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GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY
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Mid-term Review Report of project
“Piloting Provincial-Level Wetland PA System in
Jiangxi Province”
GCP/CPR/052/GFF
GEF ID: 4662

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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Exchange rate applied 1 USD = RMB 7.0

Note: All maps in this report are solely to show the geographical location of the project intervention area.

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MTR team

- *Warren Olding (International consultant and team leader)*
- *Zhang Chen (national consultant)*

FAO-GEF Coordination Unit, MTR support

- *Ms Genevieve Braun*
- *Ms Ydidiya Abera*

Acronyms and abbreviations

All abbreviations are explained in full for the first time in this report and the acronym used thereafter.

BD	Biological diversity
BH	Budget holder
BTOR	Back-to-office report
CAS	Chinese Academy of Sciences
CBD	Convention for Biological Diversity
CBPF-MSL	China Biodiversity Partnership and Framework for Action - Mainstreams of Life Programme (also referred to as the 6+1 programme)
CES	Compensation for environmental services (also PES)
CPF	Country Programming Framework
CNY	Chinese Yuan (currency)
CSO	Civil society organisation
DPMBNR	Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve
DG	Director General of the PLNNR (also National Project Director)
DNRM	Provincial Department for Natural Resources (of MNR)
EA	Execution agreement
EIH	Environmental Health Index
FAO-CN	Food and Agriculture Organization Office in China
FLO	Funding liaison officer (FAO)
FPMIS	Field Project Management Information System
EES	Environmental and social safeguards
FO	Final outcome
FPIC	Free, prior and informed consent
FRA	Forest resource assessment
GEB	Global environmental benefits
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GHG	Greenhouse gas

GIS	Geographic information system
GCU	GEF Coordination Unit (Rome)
GiZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for International Cooperation)
GoC	Government of China
HTSNR	Huyun Tundra Swan Nature Reserve
IO	Initial outcome (immediate result)
JxFoD	Jiangxi Province Forestry and Grasslands Department
JFDWPMO	Jiangxi Province Forestry Department Wetland Protection and Management Office
JPWPACC	Jiangxi Province Wetland Protected Areas Coordination Committee
JPWPAMS	Jiangxi Province Wetland Protected Areas Management Strategy
JDRC	Jiangxi Development and Reform Commission
JWPA	Jiangxi Wildlife Protection Administration
JWRIMS	Jiangxi Wetland Reserves Information Management System
KAP	Knowledge-Attitude-Practice survey
KLMBNR	Kangshan Lake migrating birds nature reserve (KLMBNR)
LFM	Logical framework matrix
LoA	Letter of Agreement
LWMBNR	Liaohuachi Wetland Migrating Birds Nature Reserve
LTO	Lead technical officer
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MEE	Ministry of Ecology and Environment
METT	Management effectiveness tracking tool
MoF	Ministry of Finance
NBIS	National biodiversity information system
MTR	Mid-term review
NBCSAP	National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and Action Plan
NDRC	National Development and Reform Commission
NR	Nature reserve

NFGA	National Forestry and Grassland Administration
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NWNNR	Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve
OPIM/MS-701	Operational Partners Implementation Modality/Manual Section 701
PA	Protected area
PDEE	Provincial Department of Ecology and Environment
PES	Payment for ecological services
PFGD	Provincial Forestry and Grassland Department (of the SFGA)
PIMM	Project Implementation Management Manual (PIMM)
PLNNR-PMO	Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve project management office
PLWMCC	Poyang Lake Wetland Management Coordination Committee
PMO/PMU	Project Management Operations/Unit (OPIM modality)
PIR	Project Implementation Report (for GEF)
PPR	Project Progress Report (for FAO)
PSC	Project steering committee
PSS	Project Support Services (FAO)
PWEPA	Poyang Lake wetland ecosystem protected area
R/LHA	River/Lake Health Assessments
SO	Strategic Objective (of FAO)
SCWP	Siberian Crane Wetland Project (UNEP/GEF)
tCO ₂ e	Tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of reference
USD	United States Dollar
WB	World Bank
WWF	Worldwide Fund for Nature

0. Executive summary

0.1 Introduction

1. The main purpose of the MTR is to assess the progress of project GCP/CPR/052/GFF, “*Piloting provincial level wetland Protected Area System in Jiangxi Province*” is to provide valuable recommendations based on evidence and findings in relation to the following evaluation criteria applied by GEF/FAO: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability factors affecting project performance and cross-cutting priorities relating to gender equality, social inclusion and environmental and social standards. An assessment of the rights of ethnic minorities was not carried out as there are none present in the project’s intervention areas. The recommendations are to focus primarily on supporting the project achieve its expected outputs, outcomes and objectives. The scope of the MTR covers the execution of the project’s three main components by the Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve (PLNNR), which hosts the Project Management Office (PMO) and reports to the, the Provincial Forestry Department (the project’s executing agency/partner). The, MTR covers the period between 03 January 2017 (date of signature of the Execution Agreement) to 30 June 2020. The MTR was carried out between 20 July 2020 and 30 November 2020. Due to the limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic, a field mission was not possible, so the work methodology focused on a desk review of project documents, supported by remote, semi-structured, interviews of a wide sample of direct and indirect stakeholders in the project. To guide the interview process, the MTR team produced a theory of change (ToC) and a detailed evaluation matrix in which indicators and judgement criteria were identified to guide the MTR’s main questions and sub questions established in its terms of reference (ToR).

0.2 Main findings

Relevance - *Question 1: Are the project outcomes congruent with current country priorities, GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework and the needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries?*

2. **Satisfactory:** The project’s objectives and expected outcomes are highly relevant to current policy developments at the national and provincial levels that call for the protection and restoration of wetland PAs based on ecosystem management approaches. Similarly, the project’s outcomes were found to fully comply with GEF5 and FAO objectives and priorities; namely improving the sustainability of PA systems, including agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors that operate in and around them. The Prodoc also places importance on incorporating lessons from previous projects, in particular the application of co-management in wetland PA systems in the Poyang Lake wetland ecosystem protected area (PWEPA), and on developing synergies with other projects, in particular the China Biodiversity Partnership and Framework for Action - Mainstreams of

Life Programme involving 6 provincial projects and one national project (6+1 programme), in which project 052 is directly participating as one of the six projects to establish the effective management of the middle reaches of the Yangtze River basin (Anhui, Hubei and Jiangxi provinces). Nevertheless, despite favourable policy developments on wetland protection, the project has an outdated design that still focuses on elements that are no longer pertinent following these policy developments and major institutional reforms in the period 2017-2018. These include the creation and implementation of the Jiangxi Province Wetland Protected Areas Coordination Committee (JPWPACC), and the application of ecological health indices. In addition, the Prodoc provides inadequate information on the identification and application of suitable financial mechanisms to support the achievement of some of its main expected outcomes. For example, the Prodoc provides no information concerning the financial mechanism to be established to support the development and operation of the Jiangxi Wetlands Information Management System (JWRIMS) as a cross-sector information system that can be used to guide decision-making at the Jiangxi Provincial government level. Indeed, the MTR understands the JxFoD can only cover the costs of the JWRIMS that relate directly to its mandate. Similarly, the Prodoc advocates the need to support rural communities in the Poyang Lake region move out of activities that have a negative impact on wetland habitats and its biodiversity (aquaculture, fishing, agriculture, etc.) into alternative, more sustainable livelihoods, that help restore and protect these habitats. However, the Prodoc provides no details on the financial mechanism to support this transition. This is also under review by the project, but no concrete proposals have been identified so far, despite over three years of operations.

Effectiveness - *Question 2: To what extent has the project delivered on its outputs, outcomes and objectives?*

- Satisfactory:** The project is in the process of delivering outputs under all three components, although the MTR found the pace of delivery of these outputs depends significantly on how far they can be realised under the control of the Jiangxi Forestry Department (JxFoD). As a result, outputs under component 2 and educational outreach activities under component 3 show highly satisfactory progress. For example, the project is successfully conducting research in partnership with the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) on the introduction of cost-effective wetland restoration techniques that enhance the resilience of wetland habitats in the PWEPA (output 2.1), and has finalised management plans for all six demonstration wetland PAs in the PWEPA, as well as a management framework for the three main demonstration wetland PAs comprising the PLNNR, NWNNR and DPMBNR (output 2.2). Also significant is the signing of 9 of the 11 co-management plans targeted with the local communities living in and around the PWEPA (output 2.3) supported by the establishment of all 7 new field stations in the buffer areas of the PLNNR and NWNNR, which are designed to support participatory monitoring and patrolling (output 1.2). These achievements have been aided by some innovative public awareness and educational outreach activities, in particular the holding of the first

ever International Birdwatching Week in Jiangxi Province (December 2019). Indeed, this event attracted over 200 000 people and contributed to mobilising/leveraging funds to complete a number of infrastructure projects, such as a state-of-the-art visitor centre at Wechung (PLNNR), which is making a valuable contribution to advancing President Xi Jinping's call to step up ecological civilisation. The Caicha Opera's inclusion of wetlands and biodiversity conservation in its shows have also reached over 10 000 inhabitants in the PWEPA and surrounding areas to date.

4. However, the project's strategic outputs under component 1, and information management under component 3, have all experienced delays. These concern the finalisation of the gap analysis, the launch of the province's first ever wetland PA strategy (JPWPAMS), the establishment of an acceptable alternative to the JPWPACC, the design and testing of the JWRIMS and the finalisation of the study on the economic value of wetland PA system ecological services in Jiangxi Province. Although the gap analysis and economic valuation study have recently been completed in 2020, current projections are that the JPWPAMS and JWRIMS will not be launched until 2021 at the earliest. The main problem for the PSC/PMO has been that instead of fully integrating the project in the provincial planning process, it relies on workshops (as the alternative to the JPWPACC) to coordinate dialogue with provincial departments of key sectors on the development of the JPWPAMS and JWRIMS. Despite successfully progressing to a third draft of the JPWPAMS to June 2020 and development of the JWRIMS is in progress, the project does not have the authority to ensure other provincial departments will fully apply the JPWPAMS and JWRIMS during the identification and implementation of their respective sector development plans. Indeed, the MTR believes there is very little time remaining to fully integrate the JPWPAMS and application of the JWRIMS in the 14th Five-Year Provincial Development Plan and corresponding sector development plans for the period 2021-2025. The absence of a suitable cross-sector coordination mechanism is also likely to complicate consensus on the finalisation of policy, legal and regulatory reforms designed to integrate wetland conservation recommendations into the provincial government development planning and sector management plans. Moreover, the MTR found the project has a strong focus on establishing inter-institutional coordination, but has largely overlooked the potential of strengthening intra-institutional coordination and collaboration within the Provincial Department for Natural Resources, taking into account the institutional reforms of 2017-2018 led to the amalgamation of the former Ministry of Land Resources into the Ministry of Natural Resources (which is also responsible for the National Forestry and Grasslands Administration).

Efficiency - *Question 3: To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently and cost effectively?*

5. **Moderately satisfactory:** The delivery of planned outputs has been compromised by delays, largely caused by start-up difficulties associated with capacity constraints within the PMO, staff rotation, the application of GEF/FAO procedures at the same time as national/provincial ones, slower than planned recruitment of national consultants and

CTA, major legal and institutional reforms in 2017-2018 and, more recently in 2020, by the COVID-19 pandemic. These delays have contributed to setting the project's overall implementation back by as much as 18 months (this assumes the pandemic will limit travel, group meetings, etc. until 2021). As a result, overall physical progress is estimated by the MTR to be around 45 per cent to 30 June 2020, while financial progress stands at just 24.2 per cent to the same date. Moreover, the delivery of the above-mentioned strategic outputs under components 1 and 3 has experienced high transaction costs. For example, PMO staff have to spend time lobbying the Project Director and other key individuals to set up meetings and workshops with Provincial Departments in the absence of the above-mentioned cross-sector coordinating mechanism. Furthermore, the delays in launching the JPWPAMS and the JWRIMS in 2021 signifies there will be insufficient time to supervise their application by key sectors that operate in and around the wetland PA systems in the province before the project's closure in 2022. Moreover, reliance on lobbying the Project Director to hold follow-up workshops on the application of the JPWPAMS and reliance on national consultants/subcontractors to supervise the JWRIMS is not considered to be a cost-efficient way to manage policy dialogue with key line agencies in the province.

6. However, the project has demonstrated it can achieve high levels of cost-effectiveness concerning some of the "in-house" project activities realised to date under components 1 and 3. This has been particularly well demonstrated by the International Birdwatching Week, which helped mobilise/leverage over USD 70 m. of additional funds to complete the visitor centre, township upgrades, etc. in and around the PWEPA. Cost-effectiveness has also been demonstrated where the project has established formal synergies that include co-finance. For example, partnerships with CAS, ICF, the Caicha Opera, local NGOs, etc. have all helped the project share costs and improve access to qualified human resources (relating to outputs under components 2 and 3). Notwithstanding these achievements, insufficient coordination and planning with the 6+1 Programme, in particular with projects in neighbouring Anhui and Hubei provinces has reduced the scope for sharing information and costs concerning the development of an inter-provincial management strategy for the middle catchment area of the Yangtze River basin. Likewise, funding of FAO-CN to manage GEF5 funded projects is proving to be very challenging. In particular, the current Fee Guidelines applied by FAO-Rome were found to restrict the Budget Holder's (BH) capacity to employ key staff to support the administration of GEF5 projects, such as project 052. In addition, a large part of the fee retained by GCU was used in 2016-2017 to support the application of a new approach to project execution; namely national and provincial government institutions act as executing partners/operational partners based on an Execution Agreement (EA), or Operational Partner's Agreements (OPA). However, *ad hoc* conditions were set by FAO's Senior Management to cover the fiduciary risks associated with indirect execution as opposed to direct execution (DEX) through FAO, but for which there was no guidance material, or supporting information in the Prodoc.

Sustainability - Question 4: *What is the likelihood that the project results can be sustained after the end of the project?*

7. **Satisfactory.** The JxFoD is fully committed to sustaining the project's main activities. This has been demonstrated by the integration of the ecological compensation payments scheme into the Jiangxi Wetland Protection Ordinance, which is already supporting fishermen prepare for the 10-year fishing ban in the Poyang Lake region (and throughout the Yangtze River basin) from 2021. Moreover, the promotion of co-management in the PWEPA, together with the realisation of bi-annual international birdwatching weeks, show positive signs that tourism and tourism-related services can secure public and private investment in the PWEPA after the project's closure. In addition, the JxFoD is committed to funding its responsibilities in operating the JWRIMS. Nonetheless, the project has not yet integrated effective risk management in the planning and implementation of project activities, which is not aided by the general under-estimation of institutional, financial and climate change-related risks, all of which the MTR found are growing and likely to affect the longer-term sustainability of some of the project's outputs and outcomes. For example, institutional reforms of 2017-2018 have made it harder to secure a long-lasting cross-sector coordination mechanism to implement and fund the application of the JPWPAMS and JWRIMS, both of which will rely on cross-sector dialogue to agree and coordinate sector planning and development in the PWEPA. Likewise, the lack of adequate levels of intra-institutional coordination and the fact the PMO has been established within a division of the JxFoD (PLNNR) currently limit the opportunity to forge close relations with the Department of Natural Resources, which is responsible for spatial/land-use planning and through which the protection and sustainable use of wetland biodiversity and its habitats could be applied throughout Jiangxi Province as a means to reducing anthropogenic and natural risks and enhancing sustainable development. Similarly, financial risks remain a problem concerning the development of the JWRIMS as a cross-sector initiative to support and guide decision-making of all sectors (rather than just JxFoD), especially relating to the transition of local communities to alternative livelihoods in eco-tourism, small enterprise development, sustainable farming, etc.
8. Meanwhile, the project's objective stresses the importance of catalysing effective management of wetland PA systems in the PWEPA and elsewhere in Jiangxi Province, which amount to 12 wetland PAs covering 190 000 ha. The MTR found there was a lack of information on the project's contribution to achieving this target, which is not only an important indicator on the sustainability of the wetland PA systems in the province, but also data that is highly relevant to reporting on progress in meeting the Aichi Targets 8, 11 and 14. In addition, this data would facilitate information exchange on lessons and good practices within the middle reaches of the Yangtze River basin (namely with Anhui and Hubei provinces). Finally, there is no specific definition as to what constitutes "effective and sustainable wetland PA management", within the context of spatial/land-use development planning, risk mapping and other activities designed to enhance both sustainable economic development and resilience in and around the PWEPA.

Factors affecting performance - *Question 5: What are the main factors affecting the project from reaching its results?*

9. **Moderately satisfactory:** The project's outdated design, together with some design faults, are affecting the project from reaching some of its expected results. The absence of a suitable cross-sector coordination mechanism at the provincial government level together with a lack of cross-sector representation in the PSC and the employment of PMO staff and the CTA on a part-time basis have contributed to slowing down the implementation of the project and limiting its scope. The project design is also let down by the fact some of the outputs do not follow a clear intervention logic under their respective component in the Prodoc and the definition of outcomes for components 1 and 3 are not clear, nor measurable. In addition, the project's internal monitoring and evaluation is geared primarily to tracking operations to support progress reporting on meeting outputs in the PIR and PPRs, rather than a system designed to engage key stakeholders on learning and reflection concerning the achievement of immediate and wider outcomes, lessons learned and the adoption of good practices. For example, the PPRs and PIRs apply heavy reporting formats that require staff to spend a lot of time on micro-managing very long tables on the status of all activities against outputs and sub-outputs, which are largely repeated in an equally long Results Matrix (21 pages in length), where the focus is to report on meeting targets. In the absence of the Theory of Change the MTR found there is inadequate assessment of change; namely what is/is not happening as planned, identifying strengths/shortcomings that should be built upon/addressed to support and guide not only progress reporting, but also support the establishment of a more effective annual planning process and the application of specific tools such the Knowledge-Attitude-Practice (KAP) surveys as foreseen in the Prodoc. Overall, this situation has contributed to limiting the space for effective learning and knowledge exchange.
10. Moreover, the project has not established a communication strategy that is designed to promote knowledge exchange and share lessons learned and good practices to guide planning (at all levels) and promote ecological civilisation among different audiences. Thus, some synergies proposed in the Prodoc, in particular the 6+1 programme, have not led to an interchange of findings, lessons, or good practices that were foreseen to support, among others, the harmonisation of wetland PA system strategies in Anhui, Hubei and Jiangxi provinces, the development of cross-sector information management systems, the application of coordinated wetland habitat conservation and restoration initiatives, protection of specific species, etc. As a result, it is unclear how much information is being relayed to the NFGA/MNR, or UN partners such as UNDP, to support national wetland policy developments, planning, guidelines and so forth.

Cross-cutting dimensions (including gender) *Question 6: To what extent were gender considerations (including a gender analysis) taken into account in designing and*

implementing the project? And To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project?

11. **Moderately unsatisfactory:** The project has not established a gender strategy designed to follow-up on the specific needs and priorities of rural women and other vulnerable groups participating in the project. As a result, the project provides very limited information on sex-disaggregated participation in its main activities and trainings that have been conducted in the field, even though this information appears to be collected by consultants who carry out the trainings relating to, among others, co-management, monitoring, alternative livelihoods and educational outreach activities. Under these circumstances it is not possible to evaluate how far women and youths are being empowered to take up active participation and decision-making roles in project activities. Concerning conformity with the environmental and social safeguards (ESS) checklist, the MTR found this was not applied, but an environmental impact assessment was, prior to starting the project. Furthermore, the ESS has not been applied in the PMO's Self-Assessment report, or latest PIR to June 2020. However, MTR is satisfied from the evidence gathered that the project is fully compliant with the ESS checklist. In the case of ethnic minorities, the MTR was informed there are none located in the PWEPA. As a result, the MTR has not assessed the project's impact on such groups.

Knowledge activities/products

12. The project has mainly focused on the production of nine newsletters to the end of 2019. The newsletters were found to be well written in English (with a separate version in Mandarin) and provide important narratives of the project's main developments, that includes a special issue on the Poyang Lake Bird Watching Week, which includes a Media Report that provides valuable links to TV spots, websites, etc. that attended and reported on the event. The project has also funded the production of a wide selection of billboards (in Mandarin only), brochures and educational materials (mainly in Mandarin with summaries in English) designed to support learning among local communities and the general public on the biodiversity found in the Poyang Lake region. Indeed, the brochures published cover a wide selection of biodiversity including birds, fish, mammals, flowers and grasses, etc. Awareness raising has also been successfully promoted through innovative approaches such as the Caicha Opera Troupe's adaptation of its tea ceremony to include the protection of wetlands and its biodiversity and through the realisation of the first International Bird Watching week, which attracted a large number of local, national and international visitors to the Poyang Lake region. However, the project has not established a communication strategy designed to stimulate learning and knowledge exchange/reflection the systematisation of results, good practices, lesson learnt, etc., especially at the cross-sector level.

Stakeholder participation

13. The project has been highly successful in engaging the participation of local communities through its on-the-ground activities and support for co-management approaches in the nature reserves of the PWEPA. This has been aided by the establishment of PMO focal

points in at county level of government, where the project has successfully integrated wetland PA management in the local government's five-year development plans. In addition, the project has forged important alliances with the Chinese Academy of Sciences to support the wetland restoration activities and with the International Crane Foundation concerning baselines studies on birds. The International Bird Watching Week also facilitated increased support and participation of the Provincial Government in funding several infrastructure projects. However, the decision of the Provincial Government to reject the establishment of the JPWPACC in 2018 prevented the PSC and PMO from establishing a satisfactory level of cross-sector dialogue with Provincial Departments that have a major impact in the PWEPA. This situation has not been aided by the establishment of a PSC that includes no representatives from the Provincial Government.

Progress towards achieving the project's development objective

14. The MTR rates the chances of the project achieving its development objective (project objective) as **moderately likely**. However, this is conditional on applying the recommendations below to mitigate some important design shortcomings and facilitate a refocus on establishing more effective intra and inter-institutional coordination and collaboration at the inter-provincial, provincial and inter-county levels of government and with local communities.

Overall risk rating

15. The MTR believes the overall risk rating of the project should be increased from its current "low" ranking by the project to 30 June 2020, to "medium", but with a trend towards "medium-high" if not addressed, based on the evidence provided in this report and the fact the project is still some way from removing the threats identified in the Prodoc, in particular relating to the degradation and loss of wetland habitats (Threat #1) and the growing impact of the effects of climate change (Threat #3).

0.3 Conclusions

16. **Conclusion 1 on question 1 (Relevance):** *Are the project outcomes congruent with current country priorities, GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework and the needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries?* The project's objectives and expected outcomes align more strongly now with both national and provincial government policies to protect, restore and manage wetland protected areas and engage local communities based on ecosystem approaches than when the project was launched. This has strengthened the project's rationale; namely to reduce anthropogenic and abiotic threats. Furthermore, the project directly contributes to raising awareness on the functions and services of wetlands, the economic value associated with these services and the economic opportunities derived from the protection of biodiversity of global importance. The project also fully aligns with GEF5 (BD-1) and FAO priorities and strategic objectives (SO-2) and directly contributes to supporting the country meet internationally agreed goals and targets, such as Aichi

Targets 11 and 14. However, the project's strategic relevance has been limited by inadequate representation of key sectors in the PSC and insufficient coordination with the 6+1 programme, especially in Anhui and Hubei provinces, in order to develop mutually reinforcing approaches to management and conservation of wetland habitats and its biodiversity in the PWEPA, elsewhere in the Jiangxi Province and in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River basin.

17. **Conclusion 2 on question 2 (Effectiveness):** *To what extent has the project delivered on its outputs, outcomes and objectives?* The project is making satisfactory progress in delivering outputs and outcomes where the JxFoD is in direct control of planning and implementation, in particular under component 2 and the educational outreach activities under component 3. In these cases, the project is successfully raising awareness on the ecological functions and services of wetlands and on the importance of protecting biodiversity. This has been demonstrated through the realisation of the first ever International Birdwatching Week in Jiangxi province in 2019, which has shown the win-win benefits of holding such events; namely raising awareness on the need to conserve wetland habitats as well as its biodiversity at the international, national and provincial levels, while at the same demonstrating these events are good ways to mobilise new funds to support the transition to new sustainable development approaches in the wetland PAs that depend on a combination of cross-sector coordination and co-management approaches. These achievements have been reinforced by innovative educational outreach activities that are encouraging local communities to become the guardians of their wetlands. Meanwhile, project effectiveness is proving more challenging where it depends on cross-sector coordination for which there is no officially agreed mechanism in place to manage and implement cross-sector decisions. As a result, it is highly unlikely the project can reach its objective by 2022. This is not aided by the fact the project has mainly focused on inter-institutional coordination, but far less on intra-institutional coordination and collaboration within the Department of Natural Resources, which since the institutional reforms of 2017-2018 has merged institutions such as the Department for Land Resources that has a mandate to coordinate with all development sectors on spatial/land-use planning and development issues.
18. **Conclusion 3 on question 3 (Efficiency):** *To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently and cost effectively?* The project is estimated to be around one year behind schedule, although the COVID-19 pandemic and major flooding during 2020 has slowed implementation since the start of 2020, which suggests the project may be as much as 18 months behind schedule by the end of 2021. Delays in implementation are due to several factors including funding gaps that have made it difficult for the BH/FAO-CN to support the executing partner implement the EA in line with a set of ad hoc conditions set by FAO's senior management in 2016, a CTA and PMO operating on a part-time basis, staff rotation within the PMO and FAO-CN and shortcomings in project design (see conclusion 5). As a result, physical progress is estimated by the MTR to be no more than 45 per cent, while financial progress is just 24 per cent to 30 June 2020. This situation is particularly significant for the JPWPAMS (in particular the launch of its

Wetland Management Standards and Guidelines) and the JWRIMS which due to delays are not projected to start implementation until 2021. This means there is very limited time to supervise their integration into the next 5-Year Development Plan 2021-2025 and corresponding sector development plans. Moreover, the JWRIMS is unlikely to provide sufficient data to support informed decision-making until 2024 and the project's dependency on workshops and reliance on national consultants as lobbyists to facilitate cross-sector coordination on policy and legal reforms is unlikely to be an efficient mechanism to implement the JPWPAMS and JWRIMS, because neither have the political authority to deliver change. Nonetheless, the project has shown it can achieve highly satisfactory levels of cost-effectiveness where it is able to implement project activities directly, which has been demonstrated by partnership agreements with academia, local NGOs, the Caicha Opera, grass-root organisations, etc., all of which have helped share costs (cash and/or in-kind). For example, partnerships with CAS and ICF are likely to generate savings of at least USD 442 000. In addition, the project has been successful in mobilising/ leveraging a reported USD 71 m. in new funds to support the bi-annual International Birdwatching Week. However, cost-effectiveness is less evident where funding gaps remain, in particular concerning the transition to alternative livelihoods and operation of the JWRIMS.

19. **Conclusion 4 on question 4 (Sustainability):** *What is the likelihood that the project results can be sustained after the end of the project?* The MTR is satisfied the JxFoD is fully committed and will have the capacity to consolidate wetland management practices in the six demonstration sites and expand such practices into other wetland PAs. Furthermore, political and public funding risks associated with the continuation of wetland PA management are likely to remain low, especially as the next Five-Year Provincial Development Plan will support the implementation of the JPWPAMS. Nonetheless, the MTR believes the need to generate alternative revenue streams (such as climate change mitigation benefit creation, payment for environmental services, or joint ventures with the private sector) have not been explored so far to further enhance resilience to the growing effects of climate change. For example, a wide array of stakeholders interviewed agreed confirmed it will be difficult to sustain the ecological compensation payments' scheme over the long-term (i.e. beyond 2030). In addition, the project focuses a lot of resources on developing a management framework for wetland PAs in the PWEPA, supported by co-management to apply the JPWPAMS, promoting the transition to alternative livelihoods and developing the JWRIMS. However, the financial mechanisms needed to operate and maintain these initiatives over the long-term has not been resolved to date. Indeed, national consultants are finding the identification of these financial mechanisms to be challenging, in part due to the lack of regular dialogue with a number of key provincial departments that have a mutual interest to the establish such mechanisms, (in particular the development of the JWRIMS as a cross-sector provincial initiative (as opposed to a Forestry one). Furthermore, the project has not adequately defined what constitutes "effective" wetland PA management, which the MTR considers important as there is insufficient evidence to confirm "effective" management recognises

the importance of full integration of risk management, which the MTR believes is an important precursor to ensuring such management is also sustainable, taking into account institutional, financial and climate change-related risks were all found to be growing and likely to impact on wetland PA systems and their communities. In particular, activities such as risk mapping (to guide land-use planning and development) was not evident to support informed decision-making on the adoption of sustainable use approaches to enhance the resilience of wetlands PA systems and the local communities that live in and around them. Furthermore, coordinated risk management is of major interest to the 6+1 programme to underpin a coordinated wetland PA management strategy in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River as well as demonstrate the economic value of wetland conservation, which has already been demonstrated in the project's study on this subject in Jiangxi Province, (in particular concerning floods and drought regulation).

20. **Conclusion 5 on question 5 (Factors affecting performance):** *What are the main factors affecting the project from reaching its results?* The project's design is in need of updating and revising in order to optimise its effectiveness and sustain some key outcomes. In particular, there are funding gaps (both in the Prodoc and through the application of FAO's Fee Guidelines concerning the management of GEF-funded projects) that limit the BH/FAO-CN's capacity to conduct regular support missions in the field to guide the JxFoD as executing partner of project 052 (as well as other GEF5-funded projects in China) implement the EA in line with the *ad hoc* conditions applied by FAO's Senior Management prior to the launch of OPIM/MS-701. Also significant is the lack of a coherent hierarchy of outcomes and outputs under each of the components to facilitate project planning, implementation and monitoring. Furthermore, some outputs have become outdated due to political and institutional reforms since in the period 2017-2018, in particular concerning the establishment of the JPWPACC (output 1.3) to supersede the PLWMCC (output 3.2), which is no longer permitted following these reforms. Indeed, this has important implications on the implementation of the JPWPAMS (output 1.1) and JWRIMS (output 3.1) in 2021. Other design issues affecting performance include the decision in the Prodoc to establish the PSC without any cross-sector representation and the establishment of a part-time PMO based in the PLNNR which the PMO confirms has limited its political clout to work at the cross-sector level in the province. In addition, the PMO operates an internal monitoring and evaluation system that tracks operations, outputs and the meeting of targets in accordance with GEF/FAO reporting procedures, but which is not geared to optimising learning to deliver change at the cross-sector level (i.e. through effective annual planning geared to meeting results and objectives), or at the local level in the PWEPA.
21. **Conclusion 6 on question 6 (Cross-cutting priorities):** *To what extent have gender consideration been taken into account in project design and implementation?* The project's design provides analysis on the specific needs of women living in the PWEPA. However, the project has not built on this analysis during its baseline studies to support annual planning and internal monitoring. As a result, the MTR concludes from the evidence

collected that participation rates are low (on average around 20%) and that emphasis on increasing women's participation in the project's main activities in the PWEPA is not enough to remove the barriers to gender equality at the local community level without a gender strategy that focuses on increasing women's access to training, information, resources, etc. Meanwhile, the MTR is satisfied from the evidence gathered that the project continues to conform with the environmental and social standards established in the ESS in 2016, even though the MTR did not find this has reviewed and updated by the project to date.

0.4 Recommendations

22. **Recommendation 1 – Strategic relevance and effectiveness – for JxFoD/PSC, FAO-GEF Coordination Unit (GCU), FAO-RAP and FAO-CN: in line with the recommendations in the Self-evaluation report, it is highly recommended to establish regular dialogue and participatory decision-making that enhances intra and inter-institutional coordination and cooperation on planning and monitoring. It is, therefore, proposed the following Provincial Departments that are closely associated with/have a major impact on the PWEPA, assign a focal point/delegated representative with decision-making powers to participate in the PSC:**
- a) **Department of Natural Resources of Jiangxi Province (for example, from the section/division responsible for Spatial Planning/Land Use);**
 - b) **Department of Water Resources of Jiangxi Province (for example, from the section/division responsible for River Lake Health Assessments);**
 - c) **Department of Ecology and Environment of Jiangxi Province (for example, from the section/division responsible for Biodiversity Monitoring/IMS);**
 - d) **Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of Jiangxi Province (for example, from the section/division responsible for Development and Planning/Rural industries);**
 - e) **Department of Culture and Tourism of Jiangxi Province (for example, from the section/division responsible for ecotourism);**
 - f) **Jiangxi Development and Reform Commission (for example, from the section/division responsible for overseeing reforms relating to environmental protection)**
 - g) **Department of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of Jiangxi Province (for example, from the section/division responsible for Planning and Construction of Rural-Urban Areas);**
 - h) **Department of Industry and Information Technologies (for example, from the section/division responsible for overseeing compliance in areas such as industrial pollution).**

To convoke meetings with these representatives, the MTR recommends the vice governor of Jiangxi Province nominates a suitable person to chair the PSC. In addition, in order the staff of the PMO have access to these line agencies, it is recommended the PSC assesses whether it is necessary to relocate the PMO from the PLNNR to the Department level of JxFoD. Moreover, a focal point should be identified in the NFGA to maintain regular communication with the project on national wetland policy developments, coordination with strategic initiatives such as the 6+1 programme and building support for the upscaling of the project with the support of MNR. At the same time, focal points/delegated representatives should be established in the PLNNR, NWNRR, DPMBNR and the County Governments responsible for the three county-level NRs (Yugan, Wannian and Lushan) to enhance internal communication on the application and monitoring of results of the project, including contributions to provincial and national targets (including those relating to wetland habitats and biodiversity conservation as in the NBCSAP).

