support the sustainability and scaling up of project results?

Finding 24. The project developed a communication strategy and a budgeted operational plan. With delays in project implementation, there was scant information about successes to communicate and, consequently, the operational plan was not fully implemented. The communication and knowledge management of the project are considered **moderately unsatisfactory**.

150. Communication and visibility play an important role in a project to enhance stakeholder engagement, interest, ownership and scalability. This project developed a communications strategy in November 2019 to contribute to these objectives. The project developed an operational communications plan with 13 activities and a budget of about XAF 10 million. A communications expert was recruited in 2019 and a knowledge capitalization consultant was commissioned in May 2022 to support the project. Out of 13 activities identified in the operational communications plan, 6 have been completed, 3 are ongoing and 4 were not initiated. All external engagement activities, video production and press conferences were not implemented. This human resource was not exploited to its full potential and not given the opportunity to carry out field activities to document project achievements. The role of the communications expert and their efficiency and effectiveness were impacted by delays and a lack of realizations to showcase. In effect, there was not much to communicate so the communications expert's time was partially re-allocated to provide communications support to the Country Office.
151. At the level of communities, council authorities, PFCs and CFCs used project posters and leaflets to sensitize their communities. These included the use of community radio and the dissemination of messages through community associations and religious groups. Concerning communications assets on the web, the project team used the FAO Cameroon website and the Twitter account of @FAOCameroun to communicate online. Five hundred leaflets, two roll ups, 21 A0 posters, two news items and 12 tweets were produced over the six-year project implementation. The list can be found in Annex 4.

3.5.7 Overall assessment of factors affecting project performance

152. In evaluating the performance factors, the team focused on the M&E design and implementation, the quality of implementation and execution, financial management, stakeholder engagement and project communication. All other factors are rated **moderately satisfactory** compared to communications, which is **moderately unsatisfactory**. The key weaknesses related to: a non-effective M&E system; a lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities between the national coordination and the technical project team; internal governance issues; no project-specific procedures or financial management guidelines; inadequate stakeholder engagement; and failures to fully operationalize the communications strategy and operational plan. For these reasons, the overall assessment of performance factors is **moderately satisfactory**.

3.6 Cross-cutting concerns

3.6.1 Gender

Evaluation question 6. To what extent were gender, Indigenous Peoples, and vulnerable or marginalized groups involved in project implementation?

Evaluation subquestion. To what extent have gender equality and women's empowerment considerations been taken into account in the design and implementation of the project, and has the project been implemented in a way that ensures equitable participation and benefits for both sexes?

Finding 25. Gender was not a priority objective for this project. Project design and implementation were generally weak on gender. The majority of those trained in the MA&D approach were women, and they felt the most aggrieved by the lack of commitment to the promised support. The project reached Indigenous Peoples' communities, but no targeted actions were implemented to address their needs. Gender is **moderately unsatisfactory**.

153. Gender was not a priority objective for this project. The project document acknowledged the need to target women and youth through their participation in communal forest units, PFCs and income-generating activities. As the 2018 and 2020 PIR show, no gender analysis was performed, the proposed gender strategy was not implemented, and the recruitment of dedicated personnel was not carried out (FAO and GEF, 2018; FAO and GEF, 2020). Efforts were made during trainings to involve women. The training on an MA&D approach reached 1 050 people, with 556 being women. They were consequently the most let down and disappointed with the failure of the project to provide financial and business start-up support. Thirty percent of participants in PSCs were women. Apart from this information, no gender disaggregated information was gathered and reported in the results framework (see Appendix 5). On the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's gender marker score, this project is considered zero (not targeted) (OECD-DAC, 2016). Gender is deemed **moderately unsatisfactory**.

3.6.2 Minority groups, including Indigenous Peoples, disadvantaged and vulnerable people, people with disabilities, and youth

Evaluation subquestion. To what extent were Indigenous Peoples and other marginalized groups involved in the project?

Finding 26. Indigenous Peoples benefited from the project in terms of trainings and participation in CFCs and PFCs. Free, prior and informed consent was not demonstrated as no specific plan or guidelines for targeting these communities were developed. Consideration of Indigenous Peoples is **moderately unsatisfactory**.

154. Socioeconomic studies were implemented in all council forests as part of the process for the revision of the forest management plans. These studies identified the concerns and fears of communities regarding the impact of this project on their livelihoods. The provision of training in income-generating activities contributed to addressing some of these concerns. However, as identified under the section on gender, there were no specific guidelines or indicators developed to measure the effect of specific actions of the project on Indigenous Peoples. In fact, free, prior and informed consent activities should have been undertaken, as well as adapting project training activities to their needs. Respondents indicated that no specific actions were taken to enhance the participation of Indigenous Peoples and ensure no harm was committed. FAO's environmental and social safeguards Principle 9 on Indigenous Peoples should have been triggered.

3.6.3 Environmental and social safeguards

Evaluation subquestion. To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into account in the design and implementation of the project?

Finding 27. The project was classified as Category C on FAO's environmental and social safeguards guidelines. The project contributes to addressing community needs and environmental protection. Principle 9 on Indigenous Peoples could have been triggered, but this was not undertaken considering the project impacts on this population. It is expected that revised forest management plans will integrate environmental and social safeguards. The environmental and social safeguards in this project are therefore considered **satisfactory**.

155. The project document states that the project conformed to FAO's pre-approved list of projects excluded from detailed environmental assessment. The project was a Category C under FAO's environmental impact assessment guidelines for field projects. The project's environmental and development aims are geared towards addressing the problems of unsustainable forest management, biodiversity loss and climate change. The revision and

implementation of management plans would contribute to these objectives, as well as the support to income-generating activities. The environmental and social safeguards in this project are therefore considered **satisfactory**.

3.6.4 Overview of cross-cutting factors

156. The terminal evaluation assessed the extent to which gender, Indigenous Peoples, and environmental and social safeguards were taken into consideration in the project. The analysis shows weaknesses in the mainstreaming of gender and Indigenous Peoples' issues in the project and, consequently, these are deemed as being **moderately unsatisfactory**. However, Principle 9 on FAO's environmental and social safeguards could have been triggered, considering the project's activities with Indigenous Peoples. The evaluation deems that environmental and social safeguards are **satisfactory**. The overall rating for cross-cutting issues is **moderately satisfactory**.

3.7 Progress towards impact

Evaluation question 8. What evidence exists that the project is contributing to project and GEF strategic goals and targets?

Finding 28. The project has laid the groundwork for impact. This is evidenced by increased awareness, capacity gains and changes in behaviour among final beneficiaries towards SFM, biodiversity conservation and carbon management. However, ownership of the project by government agencies and local councils represents critical risks.

157. In assessing progress towards impact, respondents perceived that changes in awareness and capacity were the important gains secured. This was followed closely by contributions to the socioeconomic status of beneficiaries and environmental improvements from behavioural change.

158. There is evidence of the project's contributions to changes in capacities at different levels. The very idea of changing the paradigm in terms of the management of council forests represents a strong contribution of the project for respondents. This entails a departure from the traditional model of forest management, which prioritizes the exploitation of timber, to a more inclusive model with stronger engagement of communities and a commitment to biodiversity conservation and carbon management. While there was overwhelming support from respondents on the model proposed by the project, mayors stated that the "abrupt closure of the project"²⁷ and non-application or non-demonstration of the new forest management model during the lifespan of the project were concerning to them. This was the case for newly elected mayors from 2020 who had not had the opportunity to be briefed on the project following their election. Others were concerned that in the short term, the new model would entail a loss of income from forest exploitation since they do not possess the knowledge and know-how within councils on how to mobilize biodiversity and carbon-related funding, nor is their intrinsic value immediately visible.

