Mid-Term Review of the UNEP GEF Project

Project "Reduce marine plastics and plastic pollution in Latin American and the Caribbean cities through a circular economy approach" (GEF ID 10547)

UNEP Cartagena Convention Secretariat

June 2026

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Reduce marine plastics and plastic pollution in Latin American and the Caribbean cities through a circular economy approach
GEF ID 10547
2022-2026

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This Mid Term Review was prepared for the UNEP Ecosystems Division, Marine and Freshwater Branch, Global Environment Facility International Waters Unit by an independent consultant, Sherry Heileman.

The reviewer would like to express her gratitude to all persons met and who contributed to this review through interviews, as listed in Annex II.

Sincere thanks are extended to the project team and in particular Ms Isabelle Vanderbeck, Task Manager, and Ms Anna Blanpain, Associate Task Manager (UNEP GEF International Waters Unit); Ms Neha Dharmshaktu, Task Manager (UNEP Industry and Economy Division GEF Chemicals and Green Chemistry Unit); Ms Laverne Walker, Programme Management Officer, and Mr. Christopher Corbin, Coordinator (UNEP Cartagena Convention Secretariat) for their valuable contribution and collaboration throughout the review process. Sincere appreciation is also expressed to the Project Steering Committee and others who reviewed and provided comments to the draft review report.

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The review consultant hopes that the findings, conclusions, and recommendations will contribute to the successful completion of the GEF LAC Circular Cities project and to the continuous improvement of similar projects in other countries and regions.

BRIEF EXTERNAL CONSULTANT BIOGRAPHY

Sherry Heileman is a senior marine environment professional and project evaluator with more than 20 years' experience. She has a proven track record in conducting project evaluations for UN organisations particularly of GEF International Waters and multi-focal area projects around the world. She has significant experience in project design and coordination as well as in marine environmental assessments (regional and global) and has led or contributed to several landmark projects and publications for UN organisations. Her academic qualifications include a PhD degree in Marine Biology and Fisheries from the University of Miami, Florida (Rosenstiel School of Marine, Atmospheric and Earth Science). She is a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago and is currently based in Panamá.

REVIEW TEAM

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About the Review

Joint Review: Yes

Report Language(s): English.

Review Type: Mid-term Review

Brief Description: This report is a Mid-Term Review of the UNEP implemented GEF-funded full sized project: Reducing marine plastics and plastic pollution in Latin American and the Caribbean cities through a circular economy approach (GEF ID: 10547), under implementation between 2022 and 2026. The review provides formative insights into possible course correction for the remainder of the project's implementation.

Key words: *Mid-Term Review; Global Environment Facility (GEF); International Waters; Chemicals and Waste; marine plastic pollution; plastic pollution; circular economy; Latin America and the Caribbean; Colombia; Jamaica; Panama; Cartagena Convention; UNEP*.

Primary data collection period: January – March 2026

Field mission dates:
- 4-5 February 2026: Panamá (ANCON, Min. Environment)
- 2-5 March 2026: Kingston, Jamaica (CCS, MWECC, Montego Bay and Kingston Municipalities, PIOJ)
- 8-13 March 2026: Colombia (Santa Marta-INVEMAR, Barranquilla, Cartagena)
- 17 March 2026: Panamá (Colón & Panamá City municipalities)
- 19 March 2026: (Collection Centre, Panamá City)

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFMO	Acting Fund Management Officer
ANCON	National Association for Nature Conservation
CBO	Community-based Organisation
CCS	Cartagena Convention Secretariat
CE	Circular Economy
CEO	Chief Executing Officer
CI	Conservation International
CLI	Collective Leadership Institute
CO_2e	Carbon Dioxide Emission
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
C&W	Chemicals and Waste
CWG	City Working Group
EA	Executing Agency
FDG	Focus Group Discussion
FMO	Fund Management Officer
GEB	Global Environmental Benefit
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
HQ	Headquarters
IA	Implementing Agency
ICA	Internal Cooperation Agreement
IEC	Information, Education and Communication (strategy)
INVEMAR	Institute of Marine and Coastal Research
IP	Implementing Partner
IRT	Industry Roundtable
IUNV	International UN Volunteer
IW	International Waters
LAC	Latin America and Caribbean
LACO	Latin America and Caribbean Office (UNEP)
LBS	Land-Based Sources
LME	Large Marine Ecosystem
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MTR	Mid-term Review
MTS	Mid-term Strategy
MWECC	Ministry of Water, Environment and Climate Change
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NWG	National Working Group
PCA	Partner Cooperation Agreement
PIR	Project Implementation Review
PM	Project Manager
PMA	Programme Management Assistant
PMC	Project Management Cost
PMO	Programme Management Officer
PMU	Project Management Unit
POP	Persistent Organic Pollutant
PSC	Project Steering Committee
QER	Quarterly Expenditure Report
QPR	Quarterly Progress Report
RMB	Resources and Markets Branch (UNEP)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SSFA	Small-scale Funding Agreement

TEQ	Toxic Equivalent
ToC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNMSDCF	UN Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for the Caribbean
UNSDCF	UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
uPOP	Unintended Persistent Organic Pollutant

PROJECT IDENTIFICATION TABLE

Table 1: GEF Project Identification Table

UNEP PIMS ID/SMA[1] ID:	UNEP IPMR ID: 122562	Grant ID[2] (if applicable):	10547
UNEP Management (Division/Branch/Unit):	Ecosystems Division/ Marine and Freshwater Branch/ Global Environment Facility (GEF) International Waters Unit Industry and Economy Division/ Chemicals and Health Branch / GEF Chemicals and Green Chemistry Unit		
Implementing Partners:	UNEP Cartagena Convention Secretariat UNEP Consumption and Production Unit (Resources and Markets Branch) UNEP Regional Office Latin America and the Caribbean		
Sources of Funding:	*Country[3](ies):* Colombia, Jamaica, Panamá		
Relevant SDG(s):	SDG 6, 11, 12, 14 and 17		
MTS (all that apply):	2022-2025, 2026-2029	UNEP approval date:	28 November 2022
POW Direct Outcome(s) number/reference *(applicable for projects approved from 2022):* **OR** POW Output(s) number/reference *(applicable for projects approved pre-2022)*	POW Direct Outcome: 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 3.9, 3.11, 3.12, 3.13, 3.14	MTS 2025 Outcome(s) number/reference *(applicable for projects approved from 2022):* **OR** POW Expected Accomplishment(s) number/reference *(applicable for projects approved pre-2022):*	MTS 2025 Outcome: 3A,3B,3C
	POW Output: N/A		POW Expected Accomplishment: N/A
Sub-programme:	Chemicals and pollution action	Programme Coordination Project:	Circularity in sectors
Expected start date:	N/A	Actual start date:	22 December 2022
Planned completion date:	30 June 2027	Actual operational completion date:	N/A
Planned total project budget[4] at approval:	7,000,000	Actual total expenditures reported as of 31 December 2025:	618,932.85 US$
Planned Extra-budgetary Funds[5]:	Cash (grant): 15,472,569 US$ Other: 2,780,473.86 US$ Public investment: 799,100.37 US$ In-kind: 16,355,097.25 US$	Secured Extra-budgetary Funds:	Cash (grant): 597,771 US$ Other: 560,660 US$ Public investment: 43,574 US$ In kind: 3,619,011 US$

[1] SMA refers to the ID provided by the Integrated Planning, Management and Reporting Solution (IPMR) system, which was introduced by UNEP in July 2023.
[2] For example, ID references from EC, IKI, UNDA, Adaptation Fund, GCF.
[3] Where applicable, list countries who have provided project funds and/or co-finance.
[4] Total budget may include; Regular Budget, Environment Fund, Extra-Budgetary, including 'softly-earmarked' etc.
[5] Extra-budgetary funds may include co-finance (cash/in-kind)

		Actual Extra-budgetary Funds expenditures reported as of [date]:	See above
First disbursement:	18 January 2023	Planned date of financial closure:	30 June 2027
No. and dates of formal project revisions:	0	Date of last approved project revision:	N/A
No. of Steering Committee meetings:	3	Date of Last Steering Committee meeting:	27-28 March 2025
Mid-term Review/ Evaluation budgeted:	*At design: Yes* *At revision: No*	Mid-term Review/ Evaluation (actual date):	Jan-June 2026
Terminal Evaluation *(planned date):*	30 June 2028	Terminal Evaluation (actual date):	N/A
Coverage – Implementing Country(ies):	Colombia, Jamaica, Panamá	Coverage – Implementing Region(s):	Latin America and the Caribbean
Dates of previous project phases:	N/A	Status of future project phases:	N/A

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Background

1. The GEF project "Reduce marine plastics and plastic pollution in Latin American and the Caribbean cities through a circular economy approach (GEF ID 10547)", is being implemented in six cities in three Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) countries: Colombia (Barranquilla and Cartagena), Jamaica (Kingston and Montego Bay), and Panamá (Panamá City and Colón) from December 2022- December 2026. It is financed through a GEF grant of US$7,000,000 and co-financing of US$35,407,240. The Implementing Agencies (IA) are UNEP Ecosystems Division/Marine and Freshwater Branch/GEF International Waters Unit and UNEP Industry and Economy Division/ Chemicals and Health Branch/ GEF Chemicals and Green Chemistry Unit and the Executing Agency (EA) UNEP Cartagena Convention Secretariat (CCS). The main national Implementing Partners (IP) are the Institute of Marine and Coastal Research (INVEMAR) in Colombia, Ministry of Water, Environment and Climate Change (MWECC) in Jamaica, and the National Association for Nature Conservation (ANCON) in Panamá, with targeted technical support provided by UNEP Resources and Markets Branch (RMB) and UNEP Latin America and Caribbean Office (LACO).

2. The three countries face increasing volumes of plastic wastes, most of which ends up in the ocean, threatening marine ecosystems and biodiversity, major economic sectors, and human health. The rationale for the project is that effectively addressing marine plastic pollution requires a circular economy approach, but several barriers that impede its implementation in the participating countries need to be addressed. Therefore, the project's objective is to address the major systemic barriers to fully implementing a circular economy approach for plastics in LAC cities through five components.

This Review

3. The mid-term review (MTR) was undertaken by an independent consultant at the start of the last year of the project (covering the first three years from December 2022 - December 2025) to assess project progress towards planned results and objectives, identify problems and challenges being encountered, and recommend corrective actions to improve performance. It assessed performance against seven review criteria[6] to each of which it assigned a score from a six-point scale.[7] Data collection methods included document reviews and semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with project partners and other stakeholders.

Key Findings

4. The GEF LAC Circular Cities project has remained highly relevant to UNEP, the GEF, and national and regional concerns related to addressing marine plastic pollution using circular economy approaches. Its comprehensive, integrated design is appropriate for addressing the key systemic barriers to transitioning to a circular economy in the six cities, although the design is complex and over-ambitious for the available budget and timeframe as well as the

[6] (1) Strategic Relevance; (2) Effectiveness (incl. availability of outputs; achievement of outcomes and likelihood of impact); (3) Financial Management; (4) Efficiency; (5) Monitoring and Reporting; (6) Exit Strategy and Sustainability and (7) Factors Affecting Project Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues.
[7] Highly Satisfactory (HS); Satisfactory (S); Moderately Satisfactory (MS); Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU); Unsatisfactory (U); Highly Unsatisfactory (HU). Sustainability and Likelihood of Impact are rated from Highly Likely (HL) to Highly Unlikely (HU).

on-the-ground realities of some of the cities, including the disparity among them in terms of their capacity to implement project activities and circular economy approaches. More substantial engagement of the CCS as the Executing Agency in project formulation could have helped to ensure that the design was better aligned with on-the-ground realities in the participating cities. The project has demonstrated strong performance in mobilising stakeholders across the plastics value chain and provided opportunities for active stakeholder involvement in implementation.

5. During the period covered by the review, the highest level of progress was demonstrated in the regional level activities. A major achievement is the establishment and operationalisation of the LAC Inter-city Network and its expansion with seven other LAC cities, providing a unique platform for collaboration among governments and city-level officials. A similar mechanism for collaboration of the private sector is the Industry Roundtables (IRT), which, although not yet formally established, has garnered strong stakeholder participation in initial consultations.

6. At the broader level, the project has underperformed with respect to the achievement of the planned outputs, with only 59% of the related 22 targets programmed for Year 1-Year 3 delivered, and only one of the four outcomes (Inter-city Network) close to being fully achieved. This situation could be attributed to several factors including the extended inception phase and prolonged delay in the start of implementation of substantive activities especially in the countries. Colombia and Panama received their first disbursement only in the third quarter of 2025 and at the time of writing Jamaica was still without a signed agreement. Start-up delays could be attributed to various factors operating within the countries (e.g., internal administrative processes, delay in contracting local partners, and unfamiliarity with GEF and UNEP processes and expectations), CCS (capacity constraints due to inadequate budget allocation for project management), and UNEP HQ (including systemic UNEP institutional processes and extended recruitment timelines). Underestimation of the time required for project start-up and the ensuing delays and asynchrony in the start of substantive activities and implementation progress among participating cities has also affected the overall project and reduced efficiency because of the links between regional and national/local level activities and outputs. Moreover, because of extended delays in implementation without any visible concrete activities and tangible results in the cities, some stakeholders started to lose interest in the project, which will require their re-engagement.

7. A new project manager has been contracted (after six months without a project manager), but the Project Management Unit (PMU) is still without a fund management officer (FMO) and monitoring specialist and must rely heavily on the support of CCS staff and the two GEF Task Managers.

8. The project's weak performance during the first three years is corroborated by the low cumulative expenditure on the GEF grant during this period. Compared to the level of funds disbursed (US$1,160,000) and the total GEF grant (US$7,000,000), spending (US$618,932) was low (53% and 9%, respectively), which is inconsistent with the project's workplan and delivery of outputs expected by the third year of implementation. This was also evident in the expenditures being consistently below the forecast over the entire period, attributed to delays in contracting of the national IPs and in disbursement of the GEF funds (of which about 56% is allocated to the IPs), combined with slow implementation during the period under review. Delayed implementation in the countries has also resulted in a high project management cost in relation to cumulative expenditures (13.6%), which significantly exceeds GEF's stipulation of 5%. This represents a risk for the longevity and sustainability of the project funds, especially in the case of a no-cost extension, when additional funds will be required for project management. As such, the 5% PMC cap stipulated by the GEF is clearly inadequate for multi-

country projects involving multiple implementing partners, complex governance arrangements, and extensive monitoring and reporting requirements. A discrepancy between the levels of co-finance committed and realized (17%) means that re-engaging partners and identifying new sources of co-finance will be necessary during the remaining project lifetime. Another important gap is the lack of an exit strategy and a sustainability plan, which is essential for sustaining the project results.

9. With most of the work still to be done in less than one year and in the face of persisting hurdles and challenges, the project is at high risk. This necessitates a no-cost extension of at least 1.5 years (from December 2025) to facilitate successful completion of the project and avoid reputational risk to the CCS, UNEP, and the Implementing Partners. To ensure that the remaining time and budget are efficiently utilised, re-scoping and tailoring the country-level targets and workplans in line with their respective capacities and specific circumstances will be critical. Should a no-cost extension be granted, closer oversight and supervision (e.g., through more frequent virtual PSC meetings) will be essential to ensure that the project stays on track and within budget.

10. The overall performance rating of the GEF LAC Circular Cities project (at past mid-point) is **Moderately Unsatisfactory**. The ratings for the individual criteria are presented in the following Table.

Table 2: Summary of project ratings

Criterion	Rating
Strategic Relevance	Highly Satisfactory
Effectiveness	Unsatisfactory
Financial Management	Moderately Unsatisfactory
Efficiency	Unsatisfactory
Monitoring and Reporting	Moderately Satisfactory
Exit Strategy and Sustainability	Moderately Likely
Factors Affecting Performance	Moderately Satisfactory
Overall Project Performance Rating (beyond Mid-point)	**Moderately Unsatisfactory**

Lessons Learned

1. A project design that is overly complex and ambitious for its timeframe, budget and stakeholder capacity, and not well-aligned with the on-the-ground reality, can result in implementation challenges and reduced efficiency, with increased potential for failure.
2. Substantial involvement of the executing agency in project formulation is essential to ensure that budgets and timelines, as well as staffing, execution, and implementation arrangements are aligned with the situation in the region and participating countries.
3. Funds allocated for project management must be aligned with the needs of the project. The GEF 5% cap creates structural challenges for complex multi-country regional projects involving multiple implementing partners, extensive monitoring and reporting requirements, and complex governance arrangements.
4. The presence of a project manager with adequate support staff is crucial from the very start of a project to ensure that all necessary preparations are in place for implementation in a timely manner. Prolonged delay in the start of substantive activities followed by slow implementation with a project manager on board results in high project management cost in relation to expenditures.

5. While cost-sharing arrangements with other projects for project management generates efficiencies, it could also lead to inefficiencies. Cost-sharing requires synchronized financial planning and timely fund transfers across projects to avoid implementation delays and financial management issues.
6. Adequate preparation for implementation requires considerable time and effort, which must be accommodated in the overall project workplan and budget. Underestimation of the time required for project start-up can result in lengthy delays with knock-on effects on implementation.
7. Prolonged delay in implementation with no evidence of concrete activities and tangible results could cause stakeholders to lose interest in the project, with reputational risk to the IA, and EA, and lead implementing partners, and reduce co-finance contributions.
8. In a regional project with interdependencies between regional and national/local level activities and outputs, asynchrony in the start of substantive activities and implementation progress among participating countries/cities reduces efficiency and places the project at risk.

Recommendations

<u>Recommendation 1:</u> Strengthen the financial and project management capacity of the PMU with a full-time project manager, a dedicated FMO, and other supporting personnel. The project manager and FMO should be contracted for the entire duration of the project and without prolonged contract breaks.

<u>Recommendation 2:</u> Consider acquiring additional support from one of the Implementing Partners such as LACO or RMB, or another appropriate partner for specific support to the PMU, such as arranging regional meetings and travel, and allocation of the associated budget to the selected partner.

<u>Recommendation 3:</u> Assist countries/cities to assess and re-scope their activities according to their priorities and capacities in relation to a circular economy for plastics and on-the-ground situation, and activities and workplans tailored accordingly for the remaining project lifetime to ensure efficient implementation. In this case, each city could be involved in a sub-set of activities that collectively will contribute to project level outcomes.

<u>Recommendation 4</u>: Identify critical capacity gaps among the cities and measures to address them, to allow effective participation in the project and beyond in the circular economy for plastics. This should include strengthening technical capacity for the implementation of the long-term monitoring program being developed by the project. If this is not feasible under the project, consideration should be given to developing a proposal for achieving this goal in the post-project period, with option for financial support and retaining the capacity once in place. The proposal should be included in the sustainability plan to be developed.

<u>Recommendation 5:</u> Accelerate efforts towards signing of the agreement by the Government of Jamaica and explore options for bolstering support to the two cities for implementation of project activities, and foster collaboration between the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development and the Ministry of Water, Environment, and Climate Change (main Implementing Partner). The CCS should develop a contingency plan if the delay in signing the PCA extends beyond a certain time.

<u>Recommendation 6:</u> Identify and implement mechanisms (such a multi-stakeholder platform) to facilitate closer interaction and collaboration between the IRT and Inter-city Network to strengthen collaboration between the private and public sectors; and for sharing of lessons and experiences among the cities on a regular basis (e.g., social media groups and site visits).

Recommendation 7: Engage partners in developing a sustainability plan as a living document, to be presented for endorsement to the PSC and national governments and municipalities.

Recommendation 8: Ensure that the update of the project website is completed and available project content is uploaded in a timely manner; and as soon as possible accelerate implementation of the communication strategy, private sector approach, and gender action plan in parallel with technical activities.

Recommendation 9: Strengthen efforts to establish strategic partnerships and collaboration with other relevant national, regional, and global projects and initiatives on marine plastic pollution and circular economy for plastics; and to re-engage partners and identify new partners to increase co-finance contributions.

Recommendation 10: Consider and propose to the GEF and UNEP (IA) a no-cost extension of the project of 1.5 years to June 2028 for operational closure and to December 2028 for financial closure; and initiate actions with the Partners to revise activities, workplans, and budgets as appropriate, and put necessary arrangements in place (e.g., adequate staffing and co-finance over a longer period), in preparation for an extension.

Recommendation 11: Should a no-cost extension be granted, convene more frequent virtual PSC meetings such as quarterly or bi-annually to provide closer oversight and supervision and ensure that the project stays on track and achieves its planned outcomes and objectives in the remaining time and within budget.

Table 3: Summary recommendations implementation plan

Rec Number	Approved (Yes/No/ Partially)	Responsible Officer/Unit	Mechanism for Implementation
1	Yes	CCS	CCS will strengthen the PMU's project and financial management capacity through the recruitment of a full-time Project Manager and a dedicated Financial Management Officer, while continuing to benefit from the support of the Project Management Assistant. CCS will recruit both professionals for the full duration of the project and will make every effort to ensure continuity by avoiding prolonged gaps between contracts.
2	Yes	CCS, with implementing partners	CCS will amend the budgets of LACO, the Industry Innovation Branch (previously known as RMB) and/or implementing partners to get additional support to arrange meetings (particularly for the organization of events in project countries) and travel, as deemed possible pending the budget revision needed to support the PMU. CCS will allocate some budget to Industry Innovation Branch, for the development of a project video, the project indicator M&E framework and related country training.
3	Yes	CCS/PMU, with Implementing Partners	PMU UNEP CCS will hold guidance discussions with the implementing partners to support the development of their annual work plans and the corresponding technical and financial forecasts through the proposed project end date of June 2028. Before, during, and after the PSC meeting, all three implementing partners confirmed that they remain committed to delivering all project activities within the newly proposed timeframe. Nevertheless, CCS will continue these discussions, taking into account the specific context of each country, including the potential rescoping of certain activities, where appropriate, to facilitate effective implementation while maintaining the project's objectives and expected results.
4	Yes	CCS/PMU with Implementing Partners and cities	The project will continue to provide tailored technical support to cities through the Industry Innovation branch and specialized consultants to address capacity gaps in circular economy implementation. At the same time, a Long-Term Monitoring and Reporting Methodology is being developed, expected to be finalized by the end of September 2026, and will be presented in a virtual workshop for discussion with project partners once completed. To promote the sustainability of these

			efforts beyond the project lifetime, the Sustainability Plan will include measures to support the continuation of capacity-building activities and the long-term implementation of the monitoring methodology.
5	Yes	CCS/PMU, with Government of Jamaica	UNEP CCS will maintain regular follow-up with the Ministry of Water, Environment and Climate Change (MWECC) regarding the signature of the agreement and continue providing support to address any questions or concerns related to the process. In parallel, UNEP CCS will engage with the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) to ensure that this matter remains a priority at the governmental level and to facilitate the timely finalization of the agreement. UNEP CCS will also continue fostering collaboration between the MWECC and the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development to support effective project implementation. In addition, options to strengthen support to the two participating cities will be explored, including an on-site mission by the Circular Economy Consultant from the Industry Innovation branch to provide tailored technical assistance. Should the signature of the PCA be further delayed, UNEP CCS will develop a contingency plan to minimize implementation delays and ensure continued progress toward the project's objectives.
6	Yes	CCS/PMU, LACO, CLI and the circular economy consultant	In coordination with LACO, CLI, and the circular economy consultant, CCS will establish mechanisms to strengthen collaboration and knowledge exchange between the Inter-city Network and the IRT. These could include regular joint meetings, shared learning spaces, and peer-to-peer exchange opportunities. Relevant activities will be incorporated into the respective workplans and sustainability plans to ensure continued engagement, knowledge sharing, and collaboration among stakeholders.
7	Yes	CCS with support from Implementing partners, LACO, and the Industry Innovation branch	CCS will develop a sustainability plan by June 2027 to be presented at the PSC. Implementing partners, LACO, and the Industry Innovation branch will support this development to ensure the plan is tailored to the different national and local outcomes. The plan will be considered a living document to be updated as needed throughout the rest of the project lifetime.
8	Yes	CCS/PMU, with UNEP Communications Division and CCS Communications Consultant	CCS will finalise the GESI Action Plan by November 2026. Communication efforts will continue as an ongoing activity throughout the duration of the project and will be further strengthened through the implementation of the project's Communication Strategy through June 2028. The Communications Consultant will work closely with the CCS IT Assistant to ensure that relevant project documents, progress updates, and communication materials are regularly uploaded to the project website, beginning in August 2026, based on inputs provided by the implementing countries, LACO, and the Industry Innovation branch. With the support of the Circular Economy consultant from Industry and Innovation branch and the consultant for the IRT, the private sector approach will be developed by June 2027.
9	Yes	CCS/PMU with Industry Innovation branch, LACO, and Implementing Partners	To increase co-financing efforts, UNEP CCS and the implementing partners will engage relevant national, regional, and global initiatives and organizations, such as Plastic Reboot and MarViva, to strengthen strategic partnerships. With the support of the implementing partners, LACO, and the Industry Innovation branch, a mapping of related projects and initiatives will be conducted, and opportunities for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and synergies will be actively explored. In parallel, efforts will be made to re-engage existing co-financing partners.
10	Yes	CCS/PMU, with Implementing Partners and PSC	CCS will prepare documentation required for the no-cost extension, including the regional work plan, budget revision, and related supporting materials. Under the proposed extension, the operational closure for the implementing partners will be June 2028, with financial closure by December 2028. For UNEP CCS, as the Executing Agency, the operational closure will be December 2028, followed by financial closure in June 2029. UNEP CCS will make the necessary arrangements to support the no-cost extension, including maintaining adequate staffing and allocating the required financial resources to ensure effective implementation through the extended project period.
11	Yes	CCS/PMU, PSC	The PMU will convene additional virtual PSC meetings to assess and review project implementation, provide strategic guidance, and support timely decision-making. The frequency of these virtual PSC meetings will be reviewed and adjusted, as appropriate, to be held at least biannually or quarterly, depending on the implementation needs of the project. The PSC ToRs will be updated accordingly and circulated to the PSC for approval.

II. THE PROJECT

A. Context

Intervention context

1. The Caribbean Sea is widely considered to be the world's second most plastic-contaminated sea, after the Mediterranean Sea, with land-based sources and activities accounting for most of the marine pollution (project document). The three countries in which the project is being implemented - Colombia, Panamá, and Jamaica- face increasing volumes of plastic wastes. As reported in the project document, total leakage of plastic to rivers and the ocean in the six participating cities was estimated at around 5,423 tonnes per year, with Kingston followed by Cartagena having the highest leakage (about 3,000 tonnes and 900 tonnes, respectively).[8] Marine litter adversely affects coastal and marine ecosystems and impacts key economic sectors such as tourism and fisheries, and [9]human health. Clean-up costs of plastic waste can be significant, with estimates for South America ranging from US$196 to US$401 million, while revenue loss accounts for between US$23 to US$276 million.[10] As engines of economic growth, cities are central drivers of unsustainable patterns of consumption and need to be at the forefront of rethinking the consumption landscape.

2. Major barriers at the city level to fully implement a circular economy approach for plastics in LAC cities include lack of government regulations and policy instruments to incentivize sustainable consumption and production for circular plastic products and pollution reduction; lack of innovations and investment from the private sector to tackle the plastic pollution from a systemic and value chain perspective; lack of a common vision, approaches, and leadership for LAC cities to act collectively under an aligned regional strategy for circular economy of plastics; and lack of knowledge, awareness, and capacity to enable governments, businesses, and other stakeholders to learn and adopt best practices at the city, national, and regional levels in LAC. In line with government and business commitments, the project aims to reduce marine plastics and plastic pollution in LAC cities by facilitating circular actions and cooperation among stakeholders in the plastics value chain including governments, private sector, informal waste sector, civil society, and others at the city level to accelerate the transition to a circular economy. The logic of the project intervention is for governments to design and enforce circular policies to regulate and guide the production, consumption, and end-of-life management of plastics and to replicate them at the city level; for the private sector to innovate, re-design, and upgrade their products, service, logistics, and waste management practices; for all stakeholders to work in an orchestrated manner under a shared vision; and to enable cities to learn from each other.

Institutional context

3. The UNEP/ GEF project, "Reduce marine plastics and plastic pollution in Latin American and the Caribbean cities through a circular economy approach (GEF ID 10547)", was approved on 28 November 2022. The 4-year project is being implemented in six cities with impacts on the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean in the following countries: Colombia (Barranquilla and Cartagena), Jamaica (Kingston and Montego Bay), and Panamá (Panamá City and Colón).

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[8] UNEP (2020). National guidance for plastic pollution hotspotting and shaping action- Introduction report. Boucher J. and M. Zgola, et al. United Nations Environment Programme. Nairobi, Kenya. (see project document).