23. **Recommendation 2: efficiency and effectiveness – for JxFoD/PSC, FAO-GEF Coordination Unit (GCU), FAO-RAP and FAO-CN: the MTR supports the JxFoD’s current thinking on the need to appoint the PMO’s project manager on a full-time basis to the end of the project. It is highly recommended that the project assistant who has recently started employment on a full-time basis works with the project manager on implementing the recommendations in this report with the support and supervision of the LTO and the GEF portfolio manager in FAO-CN to ensure coordination with the 6+1 programme is re-established and information exchange on the JPWPAMS and JWRIMS, as well as lessons learned and good practices (such as the bi-annual International Birdwatching Week, co-management approaches, wetland restoration techniques, etc.) are shared. In addition, a budget reallocation should be considered to cover the employment of short-term national and (where deemed necessary) international consultants. It is recommended funds allocated to the permanent international consultant who has not been recruited to date, should be used to employ these experts. Key areas where there are gaps that need to be addressed by the project, include among others:**

- **The employment of a qualified national consultant in spatial governance, in line with the government’s commitment to unify spatial and land use planning (2019), especially at the provincial level. In particular the consultant should have knowledge on developing spatial coordination concerning socio-economic development plans (under JRDC), spatial/territory plans (under the Department for Natural Resources) urban/rural plans (under the Department for Housing and Urban-Rural Development) and, if possible, on environmental protection planning (under the Department for Ecology and Environment). It is recommended the proposed consultant works closely with the PMO, the CTA and the expert for the JPWPAMS on determining how the protection of wetland PA habitats and biodiversity can be fully integrated**

into the 14th Five-Year Plans for Provincial/Prefecture Economic and Social Development (coordinated with the JRDC), the Jiangxi Provincial/Prefecture/Township Spatial and Land Use Plans in the PWEPA (coordinated with the Department for Natural Resources) and Provincial/Prefecture/Township/County Urban/Rural Plans in the PWEPA (coordinated with the Department for Housing and Urban-Rural Development). To support the full integration of wetland management in the above-mentioned plans, it is recommended risk maps are identified by JxFoD in coordination with the Department for Housing and Urban-Rural Development to identify high, medium and low risk areas (to flooding, erosion/sedimentation, pollution, etc.) where the protection/restoration of wetland habitats and its biodiversity should be prioritised.

Figures A & B: Example of a three-dimensional model (Hani Terraces, Yunnan Province)



Source: MTR lead consultant (2014)

To aid the planning process, it is recommended a 3-D model of the PWEPA (including upland areas) is constructed under the supervision of CAS with funding determined by the PSC. In this way, opportunities to promote “planning for real” exercises with representatives from provincial departments, local government, civil society and local communities should be explored in the interests of generating consensus on the adoption of the abovementioned plans, enhancing decentralised planning in the light of the 2017-2018 reforms and promotion of ecological civilisation. The MTR provides an example of a successful 3-D model that has been developed for the Hani Terraces in Yunnan Province. In addition, internationally recognised good practices by the Ramsar Convention should be taken into account, such as the, *“Good Practices Handbook for Integrating Urban Development and Wetland Conservation”*¹ and, *“The Hidden Loss of Wetlands in China”*² and dialogue established with Birdlife International and WWF on bird species

¹ Ramsar publication produced by WWT and the Nanjing University Ecological Research Institute of Changshu, 2018.

² Weihua Xu et al, Current Biology, 2019.

monitoring and zoning of wetland bird habitats. It is recommended the 3-D model is produced by CAS (using CAS co-finance) and/or in partnership with a local university, or qualified consultancy (funded with an injection of additional co-finance from the Provincial Government/Department for Natural Resources). It is recommended this model is replicated at some point in the future and established in the visitor centre in the PLNNR to promote ecological civilisation;

- **Liaise with the Department of Industry and Information Technologies on the options available to provide access to training, resources and marketing information to promote the alternative livelihoods initiative in participating local communities (prioritising women and youths). It is recommended access is provided to its Public Service Platform for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in Jiangxi Province (setup by Provincial Government under the Department of Industry and IT in 2019 to support networking in Jiangxi Province). In this way access to help-desk and services that promote, among others, certified products from the PWEPA, market studies, guidance on business planning, marketing and administration, quality control, etc. is enhanced to rural communities and townships to aid them move into sustainable alternative livelihoods;**
- **The development of a communication strategy on wetland management and conservation tailored to the needs and priorities of different audiences, in particular stakeholders at the county level. It is recommended a gender strategy is integrated into the communication strategy in order vulnerable groups have full access to training, information, resources, etc. relating to alternative livelihoods' development, co-management techniques, etc.**
- **Establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), or similar, with project GCP/CPR/057/GFF to facilitate information exchange and visits between the project and the Departments for Water Resources in Jiangxi and Yunnan Provinces/Chongqing Municipality concerning the application of R/LHA to monitor e-flow and biodiversity in the PWEPA, the application of the River Chief system in Yunnan Province and Chongqing Municipality, etc.**
- **Explore, the potential benefit of visiting project GCP/CPR/056/GFF to exchange information on the carbon trading schemes applied in Fujian Province, to determine if such a scheme is applicable in the PWEPA, taking into account wetlands store considerable amounts of carbon.**
- **Establish a coordination agreement, or MoU with the provincial authorities that continue to operate the projects in Anhui and Hubei provinces under the 6+1 programme that ended in 2019. It is highly recommended Jiangxi Province shares its JPWPAMS with Anhui Province (which has not established its own wetland PA strategy so far) and Hubei Province (which has established an Action Plan for wetland protection in the four lakes basin around Jingzhou City), in the interests of harmonising the wetland PA management strategies and information systems with those of project 052. To aid this process it is**

recommended the CTA, LTO and FAO-CN establish contact with the UNDP office in China to aid this process and explore the establishment of synergies as and where relevant.

24. Recommendation 3 - Strategic relevance and sustainability – for JxFoD/PSC, FAO-GEF Coordination Unit (GCU), FAO-RAP and FAO-CN: A project extension of 18 months is recommended to recover the current and projected delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic and effects of record floods in June-July 2020, which is estimated to amount to a total of 18 months of lost operations. It is highly recommended the extension is granted with the following conditions:

- 1) Adopt the theory of change proposed in Appendix 9 to clarify the vision and mission of the project, role in the 6+1 programme and promote ecological civilisation all of which are designed to also support the NFGA/MEE report on targets under the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, in particular relevant Aichi Targets;**
- 2) Agree to an exchange of letters (or amendment to the Prodoc if necessary) allowing for a revision of the project’s outputs, including their assignment to different components where it is agreed they are misplaced. Alternatively, an agreement should be explored and consensus reached that allows for a complete revision of the Results Matrix to be accepted in lieu of the exchange of letters mentioned above. The revision process should take into account the contents of recommendation 1 and 2 above (includes coordination between the project and Anhui and Hubei provinces) and alignment with the ToC provided in Appendix 9 of this report.**
- 3) The project’s budget is reviewed by the PSC and FAO to address funding gaps, in particular FAO’s capacity to perform adequate levels of supervision in the field to support project implementation in the extension period proposed.**

Suggestions on how this should be done:

- Clarify the main expected outcome(s) for all three components in line with the ToC. For example:**
 - Proposed outcome for component 1: Provincial and sector development plans are designed and implemented in compliance with spatial/land use plans, in which the conservation and sustainable use of wetland ecosystems, together with risk management, are fully integrated and coordinated with Anhui and Hubei Provinces. In addition, define what constitutes “effective” management and consider including community participation in spatial/land-use planning, risk mapping and mitigation in the definition;**

- **Proposed outcome for component 2: Wetland PA management guides the implementation of provincial and sector development plans, based on co-management, inter-county and ecosystem approaches, that leads to the establishment of sustainable local communities in and around the wetland PA system;**
- **Proposed outcome for component 3: The JWRIMS – supported by an effective communication strategy - establishes itself as the IMS to be upscaled for the benefit of the middle reaches of the Yangtze River basin to support all sectors take informed and coordinated decisions on socio-economic and spatial/land-use planning (and disaster risk management) in all wetland PAs systems (including buffer zones) in Jiangxi, Anhui and Hubei provinces.**
- **Assess, modify and, where necessary, reassign project outputs to the component of the project to which they are most closely associated. For example:**
 - **Output 1.2: reassign the specific parts of this output that relate to component 2 (establishment and operation of Wetland Field Stations and establish three operational demonstration county wetland nature reserves) and ensure the expansion of geographic coverage is quantified with baseline data, so that it can be used as an indicator for JxDoF to monitor the expansion of its management services;**
 - **Output 1.4: reassign relevant parts of this output (community outreach education and economic valuation) to component 3. It is recommended the main elements of the valuation are updated at the end of each Five-Year Plan and when the JWRIMS is in full operation to support efforts to incorporate wetland values into provincial accounting systems (as foreseen in the Aichi Target 2) and designed to support informed and effective cross-sector coordination on sector planning and budgeting. Meanwhile, the remaining elements of output 1.4 (review legal/regulatory framework and integration of wetland conservation recommendations in the governmental development planning process) should be modified to secure the integration of wetland conservation and its sustainable use in the socio-economic and spatial/land-use planning process (managed by the Jiangxi Development and Reform Commission and Department for Natural Resources respectively) in urban/rural plans (managed by the Department of Housing) and in the provincial sector development planning and reform process and that the reform of their order the legal and regulatory framework is designed to fully protect wetland PA systems from change of use (especially where ecological compensation reverts farmland to wetlands, but which could be susceptible to conversion into farmland at a later date). In addition, it is recommended to assess possible policy and legal reforms in**

- consultation with the Environmental Investment Committee of the Provincial People’s Congress that aim at reducing dependency on direct provincial funding allocations to wetland PA systems to cross-sector cost sharing approaches, on applying international good practices concerning the wetland PA system management and funding (including opportunities to raise income through partnerships with private and non-governmental entities, provincial/local fiscal measures, voluntary contributions, application of PES and carbon trading initiatives at the provincial level, etc. (taking into account Nature Reserve administrations cannot generate income by law);**
- **Output 3.2: reassign to component 1. It is recommended the text is modified to include training on the integration of wetland PA management within the context of coordinated spatial/land-use planning and risk management to support and guide sector development planning in wetland ecosystems (emphasising the importance of spatial/land-use planning in the upper and middle watersheds of wetland PAs);**
 - **Output 3.3: refocus the public awareness and outreach activities under a communication strategy that includes information on how spatial/land-use planning can support component 2 achieve effective wetland management, conserve biodiversity and, with the inclusion of risk management/risk mapping/restoration techniques, increase the resilience of local communities and their wetlands.**
- **Asses and modify the project budget and reassign funds where there are funding gaps, or determine alternative sources. It is strongly recommended the PMO and PSC assess the budgetary needs of the project in the light of the recommendations in this report in order to determine:**
 - **Outputs that are projected to have an excess of funds, or which could be saved through the sharing of training and other exercises with other GEF-funded projects, or projects under the 6+1 programme, or from other donor-funded projects, including WWF, TNC, etc.;**
 - **Outputs that are projected to need additional funds and thus merit a net increase in their budgetary allocation as appropriate. For example, funds should be assigned to study promotion of environmentally-friendly small/micro business livelihoods under the support and supervision of the Department for Industry and Information Technology in Jiangxi Province (in particular using the existing platform established in Jiangxi Province in 2019);**
 - **Alternative sources of finance that could be accessed, mobilised and/or leveraged through innovative practices such future International Birdwatching weeks;**

- **Opportunities to increase the visibility of the project and GEF's commitment to save globally important biodiversity and habitats. To support this initiative, it is highly recommended the project consults local communities and schools on the adoption of a suitable logo to promote the public's association in Jiangxi Province as well as throughout China and internationally, that the PWEPA is dedicated to conserving globally important biodiversity. For example, it is highly recommended the Finless Porpoise and Siberian Crane figure in this logo to portray a similar message to WWF's Panda symbol. In this way the logo can be assigned to wetland products and learning materials from the PWEPA (and in other relevant wetland PA systems elsewhere in the Province (and inter—provincial level concerning the middle reaches of the Yangtze River basin. To support the promotion of the logo it is proposed a local community-based small enterprise is supported to produce and/or distribute souvenirs (such as figurines, badges, stickers, tee-shirts, cuddly toys, etc.) of the Finless Porpoise and Siberian Crane for sale at the visitor centres, at homestays, local shops, Nanchang airport, etc. to support local job creation in the alternative livelihoods programme.**
- **Attend to the following specific recommendations identified from interviews:**
 - **Risk management: METT and KAP should include questions that track awareness of the role of risk management in enhancing resilience of wetland PAs and the local communities that live in and around them (within the PWEPA);**
 - **Monitoring: there is a need to improve outcome (results) monitoring. This should include baseline data and targets to support the establishment of measurable indicators that are timebound as well as numerical. Baseline data should ensure there is ongoing monitoring of the wetland habitats (in terms of land area) that are brought under management to show progress in relation to "expansion of geographic coverage of operationally effective wetland PAs" (output 1.2 in the Prodoc) relating to the PWEPA and ultimately for the rest of PAs in Jiangxi Province. In this way this data can be fully integrated into the JWRIMS and support the identification of management gaps and/or scale-up good practices that support effective land-use and sector planning, ecological restoration, communications, etc. An example of how to track this data is provided in Table A. To support the project's strategic relevance and sustainability monitoring should also include the project's contribution to meeting the NBCSAP and, in particular, relevant Aichi Targets. In this way the above-mentioned communication strategy can also enhance outreach the importance of addressing the causes of biodiversity loss; namely the loss of wetland habitats that are**

fundamental to the wetland species protection plans promoted by the project, but also its contribution to reducing the effects of climate variability and change;

- **PSC: An exit strategy should be produced taking into consideration all the recommendations in this report, paying particular attention to ensuring the proposed coordination mechanism above, has a suitable secretariat that has the authority to supervise spatial/land-use compliance in the field with the support of the local communities, which implies an expansion of co-management agreements including monitoring of land-use changes.**

Table A: Increase in wetland PA area under management in Jiangxi Province (2017-2021)

Protected area name	Category	PA coverage under management 01/01/2017 (ha)	Actual PA under management to 30/06/2020 (ha)	Target PA under management to 31/12/2021 (ha)
Demonstration sites				
PLNNR	National	0	22,400	22,400
NWNNR	Provincial	0	33,300	33,300
DPMBNRP	Provincial	0	41,100	41,100
Liaohuachi NR	County	0	3,778	3,778
Kangshan Lake	County	0	35,000	35,000
Wannian Huyun NR	County	0	467	467
TOTAL PROJECT		0	136,045	136,045
Other PAs				
Baishazhou Nature Reserve	County	0	40,900	40,900
Qinglan Lake NR	County	0	1,000	1,000
Nan Lake Nature Reserve	County	0	3,300	3,300
Gutang Wetland NR	County	0	5,300	5,300
Pingfeng NR	County	0	491	491
Hexi wetland NR	County	0	4,000	4,000
TOTAL OTHER		0	54,991	54,991
TOTAL PROVINCE		0	191,036	191,036

Source: MTR and PMO (October 2020)

25. **Recommendation 4 – Efficiency and effectiveness – for FLO, GCU, PSS, FAO-CN, LTO/FAO-RAP, IDWG, Senior Management: In line with the MTR for project 057 (October 2020), it is recommended a communication mechanism is established (such as an online meeting group using Zoom) to improve dialogue and find solutions to outstanding problems associated with:**
- **The application of *ad hoc* arrangements governing the national execution of GEF5-funded projects such as project 052 in China. It is recommended a specific solution is found to ensure the BH can perform a satisfactory level of supervision/support to the executing partner (including assurance activities);**

- **The current application of FAO’s FEE Guidelines in China.** The MTR found the BH does not have enough funds to manage effectively the GEF5 project portfolio, conduct assurance activities in line with the ad hoc conditions agreed by FAO Senior Management in 2015, etc. It is, therefore, suggested dialogue centres on establishing guarantees (as opposed to the application of percentages) to ensure the BH/FAO-CN does not experience major budget shortfalls in implementing the GEF5 portfolio of projects and that this is used as a model for other countries facing similar challenges;
- **The application of OPIM/MS-701 in China.** The MTR suggests the Project Support Services (PSS) of FAO is fully integrated into the project identification and design process of GEF-funded projects to ensure full compliance and understanding of MS-701 in the EAs/OPAs agreed with executing partners. It is also strongly recommended that the mainstreaming of OPIM pays particular attention to ensuring it does not cause a major delay between the design and implementation phases, given project 052 (and other GEF5 projects) experienced significant delays between the identification/design phase and the start of the implementation phase (2012 to 2016).

Following this dialogue, it is suggested the agreed solutions are communicated to the executing partner to determine how much additional co-finance may be required to support the full application of the conditions specified in the EA (given they do not fully comply with MS-701).

0.5 Table B - GEF ratings

GEF criteria/sub-criteria	Rating ³	Summary comments ⁴
A. STRATEGIC RELEVANCE		
A1. Overall strategic relevance	HS	The project is operating in an increasingly favourable political and policy environment at both national and provincial level to conserve wetland PAs in recognition they provide important ecological services. The project’s recent study on the economic value of these services will help to advance the protection of Jiangxi’s wetland PAs further as well as support President Xi Jinping’s call to step up ecological civilization in 2019.
A1.1. Alignment with GEF and FAO strategic priorities	HS	The project continues to align with GEF5’s BD-1 and contributes to BD-2; and FAO’s SO-2 (Outcome 1)

³ See rating scheme at the end of the document.

⁴ Include reference to the relevant sections in the report.

		and FAO-CN-CPF 2016-2020 Priority Area 1 (Output 1.2).
A1.2. Relevance to national, regional and global priorities and beneficiary needs	HS	The project directly supports national priorities to conserve China's wetlands in the National Wetland Conservation Programme 2002-2030 through its latest Action Plan 2016-2020, which promotes system-based approaches to wetland PA management for the first time. Project also supports NBCSAP 2011-2030 including reporting on relevant Aichi Targets (8, 11, 14). Also supports achievement of SDG 15 (Targets 15.1 and 15.5).
A1.3. Complementarity with existing interventions	MS	The Prodoc places a lot of emphasis on establishing complementarity with existing interventions at government and non-government levels, including the Three Gorges Project (to cover part of the project's budget concerning hydrological studies) and ICF (on baseline survey on biodiversity and ecological health of PAs in PWEPA). In addition, it calls for incorporating lessons learned from previous GEF-funded projects and calls for synergies with the 6+1 programme implemented with support of UNDP in areas such as harmonising provincial strategy plans for PA systems in Jiangxi, Anhui and Hubei provinces (middle catchment of the Yangtze River basin). However, it provides no clear guidance on how these synergies are to be established and coordinated
B. EFFECTIVENESS		
B1. Overall assessment of project results	S	The project has made good progress since 2018 and is delivering on most of its planned outputs, but also faces new challenges since the Prodoc was prepared in 2014 that have not been resolved to date and which indicate the project will not have enough time to reach some of its expected outcomes and objectives in time.
B1.1 Delivery of project outputs	S	The project has shown it is delivering most effectively on outputs where the JxFoD can implement project activities by itself, in particular under component 2. However, delivery of outputs is behind schedule in the majority of cases and implementation of the JPWPAMS and JWRIMS will not start until 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and record flooding in June-July 2020, the delivery

		of outputs is expected to experience further delays to end of 2020
B1.2 Progress towards outcomes ⁵ and project objectives	MS	The project is in line to meet the immediate outcomes in the Prodoc that relate to establishing more effective management over a wider area of wetland PAs in the PWEPA, but does not monitor the land area that is under effective management in relation to baselines (in the Prodoc). However, catalysing management effectiveness of Jiangxi's wetland biodiversity is unlikely until a suitable cross-sector mechanism is in place, such as through the spatial/land-use system and greater clarity is provided on financial instruments to fund wetland PA management, ecological compensation, alternative livelihoods and the JWRIMS.
- Outcome 1	MS	The project has successfully progressed to a third draft of the JPWPAMS to promote wetland PA system management in coordination with key sectors. The workshops have acted as an <i>ad hoc</i> replacement to the JPWPACC, which is no longer an option following government reforms. As a result, there is no official government structure in place to oversee integration, implementation and monitoring of the strategy at the sector level to guide provincial policy, legal and regulatory reforms on wetland management. This situation has also not been aided by a lack of adequate coordination on harmonising strategies with the 6+1 projects in Anhui and Hubei provinces. The economic valuation of wetlands has just been completed, but the project lacks clarity on how to promote it as part of a dynamic communication strategy to lobby for change.
- Outcome 2	S	The project is showing positive signs of expanding the internal management capacity of JxFoD in all 6 demonstration PAs thanks to a new partnership agreement with CAS on wetland restoration and advances in establishing a management framework in the PWEPA that is being supported by management plans (produced for all 6 demonstration PA sites) and co-management agreements (signed with 9 of 11 local communities planned) and installation of 7 new field stations

⁵ Assessment and ratings by individual outcomes may be undertaken if there is added value.

		around PLNNR and NWNRR (output 1.2). However, financial mechanisms for the PWEPA network have not been identified so far and are delayed.
- Outcome 3	MS	The JWRIMS faces major challenges in becoming a data monitoring platform to support coordinated multi-sector informed decision-making and planning on wetland PA system management unless the coordination mechanism is clarified and the JPWPAMS is agreed. However, the educational outreach activities have progressed well aided by the first ever International Birdwatching Week in Jiangxi in 2019, which helped mobilise over USD 70 m. in additional funds in preparation for this event.
- Overall rating of progress towards achieving objectives/ outcomes	S	The project's activities are making a positive contribution to developing co-management approaches in the wetland PAs that are raising awareness and attitudinal change on the importance of conserving globally significant wetland biodiversity and its habitats as well as the importance the need to adopt alternative livelihoods that can be sustained in the PWEPA, such as tourism. Despite delays the JPWPAMS and JWRIMS are likely to be launched in 2021. However, it remains unclear whether a cross-sector coordination and funding mechanism will be in place to implement them in Jiangxi Province as planned.
B1.3 Likelihood of impact	UA	Not rated in MTRs
C. EFFICIENCY		
C1. Efficiency ⁶	MS	Overall, the project is estimated to have a physical advance of around 45% (53% according to the PMO) yet it has total expenditure of 23%. This would suggest high efficiency, but it seems more likely this is attributed to a combination of delays in payments for work not yet completed and some covering by co-finance (98% of funds already spent to 30 June 2020). Delays in implementation are significant and estimated to have set the project back by around 12 months against plan. The COVID-19 pandemic and major floods in June-July 2020, are also causing further delays, especially group-based activities (around 6 months). The

⁶ Includes cost efficiency and timeliness.

		<p>OPIM modality has also contributed to these delays by establishing the PSC with no cross-sector representation, the PMO in a division of the JxFoD that has no direct access to provincial sector departments and difficulty to apply GEF/FAO procedures simultaneously with national ones. However, activities implemented at the PA level indicate high cost-effectiveness due to their “in-house” nature and partnerships with CAS, ICF, local NGOs, etc. which have facilitated cost sharing.</p>
D. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES		
D1. Overall likelihood of risks to sustainability	ML	<p>The project/FAO appear to have under-estimated anthropic/abiotic, financial and institutional risks all of which the MTR found are increasing, such as the worst ever floods in the province in June 2020, institutional challenges due to reforms, lack of institutional coordination mechanisms, inadequate communication with 6+1 programme, high dependency on funding from government rather than internal forms of revenue generation, etc. The MTR found these risks are affecting implementation indicate measures are not in place to institutionalise cross-sector coordination and operate the JWRIMS as a centralised information system to support informed decision-making over medium to long-term.</p>
D1.1. Financial risks	ML	<p>The MTR understands national consultants supporting the identification of the strategy, information system, alternative livelihoods programme, ecological compensation payments, rewards and bonuses initiative, etc. are exploring various ways to identify suitable public funding to implement them. However, the majority of interviewees confirmed that despite the government’s shift to increasing funding for environmental protection in general in China, it has been challenging to identify suitable cross-sector funding mechanisms that are needed to operate and sustain the project’s main activities (application of the JPWPAMS, JWRIMS, wetland PA management plans, the educational outreach activities and advance the transition to sustainable livelihoods among fisherfolk and farmers in and around the PAs) as the current project management structure has limited authority to convoke meetings and</p>

		promote cross-sector agreements at the Provincial Government level.
D1.2. Socio-political risks	ML	Socio-political risks remain low due to the increasing recognition and commitment of the State Council, central and provincial governments to support wetland protection, restoration and sustainable use of its biodiversity (especially through tourism) and increase ecological civilisation
D1.3. Institutional and governance risks	ML	A cross-sectoral coordination mechanism has not been reached to promote coordinated governance structures at provincial level, but at the local level the JxFoD is being strengthened to manage wetland PAs through co-management agreements and new field stations that will help to enhance local inhabitants as the guardians of their wetlands. Nevertheless, more needs to be done to ensure they also have alternative livelihoods to sustain this new role.
D1.4. Environmental risks	ML	The project is fully geared to reducing environmental risks as defined in the ESS template. But an ESS should be applied and risk management needs to form an integral part of the JPWPAMS to communicate the economic value of protecting wetlands (especially regulation of floods and droughts which is also essential to protect bird feeding grounds)
D2. Catalysis and replication	ML	Replication of activities at the local level based on co-management and co-patrolling responses is likely where it is proven to be cost-effective and can be managed from within the JxFoD, but less evident in provincial development and sector planning unless it is properly coordinated with a secretariat charged with implementing decisions.
E. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE		
E1. Project design and readiness ⁷	MU	The project has some important design faults that have affected implementation. The EA has been underpinned by a set of conditions set by FAO's Senior Management that have been difficult to implement in the absence of guidelines and a Prodoc that had been designed prior to the

⁷ This refers to factors affecting the project's ability to start as expected, such as the presence of sufficient capacity among executing partners at project launch.

		<p>execution of projects through implementing partners. Furthermore, FAO released MS-701/OPIM soon afterwards, which FAO-CN assumed was applicable to project 052. As a result, the project endured high transaction costs supporting the executing partner (JxFoD) apply the EA in line with both the <i>ad hoc</i> arrangement agreed by FAO's Senior Management and MS-701, which was not applicable. This contributed to significant delays in implementation. Furthermore, the Prodoc obliged the executing partner to establish the PMO in a division of JxFoD (PLNNR), where it does not have the authority to lobby project interests with key sectors in the provincial government (or at the national level) regarding the development, application of the JPWPAMS and its guidelines and standards, the JWRIMS, or the up-scaling of strategic project activities through national wetland policy reforms (including a new White Paper for wetlands launched in 2020). Moreover, some of the project's outputs were found to be misplaced under their corresponding component to support effective and monitoring of results. Also significant is the absence of cross-sector representation in the PSC, although the MTR observes in the Self-evaluation report of JxFoD (Section 8.1) that provincial departments responsible for Agriculture, Water Resources, Tourism, etc. should be invited to PSC meetings and policy consultation meetings, although the inclusion of representatives from Anhui and Hubei Provinces that participated in the 6+1 programme do not appear to have been included as observers in the PSC.</p>
E2. Quality of project implementation	MS	<p>The feedback from most interviewees is that the quality of trainings and capacity building support has been satisfactory under components 1 and 2, with educational outreach activities generally conducted to a highly satisfactory level, thanks to innovative activities such as the Caicha Opera (adapting its shows to include wetlands) and the realisation of the International Birdwatching Week. However, national consultants were observed to be working largely in isolation of each other.</p>
E2.1 Quality of project implementation by FAO (BH, LTO, PTF, etc.)	MS	<p>The quality of FAO support has been satisfactory, but financial challenges persist and this affects the level of technical and administrative support that</p>

		<p>can be provided to all GEF5 projects. GCU has committed significant resources to establishing the OPIM modality in the JxFoD, but this still resulted in delays of approximately one year of operations in several projects, including 052. The LTO's location in FAO-RAP in Thailand also means there is less scope to promote and supervise the establishment and optimisation of synergies between GEF5 projects. As a result, project 052 appears to have overlaps in areas such as wetland restoration and river/lake health assessments also supported by project 057. In this regard, FAO could and should be doing more to facilitate the development of synergies, in particular with the 6+1 programme in areas such as the harmonisation of wetland management strategies and information management.</p>
E2.1 Project oversight (PSC, project working group, etc.)	S	<p>The MTR identified a high level of evidence to indicate the PSC has provided a satisfactory level of support to the project and the new DG for the PLNNR is taking up a more proactive role in supporting the project's communication with key sectors with regard to the development of the JPWPAMS.</p>
E3. Quality of project execution	S	<p>The MTR found no evidence to confirm the quality of the project's execution has been sub-standard, or poorly supported.</p>
E3.1 Project execution and management (PMU and executing partner performance, administration, staffing, etc.)	MS	<p>The PMO faces major challenges as it depends on PLNNR staff who work on a part-time basis. Moreover, the Project manager has a high workload and no full-time assistant to cover all day-to-day tasks.</p>
E4. Financial management and co-financing	S	<p>The MTR found only minor evidence in the audit report on difficulties in accounting. Substantial co-finance has already been provided to support project activities, but it is not clear from project reports, the breakdown of funding to each component of the project. The fact co-finance currently only has less than 3% remaining indicates additional co-finance may be required.</p>
E5. Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement	MS	<p>The project has enhanced project cost-effectiveness where it has established a LoA with interested parties such as CAS, ICF, local NGOs, etc. Co-management agreements have also helped engage the participation of local communities. However,</p>

		where there is no formal coordination agreement setting out precise tasks and roles, the project does not appear to have developed effective partnerships, in particular with project staff engaged in projects in Anhui and Hubei provinces under the 6+1 programme.
E6. Communication, knowledge management and knowledge products	MS	The project's educational outreach activities have succeeded in already covering over 10 000 individuals aided by construction of a visitor centre at the PLNNR, a partnership with the Caicha Opera troupe, etc. and the Birdwatching Week attracted a reported 200 000 visitors, including members from the local communities. The project also enjoyed high media coverage in these events. However, the project has not established an effective communication strategy to fully optimise the opportunities to promote change although this is hampered by the location of the PMO in the PLNNR
E7. Overall quality of M&E	MS	The quality of the internal M&E system is geared to reporting on outputs and operations to FAO/GEF, it is thus not designed to stimulate learning on outcomes (best practices) to determine how to maximise project impact. The M&E system is also not geared to facilitate information exchange at all levels.
E7.1 M&E design	MS	The project has established a monitoring and evaluation plan that complies with FAO/GEF requirements to track the status of activities, outputs and meeting of targets. However, it is not aided by a lack of a clear intervention logic between the list of expected outcomes provided in the Prodoc and the 14 outputs selected. Indeed, the MTR found it difficult to analyse some outputs as they were found to belong to different components.
E7.2 M&E plan implementation (including financial and human resources)	MS	The MTR found the project is implementing the M&E plan through the submission of progress reports that include matrices on the progress in implementing project activities and on meeting targets. Furthermore, the GEF portfolio manager and LTO have both visited project stakeholders in Jiangxi Province three times and submitted BTO reports. However, the M&E is carried out by part-time staff who have limited resources to get into the field, which means there is less scope to

		promote learning, information exchange, the development of synergies and networking, etc.
E8. Overall assessment of factors affecting performance	MS	The PSC/PMO are making every effort to implement the project but it is let down by design faults, an internal M&E system geared to tracking outputs that limits room for effective learning on removing barriers and expanding good practices, information exchange and coordinated responses support by an effective communications strategy
F. CROSS-CUTTING CONCERNS		
F1. Gender and other equity dimensions	MU	The Prodoc provides some important insights in to the plight of rural women in the Poyang Lake region, but the project has not adopted a gender strategy based on enhancing equality and empowerment of women and other vulnerable groups and thus provides limited reporting on gender.
F2. Human rights issues	MS	The MTR found the emphasis given to adopting co-management approaches to wetland management supported by joint patrolling with locals to control illegal fishing, aquaculture, farming, etc. enhances good governance. The MTR did not find evidence that human rights are under repression in this region.
F2. Environmental and social safeguards	HS	The MTR found a high level of compliance with the ESS template, even though the ESS has not been applied so far.
Overall project rating		S

Ratings: Highly satisfactory (HS), Satisfactory (S), Moderately satisfactory (MS), Moderately unsatisfactory (MU), Unsatisfactory (U) Highly unsatisfactory (HU) Unable to assess (UA). Additional ratings for Section E: Likely (L), Moderately likely (ML), Moderately unlikely (MU), Unlikely (U)

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose and scope of the MTR

26. The mid-term review (MTR) of project GCP/CPR/052/GFF, “Piloting Provincial-Level Wetland PA System in Jiangxi Province”, hereafter referred to as project 052, was launched in July 2020 in line with the provisions of the project document (Prodoc). The terms of reference (ToR) of the MTR stipulate **the main purposes of the MTR** are to:

- Provide accountability – to respond to the information needs and interests of the PFGD, the National Forestry and Grassland Administration - NFGA (at the national level), as well as other actors with decision-making power in China, for example, the People’s Congress of Jiangxi, the Provincial Development and Reform Commission, the Mountain-River-Lake Office, the Provincial Government of Jiangxi Province and the Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE), among others. In addition, the MTR report is designed to inform FAO management, the GEF Coordination Unit (GCU) and other UN agencies with valuable information on the project’s progress, achievements and lessons/good practices so far, in particular UNDP⁸;
- Provide recommendations to improve the project management by providing valuable information evaluation findings, lessons learned and good practices to managers and others responsible for regular project operations, such as the project steering committee (PSC), the project management office (PMO), the Project Task Force (PTF), FAO-RAP, FAO-China (FAO-CN) and GCU; and
- Contribute to learning by developing an in-depth understanding and contextualization of the project and its practices among the government authorities responsible for wetland management and biodiversity conservation, the entities responsible for managing 6 nature reserves supported directly by project 052 in the Poyang Lake region, local authorities and communities participating in the project, and FAO- staff and development practitioners operating in China, Asia and the rest of the world.

27. The **scope of the MTR** covers the implementation of the project’s three main components between the entry of duty (EOD) on 30 September 2016 to 30 June 2020. The geographical scope of the evaluation covers the Poyang Lake basin located in Jiangxi Province, with particular emphasis given to the three main intervention areas: the Poyang Lake National

⁸ UNDP/GEF is supporting the NFGA through the China Biodiversity Partnership and Framework for Action - Mainstreams of Life Programme (CBPF-MSL), implement the national programme: “Wetland PA System Strengthening for Biodiversity Conservation”, based on a national project and six provincial level projects, which included project 052. More information can be found in sub section 4.1.4 below.