159. The materialization of forest management plans with targeted areas designated for SFM, biodiversity conservation and carbon stock management, and their validation by the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife, represented the most significant contribution expected of

²⁷ The LTO's last field visit occurred just before the latest extension was granted and was conceived as a closing mission.

this project. At the time of evaluation, no management plan had been validated due to delays in the procurement of the implementing partners and divergences with the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife on funding for field activities required for the reception and validation of outputs from partners. While progress has been achieved in the delivery of biodiversity inventories and mapping of potential carbon sites, there was no evidence gathered from the project and stakeholders that biodiversity conservation had been impacted by the project. The database for biodiversity monitoring and management has yet to be designed and results of carbon analysis to be completed. Therefore, no progress can be reported regarding contribution towards reduction in carbon emissions or protection of biodiversity by the project.

160. This project also strived to strengthen national and local capacity in terms of development and trial of a carbon measurement model for council forests in the Republic of Cameroon. The project drew on the REALU: Reducing Emissions from All Land Uses project experience led by the ICRAF, the IITA, and the Institute of Agricultural Research for Development (ASB, 2022) as a basis for adapting the carbon accounting and monitoring system to council forests. This process was regrettably marred by procurement failures at FAO, which culminated in significant delays of over eight months for the release of soil samples to FAO²⁸ to the three carbon consultants on 13 June 2022. Consultants were, however, confident that once analysed, this would enable them to provide needed evidence for the validation of carbon sites in council forests. The reports would also provide testimony to council officials about the value of carbon in their forests and the potential financial benefits from preservation. It is expected that this additional evidence will consolidate the methodology, support the delivery of the monitoring, reporting and verification system for forest carbon, and reassure mayors about the benefits of SFM. As most of the mayors stated, the objective was not achieved since the implementation phase had not taken place. One stated: "We received the trainings less than two months ago on biodiversity conservation and on carbon stock management", suggesting that their skills were neither applied nor tested.
161. There is no evidence that the project's environmental benefits, as highlighted in the project document, were achieved. At the time of the evaluation, none of the information management systems on biodiversity monitoring and carbon monitoring/management had been delivered. This means that local council authorities and national officials – the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development – currently do not have any mechanism to access information for decision-making. While the project team has scaled up work in the field to develop the databases, it is unlikely that these databases or systems will have the time to be tested and operationalized by December 2022. The scant engagement of government agencies in the design of these databases and methodologies could impact their ownership, appropriation and sustainability in the long run. Capacity weaknesses in terms of human resources, followed by funding, access to internet, repairs and software at the council level are key risks.
162. Communities also reported that new knowledge in the processing and marketing of NTFP had contributed to increased engagement in these activities and a deviation from artisanal forest exploitation activities. In focus group discussions in all five council forest areas that

²⁸ A purchase order was raised by FAO on 6 May 2022. The evaluation team has not received confirmation that samples have been handed over to consultants and on what terms, considering their contracts had already ended.

had been visited, respondents explained how they were exploring other income options over timber exploitation. Regrettably, though, none of the business development plans designed through the project had received any support nor been implemented. In fact, field missions by the project team in May 2022 revealed that none of the plans had been implemented. This was partly due to the long gap between the initial Cycle 1 and subsequent Cycle 2 trainings on MA&D, the absence of business incubation support, demotivation due to the lack of promised support, access, and the COVID-19 pandemic. In effect, compared to the 1 050 community members who took part in the first round of MA&D training, 30 percent less (700) took part in the second cycle of training. The evaluation team cannot conclude that satisfactory progress has been made towards the project's development objective.

163. On another level, anecdotal evidence from communities revealed that increased levels of awareness of the benefits of SFM were being translated into behavioural changes. For instance, focus group discussions revealed that communities were more aware of their council forest boundaries, and members of the PFCs increased their levels of forest monitoring and denunciation of illegal forest activities. Similarly, council officials revealed that there were more reports of illegality to the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife for action. The restructuring and training of the PFCs and the CFCs has therefore strengthened capacities for good governance and SFM. One of the respondents stated: "We practice them daily in the monitoring of logging activities by companies present in the areas and also the activities carried out by the population around the council forest." Their continuous performance of forest monitoring and denunciations is likely to create a disincentive for forest illegality which, in the long run, would improve forest law enforcement if dissuasive sanctions were imposed and contribute to reduced deforestation and forest degradation and, consequently, biodiversity loss. The project failed to leverage the FAO-EU FLEGT programme's experience in the Republic of Cameroon, which has strengthened civil society-led independent forest monitoring as a tool for improving forest governance in the country. These structures lack the basic tools required to play their role effectively. With the economic challenges facing council forests, there was little commitment from mayors to fund these activities in the short term. Were the project to provide equipment and logistics support to these local structures, their effectiveness could be strengthened. However, there was no such support in sight.

3.7.1 Unintended effects

Finding 39. The project achieved unintended effects, as seen in strengthened relationships between Baka and Bantou communities. There was, however, also a loss of trust and credibility due to FAO's management of the project. More broadly, this involved the organization's image among partners and stakeholders.

164. The project registered positive effects. Anecdotal evidence from respondents in Ndikiniméki revealed that the deputy mayor of the council was elected because of her leadership actions in the community following the MA&D trainings. Respondents reported that after the trainings, she improved her leadership skills and got her community mobilized on project activities and other actions that subsequently led to her being elected in her community.
165. Other evidence pointed to greater peacebuilding in the sense that conflicts between the Baka and Bantou communities over forest resources in Mindourou, Messamena and Yoko had lessened. The participation of the Baka leaders within the PFCs contributed to

strengthened relationships between these groups of actors. In some cases, the PFCs were constituted solely by Baka leaders, enhancing their participation in the decision-making on forests that concern them.

166. There is a general sense and perception among respondents that FAO failed to live up to the standards and image that it holds. The conflicts, unilateral and sometimes arbitrary decision-making, breaking of obligations and failed promises for communities have tarnished the image and credibility of the organization. A highly innovative project with excellent scalability did not fulfil its potential. The project's results framework looks promising. However, the underlying issues faced and the fact that after more than five years communities and councils still do not have revised management plans to show nor community development enterprises supported by the project is a blow to the credibility of the organization. The same holds for the government counterparts that have failed to deliver on their objective to strengthen the carbon stocks in the project's target councils and regions.
167. Without an exit strategy and demonstrated ownership and commitment from the administration and ACFCAM/CTFC to continue building on the realizations of this project, the likelihood of impact could be jeopardized. This is in addition to the failure to anchor the project to national forestry and climate processes within the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1. The relevance of the Sustainable Forest Management under the Authority of Cameroonian Councils project is highly satisfactory.

168. The project objectives and design met the needs of the Government of the Republic of Cameroon and local council authorities. This was ensured through a participatory project design process. The project was highly aligned with national processes for SFM, biodiversity conservation and the country's climate agenda, particularly the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, the national REDD+ strategy and commitments under the Paris Agreement, as illustrated by the 2021 NDCs. It was also in line with and sought to contribute to national growth and development strategies. The project was also congruent with FAO and the GEF mandates and strategic objectives. Gender and Indigenous Peoples' issues were not priority objectives for this project and, consequently, targeted actions were not implemented. Achieving the development impact would require more focused support to women and Indigenous Peoples, as well as the provision of financial and business incubation and support programmes.

Conclusion 2. The project made significant progress in its last year of implementation (June 2021–June 2022). Its effectiveness is moderately satisfactory. The final no-cost extension of six months offers an opportunity to make further progress towards the delivery of outcomes.

169. The project results framework shows that significant progress has been made following the mid-term evaluation of 2019. However, the project has, for years, suffered significant challenges: delays; leadership and personal conflicts; a lack of communication and stakeholder engagement; a lack of accountability; and the non-application of recommendations from the PSC and mid-term evaluations. A cocktail of these failures led to four project extensions. The failure of the project to complete the revision and validation of forest management plans due to insufficient budget allocations on successive budgets means that local council forest authorities have not benefited from the expected objectives of the project. Without the validation of these revised management plans, the institutional framework for SFM, biodiversity conservation and carbon monitoring remains weak. The biodiversity database meant to monitor biodiversity in council forests has yet to be implemented. Further support is required to fully implement the biodiversity database and ensure regular monitoring of biodiversity in the council forests.