[10] Viool, V. and others (2019). The Price Tag of Plastic Pollution- An economic assessment of river plastic. Deloitte 2019, The Netherlands. https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/nl/Documents/strategy-analytics-and-ma/deloitte-nl-strategy-analytics-and-ma-the-price-tag-of-plastic-pollution.pdf

The project was endorsed by the GEF Chief Executing Officer (CEO) on 2 June 2022, and scheduled to start on 22 December 2022, with expected operational completion on 31 December 2026 and financial closure on 30 June 2027.

B. Summary of Project Design Strengths and Weaknesses

4. In general, the project design is robust and presents a comprehensive and integrated approach that is appropriate for transitioning to a circular economy for plastics. Together, the four causal pathways from project outputs through outcomes towards the project objective address the four key barriers (identified in the project document) to a circular economy for plastics in the six cities. Moreover, embedded in the design is the promotion of downstream and upstream solutions and innovations along with strengthening stakeholder capacity, recognising that transitioning to a circular economy requires systemic change that combines upstream innovation with efficient downstream management. Other crucial elements covered in the design include strengthening of policy and regulatory frameworks; financial instruments; improving stakeholder capacity in circular economy approaches, awareness, and access to information; and the involvement of diverse partners and stakeholders including the public and private sectors in project activities.

5. The project design promotes inclusive participation, with a gender analysis, gender-related targets and indicators in the results framework, and a Gender Action Plan as well as a Communication Strategy that includes a gender component. It also recognises the role of women and marginalised/vulnerable groups in the informal waste sector and will include activities to promote women representation in participatory and decision-making processes and support the economic empowerment of women. These features align closely with the multi-faceted nature of the plastic pollution issue and the complex network of stakeholders across the plastic value chain.

6. Another design strength is the engagement of well-established national institutions with the relevant capacity, expertise, and experience, to execute project activities in the countries (especially Colombia and Panamá), with targeted technical support provided by UNEP (RMB and LACO) and external consultants. Moreover, the focus on the cities is appropriate since cities are the key source of plastic pollution and responsible for local solid waste management, making them crucial actors in the battle against marine plastic pollution.

7. Although consultations with the cities were held on the project design and they approved the project document during the project preparation grant phase, several project design shortcomings were noted by the MTR. For example, the original design is complex and over-ambitious for the project duration and available budget, relative to the available financial resources, staffing, and implementation period, especially in view of the number of cities (6), and the large number and diversity of activities and stakeholders at city and national levels. During interviews, multiple stakeholders in all the cities concurred with this finding. As discussed under the sections on Effectiveness and Efficiency, a no-cost extension and associated additional costs to the CCS and implementing partners will be necessary, owing in part to the over-ambitious design in relation to the timeframe and budget.

8. Furthermore, the expectation that all the cities are to be engaged in the same kinds of activities is not realistic in view of the disparity among them in terms of capacity and on-the ground circumstances. In addition, achievement of some of the output targets (e.g., regarding policy implementation and reduction/avoidance of certain quantities of plastics) may not be feasible during the project's lifetime. Similarly, the targets for the Global Environmental Benefit (GEB) indicators 5.3, 6.2, 9.1, and 10 may not be realistic during the project lifetime.

9. Another design shortcoming is noted in component 4, output 4.3. (Long-term monitoring program operationalised by cities on the implementation of circular economy approaches and associated reduction in plastic pollution). A highly technical target consists of a set of indicators to support GEF projects on plastics to monitor the performance and impacts of activities; a methodology and tool to enable cities to forecast on the potential impacts, cost and benefits, and trade-offs of adopting various circular strategies; and a methodology and calculation tool to organize the data collection and assessment of chemicals for plastics. The expectation is that the cities will implement this monitoring program on the long-term as they transition towards a circular economy. During MTR interviews, Colón, Montego Bay, and Kingston indicated that they do not have the capacity to effectively implement such a monitoring program. However, the project does not include a capacity building component to specifically address this gap, which will require not only adequate human resources but also technical equipment and associated financial resources.

10. It should be noted that the project design team was led by the Implementing Partners (IP), LACO, and RMB, with the CCS (Executing Agency) involved in a lower capacity with limited influence during project formulation. More substantial engagement of the CCS in project formulation could have helped to ensure that budgets, staffing, execution/implementation arrangements, and timelines were better aligned with on-the-ground realities in the participating cities.

11. Quantitative targets related to reduction/avoidance of marine plastics through different measures (e.g., waste management policies, capacity building, awareness raising) are defined across multiple outputs (1.2, 2.2, 3.2, and 4.2). However, there is lack of clarity on distinguishing the contribution of multiple interventions to a single quantitative target on the reduction of plastics (especially where there are no explicit on-the-ground activities to reduce plastic pollution). Another concern is the dependence of the delivery of multiple outputs on the completion of specific output(s) within other project components. For example, data on the reduction of marine plastics for outputs 1.2, 2.2, 3.2, and 4.2 are to be reported by using the indicators and methodology to be developed under output 4.3, which if delayed, will affect the achievement of four outputs.

12. Regarding sustainability, the project document discusses several measures to be taken by the project to facilitate sustainability (e.g., developing sustainable partnerships between municipal authorities and the private sector, improving stakeholder capability to attract new sources of financing, enhancing overall governance and stakeholder engagement to address plastic pollution, and sharing of knowledge, lessons and experiences). Nevertheless, the MTR noted that the project document does not include a sustainability plan or exit strategy (as required by the GEF), and sustainable financing is not adequately addressed.

C. Results Framework

13. No major modifications were made to the project results framework since GEF CEO endorsement. The results framework is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Summary of project's latest approved results framework
(source: Project Document)

	Results Statement
Project objective	Reducing marine plastics and plastic pollution in the Latin America and the Caribbean region by facilitating circular actions at the city level to accelerate the transition to a circular economy, in line with government and business commitments on addressing marine plastics and plastic pollution.

	Results Statement
Impact	Improved ecosystem status and services resulting in strengthened livelihoods, human health and reduced pollution from plastic waste in the LAC region
Intermediate state	Increased circularity of the plastic value chain and reduced plastic pollution in LAC cities.
Project outcomes	Outcome 1: Circular economy policies adopted or improved by city-level governments to reduce marine plastics and plastic pollution in targeted cities (Component 1). Outcome 2: Circular economy innovations and practices adopted by the private sector to reduce marine plastics and plastic pollution in targeted cities (Component 2). Outcome 3: Increased capacity and cooperation among LAC cities through the LAC Inter-city Network on marine plastics and plastic circular economy and enhanced implementation of circular economy approaches in the region (Component 3). Outcome 4: Improved regional and global awareness knowledge and capacity applied, and capacity in applying circular economy approaches to reduce marine plastics and plastic pollution (Component 4). Outcome 5: Project partners adopt and act upon project results and lessons (Component 5).

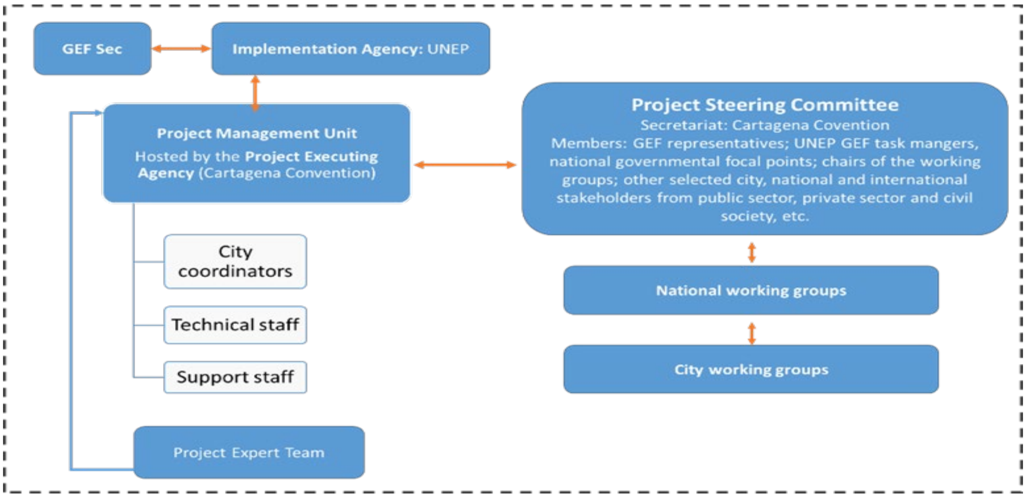
	Results Statement
Outputs	Output 1.1 Policy action plans developed by municipalities and submitted for approval to promote circular economy approaches for plastics Output 1.2 Targeted policy interventions carried out to improve circularity Output 1.3 Implementation plans for financial instruments developed to facilitate responsible plastics management Output 2.1 Approaches developed and tested to facilitate more circular design, production, and consumption of plastics Output 2.2 Approaches developed and tested to improve collection and recycling of plastic waste Output 2.3 Industry roundtable on plastic circular economy established and roundtable meetings organised, with collaboration between business stakeholders facilitated Output 3.1 Inter-city network operationalised Output 3.2 Inter-city network expanded with more participating cities Output 4.1 Information, Education and Communication (IEC) strategy for the project developed and implemented using IW: LEARN platform, GGKP and GPML platforms Output 4.2 Increased awareness of the circular economy approaches from capacity building activities Output 4.3 Long-term monitoring program operationalised by cities on the implementation of circular economy approaches and associated reduction in plastic pollution Output 5.1 Monitoring and evaluation of project outcomes and outputs to include quarterly financial reporting Output 5.2 Mid-term and terminal evaluations results shared with stakeholders

D. Project Implementation Structure and Partners

14. The project's implementing structure and partners are illustrated in Figure 1. The Implementing Agencies (IA) are UNEP Ecosystems Division/Marine and Freshwater Branch/GEF International Waters Unit; and UNEP Industry and Economy Division/ Chemicals and Health Branch/ GEF Chemicals and Green Chemistry Unit, for the International Waters IW) and the Chemicals and Waste (C&W) funding portions, respectively, of the GEF grant. The Cartagena Convention Secretariat (CCS) in Kingston, Jamaica, is the Executing Agency (EA) and is hosting the Project Management Unit (PMU). At the national level, the Implementing

Partners (IP) are the Institute of Marine and Coastal Research (INVEMAR) in Colombia (in a consortium with CEMPRE and Conservation International [CI], and the Colombian Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development as the operational focal point), the Ministry of Water, Environment, and Climate Change (MWECC) in Jamaica, and the National Association for Nature Conservation (ANCON) in Panamá. In each country, the IP is supported by a National Working Group (NWG) and a City Working Group (CWG). Additionally, project implementation is supported in each of the countries and at the regional level by various industry partners, civil society organisations, and academic and research institutes. Other technical partners include UNEP LACO and UNEP Resources and Markets Branch (RMB) for targeted technical assistance.

Figure 1: Organigram of the project with key project stakeholders
(Source: Project document)



E. Stakeholders

15. The project document presents a comprehensive stakeholder analysis, which is integral to understanding the diverse roles of different stakeholder groups in the plastic value chain and their potential contributions to project execution. In the project document, stakeholders are categorized into four distinct groups: (i) Public sector (government agencies and institutions at national and municipal levels), (ii) Private sector (including industries), (iii) academia and research, and (iv) NGOs and CSOs. Other important groups are local communities and international organizations. A special group of stakeholders are women and marginalised/ vulnerable groups, who play an important role in the informal waste sector.

F. Changes in Design during Implementation

16. No major changes were made to project design during implementation in the first three years of the project's lifetime.

G. Project Financing

17. The GEF LAC Circular Cities project is financed through a GEF grant of US$7,000,000. Co-financing (cash and in-kind) was anticipated from UNEP, governments, private sector and others to the value of US$35,407,240 (Table 5). Co-finance realised, as reported in the project implementation review (PIR) report for July 2024-June 2025), is US$5,926,728.

Table 5. Co-financing table

Co-financing (Type/Source)	UNEP own Financing (US$)		Government (US$)		Other* (US$)		Total US$)	
	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual
Grants	8,546,201		799,100	$ 43,574	6,926,368	547,771	16,271,669	591,345
Loans								
Credits								
Equity investments								
In-kind support	3,163,860		7,726,688	2,968,686	5,464,549	1,563,230	16,355,097	4,531,916
Other (*)					2,780,474	803,467	2,780,474	803,467
Total	11,710,061		8,525,788	3,012,260	15,171,391	2,914,468	**35,407,240**	**5,926,728**

*Contributions mobilised for the project from other multilateral agencies, bilateral development cooperation agencies, NGOs, the private sector and beneficiaries.

III. REVIEW METHODS

18. In line with the UNEP Evaluation Policy and the UNEP Programme and Project Management Manual, the MTR is undertaken approximately half-way through project implementation to analyse whether the project is on track, what problems or challenges the project is encountering, and what corrective actions are required. The review has two primary purposes: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote operational improvement, learning, and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UNEP and its project partners.

19. The timeframe covered by the review was December 2022- December 2025. It assessed project performance to date (in terms of relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency) and determined the likelihood of the project achieving its intended outcomes and impacts, including their sustainability. In addition, the MTR identified lessons of operational relevance for implementation during the remainder of the project.

20. Among the target audience for the review findings are the GEF, UNEP and its Ecosystems Division/Marine and Freshwater Branch/GEF International Waters Unit as well as its Industry and Economy Division/ Chemicals and Health Branch/ GEF Chemicals and Green Chemistry Unit, CCS, PMU, UNEP Caribbean Regional Co-ordinating Unit, UNEP LACO and UNEP RMB, the Project Steering Committee (PSC), and the participating countries- Colombia, Jamaica, and Panamá (government ministries, national co-executing agencies and their respective sub-contracted partners, private sector, and other local project partners and stakeholders).

21. The MTR used a set of seven review criteria specified by UNEP and the GEF: (1) Strategic Relevance, (2) Effectiveness (including availability of outputs; progress towards achievement of outcomes, and likelihood of impact), (3) Financial Management, (4) Efficiency, (5) Monitoring and Reporting, (6) Exit Strategy and Sustainability, and (7) Factors and Processes Affecting Project Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues.

A. Data Collection

Primary data sources

22. Primary data was collected through semi-structured stakeholder interviews (virtual and in-person) and focus group discussions (FGD) (Table 6). The review consultant visited five of the six cities in the participating countries, as well as Santa Marta, Colombia, to meet with the national IP (INVEMAR). Due to time constraints and stalled implementation of the project in Jamaica (PCA was still awaiting signature), Montego Bay was not visited, and the interview was conducted with the Montego Bay Focal Point in Kingston where the reviewer also held discussions with the CCS. While in Santa Marta, the reviewer held virtual interviews with partners in Bogota. The review respondents and field visits are summarised in Table 6 and further details are presented in Annex II.

23. Interviews and FGDs were conducted with 84 individuals (61% females, 39% males) (Annex II) from among the following groups:

- UNEP GEF International Waters Unit and UNEP GEF Chemicals and Green Chemistry Unit.
- Cartagena Convention Secretariat/ Project Management Unit.
- Fund Management Officers (FMO).
- UNEP Latin America and Caribbean Office.
- UNEP Resources and Markets Branch.

- Representatives from Environment Ministries and other central government agencies in the three countries.
- Representatives of the municipal governments of the six participating cities.
- Representatives of national implementing partners and their local partners.
- Private sector/industry representatives.

Table 6. Review respondents and field visits

Stakeholders - Individuals			A. Total number involved (M/F) (Total numbers involved vary due to change in personnel, etc.)	B. Planned number to contact (M/F) (Actual number to contact could not be determined in advance for larger groups of partners and stakeholders and was highly dependent on availability of the individuals at the time of the interviews)	Sample size (% B/A)[11]
Project Team	**Project Team**	Implementing agency	Task Managers 2 F (IW, C&W) Associate Task Manager 1 F (IW) Others: 1 M/ 2 F (C&W) 1 M/1 F (RMB) 1 M/2 F (LACO)	3M/8F	100%
		Executing agency(ies)	CCS/PMU: 3 M/2 F (CCS) 1 F (Former IUNV)	3M/3F	100% (Former PM N/A)
	Other consultants		4 M	4 M	100%
Beneficiaries	**Direct Beneficiaries:** (e.g. duty bearers, gatekeepers, training participants, etc.) **Indirect Beneficiaries:** (e.g. household members, civil society representatives, group members, etc.)		Variable (large number of stakeholders across plastic value chain)	Dependent on availability of individuals at the time of the interviews	
Stakeholders - Entities			**A. Total number involved**	**B. Planned number to contact**	**Sample size (% B/A)[12]**
Partners	**Project implementing/ executing partners** (receiving project funds)		Variable. See Annex II **Colombia:** INVEMAR (CEMPRE & CI) **Jamaica**: MWECC **Panama**: ANCON	Dependent on availability of individuals at the time of the interviews	
	Project collaborating/ contributing partners[13] (not receiving project fund)		See Annex IV	See Annex IV	
	Region / country / locality[14]		**A. Total number sites**	**B. Planned number sites to visit**	**Sample Size (%B/A)[15]**

[11] Percentage of people involved in the project that the review plans to contact.
[12] Percentage of entities involved in the project that the review plans to contact.
[13] Contributing partners may be providing resources as either cash or in-kind inputs (e.g. staff time, office space etc.).
[14] In case of a global project, the unit of analysis is 'region'. In case of a regional or multi-country project, the unit of analysis is 'country'. In case of a single country project, the unit of analysis is 'locality', which could refer to a city, town, village, etc.
[15] Percentage of total number project sites in each region, country or locality that the review plans to visit.

Field visits	Latin America and the Caribbean	**6 cities (3 countries)**	5 sites (No visit to Montego Bay in Jamaica, due to time constraints and no implementation, and presence of the Focal Point in Kingston at the time of the reviewer's visit)	83%
Site visits		**Colombia** Barranquilla: -Polyrec (private recycling facility) - River garbage trap Cartagena: Ambientados (Private recycling facility) **Panamá City** ANCON Collection centre (site visits constrained by time and logistics)		

Strategies for inclusivity

24. The MTR made every effort to ensure that respondents were representative across all partners and major stakeholder groups including women and marginalised/vulnerable groups. For large groups, a sub-set of individuals participated in the interviews based largely on availability and logistics. The CCS and IPs assisted with the identification of potential respondents in the countries and cities. The IPs also helped to arrange visits to the recycling and collection facilities. However, the availability of private sector representatives for interviews was limited because they were not yet fully involved in or had little knowledge of the project (Panama); or because of the heterogeneity of the sector, which is reflected in varying levels of interest, availability, and responsiveness (Colombia). In medium and large companies, internal processes could be restrictive. Arranging interviews with representatives of the informal waste sector (waste-pickers) was not feasible because of their wide geographic dispersion and irregular organisation and mode of operation in the cities. Challenges in conducting online surveys with the private sector include low prioritisation of surveys and response rates due to heavy workloads. In the informal waste sector, barriers to digital access and connectivity limit participation in self-administered surveys. Because of these challenges and time and logistics constraints, it was not possible to meet with a larger number of private sector individuals. The reviewer met with representatives from CEMPRE Colombia, which is a civil association of major companies in Colombia, and visited two small facilities in Colombia (Polyrec and Ambientados) and one collection center in Panama City.

Secondary data sources

25. Secondary data was obtained through an extensive desk review of documents and reports (Annex III) including:

- Relevant project background documentation.
- Project Document and Appendices results framework.
- Annual work plans and budgets.
- Annual project implementation review (PIR) reports, quarterly progress and expenditure reports.
- Meeting reports and minutes
- Correspondence between the EA and IAs.

- Project Inception meeting report.
- Project Steering Committee meeting reports and documents.
- Technical and other project reports and slide decks.
- Communication strategy and media releases.
- Partners studies and reports.

B. Data Analysis

26. Review findings and judgements were based on sound evidence and analysis, and information was triangulated as far as possible. The document review provided qualitative and quantitative information, which was used to codify evidence to inform the evaluation criteria. Each criterion was rated using the UNEP six-point scale (highly unsatisfactory to highly satisfactory) to rate performance, except Sustainability, which was rated according to likelihood (Highly Unlikely to Highly Likely).[16] Each rating was assigned a numerical score between 1-6 (with 1=highly unsatisfactory or highly unlikely in the case of Sustainability and 6=highly satisfactory or highly likely in the case of Sustainability). An overall performance rating for the project was determined as a simple average[17] of the individual ratings of the criteria (in accordance with UNEP's guidelines and the MTR Terms of reference, ToR).

27. For assessment of the achievement of outputs (Effectiveness), quantitative analysis was also done to determine the level of achievement (as a percentage) of the targets programmed to be achieved in Year 1 to Year 3 (as indicated in the results framework). The results are presented graphically in this report.

C. Limitations and Mitigation Strategies

28. Several factors imposed potential limitations on the review, including unavailability of key former project personnel (Project Manager) and former staff of project partners for interviews. Consequently, there were some gaps in the information available for the review. As discussed above in the section on Strategies for inclusivity, opportunities to interview representatives from the private sector (including the informal waste sector) were limited. The reviewer obtained insights and information on the private sector from the cities and IPs.

29. Due to prolonged start-up delays particularly in the countries, slow progress in execution of activities, and no implementation in Jamaica, the achievement of planned outputs and targets in the first three years was below expectations. Hence, there was a limited number of project deliverables to be assessed by the MTR.

30. To mitigate the effects of the limitations on the quality of the MTR, the review relied heavily on triangulation of data and information from available primary and secondary sources (interviews, field visits, document review, etc.) and engaged as wide a cross-section as possible of partners and stakeholders in interviews. In addition, attempts were made to contact individuals who were previously involved in the project. The hand-over notes from the former project manager and the International UN Volunteer (IUNV) provided valuable information and insights for the review.

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[16] Highly Satisfactory (HS = 6); Satisfactory (S = 5); Moderately Satisfactory (MS = 4); Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU =3); Unsatisfactory (U = 2); Highly Unsatisfactory (HU =1). Sustainability is similarly rated on a six-point scale but labelled from Highly Likely (HL) to Highly Unlikely (HU).

[17] Sum of the individual ratings for each criterion divided by the total number of criteria (8)

31. For a more efficient use of the short review timeframe, face-to-face meetings and interviews were supplemented by virtual discussions (using Teams and Zoom platforms). In addition, focus group discussions were held where possible, rather than with individuals, to increase coverage of data collection. Review and feedback from the IA, EA, and PSC on the preliminary findings and draft MTR report helped to ensure that the report provided an accurate reflection of the project's performance.

D. Ethical Considerations

32. Throughout the review process, efforts have been made to represent the views of both mainstream and more marginalised groups. Data were collected with respect for ethics and human rights issues. All pictures were taken and other information gathered after prior informed consent from the respondents. Discussions were anonymous and confidential, and information was collected according to the UN Standards of Conduct.

IV. THEORY OF CHANGE AT REVIEW

33. The project results framework consists of five components with 5 outcomes and 13 outputs and associated indicators and targets/milestones. This is accompanied by a problem tree, objective tree, and theory of change (ToC) analysis (Appendix 1 of the project document). During the review, several of the output and outcome statements were modified to align them with UNEP's definitions of these terms (Table 7). Revisions were also made to the original Impact statement and Intermediate state, as well as to some of the original drivers and assumptions related to progress from outcomes to intermediate state and long-term impacts (Table 8, Figure 2). In addition, drivers and assumptions relevant to project implementation as well as examples of key linkages between components have been added during the MTR, as shown in Figure 2. Assumptions are also provided by the MTR for transition from project outcomes to intermediate state (Table 8) and from intermediate state to impact on the longer-term (Figure 2 and Table 11).

Table 7. Justification for reformulation of results statements

Formulation in original project document(s)	Formulation for reconstructed TOC at review inception (RTOC)	Justification for reformulation and/or consultant's explanatory notes on the interpretation[18] of the result
(LONG LASTING) IMPACT		
Improved ecosystem status and services resulting in strengthened livelihoods, human health and reduced pollution from plastic waste in the LAC region	Improved marine ecosystem status and ecosystem services resulting in improved livelihoods and human health in cities throughout LAC	Removed from impact statement 'and reduced plastic pollution from plastic waste'- It is reduced plastic waste that would result in improved ecosystem status and services, not the other way around. Reduced pollution is covered in the Intermediate state. 'marine' added since the ultimate aim is reduction of marine plastics. 'strengthened' changed to 'improved'- the latter is better suited to human health as well as to livelihoods
INTERMEDIATE STATE		
Increased circularity of the plastic value chain and reduced plastic pollution in LAC cities.	Increased circularity of the plastic value chain and reduced marine plastic and plastic pollution in cities throughout LAC.	'marine' added to highlight the focus on the marine environment. In the original TOC, the Intermediate state refers to **LAC cities** whereas the 'Impact' statement refers to the **LAC region**. 'throughout LAC' added, which implies the region -since plastic is transported geographically within and across political boundaries (e.g., via rivers, ocean currents, wind, trade, etc.), it is critical that CE is widely mainstreamed and solutions adapted, replicated, and upscaled throughout the region for any significant impact on marine plastic pollution in LAC.

[18] In some instances, the results statement may not need to be reformulated, but implied meanings need to be made explicit or understanding clarified. In other cases, it may be necessary to specify the stakeholder, etc.

PROJECT OUTCOMES		
Outcome 1: Circular economy policies adopted or improved by city-level governments to reduce marine plastics and plastic pollution in targeted cities	No change	
Outcome 2: Circular economy innovations and practices adopted by the private sector to reduce marine plastics and plastic pollution in targeted cities	No change	
Outcome 3: Increased capacity and cooperation among LAC cities through the LAC Inter-city Network on marine plastics and plastic circular economy and enhanced implementation of circular economy approaches in the region	No change	
Outcome 4: Improved regional and global awareness, knowledge and capacity applied, and capacity in applying circular economy approaches to reduce marine plastics and plastic pollution	Improved regional and global awareness, knowledge and capacity in circular economy approaches applied to reduce marine plastics and plastic pollution	The wording of the original outcome statement is not clear.
OUTCOME INDICATORS		
Outcome 1: Number of cities with new policies/strategies adopted or existing policies improved; Number of new policies adopted and existing policies improved per city	No change	
OUTPUTS		
1.1. Policy action plans developed by municipalities and submitted for approval to promote circular economy approaches for plastics	Policy action plans to guide the six municipalities in promoting circular economy approaches for plastics developed and under consideration for approval	The original outputs statements are more appropriate for activities. They were modified to align with UNEP's definition (An output is the availability (for intended beneficiaries/users) of new products and services and/or gains in knowledge, abilities, and awareness of individuals or within institutions. Outputs are viewed from the perspective of the intended beneficiary or user of the output rather than the provider. E.g. access by the intended user to a report; new knowledge held by a workshop participant at the end of a training event; heightened awareness of a serious risk among targeted decision-makers.) In light of this definition, some of the outputs have been re-phrased, based on the corresponding indicators (although this does not change the original meaning of the output).
1.2. Targeted policy interventions carried out to improve circularity	Cities have access to new or improved policies for circularity of the plastic value chain.	
1.3. Implementation plans for financial instruments developed to facilitate responsible plastics management	Countries have improved implementation plans for financial instruments to facilitate responsible plastics management under consideration	
2.1. Approaches developed and tested to facilitate more circular design, production and consumption of plastics	Tested approaches to facilitate more circular design, production and consumption of plastics available to the private sector in the 6 cities.	
2.2. Approaches developed and tested to improve collection and recycling of plastic waste	Tested approaches to improve collection and recycling of plastic waste available to the private sector in the 6 cities	
2.3. Industry roundtable on plastic circular economy established and roundtable meetings organised, with collaboration between business stakeholders facilitated	Business stakeholders collaborate and participate in Industry roundtable on plastic circular economy	

3.1. Inter-city network operationalised	The 6 project cities participate in the operationalised Inter-city network	
3.2. Inter-city network expanded with more participating cities	More LAC cities join the expanded Inter-city network	
4.1. Information, Education and Communication (IEC) strategy for the project developed and implemented using IW: LEARN platform, GGKP and GPML platforms	Project partners and stakeholders are kept informed through the project's Information, Education and Communication (IEC) strategy implemented using IW: LEARN platform, GGKP and GPML platforms	
4.2. Increased awareness of the circular economy approaches from capacity building activities	Increased awareness among stakeholders of circular economy approaches from capacity building activities.	
4.3. Long-term monitoring program operationalised by cities on the implementation of circular economy approaches and associated reduction in plastic pollution	Through an operationalised long-term monitoring program, cities have improved access to data on the implementation of circular economy approaches and associated reduction in plastic pollution.	
General comment: Outputs under Component 1 consist of the development, improvement or adoption of policies and action plan and development of implementation plans for financial instruments. Implementation is not explicitly addressed, yet 4 of the targets (outputs 1.2, 2.2, 3.2, 4.2) relate to a reduction/avoidance in the quantity of marine plastic, for which implementation will be crucial. However, implementation may not be feasible within the project timeframe.		
OUTPUT INDICATORS		
Outputs 1.2, 2.2, 3.2, and 4.2 have indicators (and targets) related to reduction/avoidance in the quantity of plastic. However, it is not clear how reduction/avoidance in marine plastic would be directly attributed to outputs such as the adoption of policies (1.2), Inter-city network (3.2) and increase in awareness (4.2) where there are no on-the-ground activities to achieve such reductions. There may be potential to achieve this in the pilots (3.2). This has implications for the relevant GEB indicators and targets, which are linked to achievement of the output targets.		