Nature Reserve (PLNNR), the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve (NWNRR), and the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve (DPMBNR). The MTR team has also placed heavy importance on covering a wide sample of stakeholders (men and women) to help triangulate as far as possible its main findings and substantiate all conclusions and recommendations. Stakeholders interviewed can be found in Appendix 3.

1.2 Objective of the MTR

28. The **objective of the MTR** is to provide valuable recommendations based on as much triangulated evidence as possible, taking into account the limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic and also major flooding in Jiangxi Province when the interviews took place. To reach this objective the MTR addresses a set of main questions under the evaluation criteria set by GEF/FAO for MTRs. These are summarised in Box 1.

Box 1: Main questions for the MTR

1. Relevance	Are the project outcomes congruent with current country priorities, GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework and the needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries?
2. Effectiveness	To what extent has the project delivered on its outputs, outcomes and objectives?
3. Efficiency	To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently and cost effectively?
4. Sustainability	What is the likelihood that project results can be sustained beyond the project?
5. Factors affecting progress (questions relate to one of the above criteria)	<p>Is the project design suited to delivering the expected outcomes?</p> <p>Is the project’s causal logic coherent and clear, practical and feasible within the timeframe allowed?</p> <p>How do the various stakeholder groups see their own engagement with the project and what are the strengths and challenges of the project’s partnerships?</p> <p>Were local actors – civil society or private sector – involved in project design or implementation and what was the effect on project results?</p> <p>Is the project on track as it was originally designed or have there been delays in the project approval, implementation and reporting process?</p> <p>What are the major reasons of the delay?</p> <p>To what extent did the executing agency effectively discharge its role and responsibilities in managing and administering the project?</p> <p>How well is the PMO functioning?</p> <p>Are there sufficient human resources, financial resources, etc. for the PMO operation and does it have the capacity to support project implementation.</p>

	<p>What have been the main challenges in terms of project management and administration?</p> <p>How well have risks been identified and managed?</p> <p>What have been the financial-management challenges of the project? To what extent has pledged co-financing been delivered? Has any additional leveraged co-financing been provided since implementation?</p> <p>To what extent has FAO delivered supervision and backstopping (technical, administrative and operational) during project identification, formulation, approval, start-up and execution? What kind of support or changes is expected from FAO by the execution partners?</p> <p>How effective has the project’s internal M&E system been in supporting project planning and the development of a communication strategy to inform and promoting its key messages and results to partners, stakeholders and a general audience?</p>
<p>6. Cross-cutting priorities</p>	<p>To what extent were gender considerations (including a gender analysis) taken into account in designing and implementing the project? How has stakeholder engagement and gender assessment (gender-disaggregated targets and indicators) been integrated into the M&E system? Has the project been implemented in a manner that ensures gender-equitable participation and benefits?</p> <p>To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project?</p>
<p>Lessons learned</p>	<p>What lessons and good practices are likely to be replicated or scaled up during and soon after the project’s closure?</p>

29. To support the MTR, address these questions and report on GEF’s MTR scoring⁹, an **evaluation matrix** (EM) was elaborated and approved by the FAO-CN and GCU (see Appendix 4). The evaluation matrix provides a set of sub-questions to help answer the main questions in Box 1 and provides a summary of the indicators and judgement criteria to be considered to help guide the interviews and analyse responses. The EM also provides guidance on the sources of information to be consulted and methods to be applied to obtain as much evidence as possible to support the triangulation of main findings.

1.3 Intended users

30. In line with the stakeholder analysis conducted during the inception phase and finalised in the Inception Report (IR) presented on 24 July 2020 to FAO’s GCU. The main users of this MTR report are:

⁹ Each evaluation criterion is scored in terms of: highly satisfactory, satisfactory, moderately satisfactory, moderately unsatisfactory, unsatisfactory.

- The Chinese counterpart institutions participating directly in the project; namely the executing partner, JxFoD and, at the national level the NFGA, which is part of the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). In addition, staff of the PLNNR, NWNNR and DPMBNR, officials of the municipal and county forestry bureaus and people's governments in particular linked to the county nature reserves participating in the project: Baishazhou, Gutang Wetland, Nan Lake, Pingfeng, Hexi Wetland Nature Reserves.¹⁰ The report is also considered of interest to the Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE), which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and Action Plan 2016-2030 (NBCSAP) the Ministry of Finance (MoF), which is GEF's official partner in the People's Republic of China;
- The Project management office (PMO) operating within the PLNNR together with FAO who is supporting the implementation of the project and GEF as the main international donor;
- University and research establishments involved in the project implementation;
- Civil society organisations, in particular local inhabitants in and around the project sites who are participating in the project's training and on-the-ground activities in the forest farms; and
- Other potential interested parties include the People's Congress of Jiangxi, the Provincial Development and Reform Commission, and the Mountain-River-Lake Office.

1.4 Methodology

31. The MTR team is comprised of two consultants; one international consultant and one national consultant. The international consultant, Mr. Warren Olding, has over 20 years work experience in project management, conducting external evaluations relating to natural resources management, biodiversity conservation and sustainable rural development (includes FAO/GEF-funded projects). The national consultant, Mr Zhang Chen, is specialized on wetland conservation and management, wetland biodiversity conservation, nature reserve management and local co-management development and has work experience with the Chinese Academy of Sciences, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), FAO, IUCN, Conservation International, among others.
32. In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was agreed with GCU and FAO-CN that the overall methodological approach of the MTR would centre on a desk review of the project documents (see Appendix 5) supported by remote semi-structured interviews covering a wide sample of stakeholders who are directly involved in the project's implementation. All

¹⁰ Other county reserves that are largely in name only in the Poyang Lake region include those stated in the Prodoc: Liaohuachi wetland migrating birds nature reserve (LWMBNR), Kangshan Lake migrating birds nature reserve (KLMBNR) and Huyun Tundra Swan nature reserve (HTSNR).

interviews were conducted using online video telephony such as Zoom, TenCent/Voov, Skype and WeChat to help triangulate findings and identify gaps where further analysis could be applied in the event a field mission to Jiangxi Province is authorised later in 2020, or in 2021 by the Chinese authorities, FAO and GEF.

33. The stakeholder analysis conducted in the inception phase focused on identifying and prioritising all stakeholders at the provincial, municipal and county levels who should be interviewed in the Desk Phase. Priority stakeholders were identified by group as specified in Appendix 3. This included FAO officials directly linked to the project, in particular the Lead Technical Officer (LTO) responsible for project 052 based in FAO-RAP (Bangkok), the project manager based in FAO-CN, the acting Budget Holder (BH) based in FAO-CN¹¹, representatives working in the PMO located within the Division of the PFGD responsible for the PLNNR, local personnel from the PFGD, national advisers and consultants, representatives of local grassroots organisations, etc. The latter were identified by the national consultant in liaison with the PMO and interviewed via WeChat and TenCent applications. All responses were summarised and translated into English by the national consultant before being transmitted to the MTR international consultant. The full list of stakeholders interviewed, the reason for their selection and dates and times of the interviews can be found in Appendix 3.
34. Work methods and tools centred on, first, constructing a theory of change (ToC) with the participation of FAO-CN. The ToC was presented in the IR and subsequently shared with the LTO and PMO for their comments and observations. The latest version of the ToC can be found in Appendix 9. To guide all interviews the MTR team used the EM to identify a set of sub questions relating to the evaluation criteria listed in Box 1. They were applied to three groups of stakeholders: (i) FAO/GEF; (ii) PMO, national consultants, advisers and provincial staff; (iii) local stakeholders at the county/nature reserve level. Every effort was made to ensure women were included for interview at all levels, in particular at the local level.
35. All questions addressed to stakeholders were tailored to the specific expertise, work experience and interests of the interviewees from each of the three groups of stakeholders. To reduce interviewee fatigue questions were limited to 12 for local stakeholders and between 15 and 20 questions for the other two groups of stakeholders. Questions were submitted to all interviewees a few days before the interview date to allow for translation into Chinese and to facilitate informed responses during the interviews. All interviews were conducted with the employment of a qualified interpreter and in a semi-structured manner to allow the MTR team the flexibility to enhance its analysis and findings as and when necessary. In the vast majority of cases interviewees commented on their satisfaction with the interview process. Indeed, the MTR team attempted to use the

¹¹ The BH requested one interview to cover the MTRs being conducted by the international consultant for the following three GEF-funded projects in China between March and September 2020: GCP/CPR/052/GFF, GCP/CPR/056/GFF and GCP/CPR/057/GFF.

interviews as not only a means to extract information and data from stakeholders, but also as an opportunity to enhance learning. For example, the MTR team actively encouraged interviewees to discuss possible recommendations to key challenges, gaps and needs identified, which allowed valuable interchanges of international and national experience to take place.

36. In the light of the increasing improbability of conducting a field mission to Jiangxi Province due to the growing problems associated with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the MTR increased the sample size of interviews with local stakeholders from 6 to 13. This enabled the MTR to carry out greater analysis of the project's co-management approach applied in the NRs, identify good practices, lessons learned and outstanding gaps in the training applied in the NRs and also gain a greater insight into the project's educational activities in the local communities. Following discussions with the PMO, it was evident there are no ethnic minorities in the project's main intervention areas, so specific questions directed at this group were not included. In specific cases where the MTR was unable to obtain adequate information to substantiate its findings the present report highlights where additional interviews in the field are necessary. Finally, despite the inability to conduct field mission, the MTR team consider it important to conduct an online wrap-up meeting either online or, if possible, in Beijing with key stakeholders together with FAO-CN representatives to discuss and fine tune the recommendations, clarify next steps and address any other pending issues.

1.5 Limitations

37. The main limitation of the MTR is the continuation of restrictions on travel caused by COVID-19 pandemic, which has forced the MTR to rely on homebased analysis of documents, supported by remote interviews. Under these conditions it was agreed with FAO-CN and FAO-GCU that the MTR reporting would prepare a first draft report, based on the triangulation of evidence through online interviews. Following the receipt of comments and observations on the first draft, a second draft of the report would be finalised and submitted. In addition, given the pandemic continues to evolve and cause unforeseen developments, it was agreed the MTR should be carried out in a flexible manner and that all deadlines for the submission of deliverables should remain indicative. In this way the health and safety of the MTR team, their families and all interviewees, together with the new obligations they must follow, can be respected and applied correctly.
38. Taking into account the pandemic is likely to prevent the field mission from taking place in 2020, a solution will be sought with FAO-CN/FAO-GCU to mitigate the limitations of the MTR exercise. This could imply accepting the draft report as the definitive MTR report at which point the MTR is considered closed. Alternatively, it could be closed, but with the proviso a field mission is conducted by the MTR team in 2021 in the interests of assessing progress in the implementation of the recommendations and to provide support and

guidance on issues such as the exit strategy, the systematisation of results and promoting the up-scaling of good practices to facilitate replication, or the catalyst effect.

2 Project background and context

2.1 Threats and barriers being addressed by the project

39. The Wetland protected area system in Jiangxi Province comprises 195 nature reserves in covering an area of 1,150,200 hectares (6.9% of the entire province). It includes 8 national nature reserves (144,400 hectares), 28 provincial nature reserves (337,200 hectares), and 159 prefecture or county level nature reserves (668,500 hectares). The vast majority of these reserves (96% of the protected area (PA) sites and 95% of the total area) are under the management of the Jiangxi Department of Forestry. The 23 wetland reserves in Jiangxi province mentioned in the Prodoc cover approximately 350,000 hectares and includes 12 wetland reserves within the Poyang Lake region (190,157 hectares).¹² They provide a range of ecosystem services that underpin the local economy and safeguard the livelihoods of local residents living in and around this region. These services include: freshwater supply; fisheries and agricultural production; harvesting of plants for fuel, food and medicine plants; regulating functions such as flood mitigation, water purification; sediment retention; biomass and nutrient cycling; carbon sequestration, recreation and nature-based tourism, etc. These ecosystem services (eco-services) are connected and are ultimately dependent upon the functioning and integrity of the overall ecosystem. These wetlands also provide critical habitats for a host of globally significant species. For example, they host large concentrations of wintering water birds, such as the Siberian Crane, Oriental Stork, Swan Goose, Tundra Swan, etc. and highly endangered species (Chinese Water Deer, Finless Porpoise, etc.). Other services include recreation, tourism, research and education.
40. However, only three reserves are operational: the PLNNR, the NWNRR and the DPMBNR. Together these three reserves cover almost 50 per cent of the Poyang Lake basin. In all other cases the reserves are largely not operational and remain largely “paper” reserves. The limited operational capacity to manage wetland PAs and limited institutional capacity to manage a consolidated wetland PA system in the province has contributed to the fragmented nature of the management of the wetland PA system. Meanwhile, rapid social and economic development coupled with an increase in anthropogenic activities such as pollution and the growing effects of climate variability and change have contributed to the general degradation and fragmentation of wetland habitats in the province. If this continues the ecological integrity of the wetlands and their eco-services both inside and outside of the official PAs are threatened. This is likely to have a negative effect on socio-economic growth in the long-term.
41. The project responds to these barriers by establishing a provincial level management framework for wetland PAs in Jiangxi Province, based on comprehensive wetland PA management plans and actions at six demonstration sites (PLNNR, NWNRR and DPMBNR and three county PAs), that can be subsequently replicated in other wetland PAs. Moreover, the project was designed to establish synergies with the China Biodiversity Partnership and Framework for Action (hereafter the 6+1 programme), in particular two projects working on

¹² The PMO confirmed 3 new nature reserves have been created since the project started operation.

wetland restoration in Anhui and Hubei provinces, in the interests, “ to coordinate efforts, generate economies of scale, and ramp up project results to impact a substantially larger geographic area” of the middle reaches of the Yangtze River basin.¹³

2.2 Project description

42. A summary of the project is provided in Box 2, followed by maps showing the project’s main intervention areas in Jiangxi Province.

Box 2. Project summary

GEF Project ID: 4662.

FAO Project ID: GCP/CPR/052/GFF No. 613305

GEF 5 focal area(s): BD-1: improve sustainability of protected area systems.

FAO Strategic Objectives (2019): SO2: make agriculture, forestry and fisheries more sustainable;

CPF 2016-2020: Priority areas 1 and 4: Fostering sustainable and climate resilient agricultural development and facilitating China’s regional and international agriculture cooperation.

Total budget: USD 31 981 000

Total co-funding allocation: USD 26 692 000 broken down as follows: 1) USD 26 230 000 in-kind and cash from the Jiangxi Forestry and Grassland Administration (JFGA), the PLNNR, the Nanji NNR, the Duchang NR, and local governments; 2) USD 142 000 from the International Crane Foundation; and 3) USD 180 200 from FAO in cash after an officially agreed revision of the budget in 2016.

GEF allocation / disbursed to 31 March 2020: USD 5 108 800 / USD 1 094 696 (21.4%);

Date of CEO endorsement: 05 September 2014.

Entry of duty (start date): 03 January 2017 (receipt of first instalment was on 07 April 2017).

Implementation end date: 02 January 2022 (actual date is 06 April 2022).

Executing agency: Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve, under the Jiangxi Forestry and Grassland Department (which forms part of the Provincial Department of the Ministry of Natural Resources).

Implementation modality: Indirect execution through an Execution Agreement (EA), which establishes the Jiangxi Province Finance Department as the “Recipient” and “JxFoD” as the executing agency. FAO is required by the EA to support the project management office (PMO) in PLNNR implement the project under the authority of a Project Steering Committee (PSC)

Country and geographic locations: China - national project operating in Jiangxi province.

Protected Areas/pilot sites: Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve, the Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve, and the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve.

Project’s environmental objective (goal): to contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of globally significant wetland biodiversity in Jiangxi Province.

¹³ Although the 6+1 programme has since ended in 2019, the provincial authorities continue to implement these projects.

Project’s development objective: to catalyse the management effectiveness of Jiangxi’s wetland protected area system to conserve globally important biological diversity.

Project components (outcomes): 1) Improved and consolidated wetland PA system within the larger landscape context in Jiangxi Province; 2) Wetland PA Management Capacity is strengthened at selected demonstration sites) will pilot wetland management models, best practices, and strengthened capacities at three demonstration wetland reserve sites, the results of which will guide the formulation of management strategies and guidelines for numerous other wetland PAs in Jiangxi province; 3) Institutional & stakeholder capacities to manage consolidated wetland PA system in Jiangxi Province.

Main beneficiaries: Staff of the Jiangxi Forestry and Grassland Department (JxFoD);

Members of Provincial level bodies such as the Jiangxi Province Wetland Protected Areas Coordination Committee, the People’s Congress of Jiangxi, the Provincial Development and Reform Commission, and the Mountain-River-Lake Office; staff of the three targeted wetland Nature Reserves; Staff of the Municipal Forestry Bureaus and County People’s Governments; Local communities around the target NRs; and, indirectly other provincial forestry and grassland departments managing wetland nature reserves.

Key technical partners: International Crane Foundation and FAO

Project status: implementation is behind schedule, physically and in terms of expenditure due to start-up delays. Coronavirus pandemic is on-going disrupting group activities and trainings. Major floods are affecting the province at time of writing (July 2020) and likely to affect operations in the coming months.

Figure 1: Map of China showing the location of Jiangxi Province



Source: PMO

Figure 2: Map of the project's intervention area in Jiangxi Province

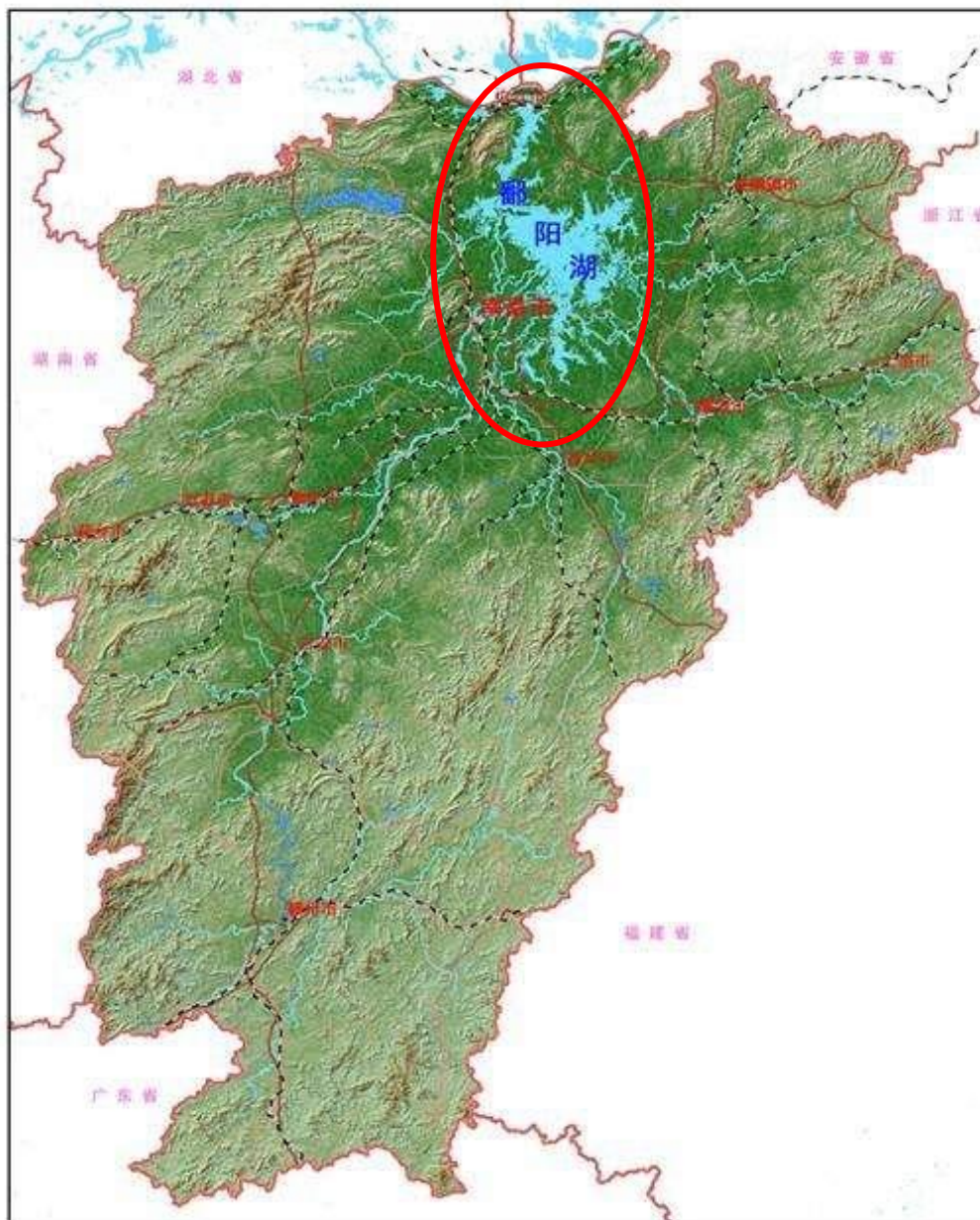
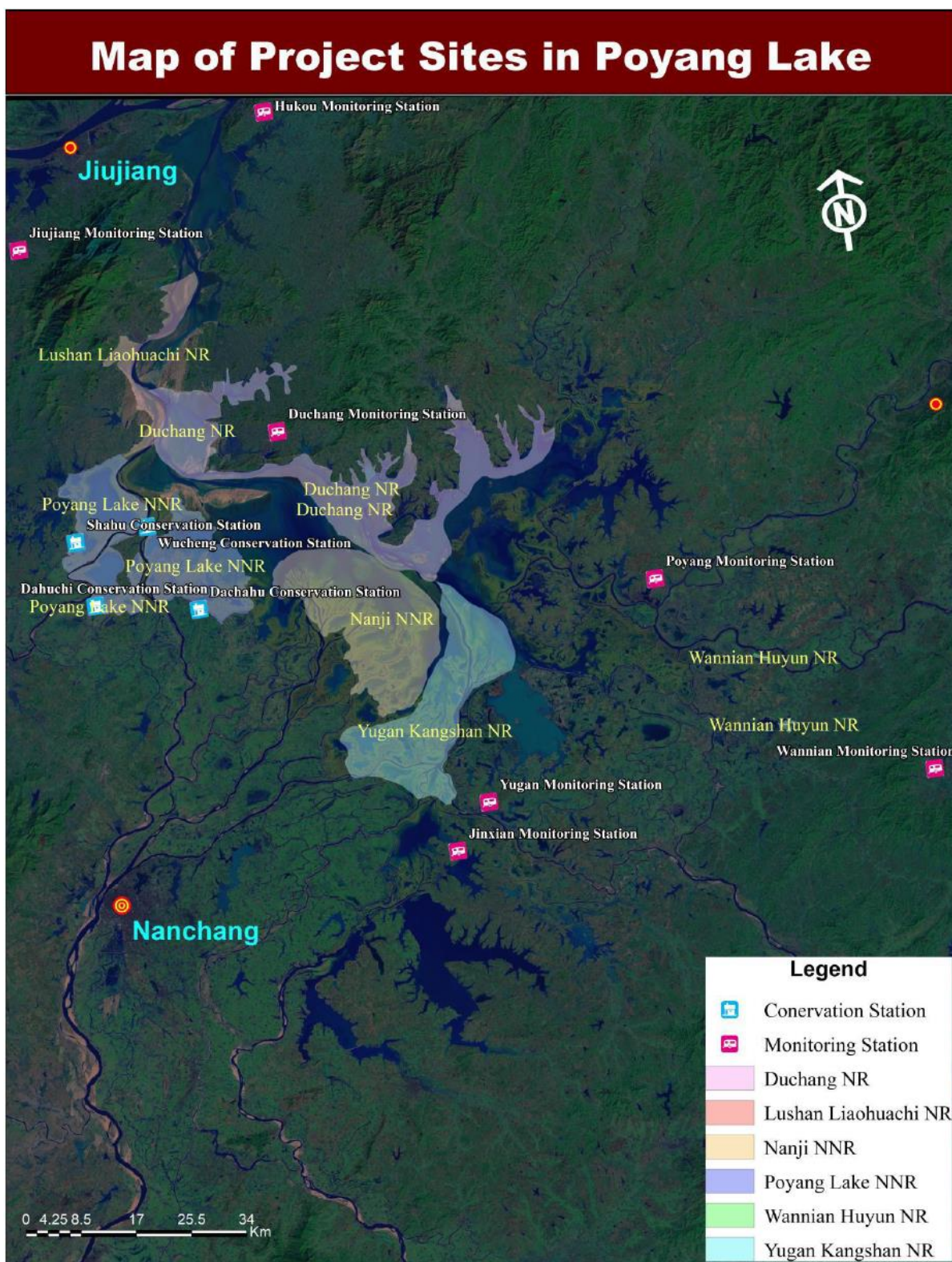


Figure 3: Map of the 6 project sites in the Poyang Lake region, Jiangxi Province



Source: PMO

3 Theory of change

43. In the absence of a ToC in the Prodoc, the MTR team proceeded to construct its interpretation of the ToC in coordination with FAO and PMO officials. To achieve this the first step concentrated producing a flow diagram starting with the project's intended impact (after its closure), taking into account the project's outcomes, objective and goal (see Box 2). The MTR found the project's main impact focuses on catalysing change in the way China's wetland protected areas are planned and managed. Following participatory analysis with FAO-CN, the LTO and the PMO, the MTR team adopted the following expected impact:
- (i) *Adoption of similar management approaches in other provinces that have wetland PA systems.* The main indicator to assess this impact should be the number of wetland PA systems adopting the Jiangxi management and planning model to at least 2030¹⁴;
 - (ii) *Increase in the conservation and restoration of wetland habitats for globally important biological diversity in China.* The increase in improved management approaches to wetlands in Jiangxi and other provinces is expected to impact positively on the protection of globally important biodiversity for future generations. The main indicators to track this impact should be, (i) the number of hectares of wetlands protecting globally important biodiversity per annum to at least 2030; and (ii) the number of species of flora and fauna removed from the Red List managed by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to 2030;
 - (iii) *Growth in ecological civilisation as societal and institutional awareness increases on the importance wetland ecological goods and services to sustain development.* In this case, the project's contribution to increasing knowledge on the economic, social and environmental benefits of wetland management is seen as the main facilitatory factor in catalysing greater ecological civilisation. The main indicator to monitor this impact should centre on the number of educational establishments that incorporate wetland education in their curriculum per annum to 2030.
44. The second step, linked the expected wider outcomes (end results of the project's intervention) to the above impacts. These were identified from the list of expected project outcomes provided in the Prodoc (p. 54). A similar exercise deciphered the expected outcomes considered to be immediate project outcomes (initial results) resulting as "effects" of project outputs. Finally, the MTR team identified the project's activities and linked them to the Prodoc's main outputs listed in the Prodoc (Section 3.2). Cross-cutting priorities were also included in the ToC to emphasise the importance of gender equality, social inclusion, good governance in securing and sustaining change vis-à-vis wetland restoration and biodiversity conservation in China. Finally, main assumptions were included to secure change.
45. In general, participants in the finalisation of the ToC enjoyed the exercise as a means to clarify the project's "vision and mission", which includes its relationship within the UNDP's 6+1 programme mentioned above. The final version of the ToC can be found in Appendix 9.

¹⁴ The year 2030 was selected to coincide with China's commitments under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

4 Key findings and MTR questions

4.1 Relevance

MTR question 1 – Are the project outcomes congruent with current country priorities, GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework and the needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries?

Finding 1. The project's objectives are more relevant today than when the project was identified thanks to the State Council's decision in 2016 to amplify the country's commitment to protecting wetland PAs by including their restoration and adopting system approaches in their management. The project's advocacy for a strategy to apply effective wetland PA system management (component 1) and strengthen internal wetland PA management capacity drawing on lessons and good practices from previous projects, in particular the application of co-management, (component 2) align closely with the provincial government's commitment to apply this decision. Furthermore, there remains an urgent need to improve data and information on wetland habitats and its biodiversity to support informed decision-making on coordinated responses to conserving and sustainably using the ecological services of wetlands (component 3). However, by anchoring the project in JxFoD's divisional unit responsible for the PLNNR, the project has limited access to decision-makers at the provincial (and national) government level to lobby for policy, legal and regulatory reforms to mainstream wetland management in sector development planning to promote sustainable development and address the threats mentioned in the Prodoc and which are exacerbated by land-use changes, pollution, sedimentation, etc. This shortcoming has been further impaired by major institutional reforms in 2017-2018, which has resulted in, among others, the decision to end specific coordination mechanisms such as the proposed JPWPACC for wetland PAs systems (output 1.3), which means changes are required to the training foreseen to develop the JPWPACC (output 3.2), as well as some specific outputs, such as finding a replacement to the ecological health index (output 2.4), which is not recognised in China. Under these circumstances, the MTR found certain aspects of the project require updating.

Finding 2: The project's design is strong in terms of complying with GEF5 and FAO objectives and priorities relating to the conservation of wetland biodiversity and emphasises the importance of developing synergies with other projects, in particular the 6+1 programme being implemented with the support of UNDP, in which project 052 is directly participating. Nevertheless, synergies with GEF5 projects that were being identified and designed in the same period as project 052 appear to have been overlooked and there is a lack resources to support key activities with local communities to develop alternative livelihoods as a means to reducing their dependency on aquaculture, fishing and other wetland goods and services.

4.1.1 Strategic relevance of the project's expected outcomes (components 1-3)

46. The project's objective continues to be highly relevant to the national government's commitment to conserve biodiversity and step up ecological civilisation. Since the project's endorsement in 2014, this has been most clearly demonstrated by the following policies, strategies and plans:

- The National Wetland Conservation Action Plan was issued by the then Ministry of Environment Protection in 2000, which led to the launch of the National Wetland Conservation Programme 2002-2030, designed to establish 713 wetland reserves and conservation sites (includes the wetland reserves prioritised by project 052);
- The application of National Wetland Conservation Programme Implementation Plans 2005-2010 and 2011-2015. In 2016 the State Council issued the National Wetland Conservation and Restoration System Plan 2016-2020. The 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020), is supporting the implementation of this plan and marks an important move to system-based management of wetlands in which wetland restoration, management and monitoring form an integral part. This has been echoed in the 13th Five-year Plan for Jiangxi Province, which cites the management and restoration of wetlands in the Poyang Lake region as a priority¹⁵;
- The National Biodiversity Strategy Conservation and Action Plan 2011-2030 (NBCSAP), which centres on protecting the country's biodiversity under China's Biodiversity Partnership and Action Framework. Among the country's priorities is biodiversity conservation in the Poyang Lake region. Other priorities aligned with project 052 include the improvement of the policy and legal system to enhance biodiversity conservation and its sustainable use, the integration of biodiversity conservation into sectoral and regional planning (includes provincial planning), enhancing biodiversity monitoring and evaluation and establishing participatory mechanisms and partnerships, which in the case of project 052 concerns the establishment of wetland co-management approaches with civil society¹⁶;
- The promulgation of Management Rules for Wetland Protection in 2013, which calls for, among others, the establishment of wetland management master plans and lists human activities that are prohibited in wetland areas, including damming, draining, land reclamation, grazing, fishing and mining of wetland habitats;
- The integration of the project in the above-mentioned 6+1 wildlife conservation framework programme of the National Forestry and Grasslands Administration (NFGA) which through technical support from UNDP's aims at establishing a

¹⁵ IUCN Country Report: The People's Republic of China, by Line Yanmei and Chen Yue, 02 October, 2014.

¹⁶ FAOLEX Database, summary of the NBCSAP 2011-2030, 17 September 2010,

national coordination mechanism on biodiversity conservation, which includes biodiversity conservation in priority wetland reserves such as the PLNNR¹⁷;

- President Xi Jinping's personal call in November 2019 to intensify the development of an ecological civilisation in China, based on the ancient Chinese concept of man living in harmony with nature,¹⁸ together with his personal support to push through the Draft Law of the Protection of the Yangtze River Basin, which includes the Poyang Lake basin. The Draft Law was submitted for its first reading in January 2020¹⁹;
- A White Paper to improve the law on wetland management was released on Wetland Day in 2019 by the National Forestry and Grasslands Administration (NFGA). The NFGA is currently formulating the Wetland Environmental Protection Law and aims to send it to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress for review in the coming months; and
- The introduction of new ordinances and prohibition orders, which includes the Jiangxi Wetland Protection Ordinance and a 10-year fishing ban in the Yangtze River basin from January 2021.

47. The project's specific focus on strengthening the institutional, policy and regulatory framework on wetland PA management in Jiangxi Province was also found to be highly relevant and justified. For example, the majority of stakeholders interviewed stated there is a high level of recognition and acceptance in Jiangxi Province that the barriers of fragmentation of wetland PA management, limited capacity to manage wetland PAs and the limited institutional capacity to manage wetland PAs (as a system) continue to be major challenges that need to be addressed before ecological integrity and ecosystem services of wetland habitats can be restored in the province and in the Poyang Lake region in particular.

48. The project's emphasis on improving coordination at the provincial level to address these barriers was also found to be highly pertinent. For example, this is evident in the gap analysis conducted in 2018-2019 and final report presented in early 2020, which stated the importance of strengthening coordinated planning, management and monitoring capacity in Jiangxi Province. Interviews with stakeholders also confirmed the employment of national consultants who are simultaneously working on national and provincial policy and legal reforms for wetlands in Jiangxi Province also ensures coordination between

¹⁷ This programme is not mentioned in the Prodoc under the section "*coordination with other GEF projects in China*", but is briefly mentioned under "Replicability" where scaling-up and replication of project activities at the national level is foreseen under the "*national SFA Wetland Programme UNDP-GEF project*" (p.58).

¹⁸ In an article written by President Xi Jinping in the English Edition of the QiuShi Journal he calls for recognising the importance of stepping up development of an ecological civilisation in line with China's past as far back as the Qin and Han dynasties (221 BC to 220 AD) when, "*there were separate officers responsible for forests, rivers, shorelines, gardens, and farmlands, and the warden system in fact carried on all the way to the Qing Dynasty were separate officers responsible for forests, rivers, shorelines, gardens, and farmlands, and the warden system in fact carried on all the way to the Qing Dynasty*". 17 September 2019, p.1.