170. The project achieved significant capacity building gains for different stakeholders: council authorities; PFCs; CFCs; local government officials; and forest-dependent communities. Stakeholders appreciate the support provided through this project, and indicative changes in behaviour towards SFM are beginning to emerge. However, the strengthened institutions lack the requisite material and logistics support to play their role effectively. Communities trained in the MA&D approach have yet to be funded, and no business development plans have been implemented as of June 2022 (see Recommendation 4). The introduction of carbon monitoring and management in council forests is an innovation. If successful, it could yield long-term environmental, social and economic benefits for councils and local forest-dependent communities. Unfortunately, procurement shortcomings at FAO and weak proactivity from leadership means that the systems for carbon monitoring are incomplete. The no-cost extension provides an additional

opportunity for the carbon database to be developed and tested. The training of beneficiaries in the management of carbon just ended in June 2022. Continued support – beyond the project's NTE date in December 2022 – is needed to embed the experience and contribute to a paradigm shift from traditional timber exploitation as a main source of council forest income. Local capacity remains weak in terms of sustaining results without further support.

171. The methodology and approach for carbon monitoring, reporting and verification has been effectively developed and tested. The shambolic management of the soil sample analysis process means that setting up and piloting the carbon monitoring system has not been fully implemented. The government was expected to mobilize cofinancing and lead the restoration and strengthening of carbon stocks in target councils. Due to the lack of available government funding, only 3 800 ha of restoration and reforestation was achieved out of the 56 200 ha planned.
172. The project did not apply a results-based management approach. Action plans and budgets were developed, but recommendations were rarely implemented in full. The structures expected to support project delivery were either not created or ineffective. The mid-term and terminal evaluations were effectively commissioned. Mid-term evaluation recommendations were not implemented in full. No evidence exists that good practices have been documented or disseminated to external stakeholders.

Conclusion 3. Project management and operational delivery were inefficient, characterized by delays and, at times, poor quality of deliverables.

173. FAO applied its internal administrative and financial management procedures. The lack of project-specific guidelines affected project roles and responsibilities of all partners. This led to disagreements, which translated into conflicts and delays. Financial reports were not regularly produced for stakeholders. At the time of the evaluation, the only available report was dated September 2020, which was the report presented to the PSC.
174. The project budget was unbalanced. Key project activities were under budget, resulting in significant delays in delivery. The project experienced procurement deficiencies, and the expected cofinancing from project partners did not materialize. The project team has been reinforced with additional personnel since the mid-term evaluation. Performance, however, has remained mixed and suboptimal. This has negatively affected the project's value for money.

Conclusion 4. Project achievements are moderately likely to continue beyond the initial period. However, these gains could be lost if financial, social, institutional and environmental risks are not mitigated.

175. A significant number of trainings were delivered to target council forest stakeholders. Various tools, guidelines and research have been produced, which can be utilized beyond the project. Draft forest management plans, if approved, provide the institutional framework for achieving the project's environmental objectives. While training on MA&D was provided, a lack of incubation and start-up support led to no community enterprises. This suggests that capacities are weak in ensuring the continuity of results without further support (see Conclusion 2).

176. Delays in the project results means that local councils have not mobilized any direct income from the project, nor have communities due to a lack of business plans. The decision by the Ministry of Finance to reallocate revenue away from local councils means there might be more pressure to generate income from the short-term exploitation of timber. The mismanagement of council forest revenue remains one of the most reported issues to the National Anti-Corruption Commission. Another financial risk is for councils to sign exploitation agreements with private investors: the investors might not operate under new management plans. Such a risk is compounded if the council is only partially informed and engaged in the project and the details of the plan.
177. Climate change, forest fires and illegal forest and wildlife trafficking, as well as other anthropogenic impacts on forests, will continue to be on the rise. The capacities of council officials, the PFCs, the CFCs and the communities remain weak. Further strengthening for better forest and wildlife monitoring, and the transparent management of forest and carbon resources, are required. Without more support, SFM is unlikely to be achieved – as are the biodiversity conservation and carbon components of the project.

Conclusion 5. The factors affecting performance are rated as moderately satisfactory. The project design is satisfactory overall, while the quality of implementation, execution and M&E design and implementation are only moderately satisfactory.

178. The project idea emanated from ACFCAM/CTFC, but fiduciary assessment of the organization led to FAO being designated as the GEF implementing agency. The project design was robust with planned activities capable of delivering on outputs and outcomes. The failure of FAO to validate final project proposal documents with the national stakeholders led to mistakes. This negatively impacted project start-up, implementation and relationships between FAO and ACFCAM. FAO failed to provide capacity building to CTFC, leading the organization to being aggrieved and the perception of being unfairly treated by FAO.
179. The revised project's M&E was too complex to be implemented and could not be applied fully. The budget allocated for M&E appeared sufficient, but the plan was understaffed without an M&E officer for the scale of the project. Project monitoring routines were implemented in terms of reporting to donors, but data collection for decision-making was weak. The project was characterized by internal conflicts, staff turnover, poor internal dynamics, an inadequate understanding and application of roles, and a poorly perceived separation of implementation and execution roles. This led to failures in stakeholder engagement and communication, which were considered marginally unsatisfactory. There was a general perception among the government, mayors and national partners that the project had become "an FAO show" with many considering their participation as passive and perfunctory. This lack of ownership and appropriation has serious implications for sustainability.
180. The PMU was ill-equipped to deliver in terms of numbers and quality of personnel. Since inception, this project has suffered from staff turnover: two technical coordinators left in quick succession, and the biodiversity expert on the team was subsequently promoted to the role of technical coordinator. While appreciated by partners, the Project Technical Coordinator failed to deliver on their terms of reference through a combination of insufficient technical expertise in all project areas of intervention and a perceived lack of professionalism in the delivery of their functions. There was insufficient technical support within the PMU and poor understanding of the defining role and function of the LTO, which

contributed to strenuous relationships between the Project Technical Coordinator and the LTO. This situation was allowed to fester from May 2018 to October 2021, when the PMU was finally boosted with two additional experts and the PMU structure was reorganized. The BH did not enforce the LTO actions proposed by the mid-term evaluation.

181. The FAO roles and responsibilities matrix articulates the roles and responsibilities of members of the PTF – the BH, the LTO, the Funding Liaison Officer and others – but it is silent on conflict management. The implementation of these roles assumes pacific relations and a willingness to work together among different members of the PTF. In this project, there were disagreements and role conflicts between PTF members and the project team. The responsibilities were shared through a combination of non-action and a lack of decisiveness and accountability. Coordination between national and technical coordination remained weak and impaired project delivery. Stakeholder engagement was weak and affected the ownership and appropriation of the project by the government, partners and local community leaders. ACFCAM/CTFC had the perception that they had been sidelined. For these reasons, a commitment to sustain project gains is lacking among national partners.
182. A knowledge expert was commissioned during this evaluation phase but has yet to start work on documenting project experiences. The communications expert used the FAO website for publications and managed the organization's Twitter account. The communications strategy was largely not implemented, and there was no engagement with external partners. The project failed to share lessons with other agencies and was not anchored in the ongoing national processes as required for ownership and sustainability.

Conclusion 6. Environmental and social safeguards were satisfactorily identified and addressed during project implementation.

183. FAO's guidelines on environmental and social safeguards were applied during project screening. This led to a Category C classification. The revision of forest management plans included the implementation of socioeconomic studies which support decision-making on safeguards. These studies have informed the revision of the forest management plans.

Conclusion 7. Gender, Indigenous Peoples, and vulnerable or marginalized groups were not priority objectives. This is considered as moderately unsatisfactory.

184. Project design was light on gender and consideration of specific gender needs, including those of Indigenous Peoples. No specific gender analyses nor action plans were developed to target women and Indigenous Peoples. These populations were generally involved and benefited from trainings. As a result, they expected start-up and incubation support for income generation and business development, but this was not provided. Capacities remain weak and further support is required.