Table 8. Justification for reformulation/expansion of drivers and assumptions

Formulation in original project document	Formulation for reconstructed ToC at review inception (RTOC)	Justification for reformulation and/or consultant's explanatory notes on the interpretation[19] of the driver or assumption
DRIVERS		
1. Human rights and gender equality[20]	See driver 9	
2. Improved policy design and enforcement on CE and plastic pollution	Improved policy design, enforcement and best practices on circular economy and plastic pollution	To include best practices
3. More circular materials, technologies, and business models tested or financially viable	More financially viable and replicable/scalable circular materials, technologies, and business models tested and widely available.	It will be more important that these are shown to be financially viable rather than just tested
4. Hazardous additives and chemicals in plastic discontinued	No change	
5. Sustainability information available to consumers	Drivers 3,4, 5 and 6 combined: Increasing availability of data	Drivers 3,4, 5 and 6 relate to a similar theme of data and information availability

[20] If the project design document contains commitments on human rights and gender equality that are not reflected in the results framework, the commitment must appear as Driver.

6. Data on flows and chemicals in life cycle of plastics increasingly available	including on chemicals use in plastics, information and knowledge for effective management of plastics and CE solutions.	
7. Long-term monitoring, reporting framework, and data increasingly available		
8. New driver	Growing recognition by public and private sectors of the opportunities for and benefits of investing in CE solutions, and opportunities for collaboration of stakeholders in the plastic value chain	As seen during field visits and interviews, there is increasing awareness of the opportunities presented by CE that will encourage adoption of CE solutions. There is also increasing collaboration among stakeholders
9. New driver	Increasing awareness and cultural acceptance of CE by citizens.	This driver is critical in operationalising a circular economy approach (seen during field visits and interviews)
10. New driver	Increasing recognition of the role of women and marginalised/vulnerable groups in CE.	Required to be included in UNEP MTR inception report guidance. Indicators and targets related to gender as well as marginalised/vulnerable groups (informal waste sector) are included in the results framework.
11. New driver	Increasing momentum towards more sustainable production and consumption patterns.	An important driver that will contribute to transformational change
ASSUMPTIONS		
1. Improved global and regional governance on plastic pollution (e.g. global treaty).	Decision makers support/endorse improved global and regional governance on plastic pollution (e.g., global plastics treaty).	Decision makers need to support or endorse regional and global governance and all that it entails - by themselves treaties, etc would not have any effect
2. Increased investment, financing, and markets for circular solutions.	Increased incentives, investment, financing, and markets for circular solutions.	Incentives added- this will be important to encourage uptake of solutions and sustainable practices
3. Breakthrough in alternative new materials, products and recycling technologies	Adequate conditions to facilitate CE technology transfer and adoption in LAC cities.	Breakthrough is more appropriate as a driver and is encompassed in driver # 2. This modified assumption highlights the importance of the transfer of new technologies.
4. Externalities of plastic pollution factored into low production cost of plastic.	No change	
5. Decreased informal economy and better managed waste in LAC	No change	
6. Increased awareness in (of) CE and plastic pollution	Stakeholders apply increased awareness and capacity to address plastic pollution and implement circular economy approaches.	This is part of a project outcome (Component 4). Increased awareness and capacity on their own will not have any significant impact and need to be applied (catalyse positive action)
7. New assumption	Decision makers mainstream CE into policy and development planning in cities throughout LAC.	CE needs to be mainstreamed otherwise the approach to CE will continue to be piecemeal and not conducive to reaching a critical mass.
8. New assumption	Climate change impacts (e.g. extreme events) and other events do not undermine progress in CE.	There is a risk that changing circumstances in the countries and region or globally may cause a shift in national/local priorities (e.g., hurricane in Jamaica; global pandemic)
9. New assumption	Adequate public pressure and market forces are sustained to push transformational change.	
See Figure 2 and Table 11 for new assumptions related to transition from Intermediate state to impact.		

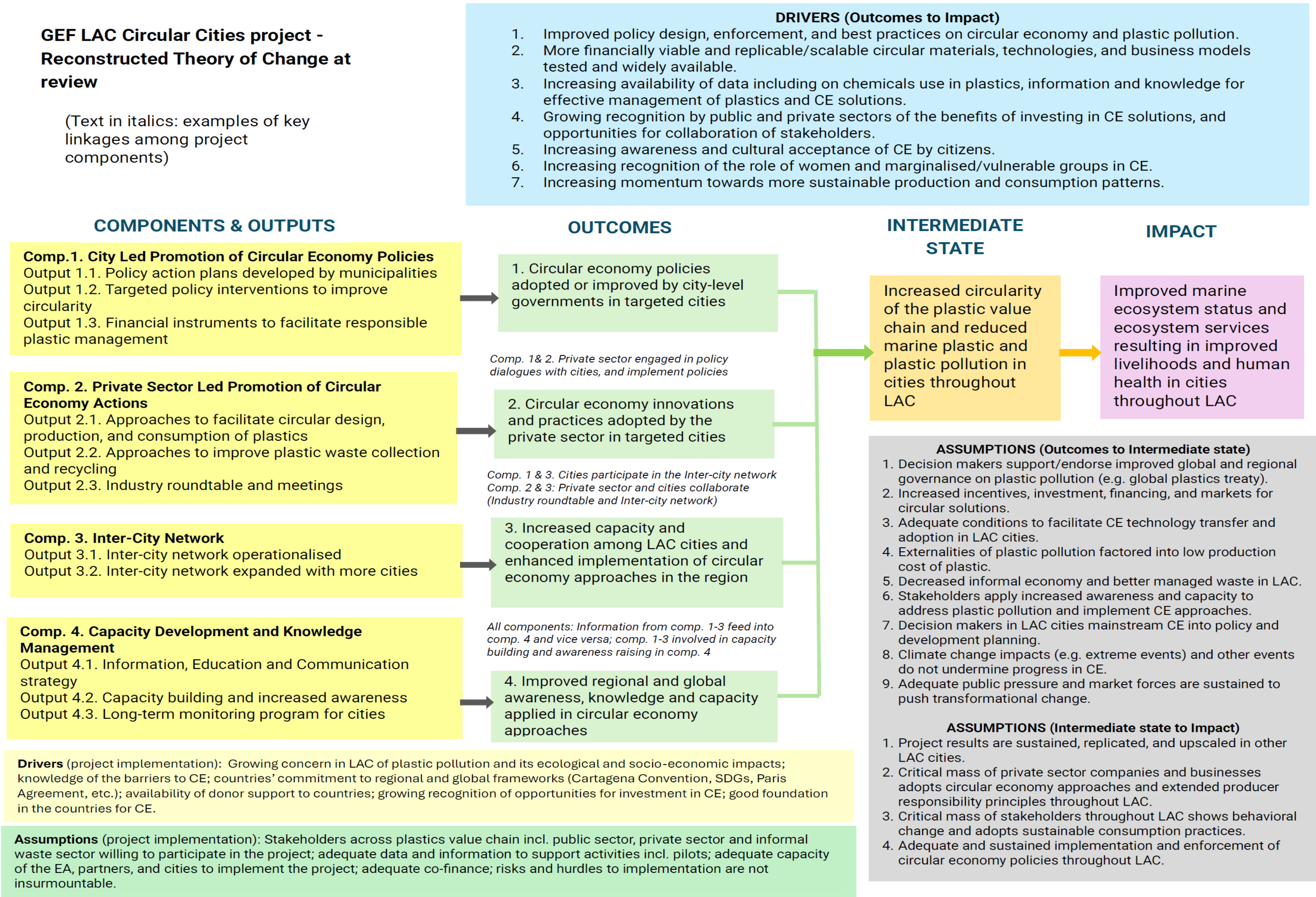
34. The TOC incorporates four distinct 'big-picture' causal pathways corresponding to the four substantive project components. The fifth component on Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is addressed in the section in this report on Monitoring and reporting. Each of the four substantive components corresponds to one of the four major barriers to adoption of a circular economy, as illustrated in the problem and objective trees in the project document. The first causal pathway addresses the lack of adequate circular economy policy instruments and regulations in LAC cities. Key actors are the national and municipal governments in the three countries, who are responsible for developing and implementing policies and regulations. However, implementation of policies and regulations may not be realistic during the project lifetime, and provisions are necessary to ensure that effective implementation and enforcement take place in the post-project period.

35. The second causal pathway addresses inadequate business innovation and investment in LAC cities. In this causal pathway, the key actors are the private sector, including the informal waste sector and industries, who will be involved in developing, testing, and adopting circular economy solutions. The third causal pathway addresses the lack of common visions, approaches, and leadership for LAC cities to collaborate and exchange best practices, with key actors being the public sector (but should also include mechanisms to engage the private sector). Inadequate knowledge, awareness, and capacity is the barrier addressed by the fourth causal pathway, with all groups of stakeholders across the plastics value chain (encompassing the entire population) being the key actors.

36. Of note is that the ToC recognises the role of stakeholders across the plastics value chain (public sector, private sector including the informal waste sector, consumers, etc.). An important driver is the increasing recognition of the important role of women and marginalised/vulnerable groups in circular economy, particularly within the informal waste sector. This is also articulated in the project document and results framework.

37. While each causal pathway is operationally independent, they coalesce to produce the Intermediate state, which ultimately leads to the achievement of the long-term impact, contingent on several drivers being in place and assumptions holding, as shown in Tables 7 and 8, and the reconstructed ToC (Figure 2). Note that in the ToC diagram, the output and outcome statements have been shortened due to limited space (the full statements are given in Table 7). The sustainability of the project results will be critical for the achievement of the long-term impact, and consideration should be given to the development of a sustainability plan for the post-project period (see Section on Sustainability).

Figure 2: Reconstructed Theory of Change at review



V. REVIEW FINDINGS

A. Strategic Relevance

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

	Assessment and Evidence of Alignment with Strategic Priorities	**Level of alignment** *full, partial, or not at all*
UNEP Priorities	MTS (2022-2025)[21] : UNEP Strategic Priorities for 2022–2025, focus on tackling the "triple planetary crisis"—climate change, nature loss, and pollution. The project is aligned with the Pollution Strategic Priority, the Strategic Objective 'Towards a Pollution-free Planet' and the Subprogramme 'Chemicals and Pollution Action', which focuses on targeting a pollution-free planet by reducing waste and harmful chemicals. The project is aligned with UNEP's Mid-term Strategy (MTS) 2025 Direct Outcomes 3A (Human health and environmental outcomes are optimized through enhanced capacity and leadership in the sound management of chemicals and waste), 3B (Waste management is improved, including through circular processes, safe recovery of secondary raw materials and progressive reduction of open burning and dump sites), and 3C (Releases of pollutants to air, water, soil and the ocean are reduced). Programme of Work (2022-2023)[22] : The project is aligned with Direct Outcomes 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 3.6, 3.9, 3.13, and 3.14, particularly 3.2 on reducing land-based sources of pollution including marine litter, 3.3 on reducing plastic pollution, and 3.6 on Resource efficiency and circularity. Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building: The project is helping the countries to develop innovative circular economy solutions, and building stakeholder capacity for circular economy approaches to address plastic pollution. South-South Cooperation: The project is promoting South-South cooperation through its implementation in three LAC countries and facilitating exchange of information and experiences among them, as well as through the IRT and LAC Inter-City Network.	Full
Donor Priorities	The project is strongly aligned with GEF 7 Priorities in the International Waters (IW) and Chemical and Wastes Focal Areas: IW-1-3 Strengthen blue economy opportunities by addressing pollution reduction in marine environments. CW-1-1 Strengthen the sound management of industrial chemicals and their waste through better control, and reduction and/or elimination.	Full

[21] Refer to the MTS under which the project was approved.
[22] Refer to the POW under which the project was approved.

<table>
<tr><td>Country / Regional / Global Priorities</td><td>Country priorities: The project’s relevance to national priorities can be articulated through its linkages with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for Colombia and Panamá, and the UN Multi-Country Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for the Caribbean (UNMSDCF) outcomes (Jamaica).

In Colombia, the project contributes to the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) Strategic Axis 4: Environment, Climate Action, and Energy Transition: Supports a clean and fair energy transition and promotes environmental protection to tackle the triple planetary crisis (climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution).

In Jamaica, the project contributes to UNMSDCF outcome 6, "Natural Resource Management - Caribbean countries manage natural resources and ecosystems to strengthen their resilience and enhance the resilience and prosperity of the people and communities that depend on them".

In Panamá, the project contributes to the UNSDCF outcome Environmental Action: Initiatives aimed at reducing deforestation, increasing forest cover, and implementing marine plastic reduction programs.

Regional priorities: This project is aligned with priority area 3, "resilience to climate change and shocks and sustainable natural resource management", as outlined in the UNMSDCF for the Caribbean; and the Cartagena Convention Land-Based Sources (LBS) Protocol.

Global priorities: The project is fully aligned with Agenda 2030 and in particular the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 Life Below Water and its Target SDG 14.1 Reduce Marine Pollution (By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution). The project will enable countries, private sector, industries, and other stakeholders along the plastics value chain to prevent and reduce marine plastic pollution through a circular economy approach.

Other SDGs with which the project is aligned are:
• Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
• Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
• Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
• Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
The project is also aligned with the New Plastics Economy Global Commitment, and efforts to develop a global plastics pollution treaty.</td><td>Full</td></tr>
<tr><td>Complementarity/Coherence with other interventions</td><td>Relevant interventions are presented in the project document, including:
• Regional Action Plan for Marine Litter in the Caribbean.
• Latin America and the Caribbean Circular Economy Coalition.
• Trash Free Waters International Initiative in the Wider Caribbean Region.
• Working Group on Marine Litter and Microplastics in LAC.</td><td>Full</td></tr>
</table>

	• Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities. Each of the three project countries has multiple interventions related to circular economy and reducing marine plastic pollution.	

Rating for Strategic Relevance: Highly Satisfactory

B. Effectiveness

Availability of Outputs

38. Assessment of the achievement of planned outputs focused on the 22 targets programmed for Year 1-Year 3 and associated indicators (as per the results framework) in project components 1-4. Progress in component 5 (Monitoring and Evaluation) is discussed under Monitoring and Reporting. This exercise was supported by review of the quarterly progress reports, the annual PIRs, other project documentation including the technical reports produced, in addition to interviews with partners and stakeholders. The results of the assessment of performance are presented in Table 9 and Figure 3.

Table 9. Progress towards outputs

Outputs and targets programmed for Year 1-Year 3	Narrative Assessment of Progress	Sources of Information/Evidence
Output 1.1: **Policy action plans developed by municipalities and submitted for approval to promote circular economy approaches for plastics.** **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** Targets - 1 global review of policy framework on circular economy for plastics with recommendations for LAC by Y1 - 6 city-level policy action plans (1 per city) developed by Y2 Indicators - Number of city-level policy action plans developed - Number of consultation meetings with city governments and relevant stakeholders organised - Percentage of female decision makers involved	Level of delivery at mid-point: partially delivered Component 1 outputs were produced with technical support of UNEP RMB and a RMB consultant, through desk reviews and bottom-up approaches via regional technical workshops and consultations in 2024 and 2025 with partners and stakeholders in the participating cities. Only one of the two programmed targets was achieved and consisted of a report ‘Overview of policy framework and examples on policy and financial instruments’. The comprehensive overview supports all three outputs in Component 1, covering three targets (1.1. global review of policy framework, 1.2. overview of global best practices on policy instruments, and 1.3. overview of global best practices on financial instruments). The project has not delivered any of the six city-level policy action plans although formulation of the plans advanced through regional technical consultations in October 2024 and on upstream and downstream solutions (June and July 2025, respectively) led by the RMB consultant. In addition, a harmonised city action plan template, which includes a framework for indicator monitoring, was developed.	-Quarterly progress reports - PIRs 2024 & 2025 -Interviews with project team -Final report ‘Overview of policy framework and examples on policy and financial instruments’ Oct 2024.
Output 1.2: **Targeted policy interventions carried out to improve circularity** **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** Indicators - Number of selected policies adopted - Number of existing policies improved - Tonnes of marine plastics reduced	Level of delivery at mid-point: partially delivered The single planned target has been achieved and is covered in the report mentioned under Output 1.1 (Overview of policy framework and examples on policy and financial instruments). This report includes an overview of global best practices on policy instruments and selects the most appropriate best practices for the six LAC cities, for further development and implementation. The best practices provide a basis for discussion by the LAC cities on their selection and prioritization for implementation within the project. In addition, reference materials were compiled to	-Quarterly progress reports - PIRs 2024 & 2025 -Interviews with project team -Final report ‘Overview of policy framework and examples on policy and financial instruments’ Oct 2024.

Targets - 1 overview of global best practices on policy instruments with recommendations for LAC by Y1	share relevant guidance on policy interventions identified in the country workplans. Although the cities have not yet started to develop concrete policy interventions, preparatory work has progressed.	
Output 1.3: Implementation plans for financial instruments developed to facilitate responsible plastics management **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** Indicators Number of implementation plans for financial instruments developed, improved or prepared for consideration /submission Targets - 1 overview of global best practices on financial instruments with recommendations for LAC by Y1	Level of delivery at mid-point: Partially delivered The single planned target on overview of global best practices on financial instruments with recommendations for LAC was achieved and is included in the report 'Overview of policy framework and examples on policy and financial instruments' (mentioned under output 1.1). The compiled best practices provide recommendations on how similar instruments can be implemented in LAC cities and tailored to the LAC context. Other activities included preparation by the City Working Groups of criteria for city selection to develop financial instruments. Reference materials were compiled to share relevant guidance on financial interventions identified in the country workplans, to be shared with the cities. No implementation plans for financial instruments have been developed.	-Quarterly progress reports - PIRs 2024 & 2025 -Interviews with project team -Final report 'Overview of policy framework and examples on policy and financial instruments' Oct 2024.
Output: 2.1 **Approaches developed and tested to facilitate more circular design, production, and consumption of plastics** **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** Indicators - Number of solutions on sustainable production and consumption pilot tested Targets 1 compilation of global best practices on upstream business solutions, with recommendations for LAC by Y1	Level of delivery at mid-point: Partially delivered The single target planned for Y1-Y3 (compilation of best practices on upstream business solutions) was achieved. This consists of an overview of best practices on existing upstream business innovations and solutions on elimination, reduction, and reuse at the global level with recommendations for the LAC context. This report will contribute to development of the upstream pilots. Regional and national training sessions on down- and upstream solutions were conducted for the countries. No upstream pilots have been tested and no activities conducted to reduce the quantity of plastics. Extensive technical consultations with the cities and other preparatory activities have taken place, with support of RMB and the RMB consultant.	-Quarterly progress reports - PIRs 2024 & 2025 -Interviews with project team -Presentation and notes: Regional Session on Upstream Solutions: Good practices on upstream innovations and solutions to eliminate, reduce and reuse. Workshop, 19 June 2025. -Upstream Pilot Intervention Action Plan -Descripción del piloto aguas arriba, Colombia -Presentation 'Next steps for the design and implementation of up-

	Among the deliverables produced are an Upstream Pilot Intervention Action Plan and descriptions of pilot projects for Colombia and Panama (see last column), and monitoring indicators to track progress of the pilot solutions. In Q4 2025, the upstream pilot plan template, with monitoring indicators embedded, was completed and shared with Panamá. With RMB support, Panamá developed a mini-feasibility study for all potential upstream and downstream interventions identified in 4 priority sectors (commerce, logistics, tourism and fishery), which is to be shared with the other cities.	and downstream pilot intervention', Jamaica. -Overview of best practices on existing upstream business innovations and solutions on elimination, reduction and reuse (presentation).
Output: 2.2 **Approaches developed and tested to improve collection and recycling of plastic waste** Indicators - Number of solutions on collection, recycling and disposal of plastic waste pilot tested - Tonnes of marine plastics reduced Targets - 1 compilation of global best practices on plastic collection and recycling with recommendations for LAC by Y1	Level of delivery at mid-point: Partially delivered The single target programmed for Y1-Y3 has been achieved, with the completion of a review on global best practices on collection and recycling interventions and approaches for cities, with recommendations for LAC. This report will contribute to development of the downstream pilots. As with the other targets, extensive consultations were undertaken with the cities for the preparation of this report. No downstream pilots have been tested and no activities conducted to reduce the quantity of plastics. Among the deliverables produced are a Downstream Pilot Intervention Action Plan and descriptions of downstream pilots for Colombia and Panama (see last column).	-Quarterly progress reports - PIRs 2024 & 2025 -Interviews with project team -Downstream Pilot Intervention Action Plan -Descripción del piloto aguas abajo, Colombia -Presentation and notes: Regional Session on Downstream Solutions: Good practices on downstream innovations and solutions to collect and recycle. Workshop, 18 July 2025. -Overview of best practices on existing collection and recycling solutions (presentation).
Output: 2.3 Industry roundtable on plastic circular economy established and roundtable meetings organised, with collaboration between business stakeholders facilitated Indicators - Number of roundtable meetings organised - Number of women entrepreneurs supported by the project in promoting the circularity of their business.	Level of delivery at mid-point: Partially delivered. The Collective Leadership Institute (CLI) was contracted by the CCS to support the establishment and organisation of the IRT. Of the two targets programmed, the framework strategy document was delivered. The in-person IRT workshop that was scheduled to be held at the end of 2025 was postponed to May 2026 to align with the PSC and Inter-city Network meetings. Other activities undertaken included the establishment of a project IRT Support Team consisting of CCS and CLI (core members) and the IPs ANCON	-Interviews with project team, CLI - Industry Roundtable framework strategy document

Targets - 1 strategy document elaborating the vision, approach, code of conducts, governance and activities of the industrial roundtable by Y1 - 12 industry roundtable meetings organised (1 per city every 2 years) - At least 40 women entrepreneurs supported by the project in promoting the circularity of their business (no timeframe given)	(Panamá) and INVEMAR (Colombia). In addition, local IRT support teams including private sector representatives for Colombia and Panamá were identified through an open and transparent process (Jamaica also selected two representatives). Subsequently, a meeting was held with the leaders of each city's roundtable, during which commitments were made to implement the actions defined in the strategy document. In Cartagena, plastics platforms previously existed, which required an additional loop of consultation and alignment with the public sector actors convening these platforms. To kick off the process of co-organizing IRT dialogues in the six cities, CLI collaborated with country IPs and city governments to organise inclusive and participatory virtual private sector consultations among key actors in Colombia and Panamá. Participation in the consultations exceeded expectations of the organisers, with 82 persons in Colombia (45% females, 55% males) and 34 persons in Panamá (59% females, 41% males). Engagement efforts with Jamaica were not successful owing to the lack of a signed PCA. Additional effort by CLI will be necessary to engage the Jamaican cities when the PCA is signed. However, CLI's contract ends in June 2026 and furthermore, their contract covers only one IRT meeting, bringing uncertainty about continued support to the IRTs.	
Output: 3.1: Inter-city network operationalised Indicators - Number of the network meetings organized - Percentage of women actively participating in the inter-city network planning board/council Targets -1 framework document including the vision, objectives, governance and activities of the inter-city network by Y1	Level of delivery at mid-point: Fully delivered. This component is supported by UNEP LACO, with a LACO consultant assigned as the network coordinator. Three of the four targets programmed for Y1-Y3 were achieved. The Inter-City Network framework document was developed in consultation with the six cities and was subsequently approved by the Network Coordinating Committee. City representatives reached consensus on a common vision, mission, objectives, governance structure, and operational matters including planned network activities, as outlined in the framework document. In addition, a draft of the knowledge activity plan was further advanced.	-Interviews with UNEP LACO -Inter-City Network framework document - Inter-city Network website structure -1st Inter-city Network webinar (Tourism and the Circular Economy of Plastics)

-1 functional network of LAC cities established by Y2 - 2 network meetings organized (1 in Y2 and 1 in Y4) -1 network website and social media channels developed in Y2 At least 40% of the members of the Inter-city Network planning boards/councils are women (timeframe not specified in results framework)	A notable achievement was the official launch of the Inter-city Network involving the six project cities in March 2025 in Colombia, and the appointment of the City of Barranquilla as the first Network Chair. The launch garnered wide media attention across the three countries. Network members are only the public sector (national and municipal governments), although private sector representatives can participate as panelists in the webinars. The Network is facilitating collaboration and information exchange among the cities' public sector to accelerate the transition towards a circular economy for plastics in LAC cities. The first face-to-face Network meeting will take place in May 2026, back-to-back with the 3rd PSC meeting. However, several virtual meetings and consultations with the core cities took place in 2025. A draft website structure has been prepared but the website and social media channels are still to be established. Note: Activities continued in 2026 and included the launch of a webinar series (Accelerating the Circular Economy of Plastics in Cities) with the aim to strengthen capacities and facilitate the exchange of knowledge in the thematic areas defined in the 2025–2026 Activity Plan. The first webinar on tourism and circular economy had 43 participants consisting of 17 (40%) men and 21 (49%) women, with no information on the gender of 5 (12%). indicating a high level of interest. The second webinar had 48 participants consisting of 22 (46%) men and 26 (54%) women.	
Output: 3.2: Inter-city network expanded with more participating cities Indicators - Number of additional cities supported with the development of policy and action plan - Tonnes of marine plastics reduced	Level of delivery at mid-point: Partially delivered. Only one target for this output is programmed for the period covered by the MTR (harmonised city action plan template for LAC cities). UNEP LACO is supporting the development of this action plan, in collaboration with to facilitate linkage with Component 1 (policy action plan and	-Letters from cities expressing interest to join the Network -Interview with the Network Coordinator

Targets - 1 harmonised city action plan template developed for LAC cities Y3 - 15 cities connecting to the network (6 project cities + 9 additional cities in the region) by Y4	policy/financial instruments). The first draft of the city action plan continued to be developed during 2025. Although not programmed to be completed until Year 4, the expansion of the Inter-city Network has made good progress. Formal letters to join the Network were received from seven additional LAC cities- Buenos Aires (Argentina); Puerto Montt and Puerto Varas (Chile); Quito (Ecuador); and Mexico City, Tulum, and Playa del Carmen (Mexico), bringing the total to 13 cities in the Network.	
Output: 4.1 **Information, Education and Communication (IEC) strategy for the project developed and implemented using IW: LEARN platform, GGKP and GPML platforms** Targets -1 project website compliant with IW:LEARN established by Y1 and deliverables uploaded to the website upon completion -2 Shared water ecosystems engaged with IW:LEARN – Caribbean and Pacific -1 communication strategy compliant with IW:LEARN requirements developed by Y1 -1 Gender Guidance Note prepared to be used by the project team to ensure gender mainstreaming by Y1 -1 survey conducted to assess role of women in plastic value chain by Y1 -At least 40% audience of the communication campaigns are female -990,162 direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as co-benefit of GEF investment Indicators - Number of project website established - Level of engagement in IWLEARN through participation and delivery of key products	Level of delivery at mid-point: Partially delivered Four of the five targets programmed for the review period were achieved. In accordance with UNEP's request, a project sub-site rather than a separate website was developed and linked to UNEP CEP website, in collaboration with UNEP Communications Division through an inter-agency agreement between CCS and UNEP. Additional support is provided by the CCS technical IT assistant. The first version of the sub-site can be accessed at: https://www.unep.org/cep/projects/circular-cities-beyond-plastics. At the time of the MTR, the site was being overhauled and updated. Currently, the website content consists mainly of background information on the project, with no project deliverables yet available. However, the website will be regularly updated once the cities advance their workplans and deliverables. The target of 2 shared water ecosystems engaged with IW:LEARN was achieved with five of the six project cities located on the coast of the Caribbean Sea Large Marine Ecosystem and one (Panamá City) on the Pacific Central-American Coastal LME.	-Communication strategy -Draft Gender Guidance Note -Project sub-site -Promotional video

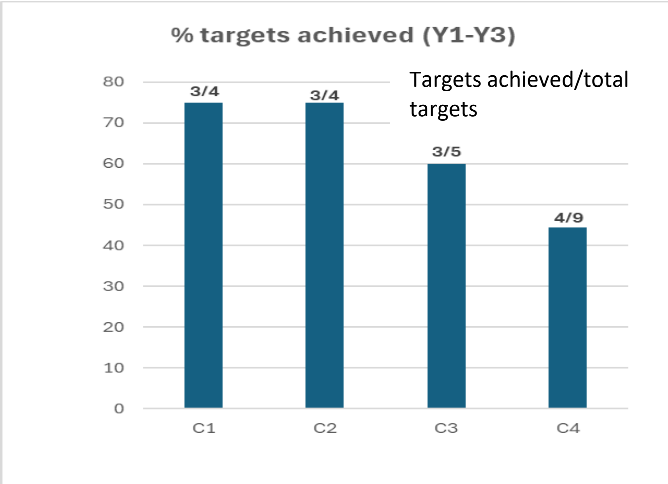
- % of completion on delivery of the communication strategy - Number of selected case studies on circular policies and sustainable business practices - Number of experience or best practices notes developed - Number of key IW: Learn events participated - Number of videos for communication Gender related indicators: - Number of surveys conducted to assess role of women in plastic value chain - % of documents with explicit gender mainstreaming - % of beneficiaries disaggregated by gender	The Communications Consultant was onboarded in early Q4 2024 and prepared the project communication strategy and communication guidelines in consultation with country and city-level stakeholders. Each country is adapting the strategy to suit their specific context and available resources. The Project Manager (former) participated in the GEF International Waters Conference held in Uruguay in September 2024 and one promotional video on the project has been produced https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZ5dWmsOIuY Regarding the two targets related to gender, a draft action plan for the gender deliverables was developed and work on the gender guidance note commenced. The Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) consultant was contracted in April 2026.	
Output: 4.2 **Increased awareness of the circular economy approaches from capacity building activities** Indicators - Number of people involved in the training and communication activities with gender disaggregated target - Tonnes of marine plastics reduced Targets - 3 national level trainings organised and at least 50% female participants in Y2-Y3 (1 per country)	Level of delivery at mid-point: Not delivered. Only one of the four targets (3 national level trainings organised) is programmed for Y1- Year 3, while the others are programmed for year 4. The target has not been achieved.	
Output: 4.3	Level of delivery at mid-point: Not delivered	

Long-term monitoring program operationalised by cities on the implementation of circular economy approaches and associated reduction in plastic pollution **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** Indicators - Number of methodology and calculation tool to organize the data collection and assessment of chemicals for plastics Targets - 1 set of indicators aiming to support plastic related GEF projects to monitor the performance and impacts of activities developed by Y3 and tested with the 6 cities by Y4 - 1 methodology and a tool to enable cities to forecast on the potential impacts, cost and benefits, and trade-offs of adopting various circular strategies developed by Y3 - 1 methodology and calculation tool to organize the data collection and assessment of chemicals for plastics developed by Y3	None of the three programmed targets has been achieved. The project will develop an M&E approach in 2026. Development of a M&E mechanism has not been completed as planned in Y3, but technical discussions between UNEP RMB, UNEP LACO, consultants and others have taken place. An M&E consultant is required to track project implementation progress. The delays in delivery of targets in Component 4 will affect the other components since it cuts across them all.	
Output: 5.1: Monitoring and evaluation of project outcomes and outputs to include quarterly financial reporting **Performance against Indicator(s) and Target(s)** Indicator - Number of quarterly and annual progress reports & annual workplan and budget completed Targets - 12 quarterly reports and 2 PIRs by Y2 - 20 quarterly reports and 4 PIRs by Y4	Level of delivery at mid-point: Fully delivered. Note that the targets for the quarterly reports (as specified in the results framework) are incorrect. The number of quarterly reports per year should be 8 (4 progress reports and 4 expenditure reports), or 16 reports by Y2 and 32 reports by Y4. The programmed target was achieved during the period covered by the review. Since Q2 2023, the quarterly progress reports and quarterly expenditure reports along with annual workplans and budgets, have been regularly produced and submitted to UNEP IA, albeit with some delay. Two PIR reports have been produced (July 2023-June 2024 and July 2024-June 2025).	