¹⁹ Global Water Partnership, China, 01 February 2020.

project and national developments, such as the elaboration of the above-mentioned White Paper and review of the National Wetland Management Strategy.

49. However, the MTR identified some shortcomings in the project design (see 4.5.1), that have a bearing on its strategic relevance. In particular, the management structure established in the Prodoc (p. 16-17) anchors the project's PSC and PMO within the PLNNR with no cross-sector representation. Although, the MTR found this is appropriate to conduct project activities associated with capacity building and educational outreach at the PA level, (components 2 and 3) the adoption of the National Wetland Conservation and Restoration System Plan in 2016 calls for the broadening of the scope of wetland management beyond its boundaries. Thus, the strategic activities and outputs of the project (under component 1 and the information system proposed under component 3) requires closer coordination and cooperation with key development sectors in order to achieve coordinated management responses designed to restore, conserve and sustainably use the wetland ecosystem and its functions. Indeed, several interviewees confirmed one of the main challenges at the present time is the application of the ecological "red line" and effective law enforcement in order to prevent land-use changes from wetlands to aquaculture, agriculture, housing, etc.
50. Another shortcoming affecting the project's strategic relevance concerns the restructuring of the Poyang Lake Wetland Management Coordination Committee (PLWMCC) into the Jiangxi Province Wetland Protected Areas Coordination Committee (JPWPACC). This proposal in the Prodoc is no longer possible following major institutional reforms in 2017-2018, which calls for the ending of specific management committees, on the grounds too many coordination committees are likely to be counterproductive and costly to maintain. Instead, the national government prefers the establishment of cross-sector coordination mechanisms at the provincial, municipal and county levels. As a result, the project is not aligned with current institutional developments that require it to work closely with the provincial government where it can promote the benefits of integrating wetland management and restoration into the provincial and sector development planning. Moreover, the Prodoc refers to the project assuming the role of "secretariat" to the PSC to coordinate the implementation of project activities, which should be agreed with the PLWMCC/JPWPACC (p. 72). However, there is no mention of the secretariat, or equivalent, that should be established with the authority needed to ensure all strategic decision-making reached at the provincial level is implemented in a coordinated manner to the benefit of wetland PAs and their local communities.
51. Also, significant to the project's strategic relevance concerns the application of the ecological health index (EHI) to inform all sectors on the trend in ecological health and biodiversity levels in wetland PAs systems (output 2.4 in the Prodoc). This monitoring method has not been officially adopted and cannot, therefore, be replicated. Coincidentally, the MTR found a similar problem in the GEF5-funded project GCP/CPR/057/GFF, which is being implemented in Yunnan Province and Chongqing

Municipality.²⁰ In this case, the Prodoc called for the creation of the “green-line scorecard” to be applied to monitor the ecological health and biodiversity of pilot rivers, but which has been dropped by the Ministry of Water Resources (MWR) and replaced by pre-existing **river/lake health assessments (R/LHA)**, which have been updated with the project’s support to include new modules that mainstream ecological flow analysis and biodiversity conservation. Although the application of these new R/LHAs appear to be applicable to replace the EHI in project 052, the MTR found that there are no provisions in the Prodoc under the section, “*coordination with other GEF Projects in China*” for synergies with project 057, which started operations just one day before project 052 in September 2016.

52. Finally, the MTR observes that the Prodoc recognises the importance of wetland management in supporting mitigation and adaptation to climate change (component 2, output 2.1). However, the Prodoc provides no information on the important role wetlands play in storing carbon and how this could be exploited through carbon trading schemes such as emission trading schemes (ETS). This is surprising taking into account the wetland areas to be restored around the Poyang Lake region appear to offer an opportunity to raise carbon offset payments from industry in Jiangxi Province and the Yangtze River Economic Belt (YREB) that could be used to fund project lead initiatives for which there is little or no information in the Prodoc, such as to support alternative livelihoods under output 2.3. Furthermore, this corresponds with GEF5’s objective 5 (promote conservation and enhancement of carbon stocks), which is supporting projects that include carbon sequestration, such as project GCP/CPR/056/GFF, which was also launched in September 2016.²¹

4.1.2. Alignment with GEF strategic priorities

53. The MTR confirms the project remains fully consistent with GEF5’s first objective (BD-1): *improve sustainability of protected area systems* and continues to contribute to outcome 1.1: *Improved management effectiveness of existing and new PAs*, which has been enhanced further by the national and provincial commitments to conserve and restore the wetland PA system in Jiangxi Province, promote green growth and step up ecological civilisation. Indeed, these developments are designed to reduce the risks of undermining the capacity of wetland ecosystems to function and provide the goods and services that green economic growth will need to sustain itself over the long-term.
54. In addition, the MTR found that through the government’s commitment to wetland conservation and restoration, the project is also supportive of BD-2 of GEF5: *mainstream biodiversity conservation and sustainable use into production landscapes/seascapes and sectors*. For example, the project contributes to reducing the negative impact that productive sectors, such as agriculture, mining, housing and industry have on wetland

²⁰ The MTR lead consultant conducted the MTR of project 057 earlier in 2020.

²¹ The MTR lead consultant conducted the MTR of project 056 prior to this MTR in 2020.

biodiversity in Jiangxi Province and on communicating the importance of preserving the wetland ecosystem and its services to help sustain these sectors.

4.1.3. *Alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, FAO's Strategic Objectives and Country Programming Framework 2016-2020.*

55. The MTR found the project responds directly to Sustainable Development Goal 15 (SDG-15): *"Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss"* and in particular Target 15.1: *By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements"*. and Target 15.5: *"Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species"*.
56. In terms of the project's alignment with FAO's five Strategic Objectives (SO) under the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the MTR found the project continues to align with SO-2: *Increase and improve provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner*. More specifically, it supports the achievement of two of the four outcomes identified to meet this objective, namely: outcome 1: *producers and natural resource managers adopt practices that increase and improve the provision of goods and services in agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner*; and outcome 2: *Stakeholders in member countries strengthen governance – the laws, policies and institutions that are needed to support producers in the transition to sustainable agricultural systems*.²²
57. Furthermore, the MTR found the project is consistent with the latest Country Planning Framework (CPF) 2016-2020.²³ Priority Area 1: *"Fostering sustainable and climate resilient agricultural development"*, Outcome 1: *China aims to ensure early positive results in sustainable agriculture development by 2020 and notable progress in sustainable agriculture development by 2030* and Output 1.2: *"Biodiversity conservation and development interventions supported to revitalize key forest, water and wetland agro-ecosystems in the country"*.²⁴

²² The Strategic Objectives of FAO, (reviewed strategic framework 2010-2019), 2019.

²³ The Prodoc was designed to be consistent with Priority 4 of the previous CPF 2012-2015: *"Promoting sustainable agro-ecological development and agricultural heritage conservation and utilization"*, in particular Outcome 2: *"Strengthened capacities for management and protection of agro-biodiversity, ecological and plant and animal genetic resources"* and Output 4.2.1: *"Institutional and capacity development measures provided to develop and reinforce Government plans, policies, and legislative frameworks concerning biodiversity, ecological conservation, environmental protection, sustainable land use and forest tenure"*

²⁴ CPF 2016-2020, p. 4-5.

4.1.4 *Complementarity with existing interventions being implemented by UN agencies, or funded by international donors and non-government organisations*

58. The Prodoc dedicates a specific sub section to incorporating lessons learned from previous projects and coordination with ongoing projects that receive support (cash and/or in kind) from government, non-government and international sources. At the government level and non-government levels the project's relevance is enhanced by support from:

- The Office of the State Council Three Gorges Project to cover the costs of hydrological and water quality study in Poyang Lake region, the establishment of ecological monitoring databases, research on ecosystem functions and biodiversity protection measures, and to strengthen the capacity of the PLNNR, NNNR and the NWNRR to carry out bird and habitat protection, wetland protection and restoration, and rare species rescue and breeding;
- The NDRC to cover the costs associated with the construction of PA infrastructure and facilities, water bird and habitat conservation activities, wetland restoration; and public education;
- The JxFoD to cover operating costs of its Wetland Protection and Management Office, the management offices of the PLNNR, the NWNRR and the DPNR, the construction of up to 7 new Field Stations for the PLNNR, and an annual conservation awards program for wintering migratory birds and wetland protection;
- The International Crane Foundation (ICF) to cover the cost of the baseline survey of biodiversity and ecological health of the wetlands ecosystem of Poyang Lake, monitoring of the number, distribution and dynamic situation of the Poyang Lake wintering migratory bird populations and development of an online version of existing databases on ecological variables in the Poyang Lake region. The aim is to incorporate the ICF's scientific research and findings into project 052's wetland PA training programme.

59. The project's relevance is also enhanced by both incorporating lessons learned from previous GEF-funded projects and alignment with ongoing GEF-funded projects in China. The Prodoc specifically mentions the following:

- UNDP/GEF: China Biodiversity Partnership and Framework for Action - Mainstreams of Life Programme (CBPF-MSL), which includes the national programme: "*Wetland PA System Strengthening for Biodiversity Conservation*" (2012-2018). This project focuses on strengthening the wetland PA sub-system through a national project and six provincial level projects in different provinces, including Jiangxi Province (through project 052).²⁵ The programme, hereafter referred to as the "6+1 Programme",

²⁵ The six targets areas are: 1) the Altai mountains and wetland landscape (Xinjiang); 2) Daxing'anling forest and wetland Landscape (Heilongjiang and Inner Mongolia); 3) Hainan mangrove PAs (Hainan); 4-6) the PA clusters around three lakes along the Yangtze River: Honghu (Hubei), Poyang (Jiangxi) and Shengjinhu (Anhui).

addresses the management needs and information gaps of different wetland types. In coordination with the two other projects along the Yangtze River, project 052 will support the 6+1 Programme in areas such as: strengthening of provincial-level standards, regulations and management frameworks for wetland PAs (component 1), mainstreaming of wetland PA objectives into the Poyang Lake ecological economic zone plan (component 2) and development of spatial and non-spatial databases and management tools on wetlands in Jiangxi Province (component 3).

- UNEP/GEF: Siberian Crane Wetland Project 2003-2009 (SCWP), which covered 16 key wetland sites in China, Iran, Kazakhstan and Russia. In China this included the Poyang Lake where wetland reserves were upgraded and a database established on over 70 bird species. The lessons learned from this project have been addressed in the design of project 052. For example, due to the SCWP project 052 will promote hydrological management in the Poyang Lake region that ensures the feeding needs of migrating birds such as the Siberian Crane are not compromised by an increase/decrease of more than 50 cm in water levels. In addition, project 052 draws on the co-management approach developed by the SCWP to establish effective wetland management and monitoring, the need to establish a communication strategy and the importance of conducting site visits to the other wetland sites (in the 6+1 Programme);
- IBRD/GEF: China Nature Reserves Management Project 1995-2002, which included strengthening the management capacity within the PLNNR. This project was instrumental in the decision to locate the PMO/PSC in the PLNNR in order to build on some its main achievements, which included the initiation of co-management with local communities, infrastructure developments, installation of monitoring stations (to monitor the EHI), promoting education and improving database management.

60. In addition, the Prodoc cited collaboration with other relevant projects, among others:

- The WWF: The Pride Programme of Rare Species. Project 052 draws on its lessons learned and good practices relating to wetland PA management in Jiangxi Province;
- The Nanjing Institute of Geography and Limnology and the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Project 052 will draw on the main findings of the long-term monitoring that is being conducted with PLNNR on the impact of the Three Gorges Project on water environmental change processes, on wetland ecosystem structure and function, and on basin-wide comprehensive management in the Poyang Lake region;
- The Jiangxi Department for Water Resources: the Poyang Lake Basic Geographic Survey Project. Project 052 will use the data collected from the geographic and plant survey that will be carried out in an area of 5,000 sq. km. in the Poyang Lake region and which will be used to support geographical database development;
- The GiZ/Sino-German cooperation platform on the conservation of highly carbon-storing and species-rich ecosystems. Project 052 will draw on the results

and lessons learned generated from enhancing wetland resilience to climate change in the NNNR (Output 2.1);

- The GiZ project on Wetland Biodiversity Conservation in China. Project 052 will draw on the training programme adopted for local partners (provincial and local staff of wetland PAs) to establish the integrated ecosystem approach, ecosystem assessment and modelling, tools and approaches to establishing integrated ecosystem management (including geographical Information systems), etc.

61. Overall, the MTR found the Prodoc provides evidence of a comprehensive attempt to design project 052 on ongoing initiatives and previous project experiences, lessons learned and good practices. Nonetheless, as stated in sub section 4.1.1 above, project 052 faces considerable challenges in brokering the coordination and complementarity it will need to secure the reforms and resources that guarantee effective wetland PA system management in Jiangxi Province. As a result, the MTR believes the current location of the project within a division of the PFGD, coupled with a lack of clarity concerning the secretariat, or similar mechanism, charged with implementing decision-making (and reforms) at the provincial level will need to be addressed by all main stakeholders in the project.

Furthermore, the MTR found the Prodoc makes no mention of coordination with relevant FAO/GEF5 projects, such as project 057, which includes wetland restoration and the application of river health assessments. Similarly, UNDP/GEF-6 is supporting MEE implement *China's Protected Area Reform (C-PAR) for Conserving Globally Significant Biodiversity*, (2016-2022), but this project has also not been mentioned in the Prodoc. In this particular case, the project is designed to establish an effective National Park (NP) System through protected area reform and institutional innovation, increasing coverage of protected areas and improving effectiveness of PA management for conservation of globally significant biodiversity, which includes wetland PAs in Sichuan Province.²⁶

4.2 Effectiveness

MTR question 2 – To what extent has the project delivered on its outputs, outcomes and objectives?

Finding 3: The project has successfully started implementation of all its main activities under component 1 and has reached some significant milestones, in particular the drafting of the JPWPAMS, which is not only the first ever strategy for the wetlands PA system in Jiangxi

²⁶ The project has three components, a) National Park System Establishment, b) Provincial level National Park System strengthening at three NP pilot sites (Three-River Source NP, the Giant Panda NP, and the Xianju NP) and, c) Programme coordination and knowledge management. Five "child" projects supporting the development of the PA system are: 1) Enhancing conservation of globally significant biodiversity through PA system strengthening in Gansu, 2) Strengthening the PA system in the Qilian Mountains-Qinghai Lake landscape, 3) Strengthening Marine Protected Areas in SE China to conserve globally significant coastal biodiversity, 4) Expanding the coverage and strengthening the management of wetland protected areas in Sichuan Province, and 5) Building Sustainability into PA reforms to Conserve Globally significant Biodiversity in China.

province, but also one that has been produced in a participatory manner without the establishment of the JPWPACC. However, herein lies one of the major challenges facing the project and the provincial government, because instead of fully integrating the project in the provincial development planning process, it relies on the good will of the participants to return to their respective line agencies and authorities and implement change. Thus, the risk is that key sectors that are required to meet sector targets relating to agriculture, housing, public infrastructure, industrial development, etc. are likely to take precedence over the JPWPAMS, agreements on establishing policy, legal and regulatory reforms, coordinated development of the JWRIMS, etc. Furthermore, delays in the implementation of key activities such as cross-sector capacity building, or the launch of the JWRIMS, indicate the project is unlikely to achieve informed and coordinated decision-making between provincial line agencies before the project's closure in April 2022. In addition, the MTR found the project has overlooked the importance of strengthening intra-institutional coordination and collaboration, especially in areas such as spatial/land-use planning, which is far more achievable since the institutional reforms of 2017-2018 which led to the amalgamation of the Ministry of Land Resources into the MNR.

Finding 4: The strengthening of the internal management capacity of the three main demonstration PAs (PLNNR, NWNNR and DPMBNR) and 3 county-level nature reserves (Yugan, Wannian and Lushan NRs) under component 2 has been instrumental in bringing the three main demonstration PAs together to recognize they are no longer working in separate PAs. Instead, there seems to be a clearer understanding and commitment to collectively be responsible for the management of the Poyang Lake's ecosystem (PWEPA). This has been aided by some important achievements; namely the elaboration of coordinated management plans for all three main PAs, which together with capacity building and emphasis on co-management with local communities (also emphasised in the management plans for the 3 county NRs), has facilitated the development of a management framework for the PWEPA for the first time.

Finding 5: The establishment of the JWRIMS under component 3 has not yet been tested and signifies it is unlikely it will be able to provide consolidated data to support informed decision-making before the project closes in 2022. Furthermore, it remains unclear which institution will take-over the ownership of the JWRIMS to guarantee its operation and enforce effective cross-sector coordination on data collection, validation, processing and use.

62. Overall, the MTR found the project's physical advance stood at around 40 per cent completion at the start of 2020, which is slightly less than the 50 per cent figure estimated in the PMO's self-evaluation report produced in March 2020. Following completion of the Results Matrix exercise in Appendix 4, the MTR found the project is in most cases making satisfactory, or moderately satisfactory progress in meeting its planned outputs and outcomes. However, implementation progress is slower than planned and progress in meeting targets and outcomes under components 1 and 3 was found to be less advanced and more challenging than under component 2.

63. Slower progress than planned is due to two main factors. First, start-up delays contributed to commencing operations later than planned in 2017. This was exacerbated by major institutional reforms that took place in 2017-2018, which not only caused delays in project implementation, but also governance changes that no longer make it viable to formalise the transition of the Poyang Lake Wetland Management Coordination Committee (PLWMCC) into the Jiangxi Province Wetland Protected Areas Coordination Committee (JPWPACC) as foreseen under component 1 of the Prodoc (see also sub section 4.1.1). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has also made it more difficult for project staff, national consultants and provincial stakeholders to carry project activities and group trainings in 2020 and major floods in Jiangxi Province in June 2020 are likely to result in the provincial authorities switching time and resources to rehabilitation efforts in the post-flood phase.
64. Second, some activities, in particular the establishment of a reliable information and data system planned under component 3, appear to have overlooked not only the time and resources needed before decision-makers will be in a position to use the information system to guide cost-effective wetland PA management decisions, but the importance of close coordination with the national authorities (especially NFGA) regarding its acceptance and replication. Under these circumstances, the indications are the project faces the dilemma of promoting provincial-based wetland PA system management without the coordination mechanism clearly defined at the provincial level and the institutional linkages it needs to deliver change (in line with the ToC) at the national level. Indeed, the MTR believes the project in its current format, based on an out-of-date Prodoc, is unlikely to meet all of its planned outcomes and objectives before closure in April 2022. Inadequate levels of coordination with the 6+1 Programme is also a contributory factor in this development. As such, the project's instrumental value in catalysing change in wetland management and advancing ecological civilisation in China may have decreased, despite a more favourable political climate since 2018 and, thus, needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

4.2.1 Achievement of project outputs and progress towards project outcomes under component 1 - Strengthened institutional, policy and regulatory frameworks for the implementation of SFM from national to local level, creating a basis for enhanced biodiversity conservation and carbon sequestration

65. Following completion of the Results Matrix in Appendix 4, the MTR found some outputs in the Prodoc do not fully correspond to the correct component and chose to rearrange them accordingly. The following sub section assesses only those outputs and outcomes it believes correspond directly to component 1. Overall, the MTR found the project has made mixed progress in meeting expected outputs and outcomes relating to component 1. One of the most positive achievements under component 1 concerns the gap analysis conducted in 2018, which the MTR found has been instrumental in raising awareness on the need for an integrated ecosystem approach to managing the PAs in Jiangxi Province,

in particular for the Poyang Lake ecosystem protected areas (PWEPA), identifying institutional capacity deficiencies and determining the specific interests and needs of key stakeholders, including those at the local level, to achieve the effective management of wetland PAs. Five key findings from the gap analysis identified by the MTR are, among others:

- Inadequate baseline data on both wetland biodiversity and habitats at the Poyang Lake region level. Data collection mainly focuses on species, despite the fact most of the species move around and depend upon the Poyang Lake ecosystem (as opposed to just the protected area) for food;
 - Cross-sector coordination is low at the provincial-level as well as at the inter-county level in the Poyang Lake region. As a result, government line agencies continue to apply sector-based approaches to planning and development that have produced negative environmental impacts on the wetlands' ecological functions and services and there are cases of overlaps in natural resources management throughout the Poyang Lake region;
 - The communication channels between the project's national consultants and sector agencies need strengthening in order to identify a suitable mechanism within the provincial government to take decisions on the application of the JPWPAMS in the forthcoming Five-Year Provincial Development Plan 2021-2025 and corresponding sector plans. Furthermore, the MTR found this will need to be supported by the establishment of a suitable secretariat (or similar body) that is responsible for implementing the decisions of the provincial government and overseeing coordinated planning, monitoring and implementation of wetland conservation and restoration activities at the county and inter-county levels;
 - The lack of clarity on the financial mechanism to support and sustain wetland conservation, restoration and monitoring;
 - Inadequate identification and up-scaling of good practices relating to wetland conservation, restoration and monitoring, the development of alternative livelihoods, the creation of certified wetland products, or the development of effective and dynamic educational tools to support school curriculum development and promote ecological civilisation.
66. The drafting of the JPWPAMS and accompanying Jiangxi Province Technical Standards and Guidelines for Wetland PAs (output 1.1) were completed and reviewed in 2019, second drafts were reviewed between January and April 2020 respectively and currently third drafts have been submitted and are under review to produce a final version for official approval later in 2020. The MTR found this is a major achievement taking into account the JPWPAMS represents the first attempt at establishing a strategic approach to conserving the wetland PAs as a system in Jiangxi Province. Furthermore, the strategy draws on the main findings of the gap analysis and has incorporated lessons learned highlighted in the Prodoc. For example, the strategy recognises the importance of engaging local communities and organisations in wetland conservation through co-management agreements.

67. Moreover, the project's decision to establish multi-stakeholder consultation workshops to facilitate cross-sector dialogue on the JPWPAMS, has established an alternative coordination mechanism to the JPWPACC, which has been ruled out following major institutional reforms at the central and provincial levels in 2017-2018. For example, the workshops have facilitated consensus on the adoption of 7 key measures and 17 sub-measures in the latest draft of the JPWPAMS. Furthermore, some proposals in the JPWPAMS have facilitated JxFoD's decision to adopt them in its provincial rules and regulations on the protection and conservation of wildlife. For example, interviews confirm there is now a ban in place on wildlife hunting and trade. Similarly, the Provincial Party Secretary and Vice Governor are reported to have endorsed measures to regulate birdwatching and photography so as to reduce their impact on wintering bird migrations.
68. However, the MTR found that the establishment of the project's workshops as an alternative to the JPWPACC, together with the PMO assuming the role of secretariat to oversee the implementation of decisions taken at these workshops, is mainly geared to delivering project outputs. As a result, a majority of interviewees expressed concerns the workshops do not have the political weight needed to ensure the implementation plan for the JPWPAMS is fully applied in time to ensure it is integrated in key planning documents, such as the Province's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), sector-based plans, project appraisals, etc. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic and major floods have made it very difficult to bring national consultants, sector representatives and wetland PA managers together to address these issues in 2020, which means it is unlikely the JPWPAMS will be approved until late 2020 at the earliest. Therefore, the identification and approval of the implementation plan for the JPWPAMS will not be possible until 2021. This situation demonstrates the need for a permanent solution to operationalising sector-based planning coordination and enhancing inter-county collaboration (technical and financial), given the implementation of the JPWPAMS will largely take place after the project's closure in April 2022.
69. A permanent solution is also needed to facilitate consensus on strengthening the policy, legal, regulatory and planning framework for wetland PA management in the province (output 1.4) and ensuring all reforms are coordinated with the 6+1 programme. So far, the project has carried out the study on the current policy, legal and regulatory framework in the province and a report has been submitted to the PSC on main findings, conclusions and recommendations. However, cross-sector consultation on this report, together with reports providing recommendations on how to strengthen provincial/local government and sector-based development planning, has also been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and major flooding in Jiangxi Province between June and end of July 2020. Similarly, proposals on integrating the protection of wetlands and birds in the education curriculum supported by education outreach activities have been identified, but decision-making on these proposals are also delayed due to the pandemic.

70. However, the MTR believes this may be an appropriate time for the PMO/PSC to reassess how the project can adopt a more effective and proactive role in bringing about the policy, legal, regulatory and planning reforms needed to secure effective and sustainable wetland PA management in Jiangxi Province. For example, the MTR found the Prodoc has not focused sufficient attention on strengthening coordination and collaboration at the intra-institutional level; namely within the provincial department of the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). In addition, the institutional reforms conducted in 2017-2018 offer new opportunities to collaborate more closely with other institutions that have been amalgamated into the MNR such as the Department of Land Resources, which is responsible for, among others, spatial/land-use planning, the development, utilisation and protection of China's natural resources, and surveying and mapping.
71. Indeed, the State Council's call for provincial governments to assume more autonomy on spatial/land-use planning represents an important entry point to engage the Department of Land Resources proactively in the PSC as a means to supporting the provincial government establish this autonomy through which the integration of wetland management is established as an integral part of the provincial land-use decision-making process.²⁷ Furthermore, the project is in a position to advocate this approach on basis of the economic valuation of wetland PA services, which was submitted for review in March 2020 (under output 1.4). The MTR found this study provides clear evidence that the economic value of wetland ecological services in Jiangxi Province is high and plays an important role in sustaining economic development in the province. For example, the study shows that total value of wetland flood control and water storage services represents 34.4 per cent (USD 240 m.) of the total economic value of wetlands in 2018, (CNY 4.88 billion, equivalent to around USD 697 m.).

4.2.2. Achievement of project outputs and progress towards project outcomes under component (outcome) 2 – wetland PA management capacity is strengthened at selected demonstration sites

72. The MTR found the project is making satisfactory progress in strengthening the internal capacity of the PLNNR, NWNNR and DPMBNR through the formulation of three management plans (under output 2.2), which together provide the province's first attempt to establish a coordinated management approach to the Poyang Lake wetland ecosystem (PWEPA). Although the review process of the proposed management plans has been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and, more recently due to major flooding in June-July 2020, the MTR found the formulation of these management plans as a joint exercise has been instrumental in developing a new understanding on the benefits of applying the ecosystem approach and, thus, address a key finding in the abovementioned gap analysis; namely the need to protect habitats rather than just the species, given the latter depend on the PWEPA rather than a PA to survive and reproduce.

²⁷ The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 12 March 2020.

As a result, the three management plans are demonstrating the benefits of conserving the PWEPA, as opposed to three individual PAs.

73. The MTR found the ecosystem approach has also facilitated the identification of the management framework proposed in the Prodoc to protect the PWEPA network of PAs over the long-term (under output 2.2). The MTR has been able to triangulate the following evidence to indicate the management framework proposed at the end of 2019 represents an important contribution to removing the fragmented management approach highlighted in the Prodoc as one of the main barriers to effective wetland PA management in the Poyang Lake region:

- The establishment of 7 new wetland PA field stations (under output 1.2) at strategic sites in adjacent areas to the PLNNR (5 stations) and NWNRR (2 stations), has demonstrated the importance of applying the management framework beyond the PA's demarcated boundaries in order to monitor and control encroachment, illegal and bad practices, threats to water quantity and quality, etc. all of which threaten the wetland habitats and the species that depend on the PWEPA. Indeed, the MTR found this action represents the first step to establishing a buffer-zone around the PWEPA, which is considered internationally as good practice to protect the ecological functions and services of wetlands;
- The identification of 3 county-level wetland PA management plans for Yugan, Wannian and Lushan NRs²⁸ have demonstrated the importance of not only expanding the management framework to cover a wider area of the PWEPA, but applying co-management approaches (output 2.3) to support, among others, the monitoring of migratory species, law enforcement and the restoration of wetland habitats. For example, 9 villages have signed co-management agreements and a further two are in the process of signature. In the case of the management plan for Lushan NR interviewees confirmed co-management has already started for the wetland bird surveys and the identification of ecological compensation agreements to support the transition to alternative livelihoods for households that are dependent on fishing, aquaculture, paddy farming in the wetlands, etc. Moreover, the MTR was informed that all three local governments are reported to have integrated the management and protection of their NRs into the local government planning process;
- The identification of cost-effective techniques to restore and rehabilitate the wetlands in the PLNNR and NWNRR (under output 2.1) have shown the management framework can adopt wetland restoration/rehabilitation techniques that also enhance its resilience to the effects of climate variability and

²⁸ The MTR understands the PMO opted for these NRs as better demonstrations than those identified in the Prodoc; namely:

Nan Lake Nature Reserve; Xieshan Grey Heron Reserve; and Kangshan Lake Area Migratory Bird Nature Reserve.

change. For example, the studies and pilot activities realised so far with the support of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) have shown how local grasses can support wetland restoration, conserve food sources for wetland birds and enhance resilience;

- The completion of a study on the impact of hydrological changes on wetlands in the PWEPA (under output 2.1) has increased awareness on the importance of establishing a management framework that engages the provincial department for water resources in coordinated responses to maintaining water level ceilings in the PWEPA to protect ecological flow rates, key food sources for migrating birds, etc.;
- The application of the management effectiveness tracking tool, or METT (under output 2.4) has enabled the PAs to assess their ecosystem management capacity and application of management tools such as measuring the ecological health of the PAs in the PWEPA. According to the PMO's self-evaluation report, the METT scores at the three main demonstration wetland PAs and 9 county-level wetland PAs in the PWEPA have all achieved an increase in their METT scores ranging from 2 to 19 points.

74. Nonetheless, interviews confirmed that the review of the management framework has been delayed in 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, major flooding and because most activities planned under component 2 are still being implemented. This is confirmed in the PMO's Self-evaluation report, where the majority of activities have estimated progress rates of between 30 and 80 per cent (averaging 57% overall for component 2). Furthermore, interviewees expressed concerns that despite progress in the identification of the wetland management plans and management framework for the PWEPA, more needs to be done to clarify the financial framework (foreseen under output 2.2) that will support their implementation and/or up-scaling over the long-term. This was confirmed in the above-mentioned gap analysis and remains an important sticking point that also highlights the need for the project to have greater access to decision-makers in the provincial government. In particular, the MTR identified the following gaps relating to the future funding of activities proposed by the project in the PWEPA network:

- Funding of the biodiversity and hydrological monitoring activities (including new equipment): the MTR believes the project has underestimated the costs associated with the establishment, operation and maintenance of biodiversity and hydrological monitoring networks. For example, the CAS confirmed it will take a minimum of three years to consolidate monitoring data on fish food levels, bird habitats, etc. before it can support informed decision-making. The CAS has agreed to provide USD 400 000 to support these monitoring activities, but the MTR did not find evidence to confirm how the monitoring programme will be funded over the long-term to ensure a highly qualified team of experts are able to oversee data collection (especially by locals), validation (including species identification), processing, quality control and use (including modelling);

- Funding of rewards and bonuses in cash (under output 2.3) to local fishermen and farmers who support bird count monitoring and who register an increase in the number of birds and species in their lakes and wetlands each winter season. Although these cash payments have stimulated attitudinal change, the MTR has reservations that this form of payments can be sustainable unless a clear financial mechanism is in place to fund them over the long-term;
 - Funding of the ecological compensation scheme to fishermen and farmers who comply with new standards and regulations relating to the management of wetlands in the PWEPA (under output 1.4): the MTR found the scheme has been integrated into the Jiangxi Wetland Protection Ordinance. However, funding of eco-compensation relies heavily on provincial government funding, (CYN 137 m. (USD 1.9 m.) paid to June 2020) to compensate farmers for land restored and/or rehabilitated to natural wetlands (36 000 ha to date). The MTR found this form of funding is likely to be unsustainable, or scaled back soon after project closure, which means alternative funding mechanisms need to be identified to help cover this activity over the medium to long-term. For example, the MTR found little attention has been given to identifying the application of a specific levy/tariff, a payment for ecological services scheme (PES), or promote carbon trading schemes (taking into account large wetlands store sufficient carbon to make emission trading schemes a viable option);
 - Funding of the village coordination committees that will oversee the implementation of the co-management plans operating in the PWEPA: the MTR found little information on how these committees will be funded to apply these plans and report on achievements and challenges;
 - Funding of alternative livelihoods programme (under output 2.3): the MTR found that despite progress in identifying this programme and progress in establishing pilot ecotourism activities in two villages in the NWNRR, most candidates selected to participate in this programme have lost interest. The MTR found that a major reason concerns how this programme will be funded. For example, the project has no budget allocated to fund key activities, such as carrying out market and commercial studies, producing business plans, advancing credit facilities, operation of a business management help-line, training on quality control, etc.
75. In addition, the MTR found a corresponding lack of promotion of income generating activities designed to help self-fund wetland management activities and, thus, reduce dependency on government funding over the medium to long-term. Discussions with interviewees confirmed the Prodoc provides no guidance on generating revenue streams in this way. Indeed, the MTR found there are opportunities to generate revenue through the sale of souvenirs, photographs, drawings, paintings, cuddly toys of flagship animals from the Poyang Lake region, etc. all of which could be used to help fund the conservation of species that have been targeted for species monitoring and protection plans (under output 2.4).

Figures 4 & 5: Biodiversity of global importance: Finless Porpoise and Siberian Cranes



Source: Figure 6: Shanghai Daily, 12 April 2017; Figure 7: PMO

76. Species monitoring and conservation plans for four important migratory birds have already been drafted and submitted in 2020 and others that include the finless porpoise (*Neophocaena phocaenoides*) and water deer are planned for submission in the second half of 2020. Interviewees agreed with the MTR's suggestion that a logo of the finless porpoise and/or Siberian crane offers an excellent opportunity to develop an ecological icon to associate the conservation of the PWEPA with these animals at both the national and international levels. Furthermore, an icon would support the promotion of certified products from the wetland PA system, the educational outreach programmes and the international bird-watching week (under output 3.3). Figures 4 and 5 show images of the finless porpoise and Siberian Crane *Grus* (*Grus leucogeranus*).