Conclusion 8. Progress towards impact is moderately satisfactory. Evidence points to emerging contributions to project and GEF strategic goals and targets.

185. Capacity building was a central tenet of this project. Significant training events were delivered, reaching council authorities, the PFCs, the CFCs and local communities on a wide range of SFM, biodiversity conservation and carbon management-related issues. This also involved the MA&D approach. Despite the identified weaknesses, it is likely that the knowledge gained can be applied beyond the project. Trainings were organized towards the end of the project. When organized early in the project, the trainings lacked continuous

follow-up, provision of necessary tools and the opportunity to put the learnings into practice and ensure their sustained use within the communities.

186. Signs of impact have been reported by the PFCs, the CFCs and the communities regarding increased awareness of the multiple benefits from forests, attempts to diversify from artisanal timber to NTFP and more reporting of illegal activity to the authorities. If continued, these aspects will likely reduce pressures on forests and promote SFM, biodiversity conservation and climatic resilience.
187. Anecdotal evidence also showed unintended effects through strengthened relationships between the Baka and Bantou communities. GIZ intends to build on this experience as it continues to support council forests. Unfortunately, the challenges faced in this project have led to a loss of stakeholder trust in FAO's ability to deliver on projects that rely on collaboration.

Conclusion 9. Project lessons were not documented and cannot inform future project design on SFM.

188. The only activity on lessons learned involved the recruitment of a documentation expert in May 2022.

4.2 Recommendations

4.2.1 Recommendations to FAO

Recommendation 1. FAO needs to urgently engage in an inclusive, participatory process to develop the project's exit strategy.

189. FAO, in collaboration with the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife, needs to convene the PSC and provide the opportunity for stakeholders to understand the project's state of progress. This is important because most stakeholders have felt left out since the last meeting in September 2020. Weak stakeholder engagement and poor communication and collaboration among partners have been hallmarks of the project, which has impacted the level of ownership and future commitment. FAO needs to reinstate a collaborative environment and organize meetings with all partners involved to assess the progress achieved and explore how project gains can be secured and sustained. It must also clarify the roles that different actors need to play in this exit strategy, and ensure their ability and desire to undertake them. With the six months left, this inclusive process could significantly enhance the commitment of partners and ensure the ownership and continuity of project results. This is particularly relevant for the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife, the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development, and the CTFC, which remains the technical arm of ACFCAM.²⁹
190. Partners have long suggested the need for joint visits to the field in order to collectively assess progress on the ground. As part of developing the project's exit strategy, FAO could organize these requested joint missions to different council forests. This way, the involved actors can learn about the on-the-ground progress and challenges and formulate recommendations. The newly recruited capitalization expert could also use these field

²⁹ It is important to mention that part of reason for the disengagement of ACFCAM from the project was that they had won a new European Union project and were no longer interested in an LOA. However, due to their strategic positioning, they could still play a role in the future of the project. If this fails, there is a need to explore other technical consultants or national support agencies to provide specific support.

missions to document the project experiences and good practices, if any. There are currently several SFM, biodiversity conservation and carbon/climate-related initiatives and processes in the country. These include the FLEGT VPA, REDD+, NDCs, the promotion of the domestic timber market and public procurement. With the latest six-month extension, the project management team needs to be assertive in its outreach towards these initiatives. They should also explore opportunities for the project gains to be embedded in or inform other processes. The evaluation team also recommends that, in line with Article 3 of the Cooperation Agreement with the government, the exit strategy could include discussions with the government regarding the transfer of project assets as part of this project.

Recommendation 2. FAO should consolidate the capacity building acquired in order to strengthen the pathway to the environmental and developmental impacts of the project.

191. There is need for a rapid assessment of the communities trained in MA&D approaches that work with local councils in order to assess the short-term needs required to reinvigorate their business development plans. This assessment could be implemented by a consultant and quantify the support required for starting up business enterprises. FAO should provide the necessary support to selected enterprises. This is important to not only kick-start the dormant business plans but also address the tarnished image of the project and FAO within these communities.
192. Local councils, the PFCs and the CFCs have been strengthened but still demonstrate weak capacities to be effective. In line with Recommendation 1, revisit a role for the CTFC to ensure continuous monitoring of capacities. Further, assess the needs in terms of equipment and logistical support. This will inform the continuous coaching and mentoring mechanism for the project's target groups, such as council executive secretaries and leaders of councils. The biodiversity and carbon databases need to be finalized and tested in all target council forests. Stronger engagement with the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development, and the ACFCAM/CTFC, is crucial for sustainability and the management and use of the databases. With sufficient buy-in, these organizations could mobilize the resources required to update and maintain these databases.

Recommendation 3. FAO needs to come to an agreement with government partners (the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development). No effort should be spared in ensuring joint FAO and Ministry of Forests and Wildlife field supervision visits are organized to assess progress and ultimately validate the nine revised plans. For those that are incomplete, reallocate further resources to ensure that all 17 council forest management plans undergo revision.

193. The draft LOA proposed by FAO to the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife suggests that the project estimates 9 out of 17 management plans being ready for validation by the panel that approves forest management plans. Goodwill is needed from both sides to secure a viable agreement on the field missions. Considering this is a critical risk for the project, no effort should be spared to get the revised plans validated. Without this, the project impacts cannot be achieved and the image and credibility of FAO will be in jeopardy. While the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development has historically not benefited from an LOA, their role in monitoring carbon and biodiversity cannot be bypassed. Financial resources are required for the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development teams to monitor the implementation of the

databases and revised plans on the ground. Whether these funds are mobilized through the project, the Ministry of Forests and Wildlife or the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development are a function of the goodwill and agreement FAO can establish with these partners.

Recommendation 4. In future projects, FAO should develop clear internal project guidelines to clarify the roles, scope and limits of different actors intervening in the project. These guidelines need to be agreed upon at inception and will clarify information flows between actors and the mechanisms for addressing disagreements and conflicts.

194. It is important that future projects clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of actors and lines of communication within the FAO PTF and with partners. It is important that all actors understand their roles and responsibilities and the scope of their actions and reporting lines. These include lines for transmission and the validation of project deliverables, as well as related quality standards between the PMUs and the PTF. This also involves national partner agencies and project coordination units that integrate timelines and mechanisms for redress. These project-specific guidelines must be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain fit for purpose. In time, and with practice, such specific guidelines could be made mandatory for all FAO projects, fully mitigating several of the situations witnessed here.

Recommendation 5. FAO should review its matrix of responsibilities and clarify the modalities for addressing disagreements and conflicts within the PTF.

195. The FAO PTF is governed by three principles: decentralization and subsidiarity; the segregation of duties; and an effective skills mix. However, no governing principle clearly addresses a situation in which there are role overlaps or internal conflicts and disagreements within the PTF. Linked to Recommendation 4, specific operational guidelines could be developed that lay out how the team will work within the framework of the particular project. It will be the responsibility of the BH to develop these guidelines, highlighting potential bottlenecks and mitigation measures. The working relationship between members of the PTF will be reviewed within agreed timelines to address any challenges. Where cases of lack of accountability or other issues are identified, the BH has the responsibility and power to remove or replace personnel or reorganize the PTF to ensure effective project delivery. This project highlights the need for decisive action from the BH, who is ultimately responsible for the success of the action. Otherwise, performance challenges may fester and affect project performance.

196. In proposing members to the PTF, particularly the LTO and the Chief Technical Advisor, the formulator/BH should ensure that the person has the requisite skills and experience in all key areas of project intervention and has the ability to provide comprehensive technical oversight in the project areas of intervention. In complex projects or when working on niche topics (where expertise might be limited or dispersed), the formulator/BH may request additional complementary technical experts within the organization and beyond to join the PTF. The guidelines would therefore clarify the scope and limits of actions and lines of accountability within the PTF. The BH thus ensures that the skills mix is sufficient to support delivery, but also minimizes the risk of centralization of power in any one pair of hands. The mechanism for operationalization of the roles and responsibilities would reside in well-designed action plans and budgets and in regular team meetings.