Output: 5.2: Mid-term and terminal evaluations results shared with stakeholders Indicator - Number of independent reviews shared Targets - 1 MTR and 3 regional SC meetings (inception included) by Y2 - 1 TE and 5 regional SC meetings by Y4	Level of delivery at mid-point: MTR in progress The MTR was initiated one year past the mid-point (2026). The inception meeting was held later than the time specified in the project document, and two in-person PSC meetings (and one virtual PSC meeting) were held in the first three years. Reports of these meetings were prepared and shared with stakeholders.	

39. Of the 22 targets programmed for Y1-Y3 across the four substantive components, only 13 (59%) were achieved (Figure 3). Components 1, 2, and 3 showed the highest level of performance with between 60%- 75% of the targets achieved in each component. Component 4 showed the lowest progress, with 4 of the 9 targets (44%) achieved.

Figure 3. Proportion of targets achieved in Year 1-Year 3 across the four substantive project components



40. Based on the programmed targets delivered, none of the outputs was fully achieved except for the establishment of the Inter-city Network (Output 3.1), which was launched in March 2025. In addition, although not programmed until Y4, significant progress was made towards expansion of the Inter-city Network, with formal letters to join the Network received from 7 other LAC cities (out of a target of 9 cities): Buenos Aires (Argentina); Puerto Montt and Puerto Varas (Chile); Quito (Ecuador); and Playa del Carmen, Ciudad de México, and Tulum (Mexico).

41. Targets achieved in Components 1 and 2 include Global best practices on policy frameworks, policy instruments, and financial instruments, with recommendations for LAC (3 targets); and Compilation of global best practices on upstream business solutions, and compilation of global best practices on plastic collection and recycling with recommendations for LAC (2 targets). Importantly, they also provide recommendations tailored to the LAC context and the city level. These reports, which are comprehensive and of a high quality, will guide the development of other outputs by the governments, municipalities, and private sector (e.g., development of policies and action plans, upstream and downstream solutions/pilots, and financial instruments for LAC cities). Moreover, they will serve to guide the selection and prioritisation of appropriate policies and best practices for each city, for implementation within the project.

42. Work has progressed to varying levels towards the other targets and outputs. An important element was the stakeholder engagement processes by which the targets were delivered. The project (through its partners, EA, supported by RMB and LACO, as well as consultants) has successfully mobilised public and private sector partners and stakeholders, as evidenced for example, by the Inter-city Network and IRT as well as wide stakeholder participation in the various online consultations. This is critical to foster stakeholder ownership. Support from UNEP RMB, UNEP LACO, and the IRT Support Team (CCS, CLI, ANCON, and INVEMAR), and the pilot project and the communications consultants was instrumental in the delivery of these outputs.

43. Based on the programmed targets and outputs achieved, the project has severely underperformed. The low rate of delivery of targets programmed for the first three years of the project (59%) and slow progress towards achievement of the outputs are not aligned with the proportion of the project timeframe (75%) within which they were expected to be achieved. The remaining targets and all but two of the outputs (Inter-city Network and its expansion) are still to be delivered in less than one year before the close of the project in December 2026. This situation is even more concerning since certain outputs depend on the completion of other outputs at the regional level, and Jamaica is still not fully on board. Consequently, the delivery of the remaining targets and outputs is jeopardised, and in turn the achievement of the expected outcomes and GEBs, which places the entire project at high risk.

Progress Towards Project Outcomes

44. Achievement of outcomes at mid-term is usually not evident since activities towards outputs are still ongoing. This will be assessed in detail in the terminal evaluation. At the time of the MTR, none of the outcomes had been achieved. The MTR assessed the likelihood of achievement of the outcomes based on the outcome indicators and targets as well as on an analysis of the status of the outputs, risks and assumptions, as presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Progress towards project outcomes

Outcome 1	**Circular economy policies adopted or improved by city-level governments to reduce marine plastics and plastic pollution in targeted cities**
Indicators -Number of cities with new policies/strategies adopted or existing policies improved -Number of new policies adopted and existing policies improved per city **Targets** -6 cities with new policies/strategies adopted/ implemented or existing policies improved, with municipal capacity in policy planning strengthened -1 new policy adopted and 2 existing policies improved per city	During the period of the MTR, none of the targets or outputs under this outcome have been achieved. The output on global reviews and compilation of best practices on policy frameworks, policy instruments, and financial instruments, all with recommendations for LAC cities, has been achieved and will inform the development/ strengthening of policies and financial instruments.
Sources of Information /Evidence:	- QPRs and PIRs - Field visits/observations - Interviews/FGDs - No documentary evidence to show the outcome was achieved
Narrative Assessment:	Based on the low level of achievement of outputs over the period under review and the short time remaining, the achievement of the planned outcomes is unlikely unless implementation is accelerated and an extension is granted. The following paragraphs discusses the assumptions and risks specified in the results framework regarding achievement of the outcomes. The assumption of adequate buy-in and support from city governments appear to hold in Colombia and Panamá. This was demonstrated by the high level of engagement in project activities and governance structures (even

	before agreements were signed and funds disbursed). For example, national and city-level officials have been strongly engaged in project activities such as stakeholder consultations as well as in the Inter-city Network and have set up the national and city governance structures in which they participate. On the other hand, the implementing partner and the governmental counterparts in Jamaica have not been able to fully engage with the project due to the lack of a signed PCA as well as low technical capacity. The risk that policies are developed but not fully implemented or enforced is a significant risk under the project lifetime owing to the lengthy internal processes to develop and approve policies, followed by implementation and enforcement challenges (inadequate capacity and financial resources, etc). Project partners in some of the cities indicated that implementation and enforcement of existing policies need to be strengthened rather than new policies developed. A sustainability plan (currently lacking), which includes provisions for implementation and enforcement as well as sustainable financing mechanisms, will help to increase the likelihood of implementation and enforcement beyond the project lifetime. Another risk is that city authorities fail to mobilise private sector partners during policy development and implementation, and lack of industry or key corporations' engagement. The project is proactively engaging with the private sector through mechanisms such as the IRT and other project activities (e.g., development and implementation of the pilots) and will build capacity for circular economy. However, there is need to strengthen engagement of the private sector. Regarding the risk that relevant policies are blocked by stakeholders who will be affected or by lobbyists, so far there has not been any evidence of this.
Level of progress:	Moderate progress
Outcome 2	**Circular economy innovations and practices adopted by the private sector to reduce marine plastics and plastic pollution in targeted cities**
Indicators -Number of businesses that adopted best practices or sustainable business solution -Number of business solution pilots conducted per city (more appropriate as an output indicator) **Target** -120 businesses that adopted best practices or sustainable business solution -2 pilots conducted per city (more appropriate as an output indicator)	During the period covered by the MTR, none of the targets or outputs under this outcome were achieved, although some of the output targets were delivered. The output on global reviews and compilation of best practices on upstream and downstream solutions with recommendations for LAC cities has been achieved and will inform the development of the pilots. However, pilot interventions have not yet been implemented although considerable preparatory work has been carried out in Colombia and Panama.
Sources of Information /Evidence:	- QPRs and PIRs

	- Field visits/observations - Interviews/FGDs - No documentary evidence to show that the outcome was achieved
Narrative Assessment:	Among the risks is lack of industry or key corporations' engagement. Through the IPs and other partners, the project is actively engaging with the private sector and industries and a high level of interest by the private sector has been demonstrated (e.g., in the IRT). Another risk is cultural resistance from the citizens to accept new measures or adopt innovative solutions. Implementation of the communication strategy will help to reduce this risk. Communicating information to the public on new innovative measures will be done in a way that is sensitive to local cultures and demonstrates direct benefits of the new measures. Various dissemination and communication forum and different media (TV, radio, newspapers, social media, and consumer campaigns) will be employed. Regarding the risk that interventions through the private sector fail to be sustained or replicated within and between cities and failure of informal waste sector to participate, the project is working closely with both the municipal authorities and a range of private sector operators to identify appropriate innovative approaches and appropriate financing mechanisms to encourage replication. An important consideration is the financial viability/profitability of the interventions – financially profitable interventions are more likely to be sustained and replicated. A critical mass is needed but it is not certain if this will be feasible in some of the cities because of various constraints.
Level of progress:	Moderate progress
Outcome 3	**Increased capacity and cooperation among LAC cities through the LAC Inter-city Network on marine plastics and plastic circular economy and enhanced implementation of circular economy approaches in the region**
Indicators - Number of cities joining the inter-city network - Number of governments, private sector stakeholders, NGOs involved in the inter-city network - Number of global and regional initiatives collaborating with the network **Targets** - 15 cities joining the inter-city network by Y4 - 120 governments, private sector stakeholders, NGOs involved in the inter-city network by Y4 - At least 8 global and regional initiatives collaborating with the network by Y4	Significant progress towards this outcome through the launch of the Inter-city Network in March 2025 and its expansion to include 7 additional LAC cities (see outputs section). A high level of interest in the Network's activities is evident including though participation in the first two webinars of 91 persons.
Sources of Information /Evidence:	- QPRs and PIRs - Field visits/observations - Interviews/FGDs - No documentary evidence to show the outcome was achieved
Narrative Assessment:	Assumption: Other cities willing to participate in the Intercity Network as they see the added value. In addition

	to the 6 project cities, 7 other LAC cities have joined the Network and 91 persons participated in the first two webinars. The risk that the Network cannot be sustained after the end of the project and lack of resources to support other cities expressing the willingness to develop their own action plan is significant. There are potential opportunities to help sustain the Network, e.g., through a sustainability plan that will include sustainable financing for the Network as well as the IRT.
Level of progress:	Substantial progress
Outcome 4	**Improved regional and global awareness, knowledge and capacity applied, and capacity in applying circular economy approaches to reduce marine plastics and plastic pollution**
Indicators -Number of stakeholders with awareness raised and knowledge on circular economy for plastics increased -Number of knowledge assets disseminated and applied in the region **Targets** -1000 stakeholders with awareness raised and knowledge on circular economy for plastics increased -At least 5 knowledge assets disseminated and applied in the region	None of the outputs have been achieved and only three of the nine targets programmed for the period during review were delivered. However, the project is already laying a strong foundation for the achievement of this outcome, through, for example, proactive engagement of stakeholders in project activities including technical workshops, development of pilots, Inter-city Network, and the IRT as well as implementation of the communication strategy, gender action plan, and private sector approach. The risk that Gender disaggregated data is difficult to collect is low since this is done through direct observations and records of participation in the various project activities.
Sources of Information /Evidence:	- QPRs and PIRs - Field visits/observations - Interviews/FGDs - No documentary evidence to show the outcome was achieved
Narrative Assessment:	See above for the following risks: Cultural resistance from the citizens to accept new measures or adopt innovative solutions; Policies only developed but not implemented; Interventions through the private sector fail to be sustained or replicated in cities. Other risks include: -Civil society (including NGOs, CSOs, education establishments) unwilling to participate. The project is encouraging broad civil society involvement at all stages of the project's interventions and ensuring that information released is in a form that encourages involvement. -Inadequate data available to support activities: Consultants were hired to collect baseline data in the three countries and the project will strengthen capacity for monitoring and establish monitoring mechanisms with indicators.
Level of progress:	Limited progress

45. Based on the progress to date in achievement of the outputs and the foundation established in the two countries, indications are that the project is likely to achieve the planned outcomes if execution is ramped up in the remaining time including in Jamaica, and if a no-cost extension is granted. The project has made significant progress towards achieving outcome 2 with the initiation of the IRT and outcome 3 with the establishment and functioning of the Inter-city Network. Progress made on the outputs as well as extensive consultations between the IPs, project partners and other stakeholders and project consultants have helped to establish a solid foundation for capacity building and awareness raising about circular economy, contributing to outcome 4. In addition, measures being taken to mitigate the risks identified in the results framework are reducing the risk levels, and the assumptions appear to be holding (as described above).

Likelihood of Impact

46. Drivers and assumptions related to the transition from outputs to outcomes and from outcomes to intermediate state and impact are shown in the ToC diagram (Figure 2). An analysis of the likelihood of impact is provided in Table 11.

Table 11. Likelihood of impact

Factors influencing likelihood of impact	Evident or emerging?	Discussion
Drivers to support transition from Outputs to the Project Outcomes	Yes/No/Partially Yes	All the main drivers are evident in the three project countries (concern about plastic pollution, recognition of the barriers to circular economy approaches, countries' adherence to regional and global policy frameworks, donor support, investment opportunities, supportive policy and institutional frameworks in the countries).
Assumptions for the change process from Outputs to Project Outcomes	Yes/No/Partially Partially (capacity challenges, low co-finance)	Assumptions are partially holding - inadequate capacity within the CCS/PMU and some of the cities; co-finance contributions are below expectations. The project is taking various measures to ensure that they hold throughout the project (e.g., strengthening stakeholder engagement, capacity, and awareness; acquiring relevant data and information; working diligently with partners to mitigate risks; re-engaging partners and identifying other sources of co-finance).
Proportion of **Project Outcomes** fully or partially achieved	All/ some/ none Some	Component 3 outcome on the LAC Inter-city Network has been almost fully achieved, with the launch of the Network and its expansion with 7 (out of the target of 9) other cities that have joined.

Drivers to support transition from Project Outcomes to Intermediate State (Increased circularity of the plastic value chain and reduced marine plastic and plastic pollution in cities throughout LAC)	Yes/No/Partially Yes	Drivers are likely to be in place (both from the project's outcomes themselves and existing external conditions) and will be better assessed at the end of the project.
Assumptions for the change process from the Project Outcomes to Intermediate States	Yes/No/Partially Partially	The assumptions are emerging to varying extents and will be better assessed at the end of the project.
Proportion of Intermediate States achieved	All/ some/ none None yet	It was too early in the project's lifetime for achievement of the intermediate state, which is usually achieved in the post-project period. However, the pilot projects have potential for some localised progress to be made towards the intermediate state.
Drivers to support transition from Intermediate States to Impact	Yes/No/Partially Partially	Drivers are likely to be in place (both from the project's outcomes themselves and existing external conditions) and will be better assessed at the end of the project. The transition from outcomes to intermediate state and impact requires a longer timeframe, during which unforeseen changes may occur.
Assumptions for the change process from Intermediate States to Impact	Yes/No/Partially Partially	The transition from intermediate state to impact requires a longer time-frame and a critical mass of private sector companies and businesses as well as stakeholders across LAC but because of the wide disparities in the region, it is uncertain if the impact would be region-wide and any substantial impact may be localised (to be assessed by the terminal evaluation).

Rating for Effectiveness: Unsatisfactory
Rating for Availability of Outputs: Unsatisfactory
Rating for Achievement of Project Outcomes: Unsatisfactory
Rating for Achievement of Likelihood of Impact (Use 'Likely' scale): Moderately Unlikely

C. Financial Management

Adherence to UNEP's Financial Policies and Procedures

47. Based on the quarterly expenditure reports (QER) and quarterly progress reports (QPR) and interviews with IA and EA personnel as well as minutes of bi-weekly meetings between the IA and EA, it is evident that overall, proper financial management standards were applied. Expenditures were within the approved annual budget. Nevertheless, due to some irregularities, close monitoring and oversight of financial expenditures by the Task Managers were required.

- Project management cost amounted to 13.6% of the cumulative expenditure of US$618,932, substantially higher than the 5% PMC cap stipulated by the GEF. This was due, on the one hand, to the slow start-up and implementation in the countries, and on the other to the necessity for a PM from the start for strategic planning, start-up processes, contracting, administrative procedures, and organisation of the inception meeting, among other tasks. This is consistent with the initial phase of a project and underscores that the 5% cap is not adequate for multi-country regional projects involving multiple implementing partners, complex governance arrangements, and extensive monitoring and reporting requirements. Nevertheless, under the current circumstances, the relatively high expenditure on project management poses a risk for the longevity and sustainability of the project funds should there be a project extension when additional funds will be needed for project management.
- Charging of some expenses under the incorrect UNEP budget lines (such as the FMO's salary), inadequate internal expenditure tracking and financial management by the PMU, and persistent budgetary/reporting issues.
- Delays in submission by the IPs of the QERs to the PMU and further delay by the PMU in submission of the consolidated QERs to the IAs.

48. In the 2025 PIR report, budgeting was considered to be at a substantial risk (overspend on project management cost- PMC) in relation to components and deliverables), while reporting was considered at high risk. The latter was due to financial reporting being challenging/time consuming, discrepancies in expenditures from partners and the CCS, and delays in submission of financial reports. As a result, the Task Managers called for improvement in transparency and clarity in financial management and reporting.

49. The situation described above could be attributed to several factors including the lack of a dedicated FMO within the CCS in the first three years of project implementation (due in part to the lengthy approval process by UNEP Headquarters, HQ, for assignment of an FMO), unfamiliarity of the PM and IUNV with UNEP's financial procedures (although financial reporting and procurement were part of their responsibilities) and their restricted access to UMOJA (UNEP financial and human resources management system). The latter was due to a combination of course availability, UNEP HQ provisioning timelines, and time constraints. Within UMOJA there are different types of roles depending on one's position, and the time required to complete the various courses vary. The CCS have held discussions with UNEP HQ about who was eligible to receive access rights, and roles of staff versus consultants, etc. For the remainder of the project, should this issue continue, it would be beneficial to have consistent messaging of what is allowed according to UNEP policy and for the CCS, in consultation with UNEP HQ, to consider some clear standard operating procedures related to UMOJA approvals.

50. The split in budget and management responsibilities between the two GEF Focal Areas created some complexity for financial management of the GEF grant. Expenditures must be reported by UNEP budget line as well as project component and output according to each Focal Area, making reporting very challenging. Initial confusion internally on the correct budget templates to be used and lack of sufficient granularity on the Standard Work breakdown Structure Elements and inability to trace budget lines to specific activities

exacerbated the challenges. In some cases, assumptions and adjustments were necessary across budget lines to balance expenditures, which affected transparency. Submission of QPRs to the IA before the official close of the quarter may require additional time-consuming updates if this becomes necessary.

51. Measures to address the situation included bi-weekly meetings between CCS/PMU, FMO, and the Task Managers, support on financial management by the FMO in UNEP Geneva and the C&W FMO, assigning of an interim Acting FMO (AFMO) from UNEP HQ to the CCS in 2025 for one year, and of the CCS Programme Management Assistant (PMA) with some familiarity of the system, to assist the PMU. The AFMO provided training to the PMA and the IUNV in financial management and reporting. However, the departure of the AFMO in February 2026 left the project without a dedicated full-time FMO, which urgently needs to be addressed considering the complexity of the project, heavy financial oversight required, and financial reporting from multiple co-executing partners. In addition, at the start of their contract, the new PM should complete the required training courses to access UMOJA and become familiar with UNEP's financial procedures, with continued support from the PMA.

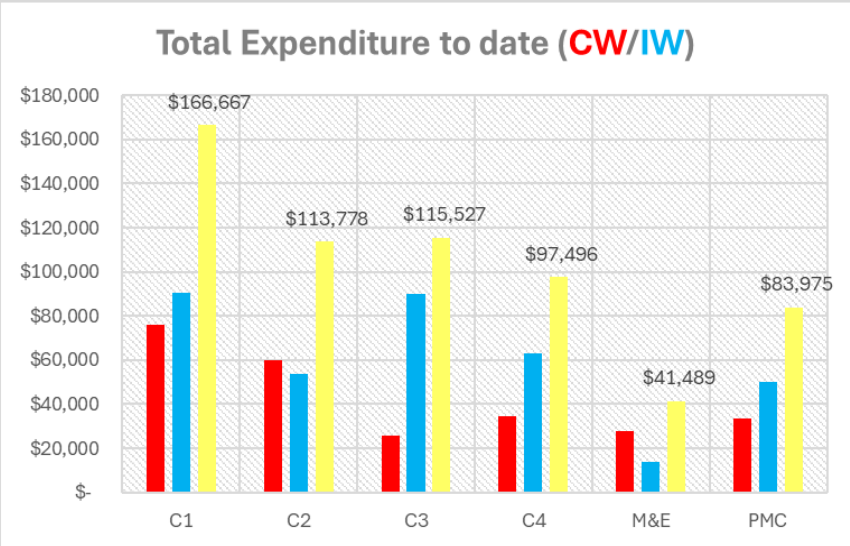
Completeness of Financial Information

52. Standard financial documentation available for the review included overall costed workplan and budget as well as forecast (GEF funds) in UNEP format, and QERs on expenditures by UNEP budget line and project component, output and activity, and according to IW and CW allocations. The final QERs (up to Q4 2025) that have been reviewed and cleared by the IA and FMO were made available for the MTR. As stipulated in the PCAs, the external IPs must submit audit reports to UNEP for total expenditures incurred during the year ending 31 December on or before 30 June of the following year. The first audit reports from INVEMAR and ANCON will be due by 30 June 2026 since they received their first disbursements only in 2025.

53. Total disbursement as of 31 December 2025 amounted to US$1,160,000 (ANCON: US$ 390,000; INVEMAR: US$ 390,000; LACO: US$ 200,000; and RMB: US$ 170,000). Because all the agreements are in US dollars, fluctuation in the exchange rate against local currencies is a significant risk factor. While no major issues have been encountered to date, currency exchange rate fluctuation needs to be closely monitored and any impacts managed. As of 31 December 2025, the total cumulative expenditure of GEF funds by project component, M&E, and PMC was US$618,932, amounting to only 53% of the US$1,160,000 disbursed and 9% of the total GEF grant (Figure 4). Components 1 and 2 had the highest levels of spending. Compared to funds disbursement and the total GEF grant, spending/delivery was low owing to the delayed start and slow implementation in the countries during the period under review. Contributing to this is the fact that 56% (US$3.9 million) of the GEF funds is allocated to the national IPs, but it was only in late 2025 that two (Colombia and Panamá) of the three signed their respective PCAs and received their first disbursements. Further, the continued lack of a signed PCA with Jamaica has impeded the disbursement of funds and implementation in the two cities.

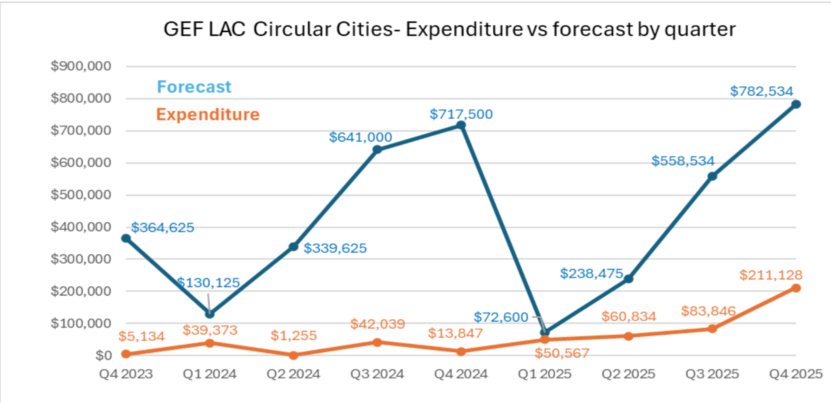
Figure 4. Cumulative expenditure as of 31 December 2025 by project component, M&E, and PMC,

(M&E: Monitoring & Evaluation; PMC; Project Management Cost; CW (red): Chemicals and Waste (red); IW (blue): International Waters; yellow: Total expenditure)



54. The low spend rate is inconsistent with the project's workplan and delivery of outputs expected by the third year of implementation, as seen in the achievement of only 59% of the targets programmed for Year 1-Year 3 (see section on Effectiveness). The lower-than-expected expenditure is corroborated by the project level expenditure rate being consistently below the forecast across all quarters from Q4 2023 to Q4 2025[23] (Figure 5). Expenditure against disbursement/forecast for Colombia (INVEMAR) in the last two quarters of 2025 (following receipt of first disbursement) was US$ 43,202 against US$389,999 (11%). Similarly, for Panama (ANCON), this was US$134,291 against US$390,000 (34%).

Figure 5. Expenditure against forecast by quarter (project level)



55. The total co-finance committed and realised are presented in Section 3.6 on project financing. Co-finance realized amounts to only US$5,926,728 of the US$35,407,240 committed at design phase (17%) (2025 PIR report). The low level is due to, among others, changes that occurred between the time that the co-finance commitments were made (2022) and the start of implementation (projects on which co-finance was based are no longer operational, and delayed start of implementation in Jamaica. Re-engaging these partners and identifying new sources of co-finance will be necessary during the remaining life of the project, for example, by a) working with the national IPs, many of whom have strong relationships with relevant actors on the ground, to facilitate re-introduction discussions where relevant, b) leverage UNEP LACO (through the current consultant coordinating the Inter-city Network) to

[23] The expenditure for Q4 2025 is still under review by the IA and has not yet been approved.

facilitate re-introduction conversations where relationships exist, particularly in the context of Colombia and Panamá.