4.2.2 Achievement of project outputs and progress towards project outcomes under component (outcome) 3 - Institutional and stakeholder capacities [are improved] to manage consolidated wetland PA system in Jiangxi Province

80. The main activities under component 3 focus on developing an information system to support effective management of the wetland PA system and raising public awareness on the importance of wetland conservation. However, activities under output 3.2 focus mainly on capacity building to support the achievement of outputs and outcomes under component 1. Overall, the MTR found the majority of activities under component 3 are ongoing and in most cases at the halfway stage of implementation. According to the PMO's Self-evaluation report overall implementation stands at 53 per cent. Following the triangulation of document analysis and information collected from the interviews, the MTR has identified the following main findings:

- Output 3.1: progress in establishing the Jiangxi Wetland Reserves Information Management System (JWRIMS) was found to be moderately unsatisfactory. The identification of the JWRIMS prototype was completed following a six-month delay in recruiting the subcontractor in July 2019. As a result, the testing of the proposed structure and information folders has also experienced delays (started in May 2020). Taking into account the CAS estimates that at least three years are

needed to collect, validate and process reliable data, it is unlikely the JWRIMS can be used to guide decision-making during the project's remaining implementation period. More important, it remains unclear which body will be responsible for overseeing the collection, processing and validation of data from all the main sector agencies operating in and/or around the wetland PA system to ensure there are no data overlaps in the JWRIMS. Some interviewees suggested the Provincial Development and Reform Commission (PDRC) has the capacity to carry out such coordination and should, therefore, be ultimately be responsible for the JWRIMS. However, taking into account the JWRIMS is designed to manage both spatial and non-spatial data using the same standards and norms on meta-data established by the 6+1 programme so as to connect the JWRIMS (and similar systems being applied in Hubei and Anhui Provinces) to a national information system for wetlands, the MTR believes the Provincial Government would be better suited to hosting the JWRIMS and promoting its ownership as an inter-agency information sharing facility. Nonetheless, the current gaps in establishing the JWRIMS, provide further evidence on the need for closer association between the project and the Provincial Government in order to convoke meetings with the sector agencies to resolve these gaps as well as coordinate better at the national level, in particular with the 6+1 programme, which since closure in 2019 is operated directly by the national/provincial authorities involved;

- Output 3.2: so far, an assessment has been conducted with main sector agencies and a training and capacity building plan has been identified and approved. The MTR found the plan targets government officials of provincial line agencies as well as policy-making institutions such as the PDRC and Environment Committee of the Provincial People's Congress as foreseen in the Prodoc. Furthermore, interviewees confirmed it has adopted an on-demand approach to training needs and will coordinate with specific training activities linked to the application of the JWRIMS. Nevertheless, the implementation of three training modules (on GIS, JWRIMS, and JWRIMS maintenance) has been delayed due to slower than planned implementation of the project's main activities relating to the design of the JPWPAMS and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and major flooding in 2020, which has limited the scope to hold group activities;
- Output 3.3: the MTR found most of the activities promoting public awareness and education on the importance of wetlands and their sustainable use have progressed in a highly satisfactory manner, although the MTR would benefit from triangulating this further through field visits. For example, the project has facilitated the construction of the PLNNR Visitor Centre in Wucheng, which is also the site of one of the PLNNR's field stations. The centre was inaugurated in December 2019 to coincide with the first ever International Bird-Watching Week at Poyang Lake also supported by the project to promote the Poyang Lake region as a major tourist centre for birdwatchers. According to data from the PMO, over 200 000 birdwatchers attended the week-long event and also plays an important role in the project's outreach activities targeting the general public, local institutions and organisations, school children, etc. on wetlands and their

functions. According to data collected by the PMO, over 3 300 people had visited the centre in the first three-months of opening, which is equivalent to 11 per cent of the total number of visitors targeted by the project (30 000).²⁹ In a second example, the project has successfully assessed how education on wetland protection and conservation can be improved in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools. This will subsequently be supported by the abovementioned policy and legal reforms to the education curriculum that are ongoing. Furthermore, the project has tested new teaching materials in schools during the Wildlife Protection Publicity Month (November 2019) and during the Birdwatching Week, among others. Figures 6 and 7 provide evidence of the project's support to establishing birdwatching infrastructure and learning facilities to international standards. A third example, concerns the Caicha Opera Troupe, which has successfully performed folk operas on wetland conservation to more than 10,000 people to date. A fourth and final example, concerns the upgrading and expansion of the wetlands' conservation rewards programme, which as mentioned above, is designed to pay local fishermen, farmers, etc. to participate in bird counts and pay cash bonuses to those who register an increase in bird numbers and species at their plots. According to project progress reports (PPR), a total of 577 individuals and a further 298 persons pertaining to local organisations have received cash awards and bonuses using GEF funds to March 2020. However, the MTR was unable to identify the increase in number of birds and species visiting the 577 sites of these individuals as this is not reported in these reports. Furthermore, the MTR would benefit from field visits to the sites to determine how many of these beneficiaries are engaged in the alternative livelihoods programme to facilitate the permanent switch from fishing and agricultural practices in the Poyang Lake region.

Figures 6 and 7: Birdwatchers at Poyang Lake and the new Visitor Centre at Wucheng.



Source: PMO, 2019

81. In terms of the effectiveness of the activities conducted so far under the three main components of the project, the MTR is unable to provide any evidence-based observations so far, because no data is available on important indicators, such as on the

²⁹ According to the PMO's Self-evaluation report it is proposed to revise this target down to 10 000 (p.69).

number of illegal resource-use incidents recorded in the PLNNR, NWNRR and DPMBNR, on bird numbers and species, on the ecological health of the wetland ecosystem, or on attitudinal changes of decision-makers, rural communities, etc. through the Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) surveys planned at the mid-way point to assess change against the baseline survey conducted in 2018.³⁰

82. Nonetheless, the MTR found there is a need to improve the project's communication of its environmental objective to fully clarify its main purpose is to underpin economic and social development through the conservation and sustainable use of the wetland PA system in Jiangxi Province. First, the MTR found the project needs to bridge its project-based approach (from the JxFoD) to dialogue with the provincial government, line agencies and other key actors by emphasising the conservation of wetland resources and services is synonymous with their sustainable use and clarify the project's "landscape approach" refers to the Poyang Lake's ecosystem, (PWEPA), rather than a "region", which has not been clearly defined in the Prodoc, or the cross-sector dialogue conducted to date. Second, the project's communication strategy should emphasise its commitment to enhancing ecological civilisation throughout Jiangxi Province vis-à-vis the conservation and sustainable use of the wetland PA system.

83. To be effective the project's communications should be tailored to the needs and interests of the different stakeholders and end beneficiaries (the local communities) and aim at establishing a much better understanding of the multiple benefits derived from conserving wetlands. Third, the emphasis on co-management of the wetland PA system should communicate the importance of farmers and fisherfolk becoming both the "guardians" of its goods and services as well as "facilitators" of inward investment to support the development of small and medium sized enterprises linked to eco-tourism, sustainable agriculture and aquaculture, as well as other sectors that have not been subject to support so far, such as healthcare and health products sector, permanent opera and theatre shows, flat boat and air engine makers and maintenance services, certified arts and crafts, emission trading schemes, off-site training services, etc. For example, interviews conducted with representatives of participating local communities voiced interest in enhancing cooperation with local enterprises already operating in the PWEPA, such as the Redstone Factory on Nanshan Island to support homestay and other tourism services for birdwatchers, or local enterprises engaged in fruit peel processing, conservation and breeding centres for endangered and injured wildlife (which could be open to visitors), promoting winter camps, etc.,

³⁰ According to the Self-evaluation report one KAP survey has taken place and showed at 7% increase in relation to its public education and school training activities (p.31).

4.3 Efficiency

MTR question 3 – To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently and cost-effectively?

Finding 6: The delivery of planned outputs has been compromised by externally-provoked delays, difficulties in applying GEF procedures at the same time as provincial and national procedures and most recently by the COVID-19 pandemic and major flooding in 2020. Physical progress stands at around 45 per cent (according to MTR estimates), while financial progress stands at just 24.2 per cent of GEF funds to 30 June 2020. Timely achievement of the project's strategic activities such as the JPWPAMS and JWRIMS (under components 1 and 3) has been particularly difficult, while activities largely controlled "in-house" by the JxFoD (under component 2) have generally advanced more efficiently. As a result, the JPWPAMS and the JWRIMS are unlikely to be approved and start implementation until 2021, which means time is extremely limited to fully integrate them in the next 5-Year Development Plan 2021-2025, as well as in the development plans of key sectors that operate in and around wetland PA systems in the province. Moreover, the project relies on a combination of workshops and national consultants/subcontractors to promote cross-sector dialogue as an alternative to the JPWPACC. This has facilitated the drafting and review of the JPWPAMS and its standards and guidelines, but the project has no direct access to decision-makers in the provincial government to advocate project objectives and deliver change.

Finding 7: The project has demonstrated it can achieve high levels of cost-effectiveness where the JxFoD has enjoyed the above-mentioned "in-house" control of project activities under components 2 and 3. This has been particularly well demonstrated by the holding the first ever International Birdwatching Week, which successfully galvanised a high level of provincial government support, as well as mobilised/leveraged a reported USD 71.3 m. of additional funds to complete a number of infrastructure-related activities in advance of the opening ceremony in December 2019. The introduction of wetland restoration techniques in association with CAS, the design and signature of co-management agreements with local communities and educational outreach activities which have already covered over 10 000 households, were also found to be highly cost-effective actions to establish local inhabitants as the new guardians of the PWEPA. However, in other areas (in particular under component 1) the project's level of cost-effectiveness has been lower. In these cases, the project is experiencing some major challenges. These include, among others, funding gaps, in particular inadequate funding of the BH/FAO-CN to manage GEF5-funded projects, the operation of the PMO on a part-time basis and inadequate mechanisms in place to facilitate the development of effective and long-lasting intra-institutional coordination at both the provincial government level and with the 6+1 Programme through which the adoption of common wetland PA management strategies and information systems have not materialised to support the management of the middle Yangtze River basin.

4.3.1 *Timeliness of activities*

84. The project's capacity to convert its resources into outputs and outcomes in line with the Prodoc and annual work plans was found to be moderately satisfactory. Physical progress for the project's three main components to 31 March 2020 was reported to be 56, 57 and 53 per cent. This equates to an average physical progress rate of 55.3 per cent. However, as stated in the previous sub-section the MTR found physical progress to be probably closer to 45 per cent, on the grounds the project experienced a delay of over six months between the project's official start (entry of duty date) on 30 September 2016 and the receipt of the first GEF disbursement of funds on 07 April 2017. In addition, the implementation of activities in 2017-2018 took place during major institutional reforms, which resulted in the need to find an alternative coordination mechanism to the JPWPAMS and difficulties to convoke meetings with provincial line agencies. In addition, the project experienced delays in recruiting some of its consultants and subcontractors, such as to develop the JWRIMS, and the project has been unable to date to recruit a replacement to the international expert who pulled out shortly before taking up his duties in 2018. It appears this has also not been aided by the fact the PMO has experienced difficulties in meeting GEF procedures, while at the same time ensuring compliance with provincial government rules and regulations relating to the recruitment international experts. Finally, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic since the start of 2020, together with major flooding in Jiangxi Province in June-July 2020, has caused the postponement of a large number of group activities, workshops, trainings, etc.
85. The MTR found the project has generally made most progress in meeting planned activities relating to infrastructure developments, the application of the educational outreach activities and wetland restoration research activities. For example, the completion of the 7 new field stations and the visitor centre at the PLNNR shortly before the first ever International Birdwatching Week provides a good example of the project's ability to deliver project activities on time. Indeed, in this example, the project appears to have demonstrated it can coordinate with the provincial government and, in the case of the visitor centre, leverage co-finance fairly quickly. Meanwhile, the more strategic activities, such as the launch of the JPWPAMS, finding a viable alternative to the JPWPACC, or establishing cross-sector coordination on the design, approval and implementation of the JWRIMS have experienced slower implementation rates than planned. In these cases, the project appears to lack the same level of authority in securing agreements as it enjoys on specific infrastructure projects.
86. Another factor, which has not aided project implementation concerns the lack of permanent staff to run the PMO and employment of the Chief Technical Officer (CTO) on a part-time basis. This situation is mainly due to inadequate funding allocated in the budget to cover permanent staffing of the PMO and CTA. Indeed, the inability to operate the project on a full-time basis is a contributory factor in the low level of expenditure of GEF funds, which at 30 June 2020 stood at just 24.2 per cent of total funds (see Table 1 below). Although, this is partly attributed to the fact the project employs a large number

of national consultants (14 to date) who, under GEF rules and procedures, can only be paid after the approval of deliverables, the low expenditure rate has more to do with the limited time the PMO can provide to project activities, coupled with their lack of policy dialogue with the provincial government on the need to integrate the conservation and sustainable use of wetland resources and services in provincial and sector development planning.

87. Under these circumstances, the MTR believes the project is unlikely to achieve key outputs and outcomes on time before the project ends operations in April 2022.³¹ Furthermore, the delays in rolling-out the JWRIMS indicate the project will not have sufficient data at its disposal in time to support its case for the conservation and sustainable use of the wetland PA ecosystem in provincial and sector development planning and monitoring. This is likely to have implications on implementing the JPWPAMS as well as providing support to the development of both provincial and national policies and plans, in particular the development of the national policy framework for wetland management, which was supported by the 6+1 programme to 2019, but which continues under the leadership of national and provincial authorities, and the formulation of the Provincial 5-year Development Plan for 2021-2025.

4.3.2 Cost-effectiveness of the project

88. The application of the EA has proved to be challenging for project 052. This situation was reported by the acting BH/FAO-CN to be a common problem for all executing partners that officially started executing GEF5-funded projects in China from 2016.³² In particular, the MTR found from its interviews that project 052 (and other GEF5-funded projects in China, such as projects 056 and 057) all experienced difficulties in starting-up their operations and that this was largely due to three main issues. First, the project was designed in line with FAO's policy to move away from direct execution (DEX) of GEF-funded projects in countries such as China where DEX was not an option, to indirect execution by an executing partner (JxFoD) based on an execution agreement (EA) with FAO. In such agreements, FAO's role is designed to focus primarily on providing technical and administrative support to assist the PMO implement the project under the authority of the PSC. However, the EA was signed and entered into operation on 03 January 2017, a few months before FAO released the Operational Partners Implementation Modality/Manual Section 701 in November 2016.³³ As a result, project 052 (as well as other GEF5-funded projects) did not fully comply with the rules and procedures in

³¹ The MTR assumes the implementation end date is five years after the receipt of the first GEF disbursement on 07 April 2017, rather than the project's date of entry on 30 September 2016.

³² The international consultant responsible for this MTR also found similar challenges in the MTRs carried out earlier in 2020 for projects GCP/CPR/057/GFF *A new green line: mainstreaming biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China's water resources management policy and planning* and GCP/CPR/056/GFF *Sustainable forest management to increase the resilience of forests to climate change in China*.

³³ MS-701 requires a capacity assessment to be conducted (prior to the signature of the OPA) on the executing partner to determine the risk mitigation measures and assurance plan to be applied in the absence of DEX.

OPIM/MS-701, but rather *ad hoc* conditions established in the EA/OPA, which in the case of project 052 were established the EA, in particular under Articles IV and V covering financial management and payments respectively. In the absence of adequate guidance material and financial support, the BH/FAO-CN found it difficult and time consuming to apply these conditions, especially taking into account the BH/FAO-CN had no previous work experience on indirect execution based on an executing partner and EA/OPA.

89. Second, the project document did not include specific funding to cover the employment of a sufficient number of GEF portfolio managers, ensure FAO-CN conducted regular support missions in the field, apply assurance activities such as spot checks, or audits, etc. The MTR found the BH/FAO-CN office endured significant funding constraints that persist to date, due mainly to the FAO's Fee Guidelines governing the management of GEF-funded projects. Interviews with the acting BH and GCU, confirm GEF5 funding in China totals USD 27 m. (covering 7 projects), of which 9.5 per cent is used to cover FAO's fees to implement these projects, (USD 2.57 m.). A total of 30 per cent of this fee is allocated to the BH (USD 771 000), 30 per cent to GCU (USD 771 000), 30 per cent to the LTO (USD 771 000)³⁴ and the remainder for promotion purposes to secure new GEF funding of projects. According to the acting BH the current fee structure is insufficient to manage the GEF5 round in China over a 6-year implementation span. For example, this situation has reportedly caused a major constraint on the recruitment of GEF portfolio managers in FAO-CN, and funding of key activities such as the assurance activities required by Senior Management.³⁵ Indeed, the acting BH reported GEF funds have only been sufficient to employ two GEF portfolio managers (covering eight GEF4-7 projects that include projects 052 and 057), while funding of the third project portfolio manager (covering one project that is project 056) together with all financial administration of GEF funds has to be covered under FAO-CN's country budget allocation.³⁶
90. Third, the establishment of a part-time PMO in the PLNNR division of the JxFoD exposed capacity constraints in implementing the EA/PIMM. For example, the MTR was informed the PMO was committed to applying several project activities directly, rather than through open tendering to recruit consultants. Furthermore, it planned to promote co-management only in the PLNNR, rather than in the other demonstration sites mentioned in the Prodoc. This approach overloaded the PMO's capacity to implement the project. In response, an attempt was made to merge these activities into the contracts of consultants already recruited. However, this overburdened the national consultants, some of whom chose to cease their contracts. In response, the PMO had to revert to open tendering of new consultants, delaying the full mobilisation of national consultants to April 2018.

³⁴ Includes 5 per cent specifically to support the implementation of projects applying the OPIM modality.

³⁵ According to interviews the GCU was unable to provide financial support to cover assurance activities due to the costs incurred in employing consultants to support the indirect execution of project 052 and other GEF5-funded projects.

³⁶ The MTR found this situation has become even more critical under GEF6 & GEF7-funded projects, where the fee percentage allocated to the BH in FAO-CN has been reduced to 25 per cent of the total fee rate of 9.5 per cent levied by FAO.

91. In the light of these issues, the MTR found the project endured high transactions costs, lengthy delays in the start of operations and insufficient coordination from FAO services to clarify the project did not comply with OPIM/MS-701. As such the conversion of resources into results was not cost-effective in the period 2017-2018. The MTR understands this was exacerbated by considerable staff rotation both in FAO-CN and in the PMO over the same period. For example, the MTR discovered that the GEF portfolio managers for projects 052, 056 and 057 all experienced changes of personnel between 2018 and early 2019. Interviews confirm this placed newly recruited staff under the highly challenging situation of carrying out their duties without adequate funding to apply what they believed were the first projects in China to be implemented in line with OPIM/MS-701, when in fact an interview with FAO's Project Support Services (PSS) in September 2020 confirmed this is not the case for the reasons explained above. The MTR found that despite the misunderstandings on this issue, this situation has to some extent been resolved since the mobilisation of key national consultants in 2019 which has facilitated the abovementioned physical advance of the project to an estimated 45 per cent to 30 June 2020 (see beginning of section 4.2).
92. Nonetheless, financial gaps for the BH remain an ongoing concern that are not conducive to optimising the cost-effectiveness of FAO services, especially as the PMO and CTA continue to operate on a part-time basis, as well as experience staff rotation that included the project director in early 2020. In addition, the LTO is located in the FAO-RAP offices in Bangkok, Thailand, in line with FAO's policy that require the majority of LTOs to operate from its regional offices to save on costs. However, the MTR found the LTO for project 052 (also responsible for project 057) has to manage a growing portfolio of projects in the region, which restricts the amount of time that can be dedicated to any one project. Furthermore, interviews confirm the LTOs in general apply a hands-on approach to managing their project portfolio, rather than opting to delegate their day-to-day technical support functions and coordination activities to a dedicated team of consultants working at the country level.
93. Another factor that appears to reduce the scope for achieving a high level of cost-effectiveness concerns the establishment of the PMO and PSC with staff exclusively from the JxFoD, in particular from the Division responsible for the PLNNR. As stated in subsection 4.2.1 this situation means the project has limited access to dialogue with the provincial government, the NFGA/MNR in Beijing, provincial line agencies, the 6+1 programme (in particular with staff still working on wetland management activities initiated by the project in Anhui and Hubei provinces), etc. To circumvent this shortcoming, the project relies on developing this dialogue through a combination of workshops and dependency on senior staff within JxFoD to lobby the provincial government and line agencies to support the project's strategic activities under components 1 and 3. In addition, stakeholders informed the MTR that contact and coordination with the NFGA is maintained through the employment of senior consultants who, on the one hand, are engaged in project activities relating to the JPWPAMS,

JWRIMS, etc. and, on the other hand, support the NFGA on policy and legal reforms on wetland PA systems.

94. This situation places a lot of dependency on senior staff in JxFoD (in particular the Director General of the PLNNR acting as Project Director) and external consultants and subcontractors, to act as catalysers of effective provincial wetland management and instigate change at the national policy and planning level. According to latest progress reports, the project has recruited 14 consultants and 14 subcontractors. The MTR found the recruitment of these consultants has enhanced the JxFoD's ownership of the project, in particular by enhancing dialogue on project planning, implementation and monitoring. Nevertheless, a number of interviewees expressed the need for these 28 individuals to engage in more systematic communication and collaboration to avoid stand-alone approaches to meeting project outputs. Furthermore, reliance on the Director General of the PLNNR (also Chairman of the PSC) to lobby project interests has increased considerably his workload. Moreover, the high dependency on consultants and subcontractors risks losing important institutional memory following the completion of their assignments, and the MTR found the both the executing agency and FAO-CN have paid insufficient attention on identifying ways to mitigate these risks. Indeed, the MTR identified two areas where there is considerable scope for the project to enhance the cost-effectiveness of its strategic activities, in particular concerning the effective implementation of the JWPAMS and JWRIMS.
95. First, there is currently no official network of focal points in place in key provincial government institutions to take up the official task of coordinating the integration of wetland conservation and management into the 14th Five-Year planning process for 2021-2025, in particular relating to economic and social development (managed by the Jiangxi Development and Reform Commission JDRC), the Jiangxi Provincial/Prefecture/Township Spatial and Land Use Plans in particular concerning the PWEPA (managed by the Department for Natural Resources) and Provincial/Prefecture/Township/County Urban/Rural Plans (managed by the Department for Housing and Urban-Rural Development), as well as in the development plans of key sectors operating in Jiangxi Province (includes provincial departments responsible for Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Water Resources Management, Department for Ecology and Environment and Industry and Information Technology). Second, there is no corresponding network of official focal points established in Anhui and Hubei provinces to increase current levels of information sharing and data exchange relating to lessons learned and good practices concerning wetland management, the conservation of habitats and species, etc., in the interests in covering the geographic area foreseen in the Prodoc (the middle reaches of the Yangtze River basin).
96. In particular, the MTR found little evidence to indicate coordinated planning has been in operation to facilitate the sharing of training costs, the consolidation of ecological data exchange (such as on species that migrate between the wetland PA systems of all three provinces), or on the development of a shared IMS covering the wetlands of all three

provinces. As a result, it appears progress in developing harmonised wetland management strategies in all three provinces has not materialised. Indeed, following contact with Anhui and Hubei provinces in September 2020, the PMO informed the MTR that Anhui Province does not have a wetland management strategy in place and in Hubei Province the main development has been the approval of an Action Plan for wetland management and protection in the Four Lakes Basin of Jingzhou City. This situation throws further light on the MTR's belief that there is unlikely to be enough time for provincial sector plans to establish a coherent approach to conserving and sustainably using their wetland PA systems before the launch of the 14th Five-Year Development Plan in 2021. Consequently, this means key demonstrations on coordinated approaches to managing water resources, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, housing, industrial development, etc. may not be fully aligned to meeting the wider objective of central government; namely delivering effective and sustainable management of the Yangtze River basin.

97. In spite of these difficulties, the MTR found the "in-house" activities under component 2 are achieving far higher levels of cost-effectiveness. In these cases, the JxFoD is able to take the lead on actions dedicated to establishing coordinated management of the PWEPA, supported by co-management with local communities, the introduction of cost-effective wetland restoration techniques and educational outreach activities. Furthermore, these activities are successfully anchoring change in local institutions, organisations and communities. For example, the project has already signed and started implementing 9 of the 11 co-management agreements planned and a further two are in the process of being finalised and signed (output 2.3). According to latest project progress reports, expenditure associated with the identification and signing of these agreements totals USD 280 698, which represents just 25 per cent of planned expenditure (USD 1 109 500). Although, the remaining 75 per cent of funds still need to be used to support the application of the co-management plans, this confirms it costs on average USD 25 518 to broker each agreement. Taking into account these agreements cover 11 local communities from 9 villages in the PWEPA, the MTR found this to be a highly cost-effective way to engage local communities in the transition to sustainable livelihoods while promoting them as the guardians of the PWEPA at the same time.
98. Similarly, the identification of cost-effective wetland restoration techniques (output 2.1) is being achieved at low cost, which has been aided through close collaboration with CAS. For example, CAS has agreed to invest around USD 300 000 of its own resources in this activity to advance research on the subject. Latest reports confirm CAS has made significant advances in identifying native flora to support wetland restoration and the development of bird feeding grounds at a pilot site in Changhuchi in the PLNNR, while total expenditure of GEF funds to support this activity amounts to USD 66 623 to 31 March 2020. This is equivalent to only 17 per cent of planned expenditure (USD 397 000), which demonstrates good value for money. Likewise, public awareness and outreach activities (output 3.3) have received a total of USD 103 177 in funding to 31 March 2020, which is equivalent to less than 14 per cent of planned expenditure (USD 756 300).

However, in return the project has established both permanent and temporary educational services that have already covered over 10 000 households, 3 300 visitors (including school children) to the visitor centre at PLNNR and over 200 000 participants in the International Birdwatching Week organised in December 2019. Indeed, interviews with local authorities and community members in the PWEPA, indicate the project has already established local awareness that the PWEPA is a wetland PA system of international importance, and this has been aided by a large number of media events covering the PAs in the PWEPA.

4.3.3 GEF funding and co-finance

99. Total expenditure of GEF funding at 31 March 2020 stood at USD 1 239 026, which is equivalent to **24.2 per cent of the GEF grant** (USD 5 108 800). Taking into account the project has already covered more than 10 000 households in the PWEPA through one or more of its activities, average expenditure in relation to end beneficiaries currently stands at around USD 109/household. A breakdown of expenditure of GEF funds by component is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of current status of GEF expenditure in USD (to 30 June 2020)

Component/ Source	2017-2022 Plan	2017* Actual	2018 Actual	2019 Actual	2020# Actual	Total Expenditure
Component 1	998,450	10,991	126,665	109,088	26,892	273,636
Component 2	2,824,950	4,881	189,833	249,102	247,827	691,643
Component 3	1,027,400	4,912	52,819	97,572	2,018	157,321
M&E	60,000	19,999	6,792	6,355	-	33,146
PMO	198,000	30,808	25,948	5,461	21,063	83,280
Total GEF	5,108,800	71,591	402,057	467,578	297,800	1,239,026
FAO**	180,200	-	7,412	-	-	7,412
TOTAL GEF+FAO	5,289,000	71,591	409,469	467,578	297,800	1,246,438

Source: PMO * Expenditure from 01/10/2016 to 31/12/2017; ** FAO cash allocation agreed after Prodoc signed.

100. Nonetheless, the MTR observes the total expenditure rate is around 60 per cent lower than the overall physical implementation rate of 53 per cent reported by the PMO (or 52% lower according to MTR estimates). On the one hand, this is explained by the abovementioned delays in project implementation, which has prevented payments for several activities that remain ongoing and which cannot be paid until completed and deliverables have been approved. On the other, the project has been successful in receiving the majority of the co-finance agreed with government agencies and the ICF, which has helped advance a number of project activities without GEF funding.

101. Meanwhile, reference to Table 2 confirms USD 24 557 000, or **98 per cent of government co-finance has already been spent**. This includes over-payments of USD 2.97 m. from JxFoD to cover unforeseen operating costs, such as for the new visitor centre

at Wechung. Meanwhile, the Three Gorges Corporation has completed the cost of installing new hydrological monitoring stations at less cost than planned, which explains the balance of USD 3.93 m. in Table 2, of which USD 118 000/year will cover operating costs of these stations. In addition, the project has been instrumental in mobilising/leveraging funds that were not foreseen in the Prodoc. The MTR understands a total of USD 1.74 m. has been mobilised to June 2020. This includes USD 300 000 from the abovementioned collaboration of CAS to support wetland restoration, USD 860 000 from the provincial government to complete the visitor centre at Wucheng in time for the Birdwatching week and USD 260 000 from the Nanchang City Forestry Bureau to support the engagement of fisherfolk in the rewards and bonus scheme (under output 2.3). In addition, USD 320 000 is reported to have been mobilised through association with iBirding.com.cn concerning the development of a mobile phone application, but this could not be triangulated by the MTR.

Table 2. Summary of current status of co-finance in USD (to 30 June 2020)

Source of co-finance	2016-2023	2016-2023	2016-2020*	2016-2020*	Total Balance	
	Plan Cash	Plan In-kind	Cash	In-kind	Cash	In-kind
Three Gorges Corp.	7,530,000	-	4,137,000		3,393,000	-
Nat. Dev & Ref Com	1,600,000	-	1,600,000		-	-
Jiangxi Forestry Dep	15,850,000	-	18,820,000		2,970,000	-
Local governments	-	1,250,000		1,825,000	-	575,000
Total Gov of China	24,980,000	1,250,000	24,557,000	1,825,000	423,000	575,000
Chinese Acad of Sc		300,000	-	58,800	-	241,200
Int. Crane Foundat.	142,000	-	142,000	-	-	-
FAO	-	320,000	-	250,000	-	70,000
TOTAL	25,122,000	1,870,000	24,699,000	2,133,800	423,000	263,800

Source: PMO; * Expenditure from 30/092016 to 30/06/2020.

102. The project has also indicated that it has successfully leveraged over CYN 137 m. (USD 19.6 m.) to support the project's ecological payments scheme. According to the PMO's PowerPoint presentation to the MTR (see Appendix 3) a total of 370 000 farmers living in 334 villages in the Poyang Lake region are reported to have received such payments. Moreover, a further USD 50 m. is reported to have been leveraged to support the upgrading of townships around Poyang Lake, around the PLNNR. For example, the Wucheng and Jiuhe Townships received upgrades, prior to holding the International Birdwatching Week held at the end of 2019. The MTR requested the following images to show Jiuhe and Wucheng Townships in Yongxiu County, before and after these payments to provide evidence the works have been completed as stated (see figures 8 to 11).

Figures 8 and 9: Images of Jiuhe Township before and after renovation.



Source: PMO

Figures 10 and 11: Images of Wucheng township before and after renovation.



Source: PMO

103. In terms of the allocation of GEF funds in the project's (revised) budget, the MTR identified three main shortcomings that will need to be addressed to facilitate project implementation. These are summarised as follows:

- There is no budget to support the project promote the integration of wetland management in the provincial land-use decision-making process. Indeed, the Prodoc focuses a lot of attention on stimulating cross-sector coordination, but has overlooked the strategic importance of coordinating wetland management through the spatial planning perspective. The MTR also considers this offers opportunities to not only enhance intra-institutional coordination, but also integrate risk management (supported by risk mapping) into the 5-Year Provincial Development Plan and sector plans to mitigate the growing effects of climate variability and change (in particular floods and droughts);
- The budget allocated to develop the JWRIMS (output 3.1), is low taking into account the large of amount of coordination work required to ensure all sectors are coordinating their data inputs correctly, the need to improve coordination and visits to other projects associated with the 6+1 programme, especially in Anhui and Hubei

provinces, but also to the NFGA/NWR in Beijing to support the development of an integrated national monitoring system for wetlands and the importance of training key staff on modelling to ensure decision-makers are empowered to take informed decisions;

- There is no specific budget to support training, research and the mobilisation of resources relating to the development of alternative livelihoods for local fishing and agricultural communities living in and around the PWEPA (includes upland areas).

104. Finally, regarding co-finance, the MTR observes the balance of cash funds remaining to support project implementation in the remaining period is low (2%). Indeed, the indications are an additional injection of co-finance (in cash and in-kind) will be needed from 2021. Interviews with the PMO confirm they are aware of this situation and that additional funds can be mobilized from the JxFoD directly as well as through provincial and local government budgets and synergies with other entities. For example, CAS plans to establish a scientific centre in Changhuchi to support long-term wetland research in the PWEPA.

4.4 Sustainability

MTR question 4 – *What is the likelihood that the project results can be sustained after the end of the project?*

Finding 8: The prospects of sustaining the integration of the ecological compensation payments scheme has been enhanced over the short to medium-term through its inclusion in the Jiangxi Wetland Protection Ordinance. The promotion of co-management in the PWEPA, together with the promotion of bi-annual international birdwatching weeks also show positive signs they can secure new public and private investment in the PWEPA and JxFoD's specific commitments to fund its responsibilities under the JWRIMS are encouraging. Nonetheless, the project appears to have under-estimated some of its risk rankings, in particular institutional, financial and climate change-related risks which have continued to be ranked as low-level risks since they were first applied in the Prodoc. However, there is ample evidence to confirm these risks have increased and, if unattended, are likely to threaten the sustainability of some key activities. For example, institutional risks have increased since the institutional reforms of 2017-2018, given the establishment of the JPWPACC is no longer an option, and means new approaches to establishing and sustaining efficient cross-sector level coordination are needed, but which are difficult to achieve while the project operates at the divisional level of JxFoD, where access to the provincial government is highly limited. Financial risks are also growing, in spite of a more favourable political situation that is prepared to inject more resources into development of ecological civilisation. For example, long-term funding mechanisms are still being studied and no agreements have been reached so far to support a number of key activities. These include the funding of JWRIMS to operate at the cross-sector level, or on the funding of alternative livelihoods to facilitate the transition to tourism/eco-tourism, small enterprise

development, the beautification of homestays, establishment of ecological villages, etc. Finally, environmental risks appear to be intensifying in nature in response to climate change (especially flooding and droughts) and the degradation and/or loss of wetland habitats and biodiversity. Indeed, this trend has been highlighted in CBD's Global Biodiversity Outlook 5 (2020), highlighting urbanization, farming expansion and pollution as key drivers of wetland degradation (see also section 4.6.2)

Finding 9: The project foresees the replication of effective management practices in wetland PAs systems, but has not clearly defined what constitutes "effective" management, nor is reporting on the expansion of effective management in the PWEPA. As a result, it is not possible to determine the level of expansion of effective wetland management in order to identify gaps and facilitate comparison with Anhui and Hubei provinces, through which good practices could identified for scaling-up. In addition, inadequate attention has been given to include in effective management the application of participatory spatial/land-use development planning, risk mapping and other activities designed to enhance not only sustainable economic development, but the establishment of resilient communities in and around the PWEPA.