Recommendation 6. FAO should establish a mechanism for monitoring the technical delivery of projects by the PTF to address underlying project performance challenges.

197. FAO could explore the development of a system for monitoring the technical delivery of projects on the ground by drawing on the existing mechanisms for tracking administrative performance.³⁰ The current administrative system uses an alert and early warning system based on monitoring key indicators, such as spending, reporting, timelines for closure and the request for funds. With this alert system, the BH is regularly updated on the state of project progress and on administrative bottlenecks that must be resolved swiftly. Once an issue has been addressed, the system no longer considers the project problematic, even if the administrative challenges reflect technical challenges.
198. To ensure that communication within teams takes place and the project implementation atmosphere is one of collegiality, a short scorecard/traffic light system could be explored through which the performance of designated PTF members is assessed and reported on by the BH on a monthly to quarterly basis. The scorecard would ask, specifically the BH, the LTO and the Chief Technical Advisor, to rank overall project delivery on a scale of one to five or one to three. Key questions could focus on team collaboration, communication, the implementation of work plans, the implementation of a steering committee or evaluation/review recommendations. This scorecard could be available to senior management at subregional and regional levels. Over time, this can enable poor performing individuals to be identified and problems can be tackled before they fester. It could also contribute to a better allocation of resources within the organization, ensuring all talent is utilized for their strengths. For example, the BH could also use this scorecard as reference in the selection and allocation of individuals to different projects. This scorecard should be very short to facilitate its use and application.

Recommendation 7. FAO needs to strengthen the management framework for delivering projects of this magnitude. It can do so through a dedicated M&E team, a procurement plan, specific financial management procedures and guidelines for partners, and grievance mechanisms where individuals who feel aggrieved can register their complaints.

199. The importance of having a dedicated M&E team and an operational M&E system that enables the project team to systematically collect, analyse and provide information for project decision-making cannot be overemphasized. If fully implemented, the M&E system also allows the team to keep track of key performance factors such as communication, stakeholder engagement and levels of satisfaction, and ownership of project outputs and outcomes by stakeholders. It will also be critical to develop biennial procurement plans that allow for the technical and financial teams to have a common understanding of resource needs throughout the life of the project and avoid delays and inefficiencies. The same applies for specific financial and administrative procedures. These must be clearly understood by all partners to avoid confusion and misunderstandings that might negatively impact the project. With conflicts likely to emerge in complex projects, FAO should systematize the integration of grievance mechanisms in all projects. These should not only focus on environmental and social safeguard impacts, but also on harm, bullying, harassment and other unproductive workplace practices.

³⁰ Reports, evaluations and reviews play a role, but when issues are not addressed promptly, as witnessed in this case, it could become too late to salvage a project. In fact, project progress reports often downplay the underlying factors for poor performance, as was the case in this project.

4.2.2 To the government

Recommendation 8. The government needs to explore opportunities for a follow-up phase of this project in order to capitalize on and develop the gains achieved through this pilot initiative.

200. Based on the results of this evaluation and other documented evidence of project performance and challenges, the government should seek to mobilize additional grant funding to support implementation and scale-up of the project gains. This could include exploring additional GEF funding or other climate and biodiversity funding opportunities under the Green Climate Fund or other donor financing.
201. Part of capitalizing on this project will also involve the integration of databases within relevant administrative units and departments, and designating sufficient human and material resources to operationalize the biodiversity and climate databases.

4.2.3 To the GEF

Recommendation 9. Provide funding for a follow-up phase or subsequent project to guarantee impact.

202. The key recommendation is for the donor to provide funding for a follow-up phase of this project or another project that would build on the results. This would enable the councils to fully embed the learning acquired and demonstrate the full impacts of this initial investment. This would also strengthen the strategic positioning of the GEF regarding the paradigm shift from traditional forest management to one that integrates biodiversity conservation and carbon management.
203. The GEF should also implement due diligence mechanisms on cofinancing promises by executing or implementing partners. The experience of this project demonstrates that cofinancing promises are easy to secure. However, without mechanisms for ensuring that partners effectively mobilize their planned contributions, this represents significant risks for future projects. For example, partners could be required to provide bank accounts or balance sheets that highlight their level of financial solvency or evidence of contracts (recruitments or property) being negotiated or signed.

5. Lessons learned

5.1 Project design, appraisal and planning

204. The design of this project followed a participatory process that included all key project stakeholders. This participatory process ensured that the project design was relevant, robust and feasible to achieve its objectives. For the effective implementation of projects and their ownership, this inclusiveness must be demonstrated throughout the project. The lack of validation of this particular project by national stakeholders following a participatory design process led to the various challenges that have already been discussed at length in this report. Ensuring participation also sends a message of fairness and creates a conducive environment for trust and collaboration to thrive.

5.2 Project management, including financial and human resources issues

205. Having a balanced and realistic budget and a project team with sufficient complementary skills provides the framework for successful project implementation. Developing realistic budgets also requires the ability to listen to experts and integrate their contributions into budgeting activities. Without building project budgets on field reality, project activities are unlikely to be delivered. As with budgets, project formulators and managers must act decisively when skill gaps are identified within the team, either by providing opportunity for further capacity building or integrating new personnel into the project team. FAO's global network provides it with unique access to experts who can be drawn on to support project implementation. However, these decisions have to be taken promptly to bridge the gaps between project needs and human resource availability.

206. This project has also shown the importance of clearly defined roles and responsibilities, as well as lines of accountability within projects. It also highlighted the necessity for mechanisms for redress and performance monitoring that go beyond administrative benchmarking to consider the underlying factors affecting project performance. Such systems could alert decision-makers and bring them to make timely decisions that address problems before they escalate and impact project delivery.

5.3 Integrated approaches

207. Projects that adopt integrated approaches, as with this project, require spaces for stakeholders to share their experiences and expertise and to ensure that the projects become more than a sum of their individual parts. This requires a collaborative working and learning environment that allows for failures and successes to be integrated as part of a collective learning process towards a common goal. The advantage of this approach also lies in understanding the inter-relationships between project components and how they nest together to deliver expected outcomes. In terms of this project, where activities were not synchronized and path dependencies were not clarified, delays and a lack of achievement became defining results. As a capacity building project, no mechanisms for post-training support to beneficiaries were practiced. The project teams and FAO need to strengthen the planning and implementation of field activities in order to create opportunities beyond the PSC for partners to consider actions, their interdependencies and responsibilities.

5.4 Cofinancing

208. National partners are not always able to generate or mobilize the stated match funding in the GEF and other projects. Mechanisms need to be put in place during the design and formulation phase in order to assess the ability of organizations to effectively deliver on financial targets. It could be valuable, at a minimum, to request financial statements, balances or asset registers as part of a due diligence process. If partners subsequently do not mobilize these resources, then the project suffers, as can be seen in the non-delivery of Outcome 4 by the forestry administration. Monitoring of these contributions on a regular basis also allows for the project team to track risks and potential impacts on the project.

5.5 Stakeholder engagement and communication

209. Projects need to actively develop and implement stakeholder participation and communications plans. Strong engagement of beneficiaries, partners and the government is required to ensure ownership and sustainability of the project. This engagement and communication about the project promotes visibility and facilitates anchoring project gains within ongoing national and international processes. By so doing, the project's coherence, sustainability and demonstrated impacts can be achieved. Stronger engagement and communication are also likely to promote goodwill among stakeholders and a willingness to collaborate.