Table 12: Financial management

Financial management components:		**Rating**	**Evidence/ Comments**
1. Adherence to UNEP's/GEF's policies and procedures:		**MU**	
Any evidence that indicates shortcomings in the project's adherence[24] to UNEP or donor policies, procedures or rules		Yes	Some irregularities and deviations were noted. Projec management cost greatly exceeded expenditures, anc expenditures were low in relation to the GEF grant anc disbursed during the period under review.
Was first disbursement carried out within 9 months of UNEP's project approval date.		Yes (No for disbursements to the countries)	The first disbursement was made from UNEP to CCS January 2023, 2 months after UNEP's project approva November 2022. First disbursements to Colombia anc were made in late 2025 in the project's 3rd year
Were the procurement policies of UNEP and the donor(s) followed? *(where applicable)*		Yes	Procurement plans were prepared by each IP in accor UNEP stipulations and the procurement plan template PCA.
2. Completeness of project financial information:		**MU**	
Provision of key documents to the evaluator (based on the responses to A-H below)			
A.	Co-financing and Project Cost's tables at design (by budget lines)	Yes	Project budget prepared according to UNEP budget lir areas of expenditures, IW/CW allocations, for each pro component, M&E and project management. Level of c pledged is provided by source only, not budget lines
B.	Revisions to the budget	No	None undertaken
C.	All relevant project legal agreements (e.g. SSFA, PCA, ICA)	Yes	Copies of all signed legal agreements were available (annexes)
D.	Proof of fund transfers	No	
E.	Proof of co-financing (cash and in-kind)	No	Co-finance contributions recorded by source, cash anc (see section 6); total co-finance contribution reported reports
F.	A summary report on the project's expenditures during the life of the project (by budget lines, project components and/or annual level)	Yes	QERs prepared and reviewed/signed by FMO and IA T Managers (by budget line, project component, outputs to IW and CW portions of the budget). Some irregulari expenditures and reporting and delay in submission o the countries and EA and in approval by the IA
G.	Copies of any completed audits and management responses *(where applicable)*	NA	
H.	Procure documents, including the approved requisition document and Source Selection Plan *(where applicable)*	No	
I.	Any other financial information that was required for this project (list):		
Overall rating		**MU**	

Rating for Financial Management: Moderately Unsatisfactory

Rating for Adherence to UNEP's Financial Policies and Procedures: Moderately Unsatisfactory

Rating for Completeness of Financial Information: Moderately Unsatisfactory

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

D. Efficiency

Cost-effectiveness

56. Several factors enhance the project's cost-effectiveness including:

- Its regional approach to addressing the needs of multiple countries at the same time.
- Cost-sharing of project personnel, e.g., PM and IUNV with the PROMAR project, which is also implemented by CCS, and of the FMO (but this had repercussions on the project). However, efficient cost-sharing requires synchronized financial planning and timely fund transfers across projects to avoid implementation delays.
- Strategic partnerships for targeted technical assistance with UNEP Divisions (UNEP RMB and UNEP LACO with relevant mandates and expertise).
- Engaging national agencies with relevant expertise, networks, partnerships, stakeholders, infrastructure, etc. This also enhances national institutional capacities, ensuring that expertise remains within local institutions that will continue to contribute to circular economy efforts beyond the project's duration. INVEMAR and ANCON have also harnessed the expertise of entities within the respective countries to execute specific activities (e.g., CEMPRE and CI in Colombia, and University of Panamá/ Basel Convention Regional Centre).
- Building on existing national and regional initiatives and national regulatory frameworks.
- Engaging with a diverse range of partners with substantial co-finance contributions.
- Integrating two GEF focal areas in the project design, facilitating joint support and collaboration in achieving IW and CW GEBs (but could also reduce efficiency due to more complex and demanding financial reporting).
- Convening of online meetings and workshops, reducing travel and other associated costs. Such a measure also facilitates wider participation in these events and greater interaction on a regular basis between the IA and EA and among project partners in a more cost-effective manner.

57. On the other hand, several factors have reduced the project's cost-effectiveness, including:

- High transaction costs associated with multiple partners and many different groups of stakeholders along the plastics value chain.
- High project management cost in relation to progress in implementation and achievements within the same period (see section on Financial management).
- Administrative and financial complications arising from cost-sharing between the GEF project and PROMAR, for example, charging of PMC to the GEF budget alone due to delayed budget disbursement from PROMAR, and slow implementation of the GEF project.
- Lack of a signed agreement between UNEP (on behalf of CCS) and Jamaica, which means that additional effort will be needed to bring the counterparts up to speed particularly regarding regional level activities. This has associated costs in terms of time and financial resources.
- A no-cost extension will reduce efficiency, since an increase in unstated costs to the implementing and executing agencies and co-executing partners will be incurred.

Timeliness

58. Key milestones and dates from GEF CEO endorsement to contracting of PM and partners are presented in Table 13. The project experienced a 6-month delay between GEF CEO endorsement (June 2022) and start of implementation considered as when the UNEP/CCS agreement entered into force (December 2022). The first disbursement from UNEP (as the IA) to UNEP CCS was on 18 January 2023, and the Inception meeting was held on 15 August 2023, eight months after project start (instead of within two months of project start, as stipulated in the project M & E plan). The PM was contracted on 16 October 2023 and the internal cooperation agreements (ICA) with UNEP RMB and UNEP LACO were signed in February and April 2024, respectively, while PCAs with ANCON and INVEMAR in March and June 2025, respectively, with the first disbursements occurring several months later. At the time of writing of this report, the PCA with Jamaica was still awaiting signature, as were the agreements between INVEMAR and its local partners CEMPRE and CI. Factors contributing to these delays are discussed in the section on Factors affecting performance.

Table 13. Key milestones from CEO endorsement and contracting of partners of the GEF LAC Circular Cities project.

Key milestone	Date
CEO endorsement	2 June 2022
UNEP approval	28 November 2022
Expected implementation start (PCA signed)	22 December 2022
Project launch	16 January 2023
First disbursement	18 January 2023
Inception workshop	15 August 2023
1st PSC meeting	17 August 2023
Project manager contracted	16 October 2023
IUNV contracted	October 2024
Informal PSC meeting - virtual	10 December 2024
2nd PSC meeting	27-28 March 2025
Contracting parties	Agreement signed
RMB	15 February 2024
LACO	2 April 2024
ANCON, Panamá	28 March 2025
INVEMAR, Colombia	26 June 2025
CLI	July 2025
Jamaica	Awaiting signature

59. Start-up delays had knock-on effects that reverberated throughout the project and affected the start of substantive activities, which only got off the ground in 2024-2025. Additionally, the delay in signing of the PCA by Jamaica has severely constrained implementation in the two cities and their participation in regional-level activities. Consequently, implementation has been severely affected as evidenced by the low achievement of targets programmed for Year 1-Year 3 and the low cumulative expenditure during the first three years of the project (see sections on Effectiveness and Financial management).

60. It is highly unlikely that the remaining targets and outputs could be achieved by the project's operational closure on 31 December 2026, even if implementation is fully accelerated. This places the project at high risk and means that a no-cost extension will be unavoidable. A no-cost extension will reduce efficiency since an increase will be incurred in unstated costs to UNEP, CCS, and IPs.

Rating for Efficiency: Unsatisfactory

E. Monitoring and Reporting

Monitoring of Project Implementation

61. The CCS/PMU is responsible for monitoring day-to-day project activities under the guidance of the IA and in accordance with the costed monitoring and evaluation (M&E) workplan presented in the project document. The M&E framework, along with the results framework and annual workplans, is appropriate for tracking implementation progress. Among the tools to facilitate monitoring of project implementation are preparation of QPRs, QERs, annual budgeted workplans, and annual PIRs. Other M&E activities are the inception meeting, annual PSC meetings, and the MTR and terminal evaluation. A crucial mechanism to monitor progress and identify mitigatory actions are bi-weekly meetings held between UNEP, CCS/PMU and other UNEP Divisions.

62. The IPs contribute to progress reporting through their respective QPRs and QERs, which are consolidated by the CCS and transmitted to the IA. QPRs have been regularly produced, albeit with some delay and inconsistencies that were picked up by the Task Managers. These reports, which are usually complete and generally of a high quality, provide a detailed account of the status of activities towards each output (% completion), actions for the following quarter, and links to deliverables produced. In particular, the relatively short frequency of progress and expenditure reporting (quarterly) allowed timely identification of any challenges and hurdles and implementation of corrective and mitigatory measures to keep the project on track. One of the shortcomings in the QPRs is that indicators and targets related to gender, which are specified in the results framework, have not been tracked in the QPRs or the PIRs. Tracking gender indicators and targets is important for the GEB Indicator 11 on Gender and requires greater attention in the remaining time. A gender expert has been contracted and will undertake tracking and reporting of gender, which will be supported by the M & E specialist to be hired by the project.

63. The annual PIRs provide a more comprehensive account of performance over the previous year of implementation (July to June). Progress each outcome and output is rated and an overall performance rating is given. In both the 2024 and 2025 PIRs, the overall rating for outcomes is ‘Moderately Unsatisfactory’, while for outputs it deteriorated from ‘Moderately Satisfactory’ to ‘Unsatisfactory’. The overall risk to implementation is ‘Moderate’. A valuable feature of the PIR is an analysis of project management risk, with ratings assigned to seven risk factors by the EA and Task Manager. It is noted that in the 2025 PIR, there is a low level of concurrence between the ratings of the EA and Task Manager for five of the seven factors, with substantial risk for Management structure, Implementation schedule, and Budget; and high risk for Reporting. The MTR considers these ratings to be justified (see section on Factors affecting performance). In the project document, the only risk factors assessed that approximate these four risk factors covered in the PIR are human resources, administrative or organizational arrangement, which were rated as moderate.

64. Quarterly expenditure reports have been regularly produced but their submission to the PMU was often delayed and with inconsistencies. The structure of the expenditure reports facilitates results-based reporting, with expenditures reported by UNEP budget line, output, project component, and M&E and project management costs, separated according to budget allocated to IW and C&W. This comprehensive approach, while making reporting more complex, clearly links expenditures to project outcomes and components as well as source of funds (IW/CW), enhancing transparency in tracking of expenditures. A useful tool developed by the IA is a budget tracker, which provides a comprehensive overview of expenditures in the previous year as well as cumulative expenditures. As previously

mentioned, discrepancies on expenditures from IPs and the CCS and delays in preparation and submission of the reports have been a challenge (see section on Financial Management).

Project Reporting

65. During the period under review, the monitoring and reporting system has been operational and in compliance with UNEP and GEF reporting requirements. Two PIR reports (July 2023-June 2024; July 2024 – June 2025), as well as 12 QERs and 12 QPRs have been prepared and submitted to UNEP (but often delayed). As previously mentioned, the project Inception meeting was held eight months after the project start. In addition, three PSC meetings were convened: Nov 2023, December 2024 (informal virtual meeting), and March 2025. The PSC meeting planned for November 2025 was postponed to May 2026. Additionally, the MTR, originally scheduled to start in January 2024, was only initiated in January 2026. This has delayed the timely identification of project status and challenges being encountered, and implementation of corrective actions.

66. In the remaining project timeframe, closer oversight and supervision will be essential to ensure that the project stays on track. Should a no-cost extension be granted, more frequent virtual PSC meetings such as quarterly or bi-annually would need to be convened, in alignment with the QERs and QPRs, to identify problems and execute adaptive management measures in a timely manner.

67. Monitoring and reporting places a heavy burden on the PMU, IA, and IPs, and monitoring support to the PMU is needed, given the mandate from the PSC at its 2nd meeting in 2025. Since the budget for monitoring of project implementation is allocated to the PM, and in the absence of a dedicated monitoring specialist, it is expected that the PM would assume this responsibility. However, a monitoring specialist will normally have different skill sets to a project manager and the two roles are not necessarily interchangeable functions. Further, in view of the PMs' half-time contract and other responsibilities, the support of a monitoring specialist will be vital as implementation is ramped up in the remaining time.

Rating for Monitoring and Reporting: Moderately Satisfactory
Rating for Monitoring of Project Implementation: Moderately Unsatisfactory
Rating for Project Reporting: Moderately Satisfactory

F. Exit Strategy and Sustainability

Exit Strategy

68. The project has not yet prepared a comprehensive exit strategy and measures to mitigate risks to sustainability. Some factors of sustainability are embedded in the project design and implementation approaches while others are contextual circumstances or conditions that evolve over the life of the intervention. To promote sustainability following the end of the project, a sustainability plan that is developed in collaboration with and endorsed by the national governments, municipalities, and IPs, among others, will be crucial. The project has the opportunity to facilitate the development of such a sustainability plan in the remaining time. An important component of the plan will be sustainable financial mechanisms including for sustainability of the Inter-city Network and IRT and other project outcomes.

Socio-political Sustainability

69. With plastic and marine plastic pollution high on the global, regional, and national/local agenda and growing momentum towards the adoption of circular economy approaches, the governments are already integrating such approaches in policy and regulatory frameworks and programmes to address plastic pollution. This is working in favour of the GEF LAC Circular Cities project, which has already garnered a significant level of political support in the countries as well as industry commitments in Colombia and Panamá and government support in Jamaica. This was evident, for example, in the efforts undertaken by the governments, IPs, and other stakeholders to prepare for project implementation even before they signed their respective PCAs (Colombia and Panamá), and also in Jamaica's persistent efforts to have the PCA signed despite the constraints faced. Furthermore, support for the project has not wavered in the face of political changes (as occurred in Panamá and Jamaica with changes in the respective central governments in 2024 and 2025, respectively).

70. Active measures taken by the project that will contribute to socio-political sustainability include strengthening and promoting partnerships between the municipalities and the private sector including through the Inter-city Network and IRT (both of which have already garnered a high level of stakeholder interest); improving stakeholder understanding and awareness of circular economy approaches; engaging national and municipal stakeholders in the project governance structures (CWGs, NWGs, PSC, among others), enlisting the municipalities in lead roles for local activities, and closely engaging policy makers and industries in project activities including the pilots. Moreover, the project outcomes are closely aligned with the countries' priorities and policy and regulatory frameworks as well as ongoing circular economy initiatives. An important consideration for socio-political sustainability is the involvement of women and vulnerable/marginalised groups and formalising of the informal waste sector, which are integrated in the project design.

Financial Sustainability

71. An essential component of the proposed sustainability plan to be developed by the project will be sustainable financing mechanisms. Several of the project's outputs and deliverables directly address aspects that will promote financial sustainability, including developing implementation plans for financial instruments for responsible plastics management; exploring sustainable financial mechanisms including for the Inter-city Network; engagement of the private sector through the IRT and the pilots; and identifying business opportunities associated with circular economy solutions that are profitable and amenable to replication and upscaling. Through the pilots, the project will identify opportunities for innovation, product redesign, and business model transformation. One of the ultimate aims of these activities is to promote private sector investments in circular solutions, which will contribute to financial sustainability. Additionally, promotion of alternative/improved sources of income for the communities and individuals that rely on the informal waste sector for their livelihoods will be vital. Representatives from the IPs and the private sector facilities visited indicated that currently, there is little incentive for collection and recycling of most plastic waste owing to its low value and limited markets in the countries for recycled products.

72. There are good prospects for financial sustainability in the project countries through the existing and planned programmes and national circular economy plans and strategies (or similar) being financed by national budgets and/or bilateral donors and other sources. (Examples are provided in the project document.) Financial sustainability also hinges on catalysing follow-on donor financing and co-financing, for example, through the GEF 8 Circular Solutions to Plastic Pollution Integrated Program, International Finance Corporation Plastic Circularity Initiative, National Plastic Action Platforms, and Plastic Reboot, among many

others. During the remaining time of the project, strengthened efforts to explore these opportunities will be required.

Institutional Sustainability

73. All three project countries have robust institutional frameworks (with variable capacity) related to environmental protection, including relevant government ministries and departments, local government, environmental authorities and environmental protection agencies, academic and research/technical institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGO), and community-based organisations (CBO), among others. An important element is the institutional partnerships that already exist in the countries (both internally and with external partners). Likewise, all the countries have robust policy and regulatory frameworks for environmental protection in which they are already integrating circular economy considerations (described in the project document). Collectively, these represent a solid foundation to sustain/support the institutionalisation of project outcomes. Furthermore, already there is significant momentum in the countries, particularly Colombia and Panamá, towards a circular economy for plastic. Nevertheless, as discussed in the project document, several existing barriers hinder the full transition to a circular economy for plastics in the countries (lack of regulations and policy instruments; lack of innovations and investment from the private sector; lack of a common vision, approaches, and leadership; and lack of knowledge, awareness, and capacity).

74. Through its four substantive project components, the GEF LAC Circular Cities project is helping to address these barriers and create an enabling environment for transitioning to a circular economy for plastics in the six cities as well as in other LAC cities through the Inter-city Network. An important project legacy will be strengthened policy and institutional frameworks and improved capacity of stakeholders across the plastic value chain for circular economy approaches, with a strong focus on the public and private sectors as well as industries.

75. In addition to strengthening the capacity of existing institutions and the private sector through training and direct involvement in project activities, the project has established additional structures (Inter-city Network and IRT) as well as various governance entities (such as the national and city working groups). There are reasonable prospects for sustaining these structures after the project ends, for example, by integrating them into relevant existing entities (e.g., Cartagena Plastics Platforms, National Plastic Action Partnerships, National Plastics Pacts, Latin America and Caribbean Circular Economy Coalition) and mobilising sustainable financing. The pilot intervention action plans include subchapters on sustainability and upscaling, and capacity building with IRT teams will include discussion of sustainability aspects.

76. Potential risks to institutional sustainability may arise, for example, from any change in central government administration following national general elections. However, as seen in Jamaica and Panamá, changes following their elections (in 2025 and 2024, respectively) did not appear to have reduced the momentum towards establishing a circular economy for plastics (although the project experienced some delays in start-up and implementation). Another potential risk stems from change/loss of relevant personnel, which commonly occurs in all the three countries. This risk may be higher in Jamaica than in the two other countries, owing to its smaller population and lower capacity. As mentioned in the assessment of project design, the project is developing a monitoring program to be implemented by the cities. However, the required capacity is limited but there are no provisions for training of technical persons to implement the program. This shortcoming will affect sustainability of the project results.

77. It should be noted that for all three elements of sustainability discussed above, the likelihood of sustainability is variable among the cities. For example, sustainability is likely to be higher in cities with strong capacity and established institutional frameworks and programmes to address plastic pollution (e.g., Barranquilla, Panama City) compared to cities with lower capacity (e.g., Montego Bay, Colon). The likelihood of sustainability may change over the remaining time of the project and will be better assessed by the terminal evaluation.

Rating for Likelihood of Sustainability (use 'Likely' scale): Moderately Likely
Rating for Socio-political Sustainability: Moderately Likely
Rating for Financial Sustainability: Moderately Unlikely
Rating for Institutional Sustainability: Moderately Likely

G. Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues

Project Inception

78. Key milestones and dates related to the project inception are presented in Table 13 (Section on Efficiency). As can be seen in this Table, the necessary preparations for the substantive start of the project were significantly delayed. Following the official expected start of implementation in December 2022, the project experienced an 8-month delay until the Inception meeting in August 2023. Further delays were experienced in staffing of the PMU with the contracting of the PM and IUNV in October 2023 and October 2024, resp. In addition, contracting of the various IPs did not happen until 2024-2025 with signing of the ICAs with UNEP RMB and UNEP LACO in February and April 2024, respectively; and signing of PCAs with ANCON and INVEMAR in March and June 2025, respectively. First disbursement for funds from UNEP CCS to these partners occurred several months after signing. At the time of writing of this report, the Jamaica PCA was still awaiting signature by the Government. Likewise, the agreements between INVEMAR and its local partners CEMPRE and CI remain unsigned.

79. Delays in the project inception and preparation phase were due to a range of factors operating at different levels – in the countries, CCS, and UNEP HQ. Countries were not fully ready for implementation due to low engagement before project inception. Unfamiliarity of the national IPs with GEF and UNEP processes and expectations, inadequate capacity for workplan and budget preparation, complex internal bureaucracy (requiring several approval steps and drawn-out consultations with UNEP), and considerable time and effort to identify and engage their partners and to approve contracts, were among some of the challenges faced by the countries. To date, owing to fiscal constraints and administrative hurdles including review by multiple government entities and the need for cabinet approval, Jamaica still has not signed the PCA, with potential negative consequences for the successful completion of this regional project.

80. Challenges faced by the CCS during start-up consisted of a combination of administrative, project, and financial management capacity constraints and systemic UNEP institutional processes (including approval requirements for staffing as well as extended recruitment timelines, and uncertainty regarding UNEP partner agreement templates), steep learning curve of the PMU associated with a new project and UNEP modalities, hurdles within the countries over which the CCS and UNEP had no control (as mentioned above), and the high effort required for coordination of multiple stakeholders.

81. Delays and asynchrony in establishment of the PCAs and ICAs and first disbursement of funds to the IPs have disrupted the scheduling and smooth implementation of activities at both regional and municipal levels and has resulted in the low expenditure reported.

Quality of Project Management and Supervision

UNEP/Implementing Agency

82. Through its two Task Managers, the IAs are responsible for overall project supervision and oversight, overseeing the project progress, quality assurance procedures, approving progress reports, and clearing disbursements, ensuring the proper quality of outputs, and reporting project implementing progress to GEF. The involvement of the two UNEP Divisions has strengthened the support, supervision, and technical backstopping through the Task Managers. This has been vital especially considering the capacity and other constraints and hurdles faced by the CCS/PMU. Regular communication including bi-weekly meetings between the IA teams and CCS, with minutes prepared for each meeting, has facilitated timely identification and resolving of problems and issues. In addition, close scrutiny and monitoring of implementation through the quarterly progress and expenditure reports and PIR reports, identification of issues, and providing guidance to the PM on addressing them, has helped to facilitate adaptive management.

83. Based on review by the MTR consultant of communication between the IA and CCS/PMU as well as the minutes of bi-weekly meetings, it is evident that there have been effective management and supervision by the IAs.

Partners/Executing Agency

84. One of the factors affecting project performance in the first three years of implementation was inadequate capacity of the CCS/PMU (as mentioned above under Project inception). This was recognized in the PIR reports, in which Management structure and implementation schedule were considered as substantial risks to the project. The CCS is a small secretariat that is simultaneously managing multiple large projects. Moreover, frequent turnover of UNEP support personnel exacerbates the challenges faced. For the complex GEF Circular Cities project, the allocated funds are insufficient for the full skill sets needed for project management and execution, resulting in increased workload of existing staff. The PMU personnel had to rely heavily on the FMO, PMA, and Task Managers. Further, some delay in recruiting staff, particularly the FMO, was associated with approval from UNEP HQ (for example, it took about one year for UNEP to approve the assignment of the AFMO to the CCS).

85. Delay in recruitment of the PM (as a consultant through UNOPS to expedite contracting, which was agreed by the IA and EA as the most practical and timely option under the circumstances and budget envelope) and supporting staff (IUNV) and their half-time assignment to the project with restricted access to UMOJA, and the lack of a dedicated FMO until 2025 contributed to the delay in getting the project off the ground and its subsequent slow implementation in the countries. Following establishment of the PMU, issues related to clarity of roles, responsibilities, and communication pathways between the PMU, EA, IAs (IW and C&W), and UNEP HQ needed to be addressed. These should have been clearly defined and communicated at project inception. As previously mentioned, bi-weekly meetings between the CCS/PMU and the Task Managers were crucial in addressing the issues encountered. Periodically, PMU personnel provided some limited support to core secretariat-wide activities but not of a magnitude that affected project delivery. Such support reflected the integrated nature of the small secretariat and the project's direct contribution to

implementation of the Cartagena Convention mandate and related projects such as PROMARr.

86. Departure of the PM in October 2025 and the IUNV in December 2025 and the AFMO in February 2026, respectively, without timely replacement, has further weakened the PMU. On her departure, the PM left a comprehensive handover note with recommendations including to address the gaps in project staffing. Countries have indicated that support by and communication with the PMU was excellent but deteriorated following departure of the PM and IUNV. As recommended by the informal virtual PSC meeting (December 2024) and endorsed by the MTR, more frequent informal check-ins by the PMU with the countries will be vital during project implementation.

87. Adaptive management measures taken included assignment of an FMO from UNEP HQ and of a part-time CCS PMA for financial management support as well as of a CCS Programme Management Officer (PMO) to support Jamaican Government counterparts. On the departure of the PM, the PMO began to provide additional support to the project. It was not until about six months following the departure of the PM that the former IUNV was contracted (April 2026) as an interim part-time project manager under a consultancy for 6 months. While the new PM has good knowledge of and experience with the project, the part-time, temporary consultancy arrangement brings with it the same challenges as before (restricted access to UMOJA, limited time to dedicate to the project, potential gap in project management at the end of the six months, etc.). A communications consultant was recruited in late 2025 and a gender and social inclusion expert in April 2026.

88. The CCS remains without an FMO, but since UNEP's hiring policies (which the CCS must follow) are being reviewed in relation to administrative staff, delays with staff recruitment are to be expected. In addition, a monitoring specialist is needed to track progress against the targets and indicators including the GEBs. Options include hiring a monitoring consultant or the PM assuming the responsibility. However, the latter may not be feasible considering their half-time contract and heavy monitoring workload expected. Another factor that could potentially affect operations is the 8-hour time difference between Kingston, where the CCS is located, and UNEP HQ in Nairobi.

89. With the project at high risk and the short time remaining, it is imperative that these gaps be urgently filled and other measures taken to support the CCS in specific areas. One such measure is consideration of another appropriate agency such as LACO or RMB (should they have the capacity and agree to this option) for additional support, for example, organisation of regional meetings and travel especially when CCS's other commitments (such as preparation for the Cartagena Convention Conference of Parties) take precedence over support for the project. If agreed, this will require allocation of the budget for regional meetings and travel to that agency.

Implementing Partners

90. The CCS is supported by the following Implementing Partners: INVEMAR (Colombia) and ANCON (Panamá), with MWECC of Jamaica still to be contracted, UNEP RMB and UNEP LACO along with their consultants (for targeted technical assistance to project components 1, 2, and 3), CLI for the IRT dialogues, and a communications consultant as well as a consultant to support development of the pilot projects. The IPs and consultants were instrumental in the delivery of the targets in the first three years. Even in the absence of signed agreements and project funds, the IPs undertook a considerable amount of preparatory work (establishment of functioning city and national working groups, steering committees, technical committees, mobilizing different groups of stakeholders, extensive stakeholder

consultations, preparation of workplans, diagnostic and other studies, etc.) using their own resources. As a result, by the time agreements were signed in the project's third year, Colombia and Panamá had already built significant momentum for implementation.

91. The countries have had to face several hurdles including unfamiliarity with the GEF's and UNEP's requirements such as financial reporting, significant level of effort to engage and coordinate a multitude of different stakeholders, delay in signing contracts with local partners (between INVEMAR and CEMPRE, CI), and limited capacity in some of the cities. Changes in government personnel and focal points have impacted project implementation in all the countries, with Jamaica being most affected. Because of the delayed start of implementation in the cities, Colón and the two Jamaican municipalities reported that stakeholders were losing interest in the absence of any advances in implementation. In these cases, re-engaging stakeholders will be necessary.

92. INVEMAR has adequate capacity and technical expertise and has established a strong internal team as well as a network of external partners for implementation of the project in the two cities. This was also evident in the participation of numerous partners, stakeholders and two private companies in the MTR interviews and FGDs in this country. However, delay in signing of contracts between INVEMAR and its local partner CEMPRE and CI has affected progress in activities related to development of the pilots (CEMPRE) and interventions aimed at strengthening and implementing circular economy policy instruments in the cities (CI). While the involvement of multiple partners in the execution of project activities strengthens the technical aspects, it makes coordination challenging. INVEMAR has held many meetings and consultations with stakeholders and completed various studies and reports in preparation for project implementation.

93. In Jamaica, fiscal space has been allocated for the new fiscal year starting 1 April 2026, and the PMU should strengthen efforts to get Jamaica on board as soon as possible. The IP will be the MWECC but because of capacity constraints (compounded by the recent departure of two staff members), additional support will be required. Further, while the PCA will be with MWECC, the two cities come under the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development, which has not been very involved in the project. As such, there is merit in the recommendation of the informal PSC meeting held in December 2023 that the latter be included in the PSC. Other disruptions arose when Montego Bay was struck by Hurricane Melissa in 2025, stalling project preparatory activities in this city, and with the change in government following the general elections in 2025.