4.4.1 *Socio-political, financial, institutional and governance, and environmental risks to sustainability*

105. The MTR found the PMO, BH and LTO have conducted annual reassessments of risks identified in the Prodoc together with any new risks that need to be included and, where applicable, addressed with suitable mitigation measures. The annual assessments comply with the PIR template and in most cases have incorporated the rankings of all three parties. Overall, the project has maintained an overall "low" risk ranking for the project up to the latest PIR (July 2019 to June 2020).³⁷ The MTR identified the following findings from its analysis of the risk assessments to 2019:

- a) **Socio-political risks remain "low"**. This ranking is justified on the grounds the Jiangxi Provincial government has issued the Jiangxi Lakes Protection Ordinance together with new supporting policies and regulations. The **MTR agrees with this ranking**, because the State Council, central and provincial government and President Xi Jinping have all expressed a growing recognition of the importance of conserving the ecological functions and services of the country's wetlands, especially in the Yangtze River Basin, as an important means to supporting sustainable economic development. In addition, they are implementing "The Beautiful Rivers and Lakes Initiative" and have called for the stepping up of ecological civilisation (2019) and increasing the autonomy of provincial governments in key areas, such as land-use planning and water resources management (2020).

³⁷ The MTR was provided with a copy of the PIR for the period July 2019 to June 2020 (refers to the period July 2018-June 2019 in the title), on 31 August 2020 with the main purpose of reviewing the latest risk assessment in Section 5.

- b) **Institutional risks remain “low”**. This ranking focuses on the view that inter-institutional coordination between the PLNNR/JxFoD and line agencies has been strengthened by inviting technicians and staff of line agencies to participate in training and other project activities, in PSC meetings and workshops on wetland management coordination. Furthermore, once the JPWPAMS and its guidelines have been approved the PLNNR/JxFoD believes coordination will increase with the Agriculture and Water Resources Departments, County Governments, etc. The MTR found this overlooks three key challenges. The first concerns, how policies, strategies and plans on wetland PA system management will be implemented in a coordinated, effective and sustainable way at the provincial and inter-county levels? The MTR found the LTO has expressed concerns the PMO operates at the NR level, which “has difficulties to coordinate the provincial line agencies”. Indeed, the MTR did not find sufficient evidence to confirm the workshops represent a sustainable coordination mechanism to replace the JPWPACC. Furthermore, the JPWPAMS and JWRIMS will not be ready for implementation until 2021, shortly before the project will end in April 2021. The second, concerns inadequate attention has been given to strengthening intra-institutional coordination and collaboration. This is despite the fact the institutional reforms of 2017-2018 reported above provide new opportunities to develop alliances within the Provincial Department for Natural Resources in strategic areas, such as land-use planning, risk mapping, etc. Third, there is a general lack of leadership to ensure policies, strategies and plans relating to wetland PA systems are harmonised with those of Anhui and Hubei provinces to support the wider management of the Yangtze River basin (in particular its middle reaches). For these reasons the **MTR believes institutional risks pose a major threat to sustaining project results and should therefore be re-ranked to “medium-high”** as well as flagged for new mitigation measures to be discussed and agreed.
- c) **Financial risks remain “low”**. The ranking is justified on the grounds the promotion of co-management, the employment of locals in monitoring and wetland restoration work together and the application of an ecological compensation scheme are indicators that financial risks are low. However, this overlooks the capacity of the provincial government, line agencies and the JxFoD to maintain adequate levels of finance to sustain key project activities, outputs and results. The MTR is not satisfied the project has a clear exit strategy that defines how the implementation of its strategic activities such as the JWPAMS, the JWRIMS, the eco-compensation scheme, coordination within the projects of the 6+1 programme, etc. will be funded until at least 2030 to coincide with the Agenda 2030, Aichi Targets and other aspects of the NBSAP. In addition, the MTR found the project has generally overlooked the opportunities raise internal income from the wetland PA system to help self-fund co-management, monitoring and patrolling in and around the PWEPA, or provide training and support to the development of sustainable livelihoods among the local communities in the Poyang Lake region. For these reasons, the **MTR found financial risks have grown since 2019 and justify a “medium-high” ranking**.

- d) **Currency exchange risks remain “low”**. The MTR agrees with the rating taking into account this risk has been addressed by applying a 3 per cent contingency budget line to compensate for negative US Dollar currency fluctuations against the Chinese Yuan. In addition, the US Dollar has been fairly stable against the Chinese currency with only one fluctuation of any significance in 2018.³⁸
- e) **Fiduciary risks**. The MTR did not find a ranking for this risk. However, the MTR ranks this risk as low, because it found no evidence to indicate staff within JxFoD are acting contrary to rules and procedures in the PIMM. External spot checks conducted on 25 May 2018 and 08 July 2019 and the external audit carried out in January 2019 have not reported any major problems concerning a lack of transparency, or accounting irregularities that put at risk project operations, or the sustainability of main actions. However, both the spot checks and audit did highlight as “medium priority” the need for better compliance/internal control concerning the description, amounts, dates of expenses and reasons for not adopting the cash-basis accounting approach.
- f) **Climate change-related risks are “medium”**. The ranking is justified on the basis the project will integrate mitigation measures to reduce the impacts of climate change and hydrological changes to the wetland ecosystem and its habitats into project planning and biodiversity monitoring. The MTR found the ranking has overlooked three key issues. First, the project has a strong focus on promoting cost-effective wetland restoration activities that enhance their resilience to the effects of climate variability and change, but a similar approach has not been applied to the promotion of new farming techniques to support sustainable livelihoods. For example, the project’s promotion of organic farming does not include adaptation to climate change using resilient local varieties. Second, the project is not adequately “visualised” within the province as an integral part of the wider goal of enhancing the resilience of the middle reaches of the Yangtze River basin. Third, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE) has a national mandate to monitor the state of the country’s biodiversity, but there is little evidence to indicate the project’s monitoring of biodiversity is being coordinated with the Provincial Department of Ecology and Environment (PDEE), which has significant data of biodiversity and carbon stocks in the province.³⁹ Consequently, there are risks of overlaps of biodiversity monitoring, which could have negative implications for the development and use of the JWRIMS to support decision-making as well as international reporting on wetlands under the framework of the Agenda 2030, such as on Aichi Targets 8, 11 and 14 (see also section 4.6.2). Also, taking into account Jiangxi province experienced in June-July 2020 some of the worst floods on record, the risks associated with climate change are growing and this has been highlighted in the Prodoc as one of main threats that justify the project. For these reasons, the MTR believes a “high” ranking is fully justified.

³⁸ Source: MorningStar

³⁹ For example, PDEE has worked with UNEP on producing an in-depth study on “Carbon, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services – Jiangxi Province, 2009.

- g) **Health-related risks.** This has not been identified so far as a new risk, but the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic since the start of 2020 represents a major threat to the project's implementation and sustainability. Given this threat shows no signs of abating the likelihood of lockdowns, travel restrictions, lengthy quarantine periods after travel and general difficulties to conduct large group meetings, conferences, etc. signify a risk ranking of "medium-high" is justified.

106. As mentioned above, the MTR also observes the project does not have an exit strategy so far to provide a clear vision as to how key project activities and training services will be transferred and managed beyond the project's implementation period. In particular, there is no information on how the mainstreaming of key elements of the JWPAMS will be supervised and consolidated, the measures that need to be put in place to continue key training/capacity building activities, or on the expansion of biodiversity monitoring in coordination with PDEE, CAS, other education/research establishments and the former projects of the 6+1 programme in particular in Anhui and Hubei provinces. To consolidate the JWRIMS, a training facility is required to guarantee technical guidance and supervision on metadata developments in coordination with the data already collected in Anhui and Hubei provinces, NFGA, PDEE/MEE and PDWR/WRM to ensure it is replicated in other provinces as part of a national information system for wetlands.

107. In another example, local communities will need a medium to long-term strategy to be defined in coordination with, among others, the Provincial Department for Industry and Information Technology, to clarify how the development of environmentally friendly and resilient small and medium-sized enterprises are to be funded and supported. For example, the MTR was informed the gap analysis has identified the importance of enhancing the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands through the creation of certified products that comply with international and national standards. However, the MTR did not identify any partnership has been established with this provincial government body and/or the private sector to date.

108. Finally, the MTR observed the project has focused on developing tourism and eco-tourism services, but is unclear how these will be consolidated and promoted with the support of the Provincial Department for Culture and Tourism. In addition, the MTR conducted a brief assessment of current information on birdwatching services available in the Poyang Lake region and found the promotion of these services on websites, such as TripAdvisor, is limited and in some cases, there are important lessons to be learned to support their long-term sustainability. These include the general absence of bird hides for photographers who wish to take professional images of birds and who are willing to pay for such services, a wider variety of tours and improvements in food services.

4.4.2 Evidence of replication or catalysis of project results

109. The Prodoc states the project was designed to build effective and replicable models for ecosystem-based management of wetlands protected areas. One of the main indicators

to measure evidence of replication is the expansion of wetland management and governance both within the PWEPA (covering an area of 190 157 ha) and outside the PWEPA (covering an area of 5 662 ha), as well as evidence of expansion of wetland management into other NRs in Jiangxi Province. However, project progress reports and the Self-evaluation report, provides no updates on the total wetland area that will come under management following the completion of project capacity building activities. For example, the PLNNT, NWNRR and DPMBNR cover a total area of 96 800 ha in the PWEPA, but it is not clear how much of this land area will be managed following the completion of training and capacity building exercises. Likewise, there is no data on how much of the remaining 93 357 ha in the PWEPA, which is reported to contain a total of 9 “paper” NRs, will be managed.

110. In another example, the MTR was unable to identify information on the replication of community-based activities, given the majority of project activities are still on-going. For example, output 2.1 includes promotion of *“cost-effective wetland ecosystem management techniques tested and incorporated into the PWEPA for replication”*. The MTR was informed demonstrations to promote techniques for restoring wetland vegetation, restoring submerged vegetation and benthos, techniques for integrated restoration of hydrology, vegetation and water bird habitats, etc. are still being consolidated in the demonstration sites. As a result, it is not yet possible to comment on how far local government and communities are taking up these techniques. Nevertheless, interviews with locals indicate take up of these techniques is highly likely due to the application of the ecological compensation scheme that will help fund wetland habitat restoration using a selection of the best techniques identified by the CAS and the project’s lead consultant on this topic.
111. Also, significant is the fact the project has already demonstrated it can mobilise/leverage funds from the Provincial Government, CAS, the ICF, etc. to support the implementation of project activities, which indicates there are opportunities to mobilise/leverage new funds to support the replication of community-based activities, including internal income generation activities and fiscal incentives/stimulus.
112. Finally, it has been previously pointed out that the project is not closely coordinating with the authorities involved in the former 6+1 programme, especially in Anhui and Hubei Provinces since project closure in 2019, to facilitate learning on project activities that being replicated successfully elsewhere and which could be replicated by project 052 (or incorporated in existing activities to make them more effective). Likewise, the project appears to have had very little exposure to FAO’s wealth of international knowledge and experience in this regard, which could be used to improve on-going activities and/or catalyse new/adapted approaches to wetland management, conservation and monitoring. One exception, appears to be the LTO’s recent support in mid-2020 to provide stakeholders with access to information on FAO’s promotion of sustainable wetland agriculture and water management techniques being applied in the Mekong River basin.

4.5 Factors affecting performance

MTR question 5 – What are the main factors affecting the project from reaching its results?

Finding 10: The project’s design has some shortcomings that are affecting it from delivering change at the strategic level (national, inter-provincial and provincial). The absence of adequate mechanisms to systematise and apply cross-sector coordination on wetland PA management, or to fund coordinated actions relating to the operation of the JWRIMS, alternative livelihoods development and enterprise development plans, or wetland restoration are contributing factors that affect participation levels. The application of *ad hoc* conditions put in place to mitigate the risks of executing the project through the JxFoD have proved difficult to implement and caused delays and increased transaction costs. This has not been aided by the absence of a suitable project design to fund areas such as assurance activities, FAO Fee Guidelines that have contributed to the underfunding of the BH/FAO-CN to support the executing partner apply the EA/PIMM and the employment of the CTA and PMO on a part-time basis. In addition, the MTR found some outputs in the Prodoc that do not follow a clear intervention logic under their respective component (especially under component 1) and the outcomes for components 1 and 3 need greater clarification.

Finding 11: The project has a highly satisfactory approach to building synergies at all levels to enhance cost-effectiveness, research capacity, communications, learning, etc. in Jiangxi Province in general, and in the PWEPA in particular. Synergies with co-finance agreements have been the most successful as this appears to solidify the partnerships to achieve results. However, some synergies in the Prodoc are now out-of-date, or there is a lack of clarity as to the exact role the project should play. This is particularly the case with the 6+1 programme, where there is little guidance as to work plan to be established with projects in Anhui and Hubei provinces during and after their closure in 2019, as well as on permanent communication channels to be established with the NFGA/MEE on national wetland policy development, planning and biodiversity monitoring in wetland PAs.

Finding 12: The PMO has made efforts to mitigate the challenges of communication due to its part-time nature by holding weekly meetings to monitor operations and progress. On the one hand, the project maintains a strong dialogue on monitoring activities, finance outputs, METT scores, etc. On the other, it has largely overlooked the monitoring of outcomes (immediate and wider) provided in the Prodoc to support learning (linked to the ToC). As a result, there is a gap in information and reporting on these outcomes. This is not aided by the fact the application of KAP is not done on an annual basis targeting specific actions.

4.5.1 Project design and readiness

113. The MTR found the project’s intervention logic is based on a clear environmental objective (referred to as “project goal”) and development objective (termed “project

objective”) and respond to three main threats to wetlands identified in the project’s rationale; namely degradation of wetland habitats, over-exploitation of wetland species (i.e. unsustainable use of wetland biodiversity) and the effects of climate change. According to Prodoc, the project’s three main components aim at removing these threats by focusing on their root causes. However, unlike other GEF5-funded projects identified in 2014-2015, each component is not defined by a hierarchy of expected outcomes, outputs and activities with targets. Instead each component title is presented with a loosely defined expected outcome, supported by a set of outputs with long drawn out texts describing what is to be carried out. The MTR found the presentation of the project’s components and outputs in this way very time consuming to understand and analyse.

114. For example, Component 1 aims to achieve, *“improved and consolidated wetland PA system within the larger landscape context in Jiangxi Province”*. The MTR is not clear what this means, or how it is to be measured? The description of component 1, states more clearly that it is designed to, *“establish integrated provincial-level legal, planning and oversight frameworks for all wetland protected areas in the province and integrate the management of wetland PA systems with the operations and practices of productive sectors / landscapes”*. In addition, it states, the main focus of component 1 is to *“expand effective management to areas that are already within existing PAs, which is considered the highest priority in the province”*. However, it also states, *“the project has more chance of success through expanding existing PA units “unofficially” through 6-7 new field stations, as there is little political support for “official” expansion through establishing new wetland reserves”*⁴⁰ The MTR believes these statements provide clear evidence of one of the root causes of wetland degradation and over-exploitation, which is increasingly exacerbated by the effects of climate change and poor water management; namely conflicting political (and economic) interests that are not being addressed in the planning system. As a result, the idea of establishing the JPWPAMS as the main means to expanding management over a wider area of the wetland PAs in the PWEPA risks “isolating” wetland management from its wider goal of enhancing the sustainable development and resilience of Jiangxi Province, while at the same time protecting its biodiversity.

115. This “isolated” approach to expanding wetland management is further exemplified by the decision in the Prodoc to establish the PMO in the JxFoD’s PLNNR Division. Indeed, the PMO comments in the Self-evaluation report that, *“PLNNR itself is a division level institution with very limited administrative power to coordinate with department level agencies This causes problems for carrying out data collection and institutional interviews by consultants and subcontractors. For coordinating with other governmental line agencies, PMO must first coordinate with relevant divisions of Provincial Department of Forestry, which is very time-consuming”*. Furthermore, the PSC has no representatives from any line agencies, which is the main reason the project has opted to apply multi-stakeholder consultation workshops.

⁴⁰ All excerpts taken from the Prodoc, p.39-41.

116. Turning to the design of component 2 the MTR found its expected outcome and outputs have a clearer focus, build on lessons learned from previous GEF/FAO projects and correspond to the internal needs and priorities of the JxFoD, its six Forestry Bureaus participating in the demonstrations and the local communities who live in and around the PWEPA. Nonetheless, the MTR found component 2 should have incorporated output 1.2 on the grounds expansion of wetland management capacity relates directly to the needs and priorities of the JxFoD. For this reason, the RM in Appendix 6 has assessed progress of this output under component 2. In addition, interviews confirm that output 2.2 has overlooked the importance of including the development of inter-county coordination concerning the implementation county-based NRs to support the application of the PWEPA management framework.

117. Component 3, is accompanied by a poorly defined expected outcome that is also difficult to monitor: *“institutional and stakeholder capacities [enhanced] to manage consolidated wetland PA system in Jiangxi Province.”* Taking into account outputs 3.1 and 3.3. focus on information management and communication, the MTR believes it would have been clearer and simpler to have focused the expected outcome on increasing access to learning and knowledge exchange on wetland conservation and its sustainable use. Meanwhile, output 3.2 focuses on cross-sector capacity building for PA system coordination and planning, which belongs under component 1 (where it could replace output 1.2, which belongs under component 2). Finally, the economic valuation of wetland PA services (output 1.4) is designed to enhance learning and would, therefore, be better suited to component 3.

118. On a final note, the MTR wishes to recap on the finding in 4.1.1, that the Prodoc does not include any guidance on its exit strategy to clarify how key activities, such as training and monitoring, are to be continued beyond the project’s duration to ensure the project’s vision and mission (encapsulated in the ToC) is fully realised and produces the desired replication it seeks (impact).

4.5.2 *Quality of project execution and management arrangements (including assessment of risks)*

119. The MTR found no evidence to indicate the quality of the executing agency’s (EA) management and administrative capacity has been below standard, or unsatisfactory. Indeed, the MTR believes the PLNNR/JxFoD, in particular the DG, together with the PMO staff, have made every effort to implement the project as planned and to a high standard. This is demonstrated by their commitment to mobilise the multi-stakeholder workshops as an alternative to the JPWPACC, facilitating the mobilisation/leveraging of additional funds to support project activities in the run up to the International Birdwatching Week and the fact the DG has fulfilled his duties as National Project Director as prescribed in the Prodoc (p. 101) without exception. Nevertheless, the quality of the project’s execution has been compromised by the following shortcomings in the Prodoc:

- The exclusion representatives of key provincial departments responsible for Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Culture and Tourism, Ecology and Environment, Housing and Urban-Rural Development, Industry and Information Technology, Land Resources/Land-use Planning and Water Resources in the PSC;
- The employment of staff from PLNNR assigned to the PMO on a part-time basis;
- The selection of a CTA that is not based in Jiangxi and employed on a part time basis;
- Inadequate attention given fully analysing risks (see also section 4.4.1) within the context of SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) and requiring risk management to be integrated in the annual work planning process in order they are addressed through the application of project activities that include appropriate mitigation measures where and when appropriate;
- Insufficient emphasis given to capturing, discussing and analysing good practices and lessons learned from the demonstration sites, aided by GEF/FAO procedures that require two sets of progress reporting using formats that place too much attention on time consuming micro-management of project outputs.

120. Finally, in terms of project delivery in the demonstration sites, the MTR found the vast majority of local interviewees were satisfied with the quality of the trainings, capacity building, equipment, outreach activities realised. This has been achieved by the selection and employment of qualified provincial staff and national consultants/subcontractors who have in-depth knowledge and work experience in wetland planning and management, biodiversity monitoring, educational outreach activities, etc. Nevertheless, interviews also confirmed the quality of project delivery could be enhanced further by ensuring better communication and collaboration between consultants/sub-contractors and between consultants/sub-contractors and key sectors, local authorities, community-based organisations, etc. Interviewees from DPMBNR and ICF also commented on the need to improve the design of environmental education strategies using a qualified team of communications experts and carried out with various departments of the county government and the PA management units.

4.5.3 Project oversight by FAO as the GEF Agency and national partners

121. As stated in section 4.3.2 the GCU committed substantial resources to supporting the BH/FAO-CN and the executing partner implement the special conditions set by FAO's Senior Management governing the management of risk associated with indirect implementation (through an EA/OPA).⁴¹ However, given the Prodoc had not been designed or budgeted to apply these conditions (in particular effective risk mitigation and assurance activities), the BH/FAO-CN experienced a shortfall in both funding and human resources needed to apply these conditions. This contributed to delays in both the physical and financial advance of the project. Furthermore, the common understanding

⁴¹ An interview with GCU in September 2020 confirmed this centred on employing an international and national consultant in the period 2016-2018.

both within GCU and BH/FAO-CN that GEF5-funded projects are being implemented in line OPIM/MS-701 in China, indicates there was inadequate internal coordination within FAO (in particular between GCU and PSS) between its release in late 2016 to date.⁴² Furthermore, the deficiencies highlighted in section 4.3.2 concerning the Fee Guidelines applied by FAO to manage GEF-funded projects was also highlighted by the acting BH/FAO-CN as a major drawback in providing the training and supervision needed to guide the executing partner apply the EA as intended by FAO's Senior Management.

122. For example, the PMO's decision to conduct direct implementation of some activities (mainly under component 2) could have been avoided had there been higher levels of supervision and training of the PMO. Instead, in the word of the PMO, it "overloaded" its part-time staff with additional tasks.⁴³ Initially, the PMO attempted to resolve this by merging these duties into the ToR of the small team of national consultants recruited, but this just switched the work overload over to the national consultants, some of whom chose to end their contracts. As a result, it was not until April 2018 the PMO was in a position to implement the project with the support of a full teams of national consultants. Meanwhile, the recruitment of the international consultant remains unresolved since the original expert recruited for the post was unable to take up his duties due to personal reasons in 2018. This situation, was not aided by the change of the Project Manager in 2019 and the current thinking within the PMO that the funds available could be used more efficiently to support the recruitment of national consultants and cover funding gaps.

123. The quality of the technical support provided to the project by the Lead Technical Officer (LTO), was found to be satisfactory. The LTO is based in FAO-RAP (Thailand) and in this specific case is fluent in the Mandarin language. Nonetheless, location in Bangkok retains the image of a "detached" LTO which limits the level of her effective engagement in project implementation and in decision-making in areas such as the replacement of the international expert, which the MTR believes has contributed to less exposure of the project to international good practices, international networking, knowledge exchange, study tours, etc. than originally planned in the Prodoc.

124. Finally, regarding the quality of the LTO's inputs, the MTR found the LTO attended the project's Inception workshop (in May-June 2017), the project's first PSC meeting (March 2018) and the project experts' meeting to discuss progress on key outputs such as the JPWPAMS and guidelines. Analysis of the Back-to-Office Reports (BTOR), indicate the reporting officer has made some important suggestions to support project implementation. For example, in the latter the MTR identified valuable recommendations

⁴² The PSS informed the MTR that project 052 and other GEF5-funded projects did not follow or satisfy all OPIM requirements and should be considered as "exceptions than standard projects implemented through partners following the standard OPIM approach", because the conditions only apply some of the provisions of OPIM/MS-701 (such as spot checks and audits based on an assurance plan), 29 September 2020.

⁴³ Self-evaluation report, P.83

such as the importance of incorporating into the JPWPAMS water ecosystem integrity and the integrated water resources management, focusing not only on wetland conservation, but its sustainable use and emphasising the economic benefits of conserving biodiversity, citing ecotourism and pest management as examples. However, the MTR found there is a need for more regular participation of the LTO in the identification of good practices and lessons learned, improving data collection, enhancing reporting techniques (using data) and addressing communication gaps. However, the LTO informed the MTR that FAO-CN and project stakeholders have been recently provided with access to a brief on sustainable wetland agriculture and water management in the Mekong Region (FAO-RAP, July 2020) and that the relations established with UNDP on facilitating the project's participation in the 6+1 programme to 2019, as well as after its closure (i.e. between 2020-2022) has been affected by the departure of the GEF portfolio manager in 2019 and, more recently, by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

4.5.4 *Financial management and co-financing*

125. The MTR did not identify any major problems associated with the accounting and management of GEF funds. For example, financial statements and reporting were found to comply with the reporting requirements mentioned in the Prodoc (p. 76). Nevertheless, the delay of over six months in paying the first disbursement and the general low expenditure rate recorded so far, indicate that executing agencies and the Ministry of Finance (MoF) - as GEF's operational focal point in China – require practical training sessions on the application of the PIMM and that this needs to be systematically followed-up in the inception phase, rather than on an *ad hoc* basis.

126. The MTR found all entities providing co-finance, with the exception of FAO, have either fully met their co-finance obligations, or are very close to doing so. Furthermore, the JxFoD has compensated for the decision of the Three Gorges to withdraw from the project by covering its remaining balance (see Table 2 above). Meanwhile, FAO has provided just 4.1 per cent of its agreed cash contribution, although in-kind payments total 78.1 per cent of total commitments to 30/06/2020. executing agency has the slow disbursement of co-finance that have affected implementation rates, or the need to reschedule activities.

127. Finally, the abovementioned gaps in finance to cover some key activities, such as financial support to the alternative livelihoods programme and development of co-management monitoring, have not been addressed by the project to date. The MTR concludes there needs to be a systematic review of the project budget and outputs on at least a bi-annual basis and provisions provided to allow greater flexibility provided to allow for budget reallocations at each review where justified and approved by FAO and MoF.

4.5.5 *Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement*

128. The Prodoc provides a comprehensive review of opportunities to build synergies with other projects in the interests of sharing knowledge, training costs and widening the project's scope within the Yangtze River basin, focusing in particular on establishing close coordination with the above-mentioned China Biodiversity Partnership and Framework for Action (6+1 programme), in particular in Anhui and Hubei Provinces, which share similar challenges and opportunities to conserve wetland PAs over wider geographical area (i.e. middle reaches of the Yangtze River basin). The MTR found the establishment of this particular synergy offers an excellent opportunity to strengthen the case for developing an inter-provincial mechanism that is mutually reinforcing through the establishment of common management strategies and plans for the wetlands of all three provinces. In addition, it increases the chances of recovering species of global importance, as well as other endangered wetland biodiversity in general, or endemic to the middle reaches of the Yangtze basin. However, the MTR found the project appears to only be paying lip service to the development of this particular partnership by attending annual meetings and reporting on progress in the form of essentially stand-alone projects. For example, a part from information concerning participation in these annual meetings, there is no reference in the progress reports and work plans to indicate any of the project activities are part of a coordinated approach to expanding wetland management capacity, developing co-management and good governance, metadata development, education outreach communication strategies, developing research and development on wetland restoration, integrating wetland management in spatial planning, hydrological modelling and planning, etc. As such, there is a risk that duplication of activities is taking place, but going undetected.
129. A similar situation was found concerning coordination and collaboration with other GEF-funded projects. As stated in section 4.1.1 significant opportunities to develop synergies with project GCP/CPR/056/GFF have not been exploited, especially in areas such as the establishment of cost-effective wetland restoration techniques, or on gaining direct access to MWR's application of River/Lake Health Assessments (R/LHA) as an alternative to the EHI that has not been conducted on the grounds it is not an officially recognised and applied practice in China.
130. Contrastingly, synergies that have been backed-up by co-finance agreements, such as with ICF, or CAS, are demonstrating positive outcomes. For example, the partnership established with ICF has grown to include the World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), resulting in collaboration in several project activities, such as supporting the development of community co-management, development of training materials to promote education on wetlands in local communities, joint-education events, etc. Similarly, collaboration with local NGOs in DPMBNR has facilitated the creation of 5 new bird conservation associations throughout the Duchang NR and a partnership with Nanchang University and Jiangxi Normal University has demonstrated the opportunities of harnessing their capacity to produce community education materials and promote education on wetlands. Finally, also important to mention has been the synergy established with the Nanchang Caicha Opera since 2017, which has successfully

incorporated bird and wetland conservation into all its performances realised in the Poyang Lake region. Interviews confirm the opera troupe has been a highly successful way of communicating the importance of wetlands and birds, on self-analysing bad practices such as bird nets and promoting Chinese folklore and culture at the same time.

4.5.6 Communication, visibility, knowledge management and knowledge products

131. The project’s internal communication between PMO staff, staff from the PLNNR, NWNNR and DPMBNR, the Finance Division of the JxFoD, consultants, subcontractors etc. has been hampered by the part-time nature of the PMO and CTA. To improve communication weekly staff meetings are now common practice within the PMO and supported by the continuous review of project operations in an “Output Progress Monitoring Sheet”. These meetings are also an opportunity for coordination between the CTA and the Project Manager and Deputy Project Manager on technical developments, needs, etc. However, due to the establishment of the PMO at the divisional level of the JxFoD (PLNNR), staff experience high transaction costs in communicating and coordinating with provincial line departments, which cannot be accessed directly, due to the strong hierarchical nature of Chinese government. Indeed, in most cases PMO staff can usually only contact line agencies through the DG for the PLNNR, or other relevant divisions of the JxFoD. In addition, interviewees confirmed communication with the 3-participating county-level NRs is hampered by the fact they do not have representatives who sit in the PSC, or in the weekly meetings of the PMO. Similarly, communication with the NFGA and the authorities associated with the 6+1 Programme to has not been consolidated through a robust coordination plan designed to generate cost sharing, harmonise wetland management strategies and improve the visibility of project results.

Figure 12: Example of a bird checklist to promote bird watching in the local community



Source: PMO

132. The project has also established a wide variety of external communications to promote its visibility and stimulate learning, monitoring, alternative livelihoods, etc. These range from, inter alia:

- Project-specific communication activities linked to the educational outreach programme;
- Studies designed to support advocacy for wetland PA conservation and sustainable use, such as the economic valuation of wetlands;
- Press releases through local media and TV companies, such as Nanchang City TV, Jiangxi TV and local newspapers;
- Newsletters (in Chinese and English). A total of 9 newsletters have been produced to end 2019, including one specifically linked to the International Birdwatching Week at Poyang Lake in 2019;
- Promotional materials on the project in the form of brochures, banners, calendars, bird checklists and so forth. An example of a bird checklist is provided in Figure 14 above.

133. Overall, the MTR is satisfied with the wide range of communications it has established and the positive contribution they have made to both raising awareness on wetland PA services and functions and enhancing the project's visibility in Jiangxi province and in the PWEPA in particular. For example, the project 052 has shared results and experiences with the 6+1 programme partners through three main events: (i) hosting the 6+1 Annual PSC and knowledge sharing meeting in March 2018; (ii) hosting the 6+1 final wrap-up workshop in Nanchang in December 2019, which included site visits to wetland restoration pilot sites and the new visitor's centre in the PLNNR; and (iii) participating in workshops and knowledge sharing events in Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang in 2017 and 2018 respectively. However, the MTR identified a few areas where the project communications retain some shortcomings:

- The absence of a qualified communications expert who is able to apply a communication strategy that is carefully tailored to the needs, interests and priorities of different audiences (from decision-makers through to women, men and youths in the local communities);
- The lack of direct communication channels and plans with line agencies, county NRs, relevant GEF-funded projects, etc. to stimulate information exchange of mutual interest;
- The lack of a specific MoU, or work plan with partners in Anhui and Hubei provinces dedicated to harmonising the JPWPAMS and JWRIMS with their wetland management strategies and information systems, on lessons, good practices and advances in establishing funding mechanisms to support wetland management, etc.⁴⁴;

⁴⁴ Information provided by the PMO on 18 September 2020 in the Comment Matrix of the first draft report, submitted on 07 September 2020.

- The lack of communications in English (including other languages for the bi-annual International Birdwatching Week);
- The application of a specific mobile phone application dedicated to stimulating the development of a Poyang Lake interactive community networking on bird numbers, status of biodiversity, water level monitoring, hazard monitoring to support early warning systems, status of illegal practices, etc. all of which could also be used to support the development of the JWRIMS, the field stations, research, planning, informed decision-making among decision-makers, etc.;
- Improving networking at the international level on wetland management good practices, lessons, etc.

134. On this final bullet point, the absence of an international consultant, represents a major barrier to developing international networking through which information exchange, study tours, etc. could be organised.

4.5.7 Monitoring and evaluation (M&E), including M&E design, implementation and budget

135. The project's internal M&E system is designed primarily to support planning and reporting on finance, operations and progress in meeting outputs. This is aided by weekly meetings to assess progress in meeting outputs, based on the traffic light system. For example, the PPRs and PIRs require project staff to spend a lot of time on reporting on the progress of every activity under each output and sub-output and subsequently report on how far targets are being met in the Results Matrix. For example, the Self-evaluation report provides an 18-page summary of project activities and 21 pages on meeting targets. This situation is not aided by the lack of a ToC to guide results monitoring on how far the project is delivering change at the policy, institutional, management and local community levels so as to stimulate debate on the drivers of change, on gaps and what needs to be up-scaled/addressed in the annual planning process. Furthermore, specific tools such the Knowledge-Attitude-Practice (KAP) surveys are not applied annually to support and justify the annual work plans. As a result, the project lacks an internal monitoring system geared to stimulating learning and reflection on the immediate outcomes of project outputs and their wider outcome(s) linked to the ToC.

136. Furthermore, key baseline and target information was found to be missing. For example, the project has no baselines, or targets to measure progress on the expansion of wetland PA management in the PWEPA and outside, or on how far the project is contributing to establishing a common wetland management strategy with Anhui and Hubei Provinces. In fact, the project provides no information in the PIRs and PPRs on its association with the 6+1 programme beyond attending annual meetings and events. Under these circumstances, it appears the opportunities to develop inter-provincial eco-tourism, education programmes, METT and KAP surveys, etc. do not appear to have been considered and integrated into a common agenda.