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Appendix 1. People interviewed

Last name	First name	Position	Organization/location
Albert	Nikiema		FAO Regional Office for Africa
Alex	Nyarko-Badohu	Senior field programme officer	FAO Regional Office for Africa
Alphonse	Kananura	Emergency operations officer, PTF member	FAO Cameroon
Ange	Ottou	Project Assistant	Ministry of Forests and Wildlife, Cameroon
Ann	Degrande	Director	ICRAF
Armand	Asseng Ze	Forestry and environment sector support officer	FAO Cameroon
Athman	Mravili	FAOR Cameroon	FAOR Cameroon
Augustin	Bitchick Bi Bitchick	Programme coordinator	UICN
Banoho	Roger	Programme coordinator	OCD
Baudelaire	Kemajou	Director	CTFC, Cameroon
Bonaventure	Sonke	Responsible for overseeing the project's carbon management activities	FAO consultant
Cargele	Masso	Director	IITA
Cécile	Ndjebet	Coordinator	Cam-Eco
Charlemagne	Nguembou	Project technical coordinator, GEF/SFM/FAO project	FAO Cameroon
Collins	Mboufack	Project focal point	Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development, Cameroon
Elvis	Nsoh Ndam	Responsible for supervision of project forest management activities	FAO consultant
Etienne	Eba	FAOR assistant, administration officer	FAO Cameroon
Evariste	Nfongzossie	Consultant for capacity building	Djum, Mvangane and Oveng council forests
François	Kisse Bini	CFC	Ndikiniméki
Freeman	Adesimi	Regional programme leader	FAO
Henri	Meva	Consultant in charge of MA&D training, coordinator	Non-governmental organization PAPEL
Inusa	Haman	GEF focal point	Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and

Appendix 1. People interviewed

Last name	First name	Position	Organization/location
			Sustainable Development, Cameroon
Jeremie	Mbairamadji	LTO project	FAO
Joseph	Ambara	Programme coordinator	GIZ Protection of Forests and the Environment (GIZ-ProFE)
Kuena	Morebotsane	GEF Coordination Unit	FAO
Louis	Zapack	Consultant in charge of capacity building and carbon inventories	Minta, Nanga - Eboko and Ndikiniméki forest committees
Marius Tresor	Taiwe Danra	Environmental officer in the forestry unit of the council	Dimako Council
Martin	Yemefack	Consultant for capacity building and carbon inventories	Messamena/Mindourou, Lomié and Dimako forest committees
Obam	Tonye	Mayor	Messondo
Patrice	Bessoubel	Mayor	Ndikiniméki council
Pierre	Telep	Director	Monitortrust
Richard	Ebale Adjomo	Mayor	Efoulan
Richard	Zengle Ntouh	Mayor	President of ACFCAM and Mayor of Mindourou
Roger	Pismo		Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development, Cameroon
Soulemanou	Nchutsu	CFC	Mvangane
Thierry	Ndongo Douglas	CFC	Akom II
Yannick	Zamedjo	Project Assistant	Ministry of Forests and Wildlife, Cameroon
Ziekine	Wadou	PSC vice chair	Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development, Cameroon
TOTAL 38			

Field visits

Zone	Date of field visit	Interviews	Participants in focus group discussions
Dzeng	30 May 2022	1	11
Dimako	1 June 2022	2	6
Mvangane	2 June 2022	2	9
Akom II	4 June 2022	2	5
Ndikiniméki	5 June 2022	2	6
TOTAL			37

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS = 75

Appendix 2. GEF evaluation criteria rating table

GEF criteria/subcriteria	Rating ⁱ	Summary comments ⁱⁱ
A. STRATEGIC RELEVANCE		
A1. Overall strategic relevance	HS	Section 3.1
A1.1. Alignment with the GEF and FAO strategic priorities	HS	Sections 3.1.3 and 3.1.4
A1.2. Relevance to national, regional and global priorities and beneficiary needs	HS	Sections 3.1.1 and 3.1.2
A1.3. Relevance to gender	MU	Section 3.1.5
B. EFFECTIVENESS		
B1. Overall assessment of project results	MS	Section 3
B1.1. Delivery of project outputs	MS	Sections 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.2.3, 3.2.4 and 3.2.5
B1.2. Progress towards outcomes ⁱⁱⁱ and project objectives		
- Outcome 1	MU	Section 3.2.1
- Outcome 2	MS	Section 3.2.2
- Outcome 3	MU	Section 3.2.3
- Outcome 4	U	Section 3.2.4
- Outcome 5	MS	Section 3.2.5
- Overall rating of progress towards achieving objectives/outcomes	MS	Section 3.2.7
B1.3. Likelihood of impact	MS	Section 3.2.7
C. EFFICIENCY		
C1. Efficiency ^{iv}	MU	Section 3.3
D. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES		
D1. Overall likelihood of risks to sustainability	ML	Section 3.4
D1.1. Financial risks	ML	Section 3.4
D1.2. Sociopolitical risks	ML	Section 3.4
D1.3. Institutional and governance risks	ML	Section 3.4
D1.4. Environmental risks	ML	Section 3.4
D2. Catalysis and replication	ML	Section 3.4
E. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE		
E1. Project design and readiness ^v	S	Section 3.5.2
E2. Quality of project implementation	MS	Section 3.5.2
E2.1. Quality of project implementation by FAO (BH, LTO, PTF, etc.)	MU	Section 3.5.2
E2.2. Project oversight (PSC, project working group, etc.)	MS	Section 3.5.2
E3. Quality of project execution For decentralized projects: PMU/BH	MS	Section 3.5.3
E4. Financial management and cofinancing	MU	Section 3.5.4
E5. Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement	MU	Section 3.5.5
E6. Communications, knowledge management and knowledge products	MU	Section 3.5.6
E7. Overall quality of M&E	MS	Section 3.5.1

GEF criteria/subcriteria	Ratingⁱ	Summary commentsⁱⁱ
E7.1. M&E design	MS	Section 3.5.1.1
E7.2. M&E implementation plan (including financial and human resources)	MS	Section 3.5.1.2
E8. Overall assessment of factors affecting performance	MS	Section 3.5.7
F. CROSS-CUTTING CONCERNS		
F1. Gender and other equity dimensions	MU	Section 3.6.1
F2. Human rights issues/Indigenous Peoples	MU	Section 3.6.2
F3. Environmental and social safeguards	S	Section 3.6.3
Overall project rating	MS	

Notes: ⁱ See rating scheme in Appendix 3.

ⁱⁱ These include reference to relevant sections in the report.

ⁱⁱⁱ Assessment and ratings by individual outcomes may be undertaken if there is added value.

^{iv} This includes cost efficiency and timeliness.

^v This refers to factors affecting the project's ability to start as expected, such as the presence of sufficient capacity among executing partners at project launch.

Appendix 3. Rating scheme

See instructions provided in Annex 2: Rating scales in the *Guidelines for GEF agencies in conducting terminal evaluations for full-sized projects* (GEF, 2017).

PROJECT RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

Project outcomes are rated based on the extent to which project objectives were achieved. A six-point rating scale is used to assess overall outcomes:

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

During project implementation, the results framework of some projects may have been modified. In cases where modifications in the project impact, outcomes and outputs have not scaled down their overall scope, the evaluator should assess outcome achievements based on the revised results framework. In instances where the scope of the project objectives and outcomes has been scaled down, the magnitude of and necessity for downscaling is taken into account and despite achievement of results as per the revised results framework, where appropriate, a lower outcome effectiveness rating may be given.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND EXECUTION

Quality of implementation and of execution will be rated separately. Quality of implementation pertains to the role and responsibilities discharged by the GEF agencies that have direct access to GEF resources. Quality of execution pertains to the roles and responsibilities discharged by the country or regional counterparts that received GEF funds from the GEF agencies and executed the funded activities on ground. The performance will be rated on a six-point scale:

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

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Quality of project M&E will be assessed in terms of:

- i. design
- ii. implementation

SUSTAINABILITY

The sustainability will be assessed taking into account the risks related to financial, sociopolitical, institutional and environmental sustainability of project outcomes. The evaluator may also take other risks into account that may affect sustainability. The overall sustainability will be assessed using a four-point scale:

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

Appendix 4. GEF cofinancing table

Name of cofinancer	Cofinancer type ⁱ	Type of cofinancing ⁱⁱ	Cofinancing at project start (Amount confirmed at GEF CEO endorsement/approval by the project design team) (in USD)			Materialized project cofinancing at the time of evaluation (in USD)		
			In-kind	Grant	Total	In-kind	Grant	Total
Ministry of Forests and Wildlife	National government	In-kind	USD 5 000 000		USD 5 000 000	USD 2 268 200		USD 2 268 200
Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development	National government	In-kind	USD 4 500 000		USD 4 500 000	USD 1 730 000		USD 1 730 000
FAO	International organization	Grant and in-kind	USD 400 000	USD 1 050 000	USD 1 450 000	USD 408 573	USD 285 414	USD 693 987
Cam-Eco	Civil society organization	In-kind	USD 3 500 000		USD 3 500 000			
National Community-driven Development Programme	Local government programme	In-kind	USD 1 500 000		USD 1 500 000			
GIZ	Bilateral aid agency	In-kind	USD 1 900 000		USD 1 900 000			
Grand total (in USD)			USD 16 800 000	USD 1 050 000	USD 17 850 000	USD 4 406 773	USD 285 414	USD 4 692 187

Notes: ⁱ Examples of categories include: local, provincial or national government; semi-government autonomous institutions; private sector; multilateral or bilateral organizations; educational and research institutions; non-profit organizations; civil society organizations; foundations; beneficiaries; GEF agencies; and others.