94. In Panamá, ANCON has good technical expertise, experience, and infrastructure as well as strong links with civil society and the public sector. It is very advanced in public education and awareness raising activities and involved in multiple initiatives on plastic pollution and circular economy in the country. Challenges include the limited human capacity and technical expertise of the Colón municipality (no recycling facilities but working with schools and universities to collect plastic waste) and the resulting need for considerable technical support. Another concern expressed by partners and stakeholders in Colón and the two Jamaican cities is that the upstream interventions may be too advanced in view of their limited capacities. However, the project team leading the development of the pilots has indicated that there is a range of solutions from relatively easy to more complex systems, and that cities can design pilots based on the local context and capacities. The team has already discussed feasible opportunities for Colón regarding small-scale upstream pilots. In addition, the project has established contact with innovative upstream initiatives in the region with interesting lessons learnt and potential to adapt and transfer these initiatives to the project cities.

95. The wide disparity among the cities with respect to their capacity and circumstances, expecting them to all be involved in the same activities could potentially lead to sub-optimal results. Hence, the cities should be involved in executing activities that are aligned with their capacity and on-the-ground realities, especially in view of the limited time remaining, while at the same time capacity gaps are being addressed. Each city could be involved in a sub-set of activities, which collectively would contribute to the overall achievement of the project outcomes and objectives. This approach would also enrich the lessons and experiences from the different activities and interventions to be shared among the cities. An assessment of the project activities in each city in view of the realities on the ground is urgently required and workplans and budgets modified accordingly.

96. Slow implementation in the countries has compromised delivery at the regional level, since many of the activities and outputs contribute to project-level outcomes and objectives. The project is at a critical juncture, with a significant amount of work yet to be done in less than one year. The project remains at high risk, and the MTR considers that without a no-cost extension, successful completion is highly unlikely even if the present constraints and hurdles are addressed and Jamaica comes on board (additional effort will be needed to bring them up to speed).

Stakeholders Participation and Cooperation

97. The project has enlisted national and city-level institutions and organisations as implementing partners and mobilised a diverse range of stakeholders across the plastics value chain through various consultations at the national and city level, and mechanisms for stakeholder participation that are embedded within the project governance structure - the PSC, NWGs, CWGs, city steering committees, national focal points, and technical coordinating committees. Among the members of these groups are representatives from the public sector, private sector, NGOs, CBOs, and gender affairs groups. These have been established and are variably functioning in the participating countries. Other mechanisms are the Inter-city Network and the IRT. Participation in the Inter-city Network and IRT exceeded expectations, with 91 participants in first two Inter-city Network webinars; and 82 participants from Colombia and 34 from Panamá in the first IRT consultations. Efforts to bring Jamaica on board have not yet been successful. Colombia and Panama are closely engaging with the private sector (including existing circular economy roundtables in the case of Colombia) to define specific challenges and opportunities at city level and co-design concrete pilot interventions. The relevant government ministries and municipal stakeholders, private sector, informal waste sector, etc. are among the project beneficiaries (capacity building, awareness-raising, institutional strengthening).

98. Despite the project's overall strong stakeholder engagement and participation, some stakeholders (particularly in Barranquilla, Colón, and the Jamaican cities) had the perception that so far, the project has engaged in only talk, with no tangible benefits. It is important that the project manages stakeholder expectation and such benefits be clearly demonstrated, for example, in the pilot projects. Maintaining stakeholder engagement throughout the project and demonstrating tangible results (e.g., through the pilot projects) will be critical for its successful completion and sustainability of its results. To strengthen stakeholder participation and cooperation, the project has prepared a communication strategy, a private sector engagement approach, and a gender action plan, which should be implemented as soon as possible and in parallel with the technical activities.

Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality

99. The project's outcomes are directly relevant to universally recognised human rights, such as the right to livelihoods, clean water and sanitation, and a clean and safe environment. Its design recognises the importance of women and vulnerable/marginalised groups, as demonstrated in the results framework in which all components have multiple targets and indicators related to the involvement of women. Measures being taken by the project in relation to gender mainstreaming include preparation of a gender guidance note/ gender action plan as well as a communication strategy with a section on gender and social inclusion and contracting of a gender and social inclusion expert. However, during the period under review, monitoring data was not disaggregated by gender and no concrete actions specifically targeting women were implemented. It is interesting to note that most of the participants in the MTR interviews (individual and focus group discussions) were women (60%).

Environmental and Social Safeguards

100. During the project design stage, environmental and social screening was conducted in accordance with UNEP's Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework. Environmental and social risks and impacts were formally identified, and an environmental and social safeguards management plan developed with respect to the Safeguards Standards triggered by the project. Three are of moderate risk - Climate Change and Disaster Risks; Community Health, Safety and Security; and Labour and working conditions. Actions by the project to mitigate the climate change and disaster risk include reducing GHG emissions through the application of circular economy approaches by stakeholders and reducing flooding risks through improved plastic waste management strategies. For the Community health risk, decreased plastic pollution will reduce areas of stagnant water and hence breeding sites for disease vectors such as mosquitoes. With respect to Labour and working conditions, the recruitment of local project staff by UNEP as well as working conditions will be aligned with national labour laws and international commitments. A gender action plan and stakeholder engagement plan have been developed, and a project-level grievance mechanism is included on the project website.

Country Ownership and Driven-ness

101. Country ownership is being fostered by the project through several avenues such as alignment of the project with country/city priorities regarding circular economy and plastic pollution, and participation in the PSC and other governance structures, as well as the IRT and Inter-city Network. A high level of buy-in within government departments and other entities is demonstrated, for example, by the level of support, staff time and other resources assigned to the project through in-kind co-finance as well as by the level of participation in project activities.

102. In terms of country driven-ness, country/city engagement was low at design and was only facilitated indirectly through UNEP LACO. While the countries were not directly involved in the design of the project, they had the opportunity to take part in limited consultations on the project document, after the fact (although many of those individuals are no longer associated with the project or have no clear recollection of their involvement). Some of the respondents in MTR interviews were of the view that the approach to development of the project was top-down with limited involvement of the countries from the start, while others involved in the project design indicated that the approach was mixed. Enhancing country ownership and driven-ness will require greater effort in the case of Jamaica when this country comes on board.

Communication and Public Awareness

103. The GEF LAC Circular Cities project (through component 4) recognises the critical importance of communication and public awareness in shifting behaviours towards the adoption of circular economy solutions and sustainable production and consumption practices. The project has hired a communications consultant, and a communication strategy was prepared, which is to be adapted for each country. Additionally, the first version of the project website has been established, but content is sparse even though project material exists that can be uploaded. During the period under review, communication and public awareness activities have been limited (e.g., participation and presentation on the GEF LAC Circular Cities project at IW:Learn events by the former PM, media releases in the three countries) and need to be accelerated since this is crucial for the entire project as a whole and for the sustainability of its results.

104. Communication among the cities, apart from during regional events (PSC meetings, IRT consultations, Inter-city Network, meetings, and workshops) has also been limited. Although there is a budget for translation during meetings, the language barrier could hinder spontaneous informal communication between the Spanish-speaking countries and English-speaking Jamaica. However, it is important that mechanisms be established for regular interaction among the cities, and to facilitate interaction between the IRT and Inter-city Network to bring the public sector and private sector/industries together (e.g. through multi-stakeholder roundtables, social media groups, and encouraging site visits by project partners to the different cities).

Rating for Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues: Moderately Satisfactory

Rating for Quality of Project Management and Supervision: Moderately Satisfactory

Rating for Stakeholders Participation and Cooperation: Moderately Satisfactory

Rating for Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality: Moderately Satisfactory

Rating for Environmental and Social Safeguards: Satisfactory

Rating for Country Ownership and Driven-ness: Moderately Satisfactory

Rating for Communication and Public Awareness: Moderately Unsatisfactory

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusions

105. The GEF LAC Circular Cities project has remained highly relevant and strategically well-positioned within national, regional, and global environmental and natural resources management priorities, particularly related to addressing marine plastic pollution using circular economy approaches. Its comprehensive, integrated design is appropriate for addressing the key systemic barriers to transitioning to a circular economy for plastics in the six cities. Moreover, its focus on cities is also appropriate since cities are the major source of plastic pollution and responsible for urban solid waste management, making them crucial actors in the transition to a circular economy.

106. The project design incorporates six disparate cities in three countries with multiple partners and diverse stakeholders across the plastics value chain, combined with upstream innovations and downstream solutions, strengthening normative frameworks, and developing stakeholder capacity and awareness as well as promoting cooperation among LAC cities. This results in a project design that is complex and over-ambitious for the project's duration and available budget as well as the on-the-ground realities in some of the cities. Greater involvement of the CCS in project formulation could have produced a project that was better aligned with the situation in the countries.

107. During the first three years, the project mobilised a wide cross-section of stakeholders and engaged national institutions with adequate capacity and relevant expertise as implementing partners (INVEMAR and ANCON, with their local partners), with technical support provided by UNEP RMB and UNEP LACO as well as project consultants. Even without signed agreements and project funds, the partners completed a considerable amount of preparatory work using their own resources. As a result, by the time the agreements were signed and funds disbursed in the third year, partners had already built significant momentum towards implementation. This was instrumental in the successes attained.

108. Through the delivery of various targets in the first three years, stakeholders now have access to information on best practices on relevant policy frameworks and upstream and downstream solutions, with recommendations for adaptation in LAC cities. Through the IPs and various mechanisms for stakeholder participation that are embedded within its governance structure, the project has provided opportunities for active stakeholder involvement in implementation.

109. Notable is the LAC Inter-city Network and the IRT as unique mechanisms for the collaboration of two important groups of stakeholders. The establishment and operationalisation of the Inter-city Network and its expansion with other LAC cities—a major achievement—has provided a unique platform for governments and city level officials to collaborate and share experiences. Additionally, although the IRT has not yet been formally established, the strong stakeholder participation in initial consultations with Colombia and Panamá indicates a favourable potential for the involvement of the private sector in circular economy solutions. These mechanisms harness two major groups of stakeholders with significant influence in transitioning towards a circular economy. Yet, they are operationally independent, and meaningful interaction between them will be vital in strengthening the institutional framework for a circular economy. As such, appropriate mechanisms are needed to facilitate greater interaction between them and to promote their institutional and financial sustainability.

110. The project has become equipped with a communication strategy, gender action plan, and private sector engagement plan to help shift behaviours towards sustainable production and consumption practices. However, their implementation needs to be accelerated to optimise use of the remaining time. The first version of the project website was established but content is limited even though various project deliverables are available. Communication among the cities has been largely confined to regional events, and mechanisms are needed to facilitate regular interaction among the cities as well as between the IRT and Inter-city Network (e.g., through multi-stakeholder roundtables, social media groups, and site visits by project partners to the different cities).

111. The GEF LAC Circular Cities project is taking measures to ensure that gender is adequately addressed. For example, preparation of a gender guidance note/ gender action plan as well as a communication strategy that includes a section on gender and social inclusion and contracting of a gender and social inclusion expert. Various activities will be undertaken with the objective of increasing women's involvement across the plastics value chain, enhancing gender equality in decision making and leadership, and improving women's economic empowerment. A shortcoming is that so far monitoring data have not been disaggregated according to gender even though this is specified in the project results framework. Indicators and targets related to gender have not been tracked in the QPRs or the PIRs. Tracking gender indicators and targets is important for the GEB Indicator 11 on Gender and requires greater attention in the remaining time.

112. Overall, financial management was compliant with UNEP's financial policies, and in general proper financial management standards were applied. However, financial management was challenging due to inadequate financial management capacity within the CCS and the split in the budget and management responsibilities between the two GEF Focal Areas. Some stark inconsistencies were evident. Compared to the level of funds disbursed (US$1,160,000) and the total GEF grant (US$7,000,000), the spending (US$618,932) was low (53% and 9%, respectively), which is inconsistent with the project's workplan and delivery of outputs expected by the third year of implementation. This was corroborated by the quarterly cumulative expenditures being lower than the forecast over the entire period. The main contributing factors were the prolonged start-up phase and delay in contracting the IPs and disbursement of the GEF funds of which about 56% is allocated to the IPs.

113. Another inconsistency was the high project management cost in relation to cumulative expenditures of 13.6%, which greatly exceeds the GEF 5% cap. Prolonged delays in establishing partner agreements and in the start of substantive activities, with a PM on contract (as was necessary), has resulted in a significantly higher project management cost. This poses a risk for the longevity and sustainability of the project funds should there be a project extension and highlights that the 5% cap is inadequate for project management of complex, regional projects. A discrepancy between the levels of co-finance committed and realized (17%) means that re-engaging partners and identifying new sources of co-finance will be necessary during the remaining life of the project.

114. The project's implementation approach has been cost-effective in several respects, but does not compensate for the low cost-effectiveness and timeliness in other areas. Efficiency has been reduced due to factors such as the high project management cost in relation to achievements, prolonged start-up delays, and slow implementation of country-level activities. When Jamaica comes on board, additional effort by the PMU and financial resources would be required to bring them up to speed since they would not have fully benefitted from completed regional activities. The CCS together with Jamaica will need to identify additional sources of funds for this purpose. A no-cost extension will reduce efficiency since unstated costs to UNEP, CCS, and the IPs will be incurred. Potential opportunities to improve efficiency

include accelerating implementation and strengthening collaboration with other relevant regional and global projects and initiatives.

115. Supervision and technical backstopping by the Task Managers have been vital in view of the capacity constraints faced by the CCS/PMU, which has been operating with a level of project management capacity below that required for a project of such complexity. This was exacerbated by the departure of the PM and IUNV in the fourth quarter of 2025 (and of the AFMO in February 2026) at a critical time shortly after Colombia and Panamá had signed their PCAs and received their first disbursements, and signing of the PCA with Jamaica was still pending.

116. It was not until early April 2026 that the new PM came on board, but for only six months initially and under the same part-time consultancy arrangement, with all its challenges and another potential gap in project management until another PM contract is issued for the longer term. This should be avoided to ensure that the project has stable and adequate project management support in the remaining time. Furthermore, project and financial monitoring and reporting are particularly challenging and time-consuming. As implementation accelerates, the support of a monitoring specialist as well as an FMO will be vital in the remaining time.

117. There are reasonable prospects for sustainability, based on the project’s expected legacies and opportunities in the countries for assimilation of its results into ongoing programmes and policy and institutional frameworks. Potential opportunities for investments by the private sector will contribute to financial sustainability but an important consideration is the financial viability of the interventions. A critical mass of private sector investments is needed but this may not be feasible in some of the cities because of various constraints. The lack of a comprehensive exit strategy and concrete measures to sustain the project results seriously jeopardises sustainability. The development of a sustainability plan before the end of the project and in collaboration with, and endorsed by the national governments, municipalities, and IPs, among others, will be crucial. A key component of the plan should be sustainable financial mechanisms and institutional frameworks including for sustainability of the Inter-city Network and IRT and other project outcomes.

118. While the project has made progress in some respects, its overall underperformance during the period under review has been notable. Performance with respect to the achievement of the planned outputs was very weak, with only 59% of the 22 targets programmed for Year 1-Year 3 delivered, and only one of the four outcomes (Inter-city Network) almost fully achieved. Most of the targets and outputs remain to be completed in less than one year, jeopardising the successful conclusion of the project.

119. The project status as of December 2025 could be attributed to a variety of factors operating at different levels - in the countries, the CCS, and UNEP HQ. Among the challenges in the countries were complex internal administrative processes, technical and human capacity constraints, change in central governments in Jamaica (2025) and Panamá (2024), and the devastating hurricane impact in Montego Bay in 2025. Challenges faced by the CCS included a combination of management capacity constraints (due in large part to limited budget allocation for project management and the small size of the Secretariat) and time-consuming systemic UNEP institutional processes. Provision of additional support to the CCS by one of the Implementing Partners for specific tasks such as organisation of regional meetings needs to be considered for the remaining duration. The late start and persistent delays on several fronts have had major knock-on effects on implementation in the first three years. Moreover, asynchrony in the actual start and progress of activities between the country and project levels has disrupted the scheduling and smooth conduct of activities since the project is designed such that the regional activities would support the city-level activities.

120. Other challenges within the countries related to the project design include its weak alignment with the reality on the ground in the cities due to inadequate consultations with the cities during the design stage (as emerged during MTR interviews); wide disparity among the cities in their existing capacity and specific circumstances including limited waste management and recycling capability and infrastructure; focus on downstream practices; inadequate capacity in designing upstream solutions in some of the cities; and the continued lack of a signed PCA with Jamaica and agreements between INVEMAR and its local partners CEMPRE and CI.

121. The project is at a critical juncture, with most of the work still to be done in less than one year. In the face of persisting hurdles and challenges, it is highly unlikely that the project could be successfully completed in the remaining time. This places the project at high risk, which necessitates a no-cost extension of at least 1.5 years from December 2026 to facilitate successful project completion and avoid reputational risk to CCS, UNEP, and partners.

122. In preparing for an extension and to ensure that the remaining time and budget are efficiently utilised, re-scoping the targets and activities in line with the needs, capacities, and specific circumstances of the six cities while strengthening their capacity in key areas, without compromising the project's outcomes and objective, will be critical. Each city would be involved in a sub-set of activities, which collectively would lead to the overall achievement of the outcomes and objectives at the project level. This approach would also enrich the assortment of lessons and experiences from the various activities and interventions across all the cities.

123. Along with the re-scoping exercise, critical capacity gaps among the cities and measures to address them will have to be identified. This should include strengthening technical capacity for the implementation of the long-term monitoring program being developed by the project. If the latter is not feasible under the project, an option would be to develop a proposal for achieving this goal in the post-project period, with options for financial support and measures to retain the capacity once in place. This proposal should be included in the sustainability plan to be developed.

124. Should a no-cost extension be granted, closer oversight and supervision will be essential to ensure that the project stays on track and within budget. In this regard, more frequent virtual PSC meetings such as quarterly or bi-annually (instead of only annually) be convened, in alignment with the QERs and QPRs, to identify problems and execute adaptive management measures in a timely manner.

125. The overall performance rating of the GEF LAC Cities Circular Cities project (at past mid-point) is **Moderately Unsatisfactory.** The ratings for the individual criteria are presented in Table 14.

Table 14. Project performance ratings[25]

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating
Strategic Relevance		**HS**
Alignment to UNEP's, donors and country (global, regional, sub-regional and national) strategic priorities	The project is highly relevant to UNEP's, GEF's and national, regional, and global strategic priorities related to environmental protection and marine natural resources management. The issue of plastic pollution continues to be elevated on national, regional, and global environmental agendas, and countries are increasingly adopting circular economy approaches in addressing plastic pollution.	
Effectiveness		**U**
1. Availability of outputs	The project has severely underperformed, with only one (Inter-city Network) of the 11 substantive outputs (components 1-4) achieved and only 50% of the targets programmed for the first three years delivered.	U
2. Progress towards project outcomes	Progress towards achieving the outcomes has been slow except for outcome 3 (Inter-city Network), which is nearly fully achieved. It is likely that they will be achieved if implementation is accelerated and an extension is granted.	U
3. Likelihood of impact	Only some of the drivers and assumptions are emerging at mid-term. The likelihood of having the critical mass of private sector companies and stakeholders adopting circular economy approaches and behavioural change throughout LAC is uncertain considering the wide disparity among the countries and cities.	MU
Financial Management		**MU**
1. Adherence to financial policies and procedures	The project's monitoring and reporting system has been operational and in compliance with UNEP and GEF reporting requirements. Expenditures were within the approved annual budget but some irregularities were noted (overspend on project management in relation to the GEF 5% cap, expenditures and deliverables, which poses a risk for the longevity and sustainability of project funds; low spending/delivery compared to funds disbursement and the total GEF grant, discrepancies in expenditures from partners and the CCS; persistent budgetary/reporting issues; some assumptions and adjustments were necessary across budget lines to balance expenditures, which were not very transparent).	MU
2. Completeness of financial information	Financial documentation available for the review were QERs, PIRs, budgets and workplans, forecast, budget tracker, and co-finance information. Some of the QERs had irregularities or were unclear in some aspects. No audit reports or funds transfer documents from funding source(s) to UNEP or the IPs were available.	MU

[25] Most criteria are rated on a six-point scale as follows: Highly Satisfactory (HS=6); Satisfactory (S=5); Moderately Satisfactory (MS=4); Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU=3); Unsatisfactory (U=2); Highly Unsatisfactory (HU-1). Sustainability and Likelihood of Impact are rated, also on a six-point scale, from Highly Likely (HL) to Highly Unlikely (HU). The overall rating is a simple average of the numerical value (from 1-6) of all the criteria.

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating
Efficiency	While various factors increased cost-effectiveness, the project is seriously behind schedule. Overall efficiency is low (long delay in start of substantive activities, slow implementation progress especially in the countries, high project management cost in relation to expenditures and delivery, among others). As a result, the project is at risk and a no-cost extension will be necessary, which will further reduce efficiency.	**U**
Monitoring and Reporting		**MS**
1. Monitoring of project implementation	The M&E plan has been implemented by the CCS with oversight by the UNEP Task Managers. A crucial mechanism to monitor progress and identify mitigatory actions were bi-weekly meetings between UNEP and CCS/PMU. Although specified in the results framework, indicators and targets related to gender have not been tracked. The MTR was initiated one year past the mid-point (2026). The project inception meeting was held 4 months later than specified in the M&E plan, and only two in-person PSC meetings were convened in three years.	**MU**
2. Project reporting	Reporting has been in compliance with UNEP and GEF requirements, with the preparation of annual PIR reports, QERs, and QPRs (although often delayed). Reports of the Inception and PSC meetings were produced.	**MS**
Exit Strategy and Sustainability		**ML**
1. Socio-political sustainability	The project has not prepared an explicit exit strategy. It has garnered significant political support and interest from industries in the countries. Active measures that will foster sustainability include public/ private sector partnerships, engaging policy makers and industries in project activities, alignment with countries' priorities and policy and regulatory frameworks, and involvement of women and vulnerable/marginalised groups. The perception among some stakeholders that the project is engaging in 'a lot of talk' without tangible benefits could reduce socio-political sustainability.	ML
2. Financial sustainability	Aspects of the project that will promote financial sustainability include developing implementation plans for financial instruments and sustainable financial mechanisms; identifying investment opportunities in circular economy that are amenable to replication and upscaling; and project results that can be assimilated in national development planning and circular economy strategies. Financial sustainability will require a critical mass of private sector investments, but this may not be feasible in some of the cities due to various constraints. There is some potential for catalysing follow-on donor financing and co-financing if the project is successfully completed.	MU

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating
3. Institutional sustainability	Robust policy and institutional frameworks exist in the countries, and a major project legacy will be strengthened frameworks and improved capacity of stakeholders for a circular economy, with a strong focus on the public and private sectors. The project will also promote institutional sustainability through mechanisms such as the Inter-city Network, IRT, and city and national working groups. However, these mechanisms in themselves will need to be sustained, e.g., by integrating them into existing entities and mobilising sustainable financing. Potential sources of risk include change in central government administrations and loss of relevant personnel, which commonly occurs in all the countries.	ML
Factors Affecting Performance		**MS**
1. Quality of project management and supervision		MS
1.1 UNEP/Implementing Agency:	The involvement of the two UNEP Divisions has strengthened the support, supervision, and technical backstopping through the Task Managers. They have played a critical role in identify implementation issues and providing guidance to the CCS on addressing them and facilitating adaptive management. Management and supervision have been effectively carried out during the period under review.	S
1.2 Partners/Executing Agency:	Capacity constraints of the CCS/PMU exacerbated by systemic UNEP administrative hurdles and unclear roles, responsibilities, and communication pathways contributed to start-up delays and slow implementation in the countries. In particular, capacity for project and financial management was inadequate and deteriorated with the departure of the project manager, IUNV, and AFMO in late 2025-early 2026. The Implementing Partners were instrumental in the delivery of the targets in the first three years. However, various hurdles and constraints at the city and national levels contributed to implementation delays and compromised delivery at the regional level. At the time of writing, signing of the PCA by Jamaica was still outstanding due to the country's internal administrative processes and approval requirements.	MU
2. Stakeholder participation and cooperation	The project has enlisted national and city-level institutions and organisations as implementing partners and engaged stakeholders through various consultations at the national and city level, the Inter-city Network and IRT, and the project governance structure (PSC, National Working Groups, City Working Groups, etc). Efforts to bring Jamaica on board have not yet been successful. To strengthen stakeholder participation and cooperation, the project has prepared a communication strategy, a private sector engagement approach, and a gender action plan.	MS

Criterion	Summary assessment	Rating
3. Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality	The project's outcomes are directly relevant to human rights such as the right livelihoods, clean water and sanitation, and a clean and safe environment. All project components have multiple targets and indicators related to the involvement of women. Several activities will be undertaken to ensure gender mainstreaming and to empower women for participation in the plastics value chain. The project will also implement the gender action plan and has contracted a gender and social inclusion expert. However, monitoring data have not been disaggregated by gender and no concrete actions specifically targeting women have yet been implemented.	MS
4. Environmental and social safeguards	During the project design stage, environmental and social screening was conducted in accordance with UNEP's ESS Framework. Environmental and social risks and impacts were formally identified, and an environmental and social safeguards management plan developed with respect to the Safeguards Standards triggered by the project. A project-level grievance mechanism is included on the project website.	S
5. Country ownership and driven-ness	Country ownership and driven-ness are being fostered through alignment of the project with country/city priorities, and stakeholder participation in the project governance structures. Ownership is also demonstrated by the level of support, staff time, and other resources dedicated to the project through in-kind co-finance. Some respondents were of the view that the development of the project was top-down. Enhancing country ownership and driven-ness will require greater effort especially in the case of Jamaica.	MS
6. Communication and public awareness	The project has hired a communications consultant, and a communication strategy, gender action plan and private sector engagement plan prepared but was not fully implemented. Additionally, the first version of the project website was established but content is sparse even though project material is available. Communication and public awareness activities have also been limited, including communication among the cities.	MU
Overall Project Performance Rating at Mid-Point		**MU**

B. Lessons learned

Lesson Learned #1:	A project design that is overly complex and ambitious for its timeframe, budget, and implementing partners' capacities, and not well-aligned with on-the-ground realities, can face challenges in implementation and reduced efficiency, with increased potential for failure. A design that is aligned with reality and sufficiently flexible to accommodate unanticipated changes and events has a higher likelihood of success.
Context/comment:	The project involves 3 countries and 6 cities that are disparate in several respects including capacity for implementation, with a wide range of stakeholders and a variety of activities at regional and city levels, all with a budget of US$7 million and a timeframe of 4 years. Further, the on-the-ground reality in some of the cities is not fully conducive to

	implementation of a project of such complexity, and modifications in activities and implementation modalities as well as additional support to the cities may be required.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	7, 94, 95

Lesson Learned #2:	Substantial involvement of the project's executing agency in project formulation is essential to ensure that budgets and timelines, as well as staffing, execution and implementation arrangements are aligned with realities on the ground in the participating countries.
Context/comment:	The project design is over-ambitious for the available budget, timeframe and on-the-ground realities in some of the cities, resulting in the need for an extension, with additional costs to be borne by the EA and implementing partners. The design team for the GEF Circular Cities project was led by the IAs, LACO, and RMB, with the CCS involved in a lower capacity. Greater involvement of the CCS in a more substantive capacity could have made the project more 'fit for purpose', because of its knowledge of and familiarity with the situation in the countries.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	10

Lesson Learned #3:	Funds allocated for project management must be aligned with the design and needs of the project. The GEF 5% PMC cap creates structural challenges for multi-country regional projects that involve multiple implementing partners, extensive monitoring and reporting requirements, and complex governance arrangements.
Context/comment:	The funds allocated for project management were insufficient for the full skill sets required for project management and execution (administration, financial and project management, monitoring, etc.) of such a complex regional project. The capacity gaps resulted in increased workload of existing staff, and delays and underperformance of the project in the first three years.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	47, 84

Lesson Learned #4:	The presence of a project manager with adequate support staff is crucial from the very start of a project to ensure that all necessary preparations are in place for implementation. However, prolonged delay in the start of substantive activities followed by slow implementation, while a project manager is on board, results in high project management cost in relation to expenditures.
Context/comment:	Project management cost amounted to 13.6% of the cumulative expenditure, substantially higher than the 5% cap stipulated by the GEF. This jeopardises the availability of adequate funds for project management in the remaining time of the project and reduces

	efficiency, underscoring that the 5% cap is inadequate and unrealistic for such projects.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	47, 48

Lesson Learned #5:	While cost-sharing arrangements with other projects for project management can generate efficiencies, it could also lead to inefficiencies. Cost-sharing requires synchronized financial planning and timely fund transfers across projects to avoid implementation delays and financial management issues.
Context/comment:	Project management costs (PMC) are shared between the GEF Circular Cities project and the PROMAR project, which is funded by the German Government. Because of delayed budget disbursement from PROMAR, PMC was initially charged to the GEF project alone, and further complications arose due to slow implementation of the GEF project.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	56, 57

Lesson Learned #6:	Adequate preparation for implementation requires considerable time and effort, which must be accommodated in the overall project workplan and budget. This includes country engagement before project inception to ensure that they are fully prepared for implementation at the national level (including identifying and engage their partners and approving contracts) and accommodating countries' internal processes and requirements, which often are time-consuming. Underestimation of the time required for project start-up following project approval can result in lengthy delays with knock-on effects on implementation, especially for a project with a complex design and multiple partners, placing the project at high risk.
Context/comment:	The project experienced prolonged delays before the start of implementation of the substantive activities especially at the national level, owing to a variety of different factors operating at the project level as well as within the countries including internal administrative processes and requirements. Full implementation in two of the countries did not start until well into the third year and, at the time of writing, implementation had not yet started in one of the countries. The delays have resulted in the need for a no-cost extension of the project.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	58, 78, 79

Lesson Learned #7:	Prolonged delay in implementation with no evidence of concrete activities and tangible results could result in stakeholders losing interest in the project, with reputational risk to the IA, EA, and lead implementing partners and the need to re-engage partners and stakeholders and engage new partners. This also reduces the level of co-finance realized.