137. Similarly, the application of METT was found to be a useful tool to measure wetland PA management capacity and identify where such capacity is weak, but focuses mainly on tracking capacity at the operational level (as opposed to capacity to identify outcomes and manage opportunities and risks) and does not appear to compare scores with Anhui and Hubei provinces. This is particularly important at the PA and community levels where the MTR found more needs to be done to not only monitor co-management participation, but also assess results relating to their participation; namely the causes behind the upward, or downward trends that are being achieved in relation to, among others, illegal fishing, use of bird nets, drainage levels, bird numbers, employment patterns relating to organic farming, tourism, food processing and other livelihoods, introduction of endemic flora and other wetland restoration techniques, etc.

4.6 Cross-cutting priorities

MTR question 6 – To what extent have gender consideration been taken into account in project design and implementation?

Finding 11: The Prodoc provides some important insights into the plight of rural women in living in and around the PWEPA, although it falls short on establishing a gender strategy to address the specific needs and priorities of these women and other vulnerable groups (there are no ethnic minorities located in the PWEPA) by maximising their access to training, information and resources. However, in practice the project provides very limited information on sex-disaggregated participation, how far it is reaching the most vulnerable inhabitants of participating rural communities, or how many women, youths, etc. have been empowered through participation in decision-making roles, or through increases in their human, social, physical, economic and/or environmental capital.

Finding 12: The MTR is satisfied from the evidence gathered that the project continues to fully conform with the environmental and social standards established in the ESS, even though the ESS checklist was not produced by the BH prior to starting the project and has not been applied/updated in the PMO's Self-Assessment, or latest PIR. Furthermore, monitoring and reporting on the Aichi Targets appears to be absent, despite the fact the project is making an important contribution to reducing biodiversity-loss by including the restoration, protection and management of wetland habitats.

4.6.1 Gender and social inclusion focus

138. The Prodoc stresses the importance of establishing a gender balance in community-based training and activities in recognition that rural women are often knowledge holders due to the migration of men to the cities, but also, "*frequently ignored by local*

*authorities... and often the most vulnerable to the loss of wetlands ecosystem services”.*⁴⁵ Furthermore, it includes an assessment of the potential influence of gender on the project (Annex 8), which also found that that where rural men are present, they generally play dominant roles in households and will often sideline women’s participation on the basis they, “*know better about household production and can speak better Mandarin than females*”. However, cognitive analysis of ecological benefits of wetlands revealed that, “*32.6 per cent of male respondents have no idea about ecological benefits, while the figure for females is 53.3 %.*”⁴⁶

139. The MTR found the project’s response to gender equality has been moderately satisfactory. For example, the baseline survey conducted on training needs of local communities included gender analysis, which has ensured participation of women is mainstreamed in co-management activities, the promotion of alternative livelihood activities to support women and men adopt new environmentally-friendly agricultural practices (such as organic farming), become tourist guides, open guest houses/homestays, restaurants, etc. According to interviews around 40 per cent of the locals participating in the field monitoring stations installed in and around the PLNNR and NWNRR are women and all training sessions relating to co-management and educational outreach activities aim at establishing a gender balance to ensure as many women as possible are engaged in wetland PA management and conservation-related activities.

140. Furthermore, to assess progress on gender equality, the KAP surveys have been designed to be gender sensitive so as to determine how far women are learning and increasing their awareness on the importance wetlands ecosystem services, the conservation and sustainable use of these services, in patrolling and monitoring, etc. However, the MTR was unable to assess the results of the KAP survey planned at the mid-term point of project operations, as this has been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the latest PIR to June 2019 confirmed the KAP surveys are dedicated to ensuring at least 40 per cent of all respondents should be females.

141. Despite, these findings project progress reporting in the PPRs and PIRs provides limited compound monitoring on the number of women who have participated in project activities and trainings in each of the six participating wetland PA sites.⁴⁷ For example, the two PPRs submitted in 2019, provide the same table and sex-disaggregated figures concerning the participation of farmers, school students, government officials, technicians and PA management staff in project activities. As a result, the MTR requested data on the main activities/trainings conducted with local communities in the

⁴⁵ Prodoc, Section 3.5 Sustainability: Gender, p. 57.

⁴⁶ Prodoc, Annex 8, Section 3: Analysis of the potential influence of gender on the project, p. 119.

⁴⁷ Interviews indicate the co-management training specialists do record this data, but it is not collected and used by the PMO for internal analysis and reporting.

demonstration sites from the PMO. The feedback is summarised in Table 3. It confirms a total of 659 households have participated in the training and support activities conducted at the demonstration sites to 30 June 2020, of which 22 per cent were women. This contrasts with a reported 12 000 beneficiaries of which 48 per cent were women in the PPRs for 2019. In summary, this indicates more clarity is needed on the management of gender participation and that on average these activities are covering around half the number of women participants who are reported to be participating in the above-mentioned field stations.

Table 3. Summary of women’s participation in community-based activities to June 2020

Activity	Number of participants	Male	Female	% of women Participation
Training on co-management	190	168	22	12%
Local community participatory research and planning	122	94	28	23%
Local community NR ranger training	87	69	18	21%
Rewards & Bonuses (bird counts and conservation of bird feeding grounds)	260	180	80	31%
Total/Average	659	511	148	22%

Source: PMO

142. The MTR was not, however, able to retrieve more specific data on women’s participation rates at each of the wetland PA sites in order to conduct a comparison of participation rates in each PA. Also, a field visit is needed to assess women’s feedback on their views on the quality of the training to determine areas for improvement and identify specific lessons and good practices that could be addressed/replicated to enhance women’s equality and promote their specific knowledge (and technologies) on wetland biodiversity and management. Moreover, there is no information in progress reporting on how far women are being successfully empowered to take on decision-making roles. Notwithstanding, interviewees informed the MTR that a woman has been chosen to head the NWNRR since 2019 and there are cases where women’s groups appear to be developing in the tourism sector.

143. Also, significant is the MTR’s finding that gender specialist has not been employed so far to provide specific guidance on developing a gender strategy that supports, among others, the identification of women’s specific needs ensure access is optimised regarding training courses, information exchange, available resources, etc. Furthermore, there is no mention as to how far the project is applying GEF/FAO policies on gender equality, even though GEF launched a new policy document on gender in November 2017.

144. Finally, concerning the participation of ethnic minorities in the project, Jiangxi province is mainly populated by the majority Han ethnic group, although some ethnic groups are found in the province, such as the She ethnic minority. The MTR questioned a wide sample of stakeholders and local representatives to determine if any of these ethnic minorities are participating in the project, or who live in the Poyang Lake region. However, all respondents confirmed there are no ethnic minorities living in the Poyang Lake area. This is also confirmed in the latest PIR for 2019-2020, under section 8.

4.6.2 Environmental and social standards

145. The MTR was unable to determine if the BH completed the Environmental and Social Screening (ESS) checklist in 2016 prior to launching the project in September 2016. However, the MTR was provided with the Environmental Impact Assessment conducted by the BH. In summary, the BH concluded the, *“Project directly contributes to the goals of the Program of Work on Protected Areas of the CBD... is strongly aligned with GEF BD-1... will secure... globally important wetland biodiversity outcomes [and] in doing so, it will enhance the conservation and management of the habitats of endangered species including many endemics, as well as genetic and ecosystem diversity.... Over 215,000 hectares of Jiangxi’s globally significant wetlands and associated species will benefit from these ecosystem-based management regimes”*.⁴⁸

Following a rapid assessment of the ESS template, the MTR found the project’s approach and activities remain fully compliant with the ESS, in particular all of Sections I and II of the ESS concerning FAO’s Strategic Objectives and Principles for Sustainability and ESS 2 on Biodiversity, Ecosystems and Natural Habitats. However, the MTR points out that to substantiate these findings the project should include in its monitoring the contribution to the Aichi Targets (in particular 11 and 14), especially taking into account the Secretariat of CBD has published the Global Biodiversity Outlook 5 (2020), which clearly states the importance of protecting both biodiversity and its habitats. Indeed, in its overview it proclaims that, *“biodiversity is declining at an unprecedented rate and the pressures driving this decline are intensifying”*.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Risks Management and Environmental Impact Assessment, 2016 (provided by the GEF-FAO GCU in May 2020)

⁴⁹ Secretariat of CBD, Global Biodiversity Outlook 5, Summary for Policymakers, 2020, p.2.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

146. The main findings in this report lead the MTR to conclude the project is making an important contribution to enhancing the conservation and sustainable use of globally significant wetland biodiversity in Jiangxi Province (project goal). This has been aided by positive developments at the political level that have increased the project's relevance. In particular, there is a growing political commitment to conserve the country's wetlands in recognition of their ecological services, coupled with President Xi Jinping's call for the stepping up of ecological civilisation in 2019. Major institutional reforms in 2017-2018 have also provided new opportunities for provincial governments to assume more autonomy over the management of their natural resources.

147. However, these reforms have also created some new challenges that make it harder to achieve some of the project's expected outcomes, in particular at the provincial level where the establishment a cross-sector coordinating mechanism is proving difficult to achieve. As such it is not clear how far the JPWPAMS can be fully integrated into provincial and sector development plans, or how far the JWRIMS can be developed to support effective and informed cross-sector decision-making concerning the coordination of Provincial Departments development plans in and around the wetland PAs in Jiangxi Province in general and in the PWEPA in particular. Indeed, unless these challenges are fully addressed and a solution found, the MTR concludes the project's ability to catalyse effective management of Jiangxi's wetland protected areas system at the provincial level will be affected and this is likely to have an adverse effect on the protection of globally important biological diversity in these wetlands (project objective). However, at the county level the project has demonstrated that local government planning can incorporate county-based wetland NRs into its development planning and management framework.

148. The implementation of the project is also not aided by some faults in the project's design (Prodoc). Most significant is the creation of a PSC without any cross-sector representation and the establishment of the PMO in a division of the JxFoD that is responsible for PLNNR, which has no direct access to the Provincial Departments of key line agencies. Another important shortcoming is the lack of clarity as the role and coordination the project is supposed to play in the 6+1 programme designed to support the management of natural resources within the Yangtze River basin, in particular projects operating in Anhui and Hubei provinces, which together with Jiangxi Province, form part of the middle catchment area of this basin.

149. Taking into account the above-mentioned strengths and challenges facing the project, the **MTR's overall risk rating is medium, which corresponds to moderately likely the project can reach its main outcomes and objectives**. This rating is higher than the one most recently assigned by the PMO, BH and LTO in the PIR to June 2020, which retains

the same “low” risk rating that has been applied since 2017. The MTR justifies its rating on the fact inter-institutional coordination is primarily maintained through project workshops that are not sustainable, policy formulation is not being guided by effective coordination within the 6+1 programme, which foresees the establishment of harmonised management strategies for wetland PA systems in Anhui, Hubei and Jiangxi provinces, climate change is a growing threat demonstrated by some of the worst ever floods in Jiangxi and Hubei provinces on record and there are financial gaps that risk compromising the rural transition to sustainable livelihoods. In addition, the MTR has added the growing problems of the coronavirus pandemic together with a major flooding event in June-July 2020 has contributed to slowing implementation in 2020 and which is likely to increase transaction costs from 2021 in order to intensify/catch up on the implementation of key activities projected to start next year such as the JPWRAMS, JWRIMS, the development of alternative livelihoods, the application of co-management plans, etc., as well as in relation to the implementation of the recommendations proposed in this report.

Conclusion 1 (Relevance) on question 1: *Are the project outcomes congruent with current country priorities, GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework and the needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries?*

The project’s objectives and expected outcomes align more strongly now with both national and provincial government policies to protect, restore and manage wetland protected areas and engage local communities based on ecosystem approaches than when the project was launched. This has strengthened the project’s rationale; namely to reduce anthropogenic and abiotic threats. Furthermore, the project directly contributes to raising awareness on the functions and services of wetlands, the economic value associated with these services and the economic opportunities derived from the protection of biodiversity of global importance. The project also fully aligns with GEF5 (BD-1) and FAO priorities and strategic objectives (SO-2) and directly contributes to supporting the country meet internationally agreed goals and targets, such as Aichi Targets 11 and 14. However, the project’s strategic relevance is affected by its lack of direct engagement of key sectors at the provincial government level in the PSC and effective coordination with the 6+1 programme, which has reduced the scope to develop mutually reinforcing approaches to management and conservation of wetland habitats and its biodiversity in the PWEPA, elsewhere in the Jiangxi Province and in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River basin (Anhui, Hubei and Jiangxi provinces).

Conclusion 2 (Effectiveness) on question 2: *To what extent has the project delivered on its outputs, outcomes and objectives?*

The project is making satisfactory progress in delivering outputs and outcomes where the JxFoD is in direct control of planning and implementation, in particular under component 2 and the educational outreach activities under component 3. In these cases, the project is successfully raising awareness on the ecological functions and services of wetlands and on

the importance of protecting biodiversity. This has been demonstrated through the realisation of the first ever International Birdwatching Week in Jiangxi province in 2019, which has shown the win-win benefits of holding such events; namely raising awareness on the need to conserve wetland habitats as well as its biodiversity at the international, national and provincial levels, while at the same demonstrating these events are good ways to mobilise new funds to support the transition to new sustainable development approaches in the wetland PAs that depend on a combination of cross-sector coordination and co-management approaches. These achievements have been reinforced by innovative educational outreach activities that are encouraging local communities to become the guardians of their wetlands. Meanwhile, project effectiveness is proving more challenging where it depends on cross-sector coordination for which there is no officially agreed mechanism in place to manage and implement cross-sector decisions. As a result, it is highly unlikely the project can reach its objective by 2022. This is not aided by the fact the project has mainly focused on inter-institutional coordination, but far less on intra-institutional coordination and collaboration within the Department of Natural Resources, which since the institutional reforms of 2017-2018 has merged institutions such as the Department for Land Resources that has a mandate to coordinate with all development sectors on spatial/land-use planning and development issues.

Conclusion 3 (Efficiency) on question 3: *To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently and cost effectively?*

The project is estimated to be around one year behind schedule, although the COVID-19 pandemic and major flooding during 2020 has slowed implementation since the start of 2020, which suggests the project may be as much as 18 months behind schedule by the end of 2021. Delays in implementation are due to several factors including funding gaps that have made it difficult for the BH/FAO-CN to support the executing partner implement the EA in line with a set of ad hoc conditions set by FAO's senior management in 2016, a CTA and PMO operating on a part-time basis, staff rotation within the PMO and FAO-CN and shortcomings in project design (see conclusion 5). As a result, physical progress is estimated by the MTR to be no more than 45 per cent, while financial progress is just 24 per cent to 30 June 2020. This situation is particularly significant for the JPWPAMS (in particular the launch of its Wetland Management Standards and Guidelines) and the JWRIMS which due to delays are not projected to start implementation until 2021. This means there is very limited time to supervise their integration into the next 5-Year Development Plan 2021-2025 and corresponding sector development plans. Moreover, the JWRIMS is unlikely to provide sufficient data to support informed decision-making until 2024 and the project's dependency on workshops and reliance on national consultants as lobbyists to facilitate cross-sector coordination on policy and legal reforms is unlikely to be an efficient mechanism to implement the JPWPAMS and JWRIMS, because neither have the political authority to deliver change. Nonetheless, the project has shown it can achieve highly satisfactory levels of cost-effectiveness where it is able to implement project activities directly, which has been demonstrated by partnership agreements with academia, local NGOs, the Caicha Opera, grass-root organisations, etc., all of which have helped share costs (cash and/or in-kind). For example, partnerships with CAS and ICF are

likely to generate savings of at least USD 442 000. In addition, the project has been successful in mobilising/ leveraging a reported USD 71 m. in new funds to support the bi-annual International Birdwatching Week. However, cost-effectiveness is less evident where funding gaps remain, in particular concerning the transition to alternative livelihoods and operation of the JWRIMS.

Conclusion 4 (Sustainability) on question 4: *What is the likelihood that the project results can be sustained after the end of the project?*

The MTR is satisfied the JxFoD is fully committed and will have the capacity to consolidate wetland management practices in the six demonstration sites and expand such practices into other wetland PAs. Furthermore, political and public funding risks associated with the continuation of wetland PA management are likely to remain low, especially as the next Five-Year Provincial Development Plan will support the implementation of the JPWPAMS. Nonetheless, the MTR believes the need to generate alternative revenue streams (such as climate change mitigation benefit creation, payment for environmental services, or joint ventures with the private sector) have not been explored so far to further enhance resilience to the growing effects of climate change. For example, a wide array of stakeholders interviewed agreed confirmed it will be difficult to sustain the ecological compensation payments' scheme over the long-term (i.e. beyond 2030). In addition, the project focuses a lot of resources on developing a management framework for wetland PAs in the PWEPA, supported by co-management to apply the JPWPAMS, promoting the transition to alternative livelihoods and developing the JWRIMS. However, the financial mechanisms needed to operate and maintain these initiatives over the long-term has not been resolved to date. Indeed, national consultants are finding the identification of these financial mechanisms to be challenging, in part due to the lack of regular dialogue with a number of key provincial departments that have a mutual interest to the establish such mechanisms, (in particular the development of the JWRIMS as a cross-sector provincial initiative (as opposed to a Forestry one). Furthermore, the project has not adequately defined what constitutes "effective" wetland PA management, which the MTR considers important as there is insufficient evidence to confirm "effective" management recognises the importance of full integration of risk management, which the MTR believes is an important precursor to ensuring such management is also sustainable, taking into account institutional, financial and climate change-related risks were all found to be growing and likely to impact on wetland PA systems and their communities. In particular, activities such as risk mapping (to guide land-use planning and development) was not evident to support informed decision-making on the adoption of sustainable use approaches to enhance the resilience of wetlands PA systems and the local communities that live in and around them. Furthermore, coordinated risk management is of major interest to the 6+1 programme to underpin a coordinated wetland PA management strategy in the middle reaches of the Yangtze River as well as demonstrate the economic value of wetland conservation, which has already been demonstrated in the project's study on this subject in Jiangxi Province, (in particular concerning floods and drought regulation).

Conclusion 5 (factors affecting performance) on question 5: *What are the main factors affecting the project from reaching its results?*

The project's design is in need of updating and revising in order to optimise its effectiveness and sustain some key outcomes. In particular, there are funding gaps (both in the Prodoc and through the application of FAO's Fee Guidelines concerning the management of GEF-funded projects) that limit the BH/FAO-CN's capacity to conduct regular support missions in the field to guide the JxFoD as executing partner of project 052 (as well as other GEF5-funded projects in China) implement the EA in line with the *ad hoc* conditions applied by FAO's Senior Management prior to the launch of OPIM/MS-701. Also significant is the lack of a coherent hierarchy of outcomes and outputs under each of the components to facilitate project planning, implementation and monitoring. Furthermore, some outputs have become outdated due to political and institutional reforms since in the period 2017-2018, in particular concerning the establishment of the JPWPACC (output 1.3) to supersede the PLWMCC (output 3.2), which is no longer permitted following these reforms. Indeed, this has important implications on the implementation of the JPWPAMS (output 1.1) and JWRIMS (output 3.1) in 2021. Other design issues affecting performance include the decision in the Prodoc to establish the PSC without any cross-sector representation and the establishment of a part-time PMO and CTA based in the PLNNR which the PMO confirms has limited its political clout to work at the cross-sector level in the province. In addition, the PMO operates an internal monitoring and evaluation system that tracks operations, outputs and the meeting of targets in accordance with GEF/FAO reporting procedures, but which is not geared to optimising learning to deliver change at the cross-sector level (i.e. through effective annual planning geared to meeting results and objectives), or at the local level in the PWEPA.

Conclusion 6 (Cross-cutting priorities) on question 6: *To what extent have gender consideration been taken into account in project design and implementation?*

The project's design provides analysis on the specific needs of women living in the PWEPA. However, the project has not built on this analysis during its baseline studies to support annual planning and internal monitoring. As a result, the MTR concludes from the evidence collected that participation rates are low (on average around 20%) and that emphasis on increasing women's participation in the project's main activities in the PWEPA is not enough to remove the barriers to gender equality at the local community level without a gender strategy that focuses on increasing women's access to training, information, resources, etc. Meanwhile, the MTR is satisfied that the project continues to conform with the environmental and social standards established in the ESS in 2016, even though the MTR did not find this has been reviewed and updated by the project to date.

5.2. Recommendations

150. **Recommendation 1 – Strategic relevance and effectiveness – for JxFoD/PSC, FAO-GEF Coordination Unit (GCU), FAO-RAP and FAO-CN:** in line with the recommendations in the Self-evaluation report, it is highly recommended to establish regular dialogue and participatory decision-making that enhances intra and inter-institutional coordination and cooperation on planning and monitoring. It is, therefore, proposed the following Provincial Departments that are closely associated with/have a major impact on the PWEPA, assign a focal point/delegated representative with decision-making powers to participate in the PSC:

- a) Department of Natural Resources of Jiangxi Province (for example, from the section/division responsible for Spatial Planning/Land Use);
- b) Department of Water Resources of Jiangxi Province (for example, from the section/division responsible for River Lake Health Assessments);
- c) Department of Ecology and Environment of Jiangxi Province (for example, from the section/division responsible for Biodiversity Monitoring/IMS);
- d) Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of Jiangxi Province (for example, from the section/division responsible for Development and Planning/Rural industries);
- e) Department of Culture and Tourism of Jiangxi Province (for example, from the section/division responsible for ecotourism);
- f) Jiangxi Development and Reform Commission (for example, from the section/division responsible for overseeing reforms relating to environmental protection)
- g) Department of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of Jiangxi Province (for example, from the section/division responsible for Planning and Construction of Rural-Urban Areas);
- h) Department of Industry and Information Technologies (for example, from the section/division responsible for overseeing compliance in areas such as industrial pollution).

To convoke meetings with these representatives, the MTR recommends the vice governor of Jiangxi Province nominates a suitable person to chair the PSC. In addition, in order the staff of the PMO have access to these line agencies, it is recommended the PSC assesses whether it is necessary to relocate the PMO from the PLNNR to the Department level of JxFoD. Moreover, a focal point should be identified in the NFGA to maintain regular communication with the project on national wetland policy developments, coordination with strategic initiatives such as the 6+1 programme and building support for the upscaling of the project with the support of MNR. At the same time, focal points/delegated representatives should be established in the PLNNR, NWNNR, DPMBNR and the County Governments responsible for the three county-level NRs (Yugan, Wannian and Lushan) to enhance internal communication on the application and monitoring of results of the project,

including contributions to provincial and national targets (including those relating to wetland habitats and biodiversity conservation as in the NBCSAP).

151. **Recommendation 2: efficiency and effectiveness – for JxFoD/PSC, FAO-GEF Coordination Unit (GCU), FAO-RAP and FAO-CN:** the MTR supports the JxFoD's current thinking on the need to appoint the PMO's project manager on a full-time basis to the end of the project. It is highly recommended that the project assistant who has recently started employment on a full-time basis works with the project manager on implementing the recommendations in this report with the support and supervision of the LTO and the GEF portfolio manager in FAO-CN to ensure coordination with the 6+1 programme is re-established and information exchange on the JPWPAMS and JWRIMS, as well as lessons learned and good practices (such as the bi-annual International Birdwatching Week, co-management approaches, wetland restoration techniques, etc.) are shared. In addition, a budget reallocation should be considered to cover the employment of short-term national and (where deemed necessary) international consultants. It is recommended funds allocated to the permanent international consultant who has not been recruited to date, should be used to employ these experts. Key areas where there are gaps that need to be addressed by the project, include among others:

- The employment of a qualified national consultant in spatial governance, in line with the government's commitment to unify spatial and land use planning (2019), especially at the provincial level. In particular the consultant should have knowledge on developing spatial coordination concerning socio-economic development plans (under JRDC), spatial/territory plans (under the Department for Natural Resources) urban/rural plans (under the Department for Housing and Urban-Rural Development) and, if possible, on environmental protection planning (under the Department for Ecology and Environment). It is recommended the proposed consultant works closely with the PMO, the CTA and the expert for the JPWPAMS on determining how the protection of wetland PA habitats and biodiversity can be fully integrated into the 14th Five-Year Plans for Provincial/Prefecture Economic and Social Development (coordinated with the JRDC), the Jiangxi Provincial/Prefecture/Township Spatial and Land Use Plans in the PWEPA (coordinated with the Department for Natural Resources) and Provincial/Prefecture/Township/County Urban/Rural Plans in the PWEPA (coordinated with the Department for Housing and Urban-Rural Development). To support the full integration of wetland management in the above-mentioned plans, it is recommended risk maps are identified by JxFoD in coordination with the Department for Housing and Urban-Rural Development to identify high, medium and low risk areas (to flooding, erosion/sedimentation, pollution, etc.) where the protection/restoration of wetland habitats and its biodiversity should be prioritised.

Figures 13 & 14: Example of a three-dimensional model (Hani Terraces, Yunnan Province)



Source: MTR lead consultant (2014)

To aid the planning process, it is recommended a 3-D model of the PWEPA (including upland areas) is constructed under the supervision of CAS with funding determined by the PSC. In this way, opportunities to promote “planning for real” exercises with representatives from provincial departments, local government, civil society and local communities should be explored in the interests of generating consensus on the adoption of the abovementioned plans, enhancing decentralised planning in the light of the 2017-2018 reforms and promotion of ecological civilisation. The MTR provides an example of a successful 3-D model that has been developed for the Hani Terraces in Yunnan Province. In addition, internationally recognised good practices by the Ramsar Convention should be taken into account, such as the, “*Good Practices Handbook for Integrating Urban Development and Wetland Conservation*”⁵⁰ and, “*The Hidden Loss of Wetlands in China*”⁵¹ and dialogue established with Birdlife International and WWF on bird species monitoring and zoning of wetland bird habitats. It is recommended the 3-D model is produced by CAS (using CAS co-finance) and/or in partnership with a local university, or qualified consultancy (funded with an injection of additional co-finance from the Provincial Government/Department for Natural Resources). It is recommended this model is replicated at some point in the future and established in the visitor centre in the PLNNR to promote ecological civilisation;

- Liaise with the Department of Industry and Information Technologies on the options available to provide access to training, resources and marketing information to promote the alternative livelihoods initiative in participating local communities (prioritising women and youths). It is recommended access is provided to its Public Service Platform for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in Jiangxi Province (setup by Provincial Government under the Department of Industry and IT in 2019 to support networking in Jiangxi Province). In this way access to help-desk and services that promote, among others, certified products from the PWEPA, market studies, guidance on business planning, marketing and administration, quality control, etc.

⁵⁰ Ramsar publication produced by WWT and the Nanjing University Ecological Research Institute of Changshu, 2018.

⁵¹ Weihua Xu et al, Current Biology, 2019.

is enhanced to rural communities and townships to aid them move into sustainable alternative livelihoods;

- The development of a communication strategy on wetland management and conservation tailored to the needs and priorities of different audiences, in particular stakeholders at the county level. It is recommended a gender strategy is integrated into the communication strategy in order vulnerable groups have full access to training, information, resources, etc. relating to alternative livelihoods' development, co-management techniques, etc.
- Establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), or similar, with project GCP/CPR/057/GFF to facilitate information exchange and visits between the project and the Departments for Water Resources in Jiangxi and Yunnan Provinces/Chongqing Municipality concerning the application of R/LHA to monitor e-flow and biodiversity in the PWEPA, the application of the River Chief system in Yunnan Province and Chongqing Municipality, etc.
- Explore, the potential benefit of visiting project GCP/CPR/056/GFF to exchange information on the carbon trading schemes applied in Fujian Province, to determine if such a scheme is applicable in the PWEPA, taking into account wetlands store considerable amounts of carbon.
- Establish a coordination agreement, or MoU with the provincial authorities that continue to operate the projects in Anhui and Hubei provinces under the 6+1 programme that ended in 2019. It is highly recommended Jiangxi Province shares its JPWPAMS with Anhui Province (which has not established its own wetland PA strategy so far) and Hubei Province (which has established an Action Plan for wetland protection in the four lakes basin around Jingzhou City), in the interests of harmonising the wetland PA management strategies and information systems with those of project 052. To aid this process it is recommended the CTA, LTO and FAO-CN establish contact with the UNDP office in China to aid this process and explore the establishment of synergies as and where relevant.

152. Recommendation 3 - Strategic relevance and sustainability – for JxFoD/PSC, FAO-GEF Coordination Unit (GCU), FAO-RAP and FAO-CN: A project extension of 18 months is recommended to recover the current and projected delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic and effects of record floods in June-July 2020, which is estimated to amount to a total of 18 months of lost operations. It is highly recommended the extension is granted with the following conditions:

- 1) Adopt the theory of change proposed in Appendix 9 to clarify the vision and mission of the project, role in the 6+1 programme and promote ecological civilisation all of which are designed to also support the NFGA/MEE report on targets under the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, in particular relevant Aichi Targets;
- 2) Agree to an exchange of letters (or amendment to the Prodoc if necessary) allowing for a revision of the project's outputs, including their assignment to different components where it is agreed they are misplaced. Alternatively, an agreement should be explored and consensus reached that allows for a complete revision of the

Results Matrix to be accepted in lieu of the exchange of letters mentioned above. The revision process should take into account the contents of recommendation 1 and 2 above (includes coordination between the project and Anhui and Hubei provinces) and alignment with the ToC provided in Appendix 9 of this report.

- 3) The project's budget is reviewed by the PSC and FAO to address funding gaps, in particular FAO's capacity to perform adequate levels of supervision in the field to support project implementation in the extension period proposed.

Suggestions on how this should be done:

- Clarify the main expected outcome(s) for all three components in line with the ToC. For example:
 - Proposed outcome for component 1: Provincial and sector development plans are designed and implemented in compliance with spatial/land use plans, in which the conservation and sustainable use of wetland ecosystems, together with risk management, are fully integrated and coordinated with Anhui and Hubei Provinces. In addition, define what constitutes "effective" management and consider including community participation in spatial/land-use planning, risk mapping and mitigation in the definition;
 - Proposed outcome for component 2: Wetland PA management guides the implementation of provincial and sector development plans, based on co-management, inter-county and ecosystem approaches, that leads to the establishment of sustainable local communities in and around the wetland PA system;
 - Proposed outcome for component 3: The JWRIMS – supported by an effective communication strategy - establishes itself as the IMS to be upscaled for the benefit of the middle reaches of the Yangtze River basin to support all sectors take informed and coordinated decisions on socio-economic and spatial/land-use planning (and disaster risk management) in all wetland PAs systems (including buffer zones) in Jiangxi, Anhui and Hubei provinces.
- Assess, modify and, where necessary, reassign project outputs to the component of the project to which they are most closely associated. For example:
 - Output 1.2: reassign the specific parts of this output that relate to component 2 (establishment and operation of Wetland Field Stations and establish three operational demonstration county wetland nature reserves) and ensure the expansion of geographic coverage is quantified with baseline data, so that it can be used as an indicator for JxDoF to monitor the expansion of its management services;
 - Output 1.4: reassign relevant parts of this output (community outreach education and economic valuation) to component 3. It is recommended the

main elements of the valuation are updated at the end of each Five-Year Plan and when the JWRIMS is in full operation to support efforts to incorporate wetland values into provincial accounting systems (as foreseen in the Aichi Target 2) and designed to support informed and effective cross-sector coordination on sector planning and budgeting. Meanwhile, the remaining elements of output 1.4 (review legal/regulatory framework and integration of wetland conservation recommendations in the governmental development planning process) should be modified to secure the integration of wetland conservation and its sustainable use in the socio-economic and spatial/land-use planning process (managed by the Jiangxi Development and Reform Commission and Department for Natural Resources respectively) in urban/rural plans (managed by the Department of Housing) and in the provincial sector development planning and reform process and that the reform of their order the legal and regulatory framework is designed to fully protect wetland PA systems from change of use (especially where ecological compensation reverts farmland to wetlands, but which could be susceptible to conversion into farmland at a later date). In addition, it is recommended to assess possible policy and legal reforms in consultation with the Environmental Investment Committee of the Provincial People's Congress that aim at reducing dependency on direct provincial funding allocations to wetland PA systems to cross-sector cost sharing approaches, on applying international good practices concerning the wetland PA system management and funding (including opportunities to raise income through partnerships with private and non-governmental entities, provincial/local fiscal measures, voluntary contributions, application of PES and carbon trading initiatives at the provincial level, etc. (taking into account Nature Reserve administrations cannot generate income by law);

- Output 3.2: reassign to component 1. It is recommended the text is modified to include training on the integration of wetland PA management within the context of coordinated spatial/land-use planning and risk management to support and guide sector development planning in wetland ecosystems (emphasising the importance of spatial/land-use planning in the upper and middle watersheds of wetland PAs);
 - Output 3.3: refocus the public awareness and outreach activities under a communication strategy that includes information on how spatial/land-use planning can support component 2 achieve effective wetland management, conserve biodiversity and, with the inclusion of risk management/risk mapping/restoration techniques, increase the resilience of local communities and their wetlands.
- Assess and modify the project budget and reassign funds where there are funding gaps, or determine alternative sources. It is strongly recommended the PMO and PSC assess the budgetary needs of the project in the light of the recommendations in this report in order to determine:

- Outputs that are projected to have an excess of funds, or which could be saved through the sharing of training and other exercises with other GEF-funded projects, or projects under the 6+1 programme, or from other donor-funded projects, including WWF, TNC, etc.;
 - Outputs that are projected to need additional funds and thus merit a net increase in their budgetary allocation as appropriate. For example, funds should be assigned to study promotion of environmentally-friendly small/micro business livelihoods under the support and supervision of the Department for Industry and Information Technology in Jiangxi Province (in particular using the existing platform established in Jiangxi Province in 2019);
 - Alternative sources of finance that could be accessed, mobilised and/or leveraged through innovative practices such future International Birdwatching weeks;
 - Opportunities to increase the visibility of the project and GEF's commitment to save globally important biodiversity and habitats. To support this initiative, it is highly recommended the project consults local communities and schools on the adoption of a suitable logo to promote the public's association in Jiangxi Province as well as throughout China and internationally, that the PWEPA is dedicated to conserving globally important biodiversity. For example, it is highly recommended the Finless Porpoise and Siberian Crane figure in this logo to portray a similar message to WWF's Panda symbol. In this way the logo can be assigned to wetland products and learning materials from the PWEPA (and in other relevant wetland PA systems elsewhere in the Province (and inter—provincial level concerning the middle reaches of the Yangtze River basin. To support the promotion of the logo it is proposed a local community-based small enterprise is supported to produce and/or distribute souvenirs (such as figurines, badges, stickers, tee-shirts, cuddly toys, etc.) of the Finless Porpoise and Siberian Crane for sale at the visitor centres, at homestays, local shops, Nanchang airport, etc. to support local job creation in the alternative livelihoods programme.
- Attend to the following specific recommendations identified from interviews:
 - Risk management: METT and KAP should include questions that track awareness of the role of risk management in enhancing resilience of wetland PAs and the local communities that live in and around them (within the PWEPA);
 - Monitoring: there is a need to improve outcome (results) monitoring. This should include baseline data and targets to support the establishment of measurable indicators that are timebound as well as numerical. Baseline data should ensure there is ongoing monitoring of the wetland habitats (in terms of land area) that are brought under management to show progress in relation to “expansion of geographic coverage of operationally effective wetland PAs” (output 1.2 in the Prodoc) relating to the PWEPA and ultimately for the rest of PAs in Jiangxi Province. In this way this data can be fully integrated into the

JWRIMS and support the identification of management gaps and/or scale-up good practices that support effective land-use and sector planning, ecological restoration, communications, etc. An example of how to track this data is provided in Table A. To support the project's strategic relevance and sustainability monitoring should also include the project's contribution to meeting the NBCSAP and, in particular, relevant Aichi Targets. In this way the above-mentioned communication strategy can also enhance outreach the importance of addressing the causes of biodiversity loss; namely the loss of wetland habitats that are fundamental to the wetland species protection plans promoted by the project, but also its contribution to reducing the effects of climate variability and change;

- PSC: An exit strategy should be produced taking into consideration all the recommendations in this report, paying particular attention to ensuring the proposed coordination mechanism above, has a suitable secretariat that has the authority to supervise spatial/land-use compliance in the field with the support of the local communities, which implies an expansion of co-management agreements including monitoring of land-use changes.