ⁱⁱ Grants, loans, equity participation by beneficiaries (individuals) in form of cash, guarantees, in-kind or material contributions, and others.

Appendix 5. Results matrix

Output	Activities	Activities achieved	Activities remaining	Achievement percentage	Observations
Component 1: Establishment of council forests for sustainable management and biodiversity conservation					
Output 1.1.1. Database of biodiversity in the council forests established.	Activity 1: Develop criteria and indicators for designation of conservation sites, assessment and monitoring of biodiversity in the council forests	Technical publications on criteria and indicators for designation of conservation sites, assessment and monitoring of biodiversity in the council forests have been developed by the project.	0	100	Activity completed
	Activity 2: Mapping and inventory of biodiversity in the identified conservation sites to serve as reference for monitoring	The mapping and inventory of biodiversity were completed in 13 out of 17 council forests targeted by the project, namely Ndikiniméki, Nanga-Eboko, Minta, Dimako, Gari-Gombo, Yokadouma, Lomié, Djoum, Messondo, Ngambé/Ndom/Nyanon, Mvangane, Oveng and Akom II/Efoulan.	Conduct the inventory of biodiversity in the council forest of Mouloundou and complete data processing of Messamena/Mindourou, Dzeng and Yoko where inventory was already conducted.	76.47	In the four council forests remaining, the inventories of biodiversity were already done in three (Messamena/Mindourou, Dzeng and Yoko). The only work to be completed is the data processing and reporting.
	Activity 3: Create and update a database on biodiversity in the council forests	The database on biodiversity is created and installed in the computers provided by the project to the 17 council forests targeted by the project.	0	100	Activity completed
Output 1.1.2. Forest management plans integrating biodiversity conservation developed and implemented.	Activity 1: Gazetting of 561 825 ha of council forest into three blocks (10 percent for conservation site, 10 percent for enrichment and restoration, and 80 percent for SFM)	The gazetting of forest into three blocks (10 percent for conservation site, 10 percent for enrichment and restoration, and 80 percent for SFM) is conducted in 15 council forests (Ndikiniméki, Nanga Eboko, Minta, Dimako, Gari Gombo, Yokadouma, Lomié, Djoum, Messondo,	Conduct the gazetting of 10 percent for enrichment and restoration in the	88.23	Gazetting of 10 percent for enrichment and restoration to be conducted in 2 out of 17 council forests (Dzeng and Yoko).

Output	Activities	Activities achieved	Activities remaining	Achievement percentage	Observations
		Ngambé/Ndom/Nyanon, Mvangane, Oveng, Akom II/Efoulan, Moloundou and Mindourou/Messamena).	two council forests of Dzeng and Yoko.		
	Activity 2: Development of forest management plans, integrating biodiversity conservation	Development of forest management plans, integrating biodiversity conservation in 9 out of 17 council forests targeted by the project, namely Ndikiniméki, Nanga Eboko, Minta, Dimako, Gari Gombo, Yokadouma, Mvangane, Oveng and Akom II/Efoulan.	Perform the development of forest management plans, integrating biodiversity conservation in eight council forests (Mouloundou, Dzeng, Yoko, Messamena/Mindourou, Djoum, Lomié, Messondo, and Ngambé/Ndom/Nyanon).	52.94	Developing forest management plans and integrating biodiversity conservation is expected in the remaining council forests.
	Activity 3: Implementation of forest management plans, integrating biodiversity conservation	The forest management plans, integrating biodiversity conservation in 9 out of 17 council forests targeted by the project, were finalized and approved by the Ministry of Forestry, namely Ndikiniméki, Nanga Eboko, Minta, Dimako, Gari Gombo, Yokadouma, Mvangane, Oveng and Akom II/Efoulan.	Complete yet waiting for official approval of the remaining forest management plans.	0	The official approval of the forest management plans, integrating biodiversity conservation, is to be done by the Ministry of Forestry and Fauna for their use and implementation by the councils.
	Activity 4: Monitoring of forest management plan implementation	The monitoring of forest management plans takes place once they start to be implemented by the councils after their	Conduct monitoring activity once the council starts with the	0	This activity is beyond FAO control and depends on when the councils start to implement their approved

Output	Activities	Activities achieved	Activities remaining	Achievement percentage	Observations
		approval by the Ministry of Forestry and Fauna.	implementation of the approved forest management plan by the interministerial commission.		forest management plan by the interministerial commission.
Output 1.1.3. 56 200 ha of conservation sites formally designated and established within the council forests.	Activity 1: Establishment and designation of conservation sites	The establishment and designation of conservation sites was done in 13 council forests (Ndikiniméki, Nanga Eboko, Minta, Dimako, Gari Gombo, Yokadouma, Lomié, Djoum, Messondo, Ngambé/Ndom/Nyanon, Mvangane, Oveng and Akom II/Efoulan).	Complete the establishment and designation of conservation sites in Moloundou and finalize data processing in Yoko, Dzeng and Messamena/Mindourou.	76.47	Data processing in Yoko, Dzeng and Messamena/Mindourou and the establishment and designation of conservation sites in Moloundou have been completed.
	Activity 2: Establishment of management effectiveness baseline	Capacity building of council forest staff, forest users and key stakeholders, as well as guidelines, technical studies and practical tools of forest management, implementation and monitoring were performed by the project to establish the management effectiveness baseline.	0	100	Activity completed
	Activity 3: Monitoring the management effectiveness of the conservation sites	The field monitoring of the effectiveness of the conservation sites was performed.	0	100	Activity completed
Component 2: Capacity building to strengthen biodiversity conservation and SFM in council forests					
Output 2.1.1. Technical guidance and standards for SFM and	Activity 1: Development, testing and review of draft technical guidelines	Technical guidelines and standards for SFM and biodiversity conservation in conservation sites, including criteria and indicators for the selection of conservation	0	100	Activity completed

Output	Activities	Activities achieved	Activities remaining	Achievement percentage	Observations
biodiversity conservation in conservation sites were developed and disseminated in the council forests.		sites and biodiversity monitoring, technical guidelines for monitoring and reporting on biodiversity, training modules on inventory, monitoring and conservation of biodiversity in council forests, training modules on integration of biodiversity conservation and forest sustainable management of council forests, as well as technical guidelines for SFM and biodiversity conservation in council forests were realized.			
	Activity 2: Dissemination of the technical guidelines	Technical guidelines produced by the projects were disseminated to 21 councils involved and in the 17 council forests targeted by the project. In addition, the technical guidelines were disseminated to the Ministry of Forests and Environment and to the project key partners and stakeholders.	0	100	Activity completed
Output 2.1.2. Eighty-five local FPCs were established and trained, and 170 local community leaders/change agents from the villages in/around the council forests were trained in alternative livelihoods.	Activity 1: Establishment and training of 45 FPCs in forest management and monitoring	Far beyond the planned target of 45, 72 FPCs, i.e. six per council, were established, structured and trained.	0	160	Activity completed beyond the target
	Activity 2: Training of 90 local stakeholders in SFM and alternative forest income-generating activities (NTFP, hunting and ecotourism)	110 stakeholders (10 participants per council) coming from 11 councils involved in the 17 council forests targeted by the project were trained in FAO's MA&D approach and produced enterprise development plans for alternative forest income-generating activities (NTFP, hunting and ecotourism).	0	122	Activity completed beyond the target. In addition to the training of stakeholders, 440 community members coming from 11 councils were trained in FAO's MA&D approach and produced a forest