Context/comment:	Because of the delayed start of implementation, stakeholders in some of the cities were losing interest in the project and had the perception that the project was only about talk and without tangible results. Maintaining stakeholder engagement throughout the project and demonstrating early tangible results will be critical for the project's success.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	98

Lesson Learned #8:	In a regional project with interdependencies between regional and national/local level activities and outputs, asynchrony in the start of substantive activities and implementation progress among participating countries/cities reduces efficiency and places the project at risk.
Context/comment:	The project design consists of activities at the regional level and national/city level in the three countries. However, owing to different factors, the timing of the actual start of implementation varied, with some of the normative regional activities beginning first, following by activities in Colombia and Panamá, but at a standstill in Jamaica. This has disrupted the scheduling and smooth implementation of activities at both regional and municipal levels, with negative consequences for the project as a whole.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	81, 119

Recommendations

Recommendation #1:	Strengthen the financial and project management capacity of the PMU with a full-time project manager, a dedicated FMO, and other supporting personnel including a programme management assistant and long-term monitoring specialist for monitoring project implementation and the GEBs. The project manager and FMO should be contracted for the entire duration of the project and without any prolonged contract breaks. Further, CCS should ensure that the project manager has the necessary access to UMOJA and becomes adequately familiar with UNEP's procedures, and that they have access to other supporting staff when necessary.
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The CCS/PMU faced capacity constraints due in part to the limited budget allocated for project management and execution. This was characterised by the recruitment of the project manager and of supporting staff (IUNV) on half-time contracts and as consultants, and the lack of a dedicated FMO until 2025 as well as of other personnel (monitoring specialist and gender expert). The subsequent departure of all core staff between October 2025 and February 2026 severely impacted project implementation.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	80, 84-89
Priority Level:	Critical

Type of Recommendation:	Project level
Responsibility:	CCS, with UNEP
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Immediate

Recommendation #2:	Related to Recommendation #1, consider acquiring additional support from one of the UNEP partners such as LACO or RMB, or another appropriate implementing partner for specific support to the PMU, such as arranging regional meetings and travel, and allocation of the associated budget to the selected partner.
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	Because of capacity constraints within the small secretariat and PMU, the CCS/PMU occasionally will require additional support for specific activities such as arranging regional meetings and travel. An implementing partner may be willing to assume this role with re-allocation of the budget for regional travel to the selected agency.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	89
Priority Level:	Critical
Type of Recommendation:	Project level
Responsibility:	CCS, with UNEP and implementing partners
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Immediate

Recommendation #3:	In consultation with the countries and IPs, convene workshop(s) to assist countries/cities to assess and re-scope their activities according to their priorities in relation to a circular economy for plastics as well as their existing capacity and on-the-ground situation. Activities and workplans should then be tailored accordingly, with each city involved in a sub-set of activities that collectively would lead to achievement of the project outcomes and objectives. Lessons and experiences from the different activities and interventions would then be shared among the cities. The project results framework may need to be modified, and it is important that the planned outcomes and objectives of the GEF LAC Circular Cities project are not compromised.
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	Because of the wide disparity among the cities in terms of their capacity and specific circumstances, it may not be feasible for them to all be involved in the same activities. This could potentially lead to sub-optimal results and reduced efficiency particularly with the limited remaining project lifetime. Adaptive management measures are critical and an assessment of the national project activities in view of the realities on the ground is urgently required.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	95, 106
Priority Level:	Critical

Type of Recommendation:	Project level
Responsibility:	CCS/PMU, with Implementing Partners and UNEP
Proposed implementation time-frame:	June 2026

Recommendation #4:	In relation to Recommendation #3, identify critical capacity gaps among the cities and measures to address them, to allow effective participation in the project and beyond in the circular economy for plastics. This should include strengthening technical capacity for the implementation of the long-term monitoring program being developed by the project. If this is not feasible under the project, consideration should be given to developing a proposal for achieving this goal in the post-project period, with option for financial support and retaining the capacity once in place. The proposal should be included in the sustainability plan to be developed.
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	Capacity, including technical capacity, is limited in some of the cities for execution of the project activities during the project lifetime as well as for the continuation of specific tasks and activities on the long-term such as monitoring of circular economy indicators.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	9, 95
Priority Level:	Important, Opportunity for Improvement
Type of Recommendation:	Project Level, Partners
Responsibility:	CCS/PMU with Implementing Partners and cities
Proposed implementation time-frame:	June 2026

Recommendation #5:	Work with the Government of Jamaica to accelerate efforts towards signing of the PCA as soon as possible and explore options for bolstering support to the two cities for implementation of project activities, engage with the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development under which the two cities fall, and foster collaboration between this Ministry and the Ministry of Water, Environment, and Climate Change (the project's main Implementing Partner). The CCS should develop a contingency plan if the delay in signing the PCA extends beyond a certain time, to minimize associated risks to the project and avoid reputational risks.
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	At the time of writing in the final year of the project, Jamaica still had not signed the PCA with UNEP. Additionally, with two different government Ministries involved, it is vital for the project to engage fully with the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development and to foster collaboration between the two Ministries for efficient implementation in the two cities.

Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	43, 45, 58, 59, 78, 79
Priority Level:	Critical
Type of Recommendation:	Implementing Partner (Jamaica)
Responsibility:	CCS/PMU, with Government of Jamaica and UNEP
Proposed implementation time-frame:	June 2026

Recommendation #6:	Identify and implement mechanisms (such a multi-stakeholder platform) to facilitate closer interaction and collaboration between the IRT and Inter-city Network to strengthen partnership between the private and public sectors; and for sharing of lessons and experiences among the cities on a regular basis (e.g., social media groups and site visits).
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The project is establishing separate mechanisms for collaboration among the public sector through the LAC Inter-city Network and the private sector through the Industry Roundtables. Private sector representatives can participate in the Inter-city Network webinars as panelists. However, it is important for both sectors to cooperate with each other in the implementation of a circular economy, for which mechanism(s) for multi-stakeholder collaboration will be necessary.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	104, 110
Priority Level:	Important, Opportunity for Improvement
Type of Recommendation:	Project Level
Responsibility:	CCS/PMU, with UNEP LACO and CLI
Proposed implementation time-frame:	June-December 2026

Recommendation #7:	Engage partners in developing a sustainability plan, which will be a living document to be updated periodically, and which should include activities required to strengthen or sustain crucial elements such as implementation/enforcement of policies, sustainable finance mechanisms, sustaining the Inter-city Network and IRT, strengthening the functionality and sustainability of City Working Groups and National Working Groups, and capacity strengthening for monitoring, among others. The plan should be presented for endorsement to the PSC and national governments and municipalities.
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The project lacks an exit strategy and sustainability plan for the post-project period, which are essential for sustaining and building on the project results and progress towards the intermediate state and long-term impacts (as specified in the theory of change analysis).
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	12, 37, 68,
Priority Level:	Important
Type of Recommendation:	Project Level

Responsibility:	CCS/PMU, with UNEP and Implementing Partners
Proposed implementation time-frame:	June- December 2026 (or later, if a no-cost extension is granted)

Recommendation #8:	In collaboration with UNEP Communications Division and the CCS Communications Consultant, ensure that the update of the project website is completed and available project content is uploaded in a timely manner; and as soon as possible, accelerate implementation of the communication strategy, private sector approach, and gender action plan in parallel with technical activities.
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The first version of the project website is available and still being finalised. However, there is limited content even though a wide range of material that have been produced by the project is already available (reports, presentations, training material, Inter-city Network webinars), which should be accessible by partners and stakeholders. With project implementation now off the ground and high stakeholder participation, timely execution of the communication strategy, private sector approach, and gender action plan is necessary for optimal impact.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	98, 103
Priority Level:	Important
Type of Recommendation:	Project level
Responsibility:	CCS/PMU, with UNEP Communications Division and CCS Communications Consultant
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Project duration

Recommendation #9:	Strengthen efforts to establish strategic partnerships and collaboration with other ongoing relevant national, regional, and global projects and initiatives on marine plastic pollution and circular economy for plastics; and to re-engage partners and identify new partners to increase co-finance contributions.
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	There is a plethora of projects and initiatives at the national, regional, and global levels related to addressing marine plastic pollution through circular economy approaches (some of these are included in the project document). However, the project has not fully capitalised on the potential opportunities they present to form strategic partnerships, promote sustainability, and leverage co-finance. During the first three years of the project, co-finance contributions have been lower than anticipated and new sources need to be identified.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	55, 114
Priority Level:	Important, Opportunity for Improvement

Type of Recommendation:	Project Level
Responsibility:	CCS/PMU with UNEP RMB, UNEP LACO, and Implementing Partners
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Project duration

Recommendation #10:	To ensure that the project successfully achieves all its outcomes and objectives, consider and propose to the GEF and UNEP (IA) a no-cost extension of the project of 1.5 years to June 2028 for operational closure and to December 2028 for financial closure; and initiate actions with the Partners to revise activities, workplans, and budgets as appropriate, and put necessary arrangements in place (e.g., adequate staffing and co-finance over a longer period), in preparation for an extension.
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	Because of prolonged delays in start-up and slow implementation arising from challenges at the project and country levels, the project has underperformed during the first three years. Most of the targets, outputs, and outcomes are still to be achieved in less than one year, which is not feasible. Therefore, a no-cost extension is necessary to facilitate successful completion of the project and avoid reputational risks to the CCS, UNEP, and Implementing Partners.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	43, 60, 121
Priority Level:	Critical
Type of Recommendation:	Project Level
Responsibility:	CCS/PMU, UNEP, with Implementing Partners and PSC
Proposed implementation time-frame:	June 2026

Recommendation # 11:	Should a no-cost extension be granted, closer oversight and supervision will be critical to ensure that the project stays on track and achieves its planned outcomes and objectives in the remaining time and within budget. In this regard, more frequent virtual PSC meetings such as quarterly or bi-annually (instead of only annually) should be convened, in alignment with the QERs and QPRs, to identify problems and take adaptive management measures in a timely manner to ensure that the project stays on track.
Challenge/problem to be addressed by the recommendation:	The project is at high risk because of prolonged start-up delays and slow implementation in the first three years. Most of the outputs and outcomes are still to be delivered but many challenges persist such as limited capacity within the CCS/PMU and in some of the cities, lack of signed agreements with Jamaica, and between INVEMAR and its local partners (CEMPRE and CI). Other potential challenges may arise depending on the outcome of Colombia's general elections to be held in May 2026. In some respects, the project will be operating under very challenging

	circumstances with little room for setbacks. As such, closer oversight and supervision will be critical to avoid disruption in implementation.
Cross-reference(s) to relevant paragraphs	66
Priority Level:	Important
Type of Recommendation:	Project Level
Responsibility:	CCS/PMU, UNEP, with Implementing Partners and PSC
Proposed implementation time-frame:	Project duration

ANNEX I. RESPONSE TO STAKEHOLDER COMMENTS

Response to stakeholder comments received but not (fully) accepted by the reviewer, where appropriate. If all stakeholder comments were accepted, delete this annex.

Page Ref	Stakeholder comment	Reviewer Response
7-8	In the online PSC meeting organized in April, cities indicated that they could complete project activities within extension. This signals that it is possible to complete project activities if the loss of the implementation time caused by the inception delay could be compensated, and project design is not necessarily considered as being over ambitious by cities.	During MTR interviews, stakeholders in every city as well as some UNEP personnel clearly indicated that the project was over-ambitious for the budget and time-frame as well as capacity constraints, etc. in some of the cities, and re-scoping needed to be considered. The over-ambitious design is partly the reason (in addition to late start and slow implementation) why a no-cost extension is recommended. At the April online meeting, it was agreed that the CCS is to coordinate review of achievability of GEBs and work with countries on logframe target feasibility and support possible re-scoping.
	Para 9 states that there is no planned on-the-ground activities aiming for the target on reduction of plastics, which is not very accurate. The upstream and downstream pilots are on-the-ground activities and are expected to contribute directly to this target.	An important qualifier (where) is omitted in this comment: The statement in the paragraph is '**where** there are no planned on-the-ground activities,' not 'there are no planned on-the-ground activities'. Further, this statement refers to outputs specifically related to policies, capacity building, awareness-raising, etc. In the pro doc, no on-the-ground activities are defined for actual reduction of plastics for these outputs. Clarification added to the text.
	Reporting data on the reduction of marine plastics does not necessarily depend on the readiness of a complete methodology to be developed. The GEB section in the prodoc explained how data reported by cities could be simply tracked against the GEB indicators.	This refers to the capacity of the cities to implement the monitoring program, NOT the methodology itself. Colón, Montego Bay, and Kingston emphasized that they do not have the required capacity for longterm monitoring.

ANNEX II. PEOPLE CONSULTED DURING THE REVIEW

See Annex IV

ANNEX III. KEY DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

Project planning and reporting documents

- Project document, annexes and appendices
- Results Framework and Theory of Change
- Implementation Review Reports (2024, 2025)
- Quarterly Progress Reports
- Quarterly expenditure reports
- Co-finance report
- Annual workplans and budgets
- Procurement plans
- Budget tracker
- Former project manager’s hand-over note
- Update on project manager’s handover note (IUNV).
- Project Cooperation Agreements (Colombia, Panamá)
- Internal Cooperation Agreements (UNEP LACO, UNEP RMB)
- Small-Scale Funding Agreement (CLI)
- Reports of PSC meetings (1st, 2nd and virtual)
- Inception workshop report
- Communication (email) between IA and EA/PM
- Bi-weekly meetings between IA and EA - notes and action points
- Bi-weekly meetings of technical teams- meeting notes

Project outputs – Overall

- Presentation, GEB Indicators. GEF LAC Cities: Towards a plastic circular economy at the city level in LAC countries.
- GEB analysis.
- GEB contribution- overview.
- GEB Contribution - Status quo at local, national and international level.
- Presentation, First National Technical Committee meeting, INVEMAR, Santa Marta, Colombia. February 2026.
- Update of the diagnosis of public policies for the management of plastics in Colombia: territorial analysis in Cartagena and Barranquilla within the framework of the GEF LAC Circular Cities project. March 2026.
- Meeting Summary. Technical Workshop and Stakeholder Consultation, Jamaica. January 2025.
- Presentation- Taller: Mapeo de retos, actores y desafios municipales alrededor de los plásticos y sus espacios de solución, Panamá.
- Press release: Panama and Colon Recover 2.2 Tons of Plastic During Blue Revolution Week. September 2025.
- Press release: Circular Cities Project, Beyond Plastic, launches study with the Basel Convention Regional Centre at the University of Panama, ANCON, and the Ministry of Environment to promote the reduction of unnecessary plastics. February 2026.

Project outputs Component 1

- GEF LAC Cities Report- Frameworks and best practices for circular economy.
- Report- Overview of policy framework and examples on policy and financial instruments.

- Presentation and notes: Taller técnico y consultas con las partes interesadas (Colombia y Panamá). Mejores prácticas y recomendaciones a nivel internacional: Política, reutilización e instrumentos financieros. 4 October 2024.

Project outputs Component 2

- Plan de acción- Desarrollo de proyectos pilotos de economía circular. Ciudades de Panamá y Colón, Panama.
- Upstream Pilot Intervention Action Plan
- Downstream Pilot Intervention Action Plan
- Descripción del piloto aguas abajo – Colombia
- Descripción del piloto aguas arriba – Colombia
- PPT presentation- Next steps for the design and implementation of up- and downstream pilot intervention, Jamaica
- Presentation and notes: Regional Session on Upstream Solutions: Good practices on upstream innovations and solutions to eliminate, reduce and reuse. Workshop, 19 June 2025.
- Presentation and notes: Regional Session on Downstream Solutions: Good practices on downstream innovations and solutions to collect and recycle. Workshop, 18 July 2025.
- Overview of best practices on existing collection and recycling solutions (presentation).
- Overview of best practices on existing upstream business innovations and solutions on elimination, reduction and reuse (presentation).
- GEB Analysis.
- GEB Contribution- Overview.

Project outputs Component 3

- Draft Minutes- First Coordinating Committee Meeting, Inter-city Network, May 2025.
- Inter-city Network Activity Plan 2025 – 2026.
- Inter-City Network framework document.
- Formal letters- expression of interest from cities to join the Inter-city Network (Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Playa del Carmen, Quito).
- Webinar: Tourism and circular economy of plastics (YouTube).
- Inter-city Network website structure.

Project outputs Component 4

- Communication strategy
- Communication guidelines
- Private sector engagement approach
- Gender action plan
- Project website: https://www.unep.org/cep/projects/circular-cities-beyond-plastics

Previous reviews/evaluations

- Terminal evaluation of the UNEP/GEF Project "Addressing Marine Plastics – A Systemic Approach" GEF ID 9681 (desk study).

Reference documents

- UNEP Evaluation Manual 2022.
- Review criteria ratings matrix. UNEP Evaluation Office.
- GEF Risk Appetite document (GEF/C.66/13), 2024.

- Clarifying risks in GEF projects, with a focus on innovation risks. STAP Guidance Note, November 2024
- Fundación MarViva 2022. La contaminación marina por plásticos: un análisis integral de fundación MarViva. (San José, Costa Rica).
- Technical brief, ACP MEAs III project: Status of plastic waste management in the Caribbean.

ANNEX IV. REVIEW ITINERARY

Field missions and positions of persons met

	Organisation	Position	Role in the project	Gender
PANAMA				
ANCON (4-5 February 2026)				
1	ANCON	Consultant	National Project Coordinator	F
2	ANCON	Director, Urban Sustainability and Environmental Education	Institutional support	F
3	ANCON	Technical Assistant, Urban Sustainability and Environmental Education	Institutional support	F
4	ANCON	Consultant	Communication Liaison	F
5	ANCON	Consultant	City Coordinator, Colón	M
6	ANCON	Consultant	Institutional support	F
Ministry of Environment (5 February 2026)				
7	Ministry of Environment	Technical Officer	Institutional support	F
8	Ministry of Environment	Intern	Institutional support	F
JAMAICA, KINGSTON				
UNEP Cartagena Convention Secretariat, CCS (2-5 March 2026)				
9	CCS	Programme Management Officer AMEP Sub-Programme	Project management support	F
10	CCS	Coordinator, CCS	Executing Agency Head	M
11	CCS	Information Systems Assistant	Support to PMU-Communications	M
12	CCS	Programme Management Assistant	Admin. support	F
13	UNEP Caribbean Sub-Regional Office	Officer in Charge	Institutional support	F
Min. Water, Environment and Climate Change, MWECC (3 March 2026)				
14	MWECC	Chief Technical Director	GEF Focal Point, National Implementing Partner.	F
15	MWECC	Technical Officer	Institutional support	F
16	Montego Bay Municipality (3 March 2026)	Director of Planning	City Focal Point. Support implementation of city-level activities	M
17	Kingston Municipality (4 March 2026)	Parish Disaster Coordinator	City Focal Point. Support implementation of city-level activities	F
Planning Institute of Jamaica- PIOJ (5 March 2026)				
18	PIOJ	Deputy Director General, External Cooperation Management and Project Development	Institutional support	F
19	PIOJ	Deputy Director General, Sustainable Development and Social Planning	Institutional support	F
20	PIOJ	Director, Multilateral Technical Cooperation	Institutional support	F
21	PIOJ	National Liaison Assistant	Institutional support	F
22	PIOJ	Senior Project Economist	Institutional support	F
23	PIOJ	Director, Sustainable Development	Institutional support	F
COLOMBIA				
INVEMAR, Santa Marta (8-10 March)				
24	INVEMAR	Head of Research: Prevention and Protection of Marine and Coastal Ecosystems		F
25	INVEMAR	Scientific Researcher		F
26	INVEMAR	Coordinator, Marine Environmental Quality Programme		F

	Organisation	Position	Role in the project	Gender
27	INVEMAR	Support Professional		F
28	INVEMAR	Support Professional		M
29	INVEMAR	Coordinator		F
30	INVEMAR	Coordinator		F
31	INVEMAR	Coordinator		F
32	INVEMAR	Head, CMC		F
33	INVEMAR	Internal Audit		F
34	INVEMAR	Financial Coordinator		M
35	INVEMAR	Scientific Researcher		M
36	INVEMAR	Coordinator, Research and Information		F
37	INVEMAR	Budget Manager		F
38	INVEMAR	Contractor		M
Bogota (Virtual from Santa Marta, 10 March 2026)				
39	Min. Environment and Sustainable Development	Contractor	Operative Focal Point	F
40	Min. Environment and Sustainable Development	Contractor	Technical Focal Points	F
41	Min. Environment and Sustainable Development	Coordinator	Technical Focal Points	M
42	CEMPRE	Senior Project Coordinator	Local Partner (INVEMAR)	M
43	CEMPRE	Head, Finance and Services	Local Partner (INVEMAR)	F
44	Conservation International	Director, Ecosystem Services	Local Partner (INVEMAR)	M
45	Conservation International	Blue Economy Coordinator	Local Partner (INVEMAR)	M
46	Conservation International	Head	Local Partner (INVEMAR)	F
Barranquilla (10-12 March)				
47	Mayor's Office	Assessor (legal)	Barranquilla Focal Point	F
48	Mayor's Office	Professional	Institutional support	M
49	Mayor's Office (Arroyo Leon River solid waste trap)	Manager	Institutional support	M
50	EPA Barranquilla Verde	Coordinator, Citizen Participation and Environmental Education	Institutional support	M
51	EPA Barranquilla Verde	University Participation, Citizen Participation and Environmental Education	Institutional support	F
52	Atlantic Regional Corporation	Environmental Management Professional	Institutional support	M
53	Polyrec (Recycling facility)	Commercial Head	Local Partner (private sector)	M
Cartagena (12-13 March)				
54	Mayor's office	External Assessor (legal), Cooperation Int'l	Cartagena Focal Point	F
55	Mayor's office	Environmental Support Professional, Cooperation Int'l	Institutional support	M
56	Mayor's office	Communication Support Professional	Institutional support	M
57	Mayor's office	External Assessor (legal), General Secretariat	Institutional support	F
58	Mayor's office	Assessor (legal), General Secretariat	Institutional support	F
59	EPA	Director	Institutional support	M
60	CARDIQUE	Specialized Professional	Institutional support	M
61	Ambientados (Private collection and sorting facility)	CEO	Local partner (private sector)	F

	Organisation	Position	Role in the project	Gender
62	Ambientados (Private collection and sorting facility)	Environmental Engineer	Institutional support	M
63	Ambientados (Private collection and sorting facility)	Worker	Institutional support	M
64	Ambientados (Private collection and sorting facility)	Worker	Institutional support	M
Colón Municipality (17 March 2026)				
65	Colón Municipality	Head, Environmental Management	Colón Focal Point	M
Panama City Municipality (17, 19 March 2026)				
66	Panama City Municipality	Head of Resilience and Climate Change	Panama City Focal Point	F
67	Panama City Municipality	Sub-Directorate of Environmental Management	Institutional support	F
68	ANCON Collection Center (19 March 2026)	Technical Assistant	Institutional support	F

Others (all virtual except # 72)

	Organisation	Position	Role in the project	Gender
69	UNEP GEF IW Unit	Int'l Waters Portfolio Manager	Task Manager (IW)	F
70	UNEP GEF IW Unit	Associate Task Manager (IW)	Associate Task Manager (IW)	F
71	UNEP GEF C&W Unit	Associate Programme Management Officer	Task Manager (C&W)	F
72	UNEP Latin America and Caribbean Office (LACO)	Programme Management Officer	Technical support, Comp. 3- Inter-city Network	M
73	UNEP Latin America and Caribbean Office (LACO)	Consultant (LACO)	Coordinator, Inter-city Network	F
74	UNEP RMB	Programme Management Officer, Resources and Markets Branch (RMB)	Technical support, Comp. 2; project design	F
75	UNEP RMB	Programme Management Officer, Resources and Markets Branch (RMB)	Technical support, Comp. 2; project design	M
76	CCS/PMU	IUNV (former)	PMU Assistant	F
77	CCS	Financial Management Officer	FMO (Interim)	M
78	UNEP	Portfolio Manager, Chemicals & Waste	Project support	M
79	UNEP	Programme and Budget Officer (C&W)	Operations, finance and administrative support (C & W)	F
80	UNEP	Task Manager (C&W)	Supports C & W Task Manager	F
81	CCS	Consultant	Communications, Comp. 4	M
82	CCS	Consultant	Output 2 (pilots, private sector)	M
83	Creative Leadership Institute	Managing Partner	Output 2.3 (Industry Roundtable)	M
84	Creative Leadership Institute	Consultant	Output 2.3 (Industry Roundtable)	M

ANNEX V. COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH TOOLS

The MTR produced a summary of the Preliminary Findings and Recommendations, which was shared with the CCS and UNEP Task Managers for review and feedback as required in the review consultant's ToR. A PowerPoint presentation on the Preliminary Findings and Recommendations was presented to the PSC at the virtual PSC meeting held on 9 April 2026. (insert website link)

ANNEX VI. SAFEGUARDS ASSESSMENT TOOL

Assessment of the Management of Environmental and Social Safeguards[1] by the Project[2]

ESS PLANNING AT PROJECT DESIGN	
List any ESS issues identified at project design (e.g. SS 1.7, SS 2.3, etc.)[26]	Did the project involve or lead to: SS 2.1. improving resilience against potential climate change impact beyond the project intervention period? SS 2.2. areas that are now or are projected to be subject to natural hazards such as extreme temperatures, earthquakes, extreme precipitation and flooding, landslides, droughts, severe winds, sea level rise, storm surges, tsunami or volcanic eruptions in the next 30 years? SS 2.4. local communities vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and disaster risks (e.g. considering level of exposure and adaptive capacity)? SS 2.6. Carbon sequestration and reduction of greenhouse emissions, resource-efficient and low carbon development, other measures for mitigating climate change. SS 4.5. transport, storage use and/or disposal of hazardous or dangerous materials (e.g. fuel, explosives, other chemicals that may cause an emergency event)? SS 8.1. will the proposed project involve or lead to working conditions that do not meet national labour laws or international commitments?
For any ESS issues identified at project design, were <u>mitigation strategies</u> developed (Y/N)? (If yes, briefly describe)	Yes. Risk mitigation is embedded in the project design, e.g., increase resilience to climate change impacts such as flooding through improved plastic waste management (SS 2.1, SS 2.2, SS 2.4); reduction of GHG emission through circular economy approaches applied by stakeholders along the value chain (SS 2.6); support to the private sector to test and apply circular actions on improving collection, storage and recycling of plastic waste and hazardous fractions in plastic waste (SS 4.5); and adoption of UNEP guiding principles and adherence to national labour laws and international commitments in selection process and labour and working conditions (SS 8.1).
Were any <u>gaps</u> in ESS issues identified at the review inception phase (Y/N)? (If yes, briefly describe)	The project could potentially trigger risks associated with SS 6.2- economic displacement (e.g. loss of assets or access to income generation sources). Reducing plastic pollution could potentially affect the informal waste sector, which focuses on the collection of waste including plastic by ‘waste pickers’. However, the project aims to strengthen the capacity for more sustainable

[26] Select from the list of Environmental and Social Safeguards Risks in Table 1 below

	practices of people involved in this sector including women and vulnerable/marginalised groups.