Output	Activities	Activities achieved	Activities remaining	Achievement percentage	Observations
					enterprise development plan.
	Activity 3: Establishment and training of 40 FPCs in forest management and monitoring	Far beyond the target of the 40 planned, 54 FPCs, i.e. six per council, were established and trained.	0	135	Activity completed beyond the target
	Activity 4: Training of 80 locals in SFM and alternative forest income-generating activities (NTFP, hunting and ecotourism)	100 stakeholders (10 participants per council) coming from 10 councils involved in the 17 council forests targeted by the project were trained in FAO's MA&D approach and produced their enterprise development plan for alternative forest income-generating activities (NTFP, hunting and ecotourism).	0	125	Activity completed beyond the target. In addition to the training of stakeholders, 400 community members coming from ten councils were trained in FAO's MA&D approach and produced a forest enterprise development plan.
Output 2.1.3. Seventeen FTUs were established and 85 council staff members were trained in the development and implementation of forest management plans.	Activity 1: Establishment of 17 CTFCs	Field studies were conducted in the 17 council forests to assess the existence and status of CTFCs. Based on the studies, new CTFCs were established in the councils where they were absent and others were structured and strengthened.	0	100	Activity completed
	Activity 2: Training of 45 council staff members in the development and implementation of forest management plans	Eighty-eight council forest staff members from 11 councils (8 per council including members of PFCs) were trained in the development and implementation of forest management plans.	0	195.5	Activity completed beyond the target
	Activity 3: Training of 40 council staff members in the development and	Eighty council forest staff members (instead of 40) from 10 councils (8 per council including PFC members) were trained in the	0	200	Activity completed beyond the target

Output	Activities	Activities achieved	Activities remaining	Achievement percentage	Observations
	implementation of forest management plans	development and implementation of forest management plans.			
Component 3: Capacity building for the management of forest carbon					
Output 3.1.1. Existing accounting and carbon monitoring systems were adapted to council forests and tested.	Activity 1: Assessment of existing accounting and carbon monitoring systems	A technical publication on the assessment of existing accounting and carbon monitoring systems was produced.	0	100	Activity completed
	Activity 2: Adapting carbon accounting and monitoring system for the council forests				
	Activity 3: Testing the adapted carbon accounting and monitoring system	A technical publication on the testing of an adapted carbon accounting and monitoring system was produced.	0	100	Activity completed
	Activity 4: Applying the carbon accounting and monitoring system in the council forests				
	Activity 5: Measuring and monitoring carbon in the council forests	Technical guidelines and a protocol for measuring, monitoring and sustainably managing carbon stock in council forest were produced.	0	100	Activity completed
Output 3.1.2. Eighty-five FPC and 34 FTU staff members were trained in forest carbon management.	Activity 1: Training of 17 FTU staff members in methods for carbon accounting and monitoring, approaches to conserve and enhance forest carbon in the council forest and forest surveillance and protection (combatting illegal logging, illegal grazing and forest fire)	Twenty CTFCs from 10 councils were trained on methods for carbon accounting and monitoring, approaches to conserve and enhance forest carbon in the council forest and forest surveillance and protection (combatting illegal logging, illegal grazing and forest fire).	0	117.6	Activity completed beyond the target

Output	Activities	Activities achieved	Activities remaining	Achievement percentage	Observations
	Activity 2: Training of 45 FPCs in forest surveillance and protection (combatting illegal logging, illegal grazing and forest fire)	Forty members of PFCs from 10 councils were trained on methods for carbon accounting and monitoring, approaches to conserve and enhance forest carbon in the council forest and forest surveillance and protection (combatting illegal logging, illegal grazing and forest fire).	0	88.9	Activity completed
	Activity 3: Training of 17 FTU staff members in methods for carbon accounting and monitoring, approaches to conserve and enhance forest carbon in the council forest and forest surveillance and protection (combatting illegal logging, illegal grazing and forest fire)	Eighteen CTFCs coming from nine councils were trained on methods for carbon accounting and monitoring, approaches to conserve and enhance forest carbon in the council forest and forest surveillance and protection (combatting illegal logging, illegal grazing and forest fire).	0	105.9	Activity completed beyond the target
	Activity 4: Training of 40 FPCs in forest surveillance and protection (combatting illegal logging, illegal grazing and forest fire)	Twenty-five PFC members from eight councils were trained on methods for carbon accounting and monitoring, approaches to conserve and enhance forest carbon in the council forest and forest surveillance and protection (combatting illegal logging, illegal grazing and forest fire).	0	62.5	Activity completed
Component 4: Ecosystem restoration and enhancement of carbon stocks in the council forests					
Output 4.1.1. Reforestation and restoration of 56 200 ha in the council forests (10 percent of total council	Activity 1: Enrichment or rehabilitation of degraded fallow/arid lands and savannah in the council forests (11 240 ha)	The Ministry of Forests and Wildlife and the Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Sustainable Development have reforested or rehabilitated 3 821.7 ha.	Cofinancing activity not supported by the GEF budget	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Activity 2: Reforestation (33 720 ha)				

Output	Activities	Activities achieved	Activities remaining	Achievement percentage	Observations
forest and forest reserves targeted by the project).	Activity 3: Restoration of degraded forest areas (11 240 ha)		Cofinancing activity not supported by the GEF budget	Not applicable	Not applicable
Component 5: M&E and information dissemination					
Output 5.1.1. M&E plan implemented and mid-term and terminal evaluations completed.	Activity 1: M&E plan implementation from year 1 to year 4 and preparation of all reports	The project M&E plan implementation was produced.	0	100	Activity completed
	Activity 2: Mid-term evaluation	The project mid-term evaluation was performed and the report is available.	0	100	Activity completed
	Activity 3: Communication and awareness raising on project activities	Project communication and awareness raising of project activities were performed.	0	100	Activity completed
	Activity 4: Final evaluation	The project terminal evaluation was performed.	0	100	Activity completed
	Activity 5: Project good practices and lessons learned captured, published and disseminated	In progress.			

Annexes

Annex 1. Terms of reference of the evaluation

https://www.fao.org/3/cc6223en/GCP_CM033_GFF_Annex_1.pdf

Annex 2. Revised theory of change visual

https://www.fao.org/3/cc6223en/GCP_CM033_GFF_Annex_2.pdf

Annex 3. Summary of field visits and key criteria for selection

https://www.fao.org/3/cc6223en/GCP_CM033_GFF_Annex_3.pdf

Annex 4. Status of communications activities

https://www.fao.org/3/cc6223en/GCP_CM033_GFF_Annex_4.pdf

Annex 5. Evaluation framework

https://www.fao.org/3/cc6223en/GCP_CM033_GFF_Annex_5.pdf

Annex 6. Terms of reference of the Project Technical Coordinator

https://www.fao.org/3/cc6223en/GCP_CM033_GFF_Annex_6.pdf

Annex 7. Field mission report led by the LTO from 16 to 20 May

https://www.fao.org/3/cc6223en/GCP_CM033_GFF_Annex_7.pdf

Annex 8. Field mission report led by the LTO from 25 May to 4 June

https://www.fao.org/3/cc6223en/GCP_CM033_GFF_Annex_8.pdf

Annex 9. Property transferred based on receipts shared by the project team (reconstructed by the evaluation team)

https://www.fao.org/3/cc6223en/GCP_CM033_GFF_Annex_9.pdf

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