ESS MONITORING AT PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION	
Is there evidence that the potential emergence of ESS issues was actively monitored during project implementation (Y/N)? [27] (If yes, briefly describe)	Yes. ESS issues are monitored in the annual PIR (2024, 2025).
Is there a justification for the absence of ESS monitoring (Y/N)? (If yes, briefly describe[28])	NA

MANAGEMENT RESPONSIVENESS DURING PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION	
Identify the ESS issues/events triggered [29] by the project.[30]	None (as reported in the 2024 and 2025 PIRs)
Describe consequences of ESS issues/events during project implementation.	NA
Describe the management response and identify supporting documentation. [31, 32]	Supporting documentation -Annual PIR 2024 and 2025.
Were negative ESS effects offset by management response (Y/N)? (If yes, briefly describe)	NA

[27] **Low risk:** Negative impacts minimal or negligible: no further study or impact management required.
Moderate risk: Potential negative impacts, but limited in scale, not unprecedented or irreversible and generally limited to programme/project area; impacts amenable to management using standard mitigation measures; limited environmental or social analysis may be required to develop an Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP). Straightforward application of good practice may be sufficient without additional study.
High risk: Potential for significant negative impacts (e.g. irreversible, unprecedented, cumulative, significant stakeholder concerns); Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) (or Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA)) including a full impact assessment may be required, followed by an effective comprehensive safeguard management plan.
[28] For instance, during COVID, access to the field may have been restricted
[29] 'Triggered' refers to environmental or social issues/events that are caused or exacerbated—directly or indirectly—as a result of the project's activities, interventions, or presence.
[30] Select from the list of Environmental and Social Safeguards Risks in Table 1 below
[31] For most low-moderate risk projects, good practice approach may be sufficient. Project should demonstrate safeguard management approach in the project activities, budget, risks management, stakeholder engagement or/and monitoring segments of the project document to avoid or minimize the identified potential risks without preparing a separate safeguard management plan.
[32] E.g., GEF Project Implementation Report (PIR), Progress Report, Minutes, etc.

ANNEX VII. BRIEF CV OF THE REVIEWER

Names	Sherry Cynthia Heileman
Profession	Marine Environmental Consultant
Nationality	Trinidad & Tobago
Country experience	• Europe: France, Greece, Croatia, Italy, Montenegro • Africa: Kenya, Ghana, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Burkina Faso, Benin, Cameroon, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Nigeria, Senegal, Seychelles • Americas: Trinidad & Tobago, Mexico, Panama, Colombia, Jamaica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Wider Caribbean (regional projects) Asia: Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, Myanmar, The Philippines, Bangladesh
Education	• PhD degree, Marine Biology and Fisheries (Univ. of Miami- Rosenstiel School of Marine, Atmospheric and Earth Science, Florida) • MPhil. degree, Zoology/Fisheries Biology (Univ. of the West Indies, Trinidad & Tobago)

Short biography

Sherry Heileman is a senior marine environment professional and project evaluator with more than 20 years' experience around the world. She has a proven track record in conducting project evaluations for UN organisations particularly of GEF International Waters and multi-focal area projects around the world. She has significant experience in project design and coordination as well as in marine environmental assessments (regional and global) and has led or contributed to several landmark projects and publications for UN organisations. Her academic qualifications include a PhD degree in Marine Biology and Fisheries from the University of Miami, Florida (Rosenstiel School of Marine, Atmospheric and Earth Science). She is a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago and is currently based in Panamá.

Key specialties and capabilities include:

- Project evaluations (mid-term and terminal evaluations) of donor-funded projects
- Project design, coordination & management
- Marine environmental assessments & reporting including assessment and management of large marine ecosystems (LME) and Small Island Developing States
- Ecosystem approach to fisheries
- Indicators development and monitoring (socio-economic, environmental indicators)
- Languages: English (native), Spanish, French

Selected assignments and experiences

- Significant experience in environment and development, working with national, regional and international organizations (including FAO, UNEP, and UNOPS) in various thematic areas (e.g., marine/coastal pollution, marine biodiversity, blue economy, climate change adaptation, policy, international waters);
- Conducted several project evaluations (UNEP, FAO, and others) and project design (mainly GEF projects); prepared transboundary diagnostic analyses and contributed to development of strategic action programmes for GEF projects (Caribbean and Benguela Current LMEs);
- Lead or co-lead of landmark global and regional projects and publications e.g.: global GEF/UNEP/IOC-UNESCO Transboundary Waters Assessment Project (LME component); Co-lead for the development of a Regional Nutrient Pollution Reduction Strategy and Action Plan for the Wider Caribbean Region (adopted by the Cartagena Convention Conference of Parties in July 2021); Assessment of the State of the Cartagena Convention Area with respect to land-based sources of pollution (UNEP/ Caribbean Environment Programme); Coordinator of the LME component of the UNEP/GEF Transboundary Waters Assessment Programme (UNESCO-IOC consultant);

Independent reviews/evaluations

- Track record of the conduct (since 2009) of many independent midterm reviews and terminal evaluations for UN organisations of mainly GEF projects around the world (International Waters and multi-focal area projects). Includes the terminal evaluation of the UNEP/GEF Project "Addressing Marine Plastics – A Systemic Approach" (GEF ID 9681).

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

Portal Entry: What is the performance at the project's mid-point against Core Indicator Targets? *(For projects approved prior to GEF-7, these indicators will be identified retrospectively and comments on performance provided[33])*

Response:

Core Indicators at CEO Endorsement	Targets	Actual / Achievement
5. Area of **marine habitat under improved practices** (excluding protected areas) (Hectares) 5.3 Amount of marine litter avoided (tonnes)	5,065 tonnes	No measurable progress (delayed implementation at country level)
a. **Greenhouse Gas Emissions Mitigated** (metric tonnes of CO2e)	9,382 metric tonnes	No measurable progress (delayed implementation at country level)
7. Number of shared water ecosystems (fresh or marine) under new or improved cooperative management	2	No measurable progress (delayed implementation at country level)
9. Reduction, disposal/destruction, phase out, **elimination** and avoidance of **chemicals of global concern** and their waste in the environment and in processes, materials and products (metric tonnes of toxic chemicals reduced)	54.9 (14 tonnes of HBCD and 40.9 tonnes of PBDE)	No measurable progress (delayed implementation at country level)
10. Reduction, avoidance of emissions of **POPs to air** from point and non-point sources (grams of toxic equivalent gTEQ)	1.16 gTEQ	No measurable progress (delayed implementation at country level)
11. Number of **direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender** as co-benefit of GEF investment	990,162 (w/ 559,306 (F) and 430,856 (M))	A gender action plan has been prepared. The M&E project consultant to be hired will develop an M & E framework to include disaggregated data on gender participation.

Portal Entry: What has been the progress, challenges and outcomes regarding engagement of stakeholders in the project/programme? *(This should be based on the description included in the Stakeholder Engagement Plan or equivalent documentation submitted at CEO Endorsement/Approval)*

Response: Stakeholder engagement is embedded in all four technical project components and is being guided by the project's Stakeholder Analysis and Engagement Plan, Gender Action Plan, Private Sector Engagement Approach, and Communication Strategy. There has been high stakeholder participation in the PSC (including by countries/cities and other implementing partners), City and National Working Groups, Inter-city Network

[33] This does not apply to Enabling Activities

(public sector), and Industry Roundtable consultations (private sector), and other project activities. Involvement of stakeholders in Jamaica has been hampered due to the lack of a signed agreement and associated delay in disbursement of funds and start of implementation in this country. Once the agreement is signed, implementation is expected to be accelerated. Similarly, engagement with other groups (e.g., academia and non-governmental actors) is expected to increase as implementation progresses.
Portal Entry: What has been the progress, challenges and outcomes regarding gender-responsive measures and any intermediate gender result areas? *(This should be based on the documentation at CEO Endorsement/Approval, including gender-sensitive indicators contained in the project results framework or gender action plan or equivalent)*
Response: *The project's strategic priorities related to gender are: 1) increase women's involvement across the plastics value chain; 2) enhance gender equality in decision making and leadership; and 3) improve women's economic empowerment. Among the measures taken to ensure that gender is adequately addressed are preparation of a gender guidance note/ gender action plan, a communication strategy that includes a section on Gender and Social Inclusion and contracting a gender and social inclusion expert. The project will foster inclusive participation through targeted capacity-building and supporting women entrepreneurs in promoting the circularity of their businesses. The project results framework contains several gender-sensitive indicators and targets, and tracking of these as well as of the GEB indicator on gender and the gender action plan indicators will be facilitated by the gender expert and M&E specialist (latter to be hired).*
Portal Entry: 1- Provide an overall ESS risk classification to be entered into the portal as either Low, Medium/Moderate, or Hight/Substantial). Please reach out to UNEP Safeguards Advisor. 2- Provide updates on any revisions to identified types of risk classifications/ratings and describe progress made in the implementation of the management measures as outlined in the CEO Endorsement/Approval. Please make reference to any PIR-reported ESS risks. 3- Provide supporting documents
Response: *During the project design stage, environmental and social risks and impacts were identified in accordance with UNEP's Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework, and an environmental and social safeguards management plan developed with respect to the Safeguards Standards triggered by the project. Three Standards were of moderate risk - Climate Change and Disaster Risks; Community Health, Safety and Security; and Labor and working conditions. In developing solutions to plastic pollution, the project will take climate change and disaster risks, particularly related to flooding, into account. It is expected that the sustainable production of plastics and sound plastic waste management will lead to increased resilience against climate change impacts. In addition, decreased plastic pollution will reduce areas of stagnant water and hence breeding sites for disease vectors such as mosquitoes. Recruitment of local project staff by the Executing Agency will be aligned with national labour laws and international commitments. The overall ESS risk classification is Medium/Moderate (2024 and 2025 PIR reports).*
Portal Entry: What has been the progress, challenges and outcomes regarding the implementation of the project's Knowledge Management Approach, including: Knowledge and Learning Deliverables (e.g. website/platform development); Knowledge Products/Events; Communication Strategy; Lessons Learned and Good Practice; Adaptive Management Actions. *(This should be based on the documentation approved at CEO Endorsement/Approval)*
Response: *The project has hired a communications consultant and prepared a communication strategy, which is being adapted for use in each participating country, as well as a gender action plan and private sector engagement plan. However, their implementation needs to be accelerated to optimise use of the remaining time. Key target audiences have been identified based on a stakeholder analysis. However, the communication strategy is yet to be fully implemented. The first version of the project website has been established (https://www.unep.org/cep/projects/circular-cities-beyond-plastics) but content has been limited due to low delivery owing to delayed implementation in the project countries. Two important platforms for communication and sharing of information and experiences on circular economy for plastics are the Inter-city Network (which has been launched) and the Industry Roundtables. Communication materials produced include a project fact sheet, press releases, promotional video on IW:Learn, articles in UNEP and CCS newsletters, PowerPoint presentations, and a webinar series 'Accelerating the Circular Economy of Plastics in Cities' through the*

project's Inter-city Network. Lessons learned are documented in the annual PIR reports and case studies as well as best practices will emerge as implementation progresses. *Communication and public awareness activities are expected to be ramped up with implementation of the communications strategy and acceleration of activities in the countries.*
***Portal Entry*:** What are the main findings of the review?
Response: *The GEF LAC Circular Cities project has remained highly relevant and strategically well-positioned within national, regional, and global environmental and natural resources management priorities, particularly related to addressing marine plastic pollution using circular economy approaches. Its comprehensive, integrated design is appropriate for addressing the key systemic barriers to transitioning to a circular economy for plastics in the six cities. However, the project design is complex and over-ambitious for its short duration and available budget as well as the wide disparity among the cities with respect to capacity and on-the-ground realities. This has been compounded by the limited capacity of the CCS/PMU and fiscal and administrative hurdles in the countries and the still-pending agreement with Jamaica in the last year of the project. Prolonged delays in start-up have had major knock-on effects on implementation in the first three years, particularly in the countries.* *During the first three years, the project mobilised a wide cross-section of stakeholders along the plastics value chain. Through the delivery of various regional targets in the first three years, stakeholders now have access to information on best practices on relevant policy frameworks and upstream and downstream solutions, with recommendations for adaptation in LAC cities. A major achievement is the launch of the LAC Inter-city Network and its expansion with 7 other LAC cities, which is providing a unique platform for governments and city level officials to collaborate. The strong stakeholder participation in initial consultations with Colombia and Panamá for the Industry Roundtables (IRT) indicates a favourable potential for the involvement of the private sector in circular economy solutions in these countries. However, mechanisms are needed to facilitate greater interaction between the IRT and Inter-city Network and to promote their institutional and financial sustainability.* *The project has seriously underperformed with respect to the achievement of the planned targets, outputs, and outcomes, most of which remain to be completed in less than one year, placing the project at high risk. In the face of persistent hurdles and challenges, it is highly unlikely that the project could be successfully completed in the remaining time. Therefore, a no-cost extension of at least 1.5 years (from December 2026) will be necessary for successful completion of the project and avoidance of reputational risk to UNEP and the Implementing Partners. To ensure more efficient implementation in the remaining time, project activities need to be better aligned with the capacity and specific circumstances of the cities, which requires the countries/cities to assess and re-scope their activities according to their priorities and on-the-ground situation. Based on the outcome of this exercise, national level targets, workplans, and budgets may need to be modified while ensuring that the planned outcomes and objectives of the GEF LAC Circular Cities project are not compromised.* *The overall assessment of the project's performance is 'Moderately Unsatisfactory'.*
***Portal Entry**: Actual Sources of Co-financing*

Co-financing (US$) (Type/Source)	UNEP own Financing		Government		Other*		Total	
	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual
Grants	$ 8,546,201		$ 799,100	$ 43,574	$ 6,926,368	$ 547,771	$ 16,271,669	$ 591,345
Loans							0	$ 0
Credits							0	$ 0
Equity investments							0	$ 0
In-kind support	$ 3,163,860		$ 7,726,688	$ 2,968,686	$ 5,464,549	$ 1,563,230	$ 16,355,097	$ 4,531,916
Other (*)					$ 2,780,474	$ 803,467	$ 2,780,474	$ 803,467
							$ 0	$ 0
Total	$ 11,710,061	$ 0	$ 8,525,788	$ 3,012,260	$ 15,171,391	$ 2,914,468	**$ 35,407,240**	**$ 5,926,728**

*Contributions mobilised for the project from other multilateral agencies, bilateral development cooperation agencies, NGOs, the private sector and beneficiaries.

Portal Entry: Key Risks (please refer to ANNEX IX)

ANNEX IX. GEF RISKS TO ACHIEVING PROJECT OUTCOMES (FOR GEF FUNDED PROJECTS)

RISK CATEGORIES	RATINGS[34]	ASSESSMENT AND MITIGATION MEASURES
CONTEXT		
Climate	Moderate	Flooding can exacerbate marine plastic pollution by increasing waste leakage due to higher transportation of plastic waste to the oceans and collapsing waste management. During the rainy/hurricane season flooding remains a significant natural risk and threat to waste collection in the cities. In developing solutions to plastic waste collection and recycling, the project will take such risk into account. It is expected that the sustainable production of plastics and sound plastic waste management practices implemented through the project will lead to increased resilience against climate change impacts. In Jamaica, the impact of a hurricane on Montego Bay in 2025 hampered project preparatory activities.
Environment and Social	Moderate	Environmental and social screening conducted during the project design stage found that three Safeguards Standards triggered by the project are of moderate risk – Climate Change and Disaster Risks; Community Health, Safety and Security; and Labor and working conditions. In developing solutions to plastic pollution, the project will take climate change and disaster risks, particularly related to flooding, into account. It is expected that the sustainable production of plastics and sound plastic waste management will lead to increased resilience against climate change impacts. Decreased plastic pollution will reduce areas of stagnant water and hence breeding grounds for disease vectors such as mosquitoes. The Executing Agency is ensuring that the recruitment of local project staff meets national labour laws and international commitments.
Political and Governance	High	Change in government following general elections is a potential risk to the project since resulting changes (in priorities, institutions, personnel, etc.) may have unfavourable impacts on the project. Colombia's general election is scheduled for May 2026. Panamá and Jamaica each had a change in government in 2024 and 2025, resp. However, ministerial and other changes in Jamaica contributed to delay in signing of the agreement with UNEP and start of implementation. The latter has also affected the level of co-finance realised. The project is mitigating this risk through relationship building and close consultation with the relevant government authorities in the three countries.

[34]Ratings for the level of residual risk using a four-level scale (GEF Risk Appetite document GEF/C.66/13, 2024):
Low: Outcomes are likely to be achieved; risk factors are negligible or easily managed.
Moderate: Potential impacts may occur but are limited, transient, or manageable through standard measures.
High: Widespread impacts are possible; outcomes may be undermined if adaptation or mitigation measures are not effectively implemented.
Very High: Project outcomes are severely jeopardized; impacts may be irreversible, and existing mitigation measures may be ineffective.

INNOVATION		
Institutional and Policy	Moderate	A risk is that policies are developed but not implemented or without practical solutions. The project will continue to engage with national and city-level government stakeholders to ensure that the project aligns with local realities and priorities. Provisions for policy implementation post-project will be included in a sustainability plan to be developed by the project. Through the Inter-city Network and other activities, the project is engaging with the public sector (government officials) who are responsible for policy development, implementation and enforcement.
Technological	Moderate	There is a risk that the pilot projects to be implemented by the project may not achieve intended environmental outcomes or prove to be economically viable, and that interventions through the private sector fail to be sustained or replicated. The project has hired a dedicated consultant for activities related to the pilot projects and private sector engagement, prepared a private sector engagement approach, and initiated industry roundtable discussions. The pilots are being developed in consultation with the cities and private sector.
Financial and Business Model	High	risk related to the uncertainty of success from new business models intended to deliver environmental benefits and engaging private sector to support solutions promoted by the project
EXECUTION		
Capacity for Implementation	Moderate	Inadequate capacity within the Executing Agency/PMU with regards to administration as well as financial and project management has contributed to delays in implementation and placed the project at high risk. Some of the cities (Montego Bay, Kingston, and Colón) also have limited capacity for implementation and require support. Mitigation measures included bringing on board an interim FMO and assigning CCS staff to support the project. The gender expert was onboarded in March 2026 and the new project manager in April 2026. Technical support to the cities is provided by UNEP RMB and UNEP LACO as well as by consultants. An M & E expert remains to be hired.
Fiduciary	High	Inadequate financial management capacity within the CCS resulted in financial management challenges. A major shortcoming was overspending on project management cost in relation to expenditure and delivery during the first three years, which jeopardises the longevity and sustainability of the project funds should there be a no-cast extension. Assignment of a full-time interim FMO for one year (2025-2026), support from CCS PMA, and closer financial oversight by the IA were some of the mitigatory measures taken. The prolonged delay in the first disbursement to Colombia and Panamá hampered implementation in these countries.
Stakeholder	Low	The project is promoting participation of stakeholders along the plastic value chain through various mechanisms including the PSC, City and National Working Groups, Inter-city Network, and IRT. The project has mobilised a wide cross-

		section of stakeholders to participate in the project. Engagement with other groups (e.g., academia and non-governmental actors) is expected to increase as implementation progresses. Implementation of the project's communication strategy, private sector engagement approach, and gender action plan is expected to enhance stakeholder buy-in and participation.
Other		
Overall Risk Rating	Moderate	Moderate: Potential impacts may occur but are limited, transient, or manageable through standard measures.

ANNEX X. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Project Title and Reference No.: Reduce marine plastics and plastic pollution in Latin American and the Caribbean cities through a circular economy approach (GEF ID 10547)

Contact Person (TM/PM):
Project Manager at Cartagena Convention Secretariat: Alejandre Gamez Echeverri
Senior project officer at Cartagena Convention Secretariat: Laverne Walker
UNEP Chemicals and Waste Task Manager: Neha Dharmshaktu
UNEP International Waters Task Manager: Isabelle Vanderbeck/Anna Blanpain

	PLANS			
RECOMMENDATIONS	**ACCEPTED (YES/NO/ PARTIALLY)**	**WHAT WILL BE DONE?**	**EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE**	**REPONSIBLE OFFICER/ UNIT/ DIVISION/ AGENCY**
Recommendation 1: Strengthen the financial and project management capacity of the PMU with a full-time project manager, a dedicated FMO, and other supporting personnel. The project manager and FMO should be contracted for the entire duration of the project and without prolonged contract breaks	Yes	CCS will strengthen the PMU's project and financial management capacity through the recruitment of a full-time Project Manager and a dedicated Financial Management Officer, while continuing to benefit from the support of the Project Management Assistant. CCS will recruit both professionals for the full duration of the project and will make every effort to ensure continuity by avoiding prolonged gaps between contracts.	October 2026	CCS
Recommendation 2: Consider acquiring additional support from one of the Implementing Partners such as LACO or RMB, or another appropriate partner for specific support to the PMU, such as arranging regional meetings and travel, and allocation of the associated budget to the selected partner.	Yes	CCS will amend the budgets of LACO, the Industry Innovation Branch (previously know as RMB) and/or implementing partners to get additional support to arrange meetings (particularly for the organization of events in project countries) and travel, as deemed possible pending the budget revision needed to support the PMU. CCS will allocate some budget to Industry Innovation Branch, for the development of a project video, the project indicator M&E framework and related country training.	October 2026	CCS, with implementing partners
Recommendation 3: Assist countries/cities to assess and re-scope their activities according to their priorities and capacities in relation to a circular economy for plastics and on-the-ground situation, and activities and workplans	Yes	PMU UNEP CCS will hold guidance discussions with the implementing partners to support the development of their annual work plans and the corresponding technical and financial forecasts through the proposed project end date of	June 2026	CCS/PMU, with Implementing Partners

tailored accordingly for the remaining project lifetime to ensure efficient implementation. In this case, each city could be involved in a sub-set of activities that collectively will contribute to project level outcomes.		June 2028. Before, during, and after the PSC meeting, all three implementing partners confirmed that they remain committed to delivering all project activities within the newly proposed timeframe. Nevertheless, CCS will continue these discussions, taking into account the specific context of each country, including the potential rescoping of certain activities, where appropriate, to facilitate effective implementation while maintaining the project's objectives and expected results.		
Recommendation 4: Identify critical capacity gaps among the cities and measures to address them, to allow effective participation in the project and beyond in the circular economy for plastics. This should include strengthening technical capacity for the implementation of the long-term monitoring program being developed by the project. If this is not feasible under the project, consideration should be given to developing a proposal for achieving this goal in the post-project period, with option for financial support and retaining the capacity once in place. The proposal should be included in the sustainability plan to be developed.	Yes	The project will continue to provide tailored technical support to cities through the Industry Innovation branch and specialized consultants to address capacity gaps in circular economy implementation. At the same time, a Long-Term Monitoring and Reporting Methodology is being developed, expected to be finalized by the end of September 2026, and will be presented in a virtual workshop for discussion with project partners once completed. To promote the sustainability of these efforts beyond the project lifetime, the Sustainability Plan will include measures to support the continuation of capacity-building activities and the long-term implementation of the monitoring methodology.	Long-Term Monitoring and Reporting Methodology: September 2026 Sustainability plan: June 2027	CCS/PMU with Implementing Partners and cities
Recommendation 5: Accelerate efforts towards signing of the agreement by the Government of Jamaica and explore options for bolstering support to the two cities for implementation of project activities, and foster collaboration between the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development and the Ministry of Water, Environment, and Climate Change (main Implementing Partner). The CCS should develop a contingency plan if the delay in signing the PCA extends beyond a certain time	Yes	UNEP CCS will maintain regular follow-up with the Ministry of Water, Environment and Climate Change (MWECC) regarding the signature of the agreement and continue providing support to address any questions or concerns related to the process. In parallel, UNEP CCS will engage with the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) to ensure that this matter remains a priority at the governmental level and to facilitate the timely finalization of the agreement. UNEP CCS will also continue fostering collaboration between the MWECC and the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development to support effective project implementation. In addition, options to strengthen support to the two participating cities will be explored, including an on-site mission by the Circular Economy Consultant from the Industry Innovation branch to provide tailored technical assistance. Should the signature of the PCA be further delayed, UNEP CCS will develop a contingency plan to minimize implementation delays and ensure continued progress toward the project's objectives.	December 2026	CCS/PMU, with Government of Jamaica
Recommendation 6: Identify and implement mechanisms (such a multi-stakeholder platform) to facilitate closer	Yes	In coordination with LACO, CLI, and the circular economy consultant, CCS will establish mechanisms to strengthen	June 2026-June 2027	CCS/PMU, LACO, CLI and

interaction and collaboration between the IRT and Inter-city Network to strengthen collaboration between the private and public sectors; and for sharing of lessons and experiences among the cities on a regular basis (e.g., social media groups and site visits).		collaboration and knowledge exchange between the Inter-city Network and the IRT. These could include regular joint meetings, shared learning spaces, and peer-to-peer exchange opportunities. Relevant activities will be incorporated into the respective workplans and sustainability plans to ensure continued engagement, knowledge sharing, and collaboration among stakeholders.		the circular economy consultant
Recommendation 7: Engage partners in developing a sustainability plan as a living document, to be presented for endorsement to the PSC and national governments and municipalities.	Yes	CCS will develop a sustainability plan by June 2027 to be presented at the PSC. Implementing partners, LACO, and the Industry Innovation branch will support this development to ensure the plan is tailored to the different national and local outcomes. The plan will be considered a living document to be updated as needed throughout the rest of the project lifetime.	June 2027	CCS with support from Implementing partners, LACO, and the Industry Innovation branch
Recommendation 8: Ensure that the update of the project website is completed and available project content is uploaded in a timely manner; and as soon as possible accelerate implementation of the communication strategy, private sector approach, and gender action plan in parallel with technical activities.	Yes	CCS will finalise the GESI Action Plan by November 2026. Communication efforts will continue as an ongoing activity throughout the duration of the project and will be further strengthened through the implementation of the project's Communication Strategy through June 2028. The Communications Consultant will work closely with the CCS IT Assistant to ensure that relevant project documents, progress updates, and communication materials are regularly uploaded to the project website, beginning in August 2026, based on inputs provided by the implementing countries, LACO, and the Industry Innovation branch. With the support of the Circular Economy consultant from Industry and Innovation branch and the consultant for the IRT, the private sector approach will be developed by June 2027.	June 2026-June 2028	CCS/PMU, with UNEP Communications Division and CCS Communications Consultant
Recommendation 9: Strengthen efforts to establish strategic partnerships and collaboration with other relevant national, regional, and global projects and initiatives on marine plastic pollution and circular economy for plastics; and to re-engage partners and identify new partners to increase co-finance contributions.	Yes	To increase co-financing efforts, UNEP CCS and the implementing partners will engage relevant national, regional, and global initiatives and organizations, such as Plastic Reboot and MarViva, to strengthen strategic partnerships. With the support of the implementing partners, LACO, and the Industry Innovation branch, a mapping of related projects and initiatives will be conducted, and opportunities for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and synergies will be actively explored. In parallel, efforts will be made to re-engage existing co-financing partners.	June 2027	CCS/PMU with Industry Innovation branch, LACO, and Implementing Partners
Recommendation 10: Consider and propose to the GEF and UNEP (IA) a no-cost extension of the project of 1.5 years to June 2028 for operational closure and to	Yes	CCS will prepare documentation required for the no-cost extension, including the regional work plan, budget revision, and related supporting materials. Under the proposed	October 2026	CCS/PMU, with Implementing

December 2028 for financial closure; and initiate actions with the Partners to revise activities, workplans, and budgets as appropriate, and put necessary arrangements in place (e.g., adequate staffing and co-finance over a longer period), in preparation for an extension.		extension, the operational closure for the implementing partners will be June 2028, with financial closure by December 2028. For UNEP CCS, as the Executing Agency, the operational closure will be December 2028, followed by financial closure in June 2029. UNEP CCS will make the necessary arrangements to support the no-cost extension, including maintaining adequate staffing and allocating the required financial resources to ensure effective implementation through the extended project period.		Partners and PSC
Recommendation 11: Should a no-cost extension be granted, convene more frequent virtual PSC meetings such as quarterly or bi-annually to provide closer oversight and supervision and ensure that the project stays on track and achieves its planned outcomes and objectives in the remaining time and within budget.	Yes	The PMU will convene additional virtual PSC meetings to assess and review project implementation, provide strategic guidance, and support timely decision-making. The frequency of these virtual PSC meetings will be reviewed and adjusted, as appropriate, to be held at least biannually or quarterly, depending on the implementation needs of the project. The PSC ToRs will be updated accordingly and circulated to the PSC for approval.	August 2026	CCS/PMU, PSC

ANNEX XI. QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF THE REVIEW REPORT

Not applicable as quality assessments are only carried out for Management-Led Terminal Reviews in UNEP.