Table A: Increase in wetland PA area under management in Jiangxi Province (2017-2021)

Protected area name	Category	PA coverage under management 01/01/2017 (ha)	Actual PA under management to 30/06/2020 (ha)	Target PA under management to 31/12/2021 (ha)
Demonstration sites				
PLNNR	National	0	22,400	22,400
NWNNR	Provincial	0	33,300	33,300
DPMBNRP	Provincial	0	41,100	41,100
Liaohuachi NR	County	0	3,778	3,778
Kangshan Lake	County	0	35,000	35,000
Wannian Huyun NR	County	0	467	467
TOTAL PROJECT		0	136,045	136,045
Other PAs				
Baishazhou Nature Reserve	County	0	40,900	40,900
Qinglan Lake NR	County	0	1,000	1,000
Nan Lake Nature Reserve	County	0	3,300	3,300
Gutang Wetland NR	County	0	5,300	5,300
Pingfeng NR	County	0	491	491
Hexi wetland NR	County	0	4,000	4,000
TOTAL OTHER		0	54,991	54,991
TOTAL PROVINCE		0	191,036	191,036

Source: MTR and PMO (October 2020)

153. Recommendation 4 – Efficiency and effectiveness – for FLO, GCU, PSS, FAO-CN, LTO/FAO-RAP, IDWG, Senior Management: In line with the MTR for project 057 (October 2020), it is recommended a communication mechanism is established (such as an online meeting group using Zoom) to improve dialogue and find solutions to outstanding problems associated with:

- The application of *ad hoc* arrangements governing the national execution of GEF5-funded projects such as project 052 in China. It is recommended a specific solution is found to ensure the BH can perform a satisfactory level of supervision/support to the executing partner (including assurance activities);
- The current application of FAO's FEE Guidelines in China. The MTR found the BH does not have enough funds to manage effectively the GEF5 project portfolio, conduct assurance activities in line with the ad hoc conditions agreed by FAO Senior Management in 2015, etc. It is, therefore, suggested dialogue centres on establishing guarantees (as opposed to the application of percentages) to ensure the BH/FAO-CN does not experience major budget shortfalls in implementing the GEF5 portfolio of projects and that this is used as a model for other countries facing similar challenges;
- The application of OPIM/MS-701 in China. The MTR suggests the Project Support Services (PSS) of FAO is fully integrated into the project identification and design process of GEF-funded projects to ensure full compliance and understanding of MS-701 in the EAs/OPAs agreed with executing partners. It is also strongly recommended that the mainstreaming of OPIM pays particular attention to ensuring it does not cause a major delay between the design and implementation phases, given project 052 (and other GEF5 projects) experienced significant delays between the identification/design phase and the start of the implementation phase (2012 to 2016).

Following this dialogue, it is suggested the agreed solutions are communicated to the executing partner to determine how much additional co-finance may be required to support the full application of the conditions specified in the EA (given they do not fully comply with MS-701).

6. Lessons learned

154. **Lesson 1 – on conducting a homebased MTR:** The application of teleconferencing in a Desk Phase is good practice as it both develops a more in-depth understanding of the project and brings stakeholders together on one platform through which they can learn from each other which is generally not possible and/or more costly to achieve in the field.
155. **Lesson 2 – on the catalytic effect of the project:** The holding of international events such as the bi-annual Birdwatching Week is a highly effective and efficient way to increase public awareness (at all levels) and catalyse resource mobilisation to ensure the event is a success and justifies its continuation in future years;
156. **Lesson 3 – on applying biodiversity monitoring:** Data on wetland biodiversity must include monitoring of wetland habitats as this increases public awareness that to conserve globally important biodiversity effectively, it must include the conservation and protection of feeding and breeding grounds. Furthermore, this data is crucial to guide spatial/land-use planning and economic investment, especially from new sectors linked to tourism, culture and education, health and recreation, etc. that can actually reinforce and expand biodiversity conservation and its sustainable to the benefit of the rural economy;
157. **Lesson 4 – on biodiversity conservation:** The restoration of wetlands appears to be most successful when it focuses on: (i) the reintroduction of endemic/local varieties that are far more suited and resilient to Jiangxi's wetland than exotic varieties; (ii) allows natural processes to self-regulate the wetland ecosystem and protect e-flow (as opposed to over-emphasis on human-induced interventions and infrastructures that restrict e-flow); and (iii) the engagement of local communities to assume the role of their guardians, which also increases their resilience at the same time;
158. **Lesson 5 – sustaining wetland conservation:** wetland conservation tends to focus heavily on management issues, but generally overlooks the need for different financial instruments to sustain management. As a result, innovative financial streams generated from PES, ETS and other payment schemes linked directly to win-win scenarios that enhance wetland functions and services, are not exploited in the funding mix and, instead, rely heavily on government sources.
159. **Lesson 6 – on law enforcement:** participatory co-management of wetland PAs should include the empowerment of locals to support the police optimise law enforcement. This should include powers to reprimand and educate individuals who pollute, damage, burn, etc. wetland PAs and confiscate illegal hunting, fishing, aquaculture, etc. equipment prior to communicating the offence to the local law enforcement authorities.

7. Appendices

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Appendix 1. Terms of reference for the MTR

Terms of reference for the mid-term review of the project “Piloting Provincial-level Wetland PA System in Jiangxi Province “GCP/CPR/052/GFF GEF ID: 4662

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

[July 2020]

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Acronyms and abbreviations

BH	Budget holder
CO	Country Office
EOI	Expression of interest
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FLO	Funding liaison officer
FPMIS	Field Project Management Information System
GEF	Global Environment Facility
JxFiD	Jiangxi Province Finance Department
JxFoD	Jiangxi Province Forestry Department
LOA	Letter of Agreement
MTR	Mid-term review
NRs	Natural Reserves
OPIM	Operational Partners Implementation Modality
PLNNR	Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve
PWEPA	Poyang Lake Wetland Ecosystem Protected Area
PTF	Project Task Force
RM	Mid-term review manager
RO	Regional Office
SCCF	Special Climate Change Fund
SO	FAO Strategic Objective
SRO	Sub-regional Office

0 Introduction

This document provides the terms of reference for mid-term review (MTR) of FAO-GEF project Piloting Provincial-level Wetland PA System in Jiangxi Province "(GCP/CPR/052/GFF and GEF ID: 4662)

Project/programme background and context

1. The Project entitled "*Piloting Provincial-level Wetland PA System in Jiangxi Province*" (GCP/CPR/052/GFF)" was endorsed by the GEF CEO on 15 September 2014. The GCP Project Agreement and Execution Agreement were signed on 7 November 2016 and 3 January 2017, respectively. Its official starting date is 7 April 2017 and its closing date is 6 April 2022. The executing partner is the Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve (PLNNR) under the Forestry Department of Jiangxi Province. The project has a GEF budget of USD 5.29 million and USD 26.69 million in co-financing.
2. The project objective is to catalyse the management effectiveness of Jiangxi's wetland protected area (PA) system to conserve globally important biological diversity. The wetlands in Jiangxi Province provide a range of ecosystem services that underpin local economies and safeguard the livelihoods and lives of local residents, including: freshwater supply; fisheries and agricultural production; harvesting of plants for fuel, food and medicines; flood mitigation; sediment retention; nutrient cycling; recreation and nature-based tourism, etc. These ecosystem services are connected to varying degrees and are ultimately dependent upon the functioning and integrity of the overall ecosystem. The wetlands of Jiangxi also provide critical habitat for a host of globally significant species, including the largest concentrations of wintering water birds in East Asia (Siberian Crane, Oriental Stork, Swan Goose, Tundra Swan), the Chinese Water Deer, and the Finless Porpoise, among others.

ES1 Description of the project, project objectives and components

3. This section provides the key background and context descriptors

Box 1 – Basic project information

- | |
|---|
| A. GEF Project ID Number: 4662 |
| B. Recipient country: China |
| C. Implementing Agency: FAO |
| D. Executing Agency: Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve Bureau |
| E. GEF Focal Area: Biodiversity |

F. GEF Objectives: BD-1.1 (improved management effectiveness of existing and new protected areas)
G. FAO Strategy/operational program: SO2 (to increase and improve the provision of goods and services from high-value aquatic ecosystems in a sustainable manner.)
H. PIF approved: 19 July 2012
I. Date of CEO endorsement: 5 September 2014
J. Date of project start (EOD): 3 January 2017
K. Execution Agreement signed: 3 January 2017
L. Execution Agreement amended: 12 April 2018
M. Date of project completion : 3 January 2022
N. Date of Mid-Term Evaluation: March 2020

The Co-financing

- The total cost of the project is USD 31.98 million, financed through a USD 5.29 million GEF grant and USD 26.69 million in co-financing from:(i) FAO (USD 0.32 million); (ii) the government of China (USD 26.23 million); (iii) and the International Crane Foundation (USD 0.14 million).
- FAO is, as the GEF Agency, only responsible for the execution of the GEF resources and the FAO co-financing.

Box 2 : GEF allocation and co-financing

GEF ALLOCATION:	USD 5 289 000
<u>Co-financing:</u>	
FAO	USD 320 000
Office of Three Gorges	USD 7 530 000
National Development and Reform Commission	USD 1 600 000
Jiangxi Province Forestry Department	USD 15 850 000
Duchang County Forestry Bureau and Nanchang City Forestry Bureau	USD 1 250 000
International Crane Foundation	USD 142 000
Subtotal Co-financing:	<u>USD 26 692 000</u>
Total Budget:	USD 31 981 000

i. Context

4. Jiangxi Province is located in the south of China along the southern bank of the Yangtze River. The northern part of the province is dominated by Poyang Lake. Wetlands in Jiangxi province provide a range of ecosystem services that underpin local economies, although many of these services are being depleted. Provisioning Services include freshwater supply; fisheries and aquaculture; agriculture, grazing and fodder for livestock; sand production; timber production; and harvesting of plants for fuel, food and medicines. Regulating Services include water regulation (e.g., flood mitigation), water purification and waste treatment, carbon sequestration, and climate and air quality regulation. Supporting Services include sediment retention, biomass and nutrient cycling, biodiversity and habitat flora for migratory birds, maintenance of genetic resources, and underlying primary production that supports livelihoods (crop and plant growth). Cultural Services include recreation, nature-based tourism, research and education. These ecosystem services are connected to varying degrees and are ultimately dependent upon the functioning and integrity of the overall ecosystem.

5. Biodiversity and flood mitigation are by far the most important ecosystem services provided by wetlands in Jiangxi Province. The Poyang Lake region in particular is globally significant wetland system for biodiversity conservation, and increases flood mitigation functions for the whole middle and lower reaches of Yangtze River. Surveys of the Poyang Lake region have recorded an average of 425,000 migratory water birds during the winter, with a peak count of 726,000 birds in 2005, and conservation efforts seem to be effective in preserving the bird populations.

6. There are 195 nature reserves in Jiangxi Province covering an area of 1,150,200 hectares (6.9% of the entire province territory area); this system includes 8 national nature reserves (144,400 hectares), 28 provincial nature reserves (337,200 hectares), and 159 prefecture or county level nature reserves (668,500 hectares). The vast majority of these reserves (96% of the PA sites and 95% of the total area) are under the management of the Jiangxi Province Forestry Department (JxFoD). The 26 wetland reserves in Jiangxi province cover approximately 350,000 hectares; of this total, 12 wetland reserves within the Poyang Lake region account for 190,157 hectares, including three key sites -- the Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve, Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve, and the Duchang Provincial Migratory Birds Nature Reserve which together cover almost 50% of the lake basin and are the only operational reserves (with varying levels of capacity) in the Poyang Lake region.

ii. Threats on ecosystem services and biodiversity

7. 20 fish species have disappeared from Poyang Lake in recent decades, and the finless porpoise is now classified as critically endangered. In addition, flood retention capacity has decreased by approximately 30% since the 1950s, largely due to the loss of 1,466 sq. km. of wetlands due to wetland reclamation during that time. In the 1950s, Poyang Lake had the capacity to store 19 to 21 billion cubic meters of water, which is equivalent to the flood retention capacity of the Three Gorges Dam; the lake reduces flooding both by storing water from the 5 rivers which flow into the lake, and also by taking in flood waters from the Yangtze river, which significantly attenuates the flood risk in the middle reaches of the Yangtze. Carbon sequestration by wetlands is also significant; current vegetation coverage estimates for the Poyang Lake region show at least 226,220 ha of

wetlands that can contribute significantly to carbon sequestration and storage, with estimated primary production of 5.66 million tons each year and an estimated carbon storage rate per year of between 320,000 - 480,000 tons. However, it is estimated that the Poyang Lake region has lost 30% of its biomass in recent decades, which has reduced its carbon storage capacity. Unfortunately, many other critical ecosystem services provided by wetlands in Jiangxi Province are declining. The Poyang Lake region provides over 400 million cubic meters of freshwater / day, 600,000 tons of fish / year, and 48 million tons of sand / year, but all of these services currently show a downward trend.

8. Main threats to services, biodiversity and local livelihood include:

- Urban expansion, tourism development and agriculture expansion to threaten to reduce and fragment the wetlands in Jiangxi Province;
- Industrial pollution and agricultural nonpoint source pollution;
- Invasive species
- Sand excavation
- Unsustainable methods of fishing
- Climate change

iii. Project components and beneficiaries

9. According to the project document, the Project Objective is to catalyze the management effectiveness of Jiangxi's wetland protected area system to conserve globally important biological diversity. Specifically, the project objectives are to: (i) improve and consolidate wetland PA system within the larger landscape context in Jiangxi Province; (ii) wetland PA Management Capacity is strengthened at selected demonstration sites; (iii) enhance institutional & stakeholder capacities to manage consolidated wetland PA system in Jiangxi Province.

10. To achieve these objectives, the project has 3 components as described in the box below⁵²:

Box 3 – Components and outputs of GCP/CPR/052/GFF

Component 1: Improved and consolidated wetland PA system within the larger landscape context in Jiangxi Province Includes outputs of : (1) Wetland Protected Areas Strategy for Jiangxi Province; (2) Expansion of geographic coverage of operationally effective wetland protected areas in Poyang Lake region; (3) Strengthened Provincial-Level Wetland PA Coordination and Management Structures; (4) Strengthened Legal, Regulatory and Planning.

Component 2: Wetland PA Management Capacity is strengthened at selected demonstration sites Includes outputs of: (1) Cost-effective wetland ecosystem management techniques tested and incorporated into PWEPA for replication; (2) PWEPA

⁵² See the full project logframe in Annex 1

Management Framework; (3) Strengthened Capacity for Participatory Management of PWEPA Wetland Reserves; (4) Conservation and Monitoring of Priority Habitats and Species

Component 3: Institutional & stakeholder capacities to manage consolidated wetland PA system in Jiangxi Province Includes outputs of: (1) Strengthened information and data system supporting coordinated and cost effective wetland PA management; (2) Strengthened Capacity for Coordinated Management of all Wetland PAs in Jiangxi Province; (3) Public awareness and outreach on wetland conservation and sustainable use in local communities.

11. The main beneficiaries of the project are:

The **Jiangxi Provincial Department of Forestry (JxFoD)** will benefit from capacity building on wetlands conservation and management, and an improved system for sharing information on all Jiangxi provincial wetlands and related training on information management.

The **three demonstration Nature Reserves and three piloting county reserves within the Poyang Lake Wetland Ecosystem Protected Area** will benefit from significant capacity building, new equipment and infrastructure, an increased public profile, increased financing, and access to data and use of information systems produced by the project.

The **Municipal Forestry Bureaus and County People's Governments** will receive training in managing and conserving wetland ecosystems and ecosystem services; and a better understanding of the role of wetland PAs in managing water resources and sustaining local economic activities.

The **local communities** (within or adjacent to wetland reserves), will see increased employment and income-generating opportunities, and will have more participation in and awareness and understanding of wetland conservation policies and regulations. Local communities around the target NRs will be also be key participants in the co-management activities such as ecosystem restoration, small lake management, ecotourism and other activities.

ES2 **Project stakeholders and their role**

12. The terms of reference should list the key partners and stakeholders involved in the project, including the executing agencies and partners, local groups and beneficiaries. It should outline the role each plays in the project, as well as the RM and PMU's views on why they should be included in the MTR. The initial stakeholder analysis should be captured in Table A4.1.

Table A4.1. Stakeholder analysis matrix template

Key stakeholders (disaggregated as appropriate) ⁵³	What is their role in the project?	What is the reason for their inclusion in or exclusion from the MTR?	Priority for MTR (1-3) ⁵⁴	How and when should they be involved in the MTR?
1. Active stakeholders with direct responsibility for the project				
FAO	GEF agency	Manage and disburse funds from GEF in accordance with the rules and procedures of FAO; Oversee project implementation in accordance with the project document; Provide technical guidance; Report to the GEF Secretariat and Evaluation Office through the annual Project Implementation Review on project progress and provide financial reports to the GEF Trustee.	1	Interviewees: Vincent Martin, FAOR and BH; YAO Chunsheng, GEF Portfolio Officer; Li He, LTO based in RAP, Skype interview; Yurie Naito: FLO based in HQ, Skype interview
Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve Bureau(PLNNR)	Executing Partner	Directly responsible for technical implementation of project activities, day-to-day monitoring as well as financial management and purchase of goods, minor works, and services (procurement). It closely coordinates with county line agencies both during establishment of county wetland NRs and during project implementation as well as the replication of the project pilot results and the Wetland PA Management Strategy.	1	Interview with Deputy Director: Mr. YU Jun, Project Managers: Mr. Zeng Nanjing and Mr. Xiong Chaoyi
2. Active stakeholders with authority to make decisions on the project, e.g. members of the PSC				
Ministry of Finance	GEF Focal Point in China	Overall planning and supervision of all GEF projects.	2	TBC (a combined interview for all 3 MTRs)
Jiangxi Province Forestry Department	PSC member	Provide support in policy, human resources and technology to the project implementation processes, and leadership in developing wetland conservation strategies as they relate to wetland nature reserves. Will also be responsible for the design and formation of the Jiangxi Province Wetland Protected Areas Coordination Committee	1	TBC-PIs indicate the name and Title of the PSC member that will be interviewed/met.
Jiangxi Province Finance Department (JxFiD)	PSC member	Received the GEF project funds from FAO on behalf of the Chinese Government. Responsible for managing / facilitating the co-financing	2	TBC-PIs indicate the name and Title of the

⁵³ Include the names of relevant individuals, if known, and be as specific as possible

⁵⁴ 1 = essential; 2 = desirable; 3 = if time and resources allow

Key stakeholders (disaggregated as appropriate) ⁵³	What is their role in the project?	What is the reason for their inclusion in or exclusion from the MTR?	Priority for MTR (1-3) ⁵⁴	How and when should they be involved in the MTR?
		contributions to the project from national and provincial government agencies. Also will help to make certain financing mechanisms exist to implement and incentivize realization of wetland nature reserve conservation management objectives.		PSC member that will be interviewed/met
National consultants and service providers	Provide technical support to the PMO	Responsible for certain project activities and contribute to project outcomes	1	Skype interviews
3. Secondary stakeholders (only indirectly or temporarily affected)				
Office of Three Gorges	Co-financing partner		2	Skype interviews
National Development and Reform Commission	Co-financing partner		2	Skype interviews
4. Stakeholders at grassroots level who benefit directly or indirectly from the intervention (gender disaggregated where possible)				
Nature reserves	Participate in project activities	Responsible for biodiversity monitoring, protecting the wetland and promoting awareness campaign	2	TBC
Local fishermen	Participate in project activities	employed in species monitoring and protection activities in and around wetland nature reserves; will participate in various forms of community co-management of wetland reserves	2	TBC
Etc.				
5. Stakeholders at grassroots level who do not benefit from the intervention (gender disaggregated where possible)				
Nature reserves	Not in project sites		3	
Local fishermen	Not in project sites		3	
6. Other interest groups that are not participating directly in the intervention, e.g. development agencies working in the area, civil-society organizations				

Key stakeholders (disaggregated as appropriate) ⁵³	What is their role in the project?	What is the reason for their inclusion in or exclusion from the MTR?	Priority for MTR (1-3) ⁵⁴	How and when should they be involved in the MTR?
Crane Foundation	NGO	Protect Siberian crane in Poyang lake	3	

13. This initial list of key stakeholders is important to help identify potential groups and individuals to be consulted and interviewed as part of the MTR process. The initial list is likely to be modified by MTR team members once they become engaged in the MTR and will be updated as part of the MTR inception report.

ES3 Theory of change

14. The project document did not propose any Theory of Change, but has a detailed results matrix. The Theory of Change will be reconstructed by the MTR team during the inception or main phase. The reconstructed ToC will be included in the MTE report.

ES4 Implementation progress and main challenges to date

15. The overall project implementation progress as of December 2019 is:

Component 1: Improved and consolidated wetland PA system within the larger landscape context in Jiangxi Province

(1) Establishment and operation of PA Field Stations: The PLNNR established and operated 7 field stations outside of the boundaries of PLNNR by use of co-financing budget. The Jinxian, Yugan, Poyang, Duchang, Hukou, Jiujiang and Wannian field stations completed their physical construction, recruited staff and started routine daily wetland management work. Staff of all these field stations already participated in project EHI monitoring training, project management and M&E training, community co-management, and other project related activities.

(2) The first version of *Jiangxi Wetland PA Management Strategy* was formulated and has already received comments from relevant stakeholders.

(3) The PMO purchased vehicles and equipment such as telescopes, cameras and GPS, etc. for three piloting county reserves: Liaohuachi wetland migrating birds NR, Kangshan Lake migrating birds NR and Huyun Tundra Swan NR. for wetland PA monitoring & patrolling.

(4) A multi-institutional coordination mechanism was established through the consultation workshop on the *outlines of Jiangxi Provincial Wetland Management Strategy and outlines of Wetland Management Standards and Guidelines*.

(5) The 6 *Wetland Nature Reserve Management Plans* and the *Poyang Lake Wetland Protected Area Management Framework(PWEPA)* were developed and reviewed by expert evaluation team.

Component 2: Wetland PA Management Capacity is strengthened at selected demonstration sites

- (1) Wetland Restoration Pilot Plan has been drafted by Climate Change and Wetland Restoration Consultant and reviewed by a group of wetland management experts in January 2019. The construction of pilot wetland rehabilitation program started in April 2019. Until now, the consultancy team has already carried out monitoring and surveys on water birds and vegetation, etc.
- (2) In Year 2018 and 2019, the Poyang Lake Wetland Management Coordination Committee conducted a survey on over-wintering bird and wetland protection performance in 15 counties (cities, districts) within the Poyang Lake for awarding the advanced individuals and units for their contribution to wetland and bird conservation.
- (3) The PMO signed agreements with relevant nature reserves for carrying out community co-management and biodiversity monitoring activities. Each contracted nature reserve has employed local villagers to be part-time bird protection workers. Biodiversity monitoring is conducted on 8th, 18th and 28th for each month from October to next year's March.
- (4) Until December 2019, the PMO organized 10 business skill training and 12 workshops for capacity building of reserve staff and relevant stakeholders.

Component 3 - Institutional & stakeholder capacities to manage consolidated wetland PA system in Jiangxi Province

- (1) The Poyang Lake education center was established in December 2019. The FAO China office participated in its opening ceremony and unveiled the nameplate on 8 December 2019.
- (2) The Poyang Lake Wetlands Conservation Awards mechanism for wintering birds and wetland protection is improved. The Poyang Lake Wetland Management Coordination Committee and PMO conducted performance evaluation survey for identifying advanced wetland and migrant bird protection individuals and units each year.
- (3) To increase public awareness, the PMO carried out following activities: (1) the project supported the Caicha Opera, a traditional local opera performed mainly in Poyang Lake Region, which incorporated "migratory bird conservation" into the performance. The Opera was mainly performed in Poyang County, Yongxiu County, Duchang County, and Yugan County; (2) various community outreach activities were organized via thematic events of " Bird Loving Week", "Wetland Day", etc. by PMO; (3) PMO cooperated with Jiangxi Broadcast TV News to promote conservation of Poyang wetlands and migratory birds; (4) support Duchang Migrating Bird Rescuing Hospital with medicines, medical instruments; (5) as organizer of

“public education serial activity” of 2019 Poyang Lake International Bird Watching Week which provided an important platform for expanding project reputation.

Challenges faced by PMO:

- (1) The coordination among cross-sectoral departments becomes more difficult because of institutional reform.
- (2) Poyang Lake's 10 years ban on fishing will bring new opportunities but also challenges for the project implementation.

MTR purpose and scope

16. As indicated in the project document, an MTR is to be undertaken at the project midterm to review project activities, procedures, outputs, results and financial flows against targets, over a given period of time and identify reasons for positive or negative variance, to suggest recommendations for corrective actions to get project back on track where negative variance is observed and to identify good practices and lessons-learned for future application. The MTR is a requirement of the GEF and also demanded by FAO for project monitoring and reporting purposes. It is being conducted for both accountability and learning purposes of GEF, FAO, and other participating institutions.

17. The main purpose of the MTR is to:

- provide accountability – to respond to the information needs and interests of policymakers such as Ministry of Environment and Ecology (MEE) and other actors with decision-making power, for example, FAO management and the GCU;
- improve the project/ management by providing valuable information to managers and others responsible for regular project operations the PMU, PTF, GCU and PSC; and
- contribute to knowledge – in-depth understanding and contextualization of the project and its practices, of particular benefit to the government authorities for wetland management and biodiversity conservation, the GCU, FAO staff and future developers and implementers.

18. The main audience and intended users of the MRT are:

- The FAO Country Office, Project Management Team, members of Project Task Force in the FAO Headquarters and regional offices who will use the findings and lessons identified in the MTR to continue and improve the project activities and plan for sustainability of the results achieved;
- The GEF who will use the findings to inform strategic investment decisions in the future in China; and
- The Chinese counterparts such as Jiangsu, Anhui and Hubei province with wide range of wetland distribution, and some of the NGOs such as WWF, CI and IUCN who will use the evaluation findings and conclusions for future planning.

ES5 MTR scope

21. The MTR will cover the project implementation period since its start in January 2017, until February 2020, and will analyze all the project components. It will cover all the geographical areas where the project has been implemented, although not all the project locations might be visited by the ET.

22. The MTR will also consider the pre-conditions and arrangements in place that have contributed to – or hindered - the adequate implementation of the planned activities, including linkages and/or partnerships between the project and other major country initiatives.

MTR objectives and key questions

ES6 MTR objectives

23. The objective of the MTR is to provide valuable recommendations based on evidence and findings under the topics of: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, factors affecting project performance including coherence of project design, project implementation and executing arrangements and operation (including financial management and co-financing), as well as potential sustainability and longer term impact. The MTR will address/rate the following:

Relevance – the extent to which the intervention’s design and intended results are consistent with local, national, sub-regional and regional environmental and development priorities and policies and to GEF and FAO strategic priorities and objectives; its complementarity with existing interventions and relevance to project stakeholders and beneficiaries; its suitability to the context of the intervention over time.

Effectiveness – the degree to which the intervention has achieved or expects to achieve results (project outputs, outcomes, objectives and impacts, including Global Environmental Benefits) (taking into account key factors influencing the results, including an assessment of whether sufficient capacity has been built to ensure the delivery of results by the end of project and beyond and the likelihood of mid- and longer-term impacts.

Efficiency – the cost-effectiveness of the project and timeliness of activities; the extent to which the intervention has achieved value for resources by converting inputs (funds, personnel, expertise, equipment, etc.) into results in the timeliest and least costly way compared with alternatives.

Sustainability – the (likely) continuation of positive effects from the intervention after it has ended and the potential for scale-up and/or replication; any financial, socio-political, institutional and governance, or environmental risks to sustainability of project results and benefits; any evidence of replication or catalysis of project results.

Factors affecting performance – the main factors to be considered are:

- project design and readiness for implementation (e.g. sufficient partner capacity to begin operations, changes in context between formulation and operational start);
- project execution, including project management (execution modality as well as the involvement of counterparts and different stakeholders);
- project implementation, including supervision by FAO (BH, LTO and FLO), backstopping, and general PTF input;
- financial management and mobilization of expected co-financing;
- project partnerships and stakeholder involvement (including the degree of ownership of project results by stakeholders), political support from government, institutional support from operating partners (such as regional branches of agricultural extension services or forestry authorities);
- communication, public awareness and knowledge management; and
- application of an M&E system, including M&E design, implementation and budget.

Cross-cutting dimensions – considerations such as gender, indigenous-peoples and minority-group concerns and human rights; the environmental and social safeguards applied to a project

require, among other things, a review of the Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS) risk classification and risk-mitigation provisions identified at the project’s formulation stage.⁵⁵

ES7 **MTR questions**

Box A4.1. Proposed MTR questions

<p>1. Relevance (rating required)</p>	<p>1.1 Are the 3 project components and objectives congruent with the GEF focal areas/operational program strategies, China environment priorities and FAO China Country Programming Framework?</p> <p>1.2 Has there been any change in the relevance of the project since its design, such as new national policies, plans or programs that affect the relevance of the project objectives and goals? If so, are there any changes that need to be made to the project to make it more relevant?</p>
<p>2. Effectiveness of project results (rating required)</p>	<p>2.1 (component 1) To what extent has the project contributed to <i>improving and consolidating wetland PA system within the larger landscape context in Jiangxi Province</i>?</p> <p>2.2 (component 2) To what extent has the project contributed to <i>strengthening Wetland PA Management Capacity at selected demonstration sites</i>?</p> <p>2.3 (component 3) To what extent has the project contributed to increasing <i>Institutional & stakeholder capacities to manage consolidated wetland PA system in Jiangxi Province</i>?</p> <p>2.4 Are there any unintended results?</p> <p>2.5 (Likelihood of impact) Are there any barriers or other risks that may prevent future progress towards and the eventual achievement of <i>catalyzing the management effectiveness of Jiangxi’s wetland protected area system to conserve globally important biological diversity</i>?</p>

⁵⁵ FAO applies an online screening system during the project design phase. This is mandatory, even if the project was approved before FAO adopted the GEF Policy on Agency Minimum Standards on Environmental and Social Safeguards (GEF, 2011) in February 2015, as FAO had already applied the Environmental Impact Assessment Guidelines in 2011 (FAO, 2012a) to screen and rate the risks of every FAO project. Consequently, the MTR team should review and confirm the ESS assessments and risk status at mid-term and any changes suggested, if needed. The most recent GEF guidance can be found in GEF (2019b). A GEF project should not cause any harm to the environment or to any stakeholder and, where applicable, will take measures to prevent and/or mitigate any adverse effects.

<p>3. Efficiency (rating required)</p>	<p>3.1 To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently, cost-effectively, and management been able to adapt to any changing conditions to improve the efficiency of project implementation?</p> <p><i>Have the specific features related to OPIM modality been taken into consideration during project preparation (eg. recruitment and procurement procedures of the EP, etc.)</i></p> <p><i>Subquestions: How efficient was the contracting and procurement process during the first half of the project (involvement of BH, LTO)?</i></p> <p>3.2 To what extent has the project built on existing agreements, initiatives, data sources, synergies, complementarities with other projects and partnerships, etc, and avoid duplication of similar activities of other groups?</p> <p>3.3 Is the project cost-effective? How does the project cost/time versus output/outcomes equation compare to that of similar projects?</p>
<p>4. Sustainability (rating required)</p>	<p>4.1 What is the likelihood that the project results will continue to be useful or will remain after the end of the project? What are the key risks that may affect the sustainability of the project results and benefits (consider financial, socio-economic, institutional and governance, and environmental)?</p> <p><i>Did the OPIM modality contribute to ensure major ownership and sustainability of the project results?</i></p> <p><i>Did the OPIM modality contribute to increase national, subregional and subregional ownership to support better sustainability of results? And to strengthen capacities of regional, subregional and/or national entities?</i></p>
<p>5. Factors affecting progress (ratings required)</p>	<p>5.1 (Project design) Is the project design appropriate for delivering the expected outcomes? Is the logic coherent and clear? To what extent are the project’s objectives and components, clear, practical and feasible within the timeframe?</p> <p>5.2 (Project management) To what extent did the Forestry Department of Hunan Province effectively discharge its role and responsibilities related to the management and administration of the project? What have been the main challenges in relation to the management and administration of the project and what changes are needed to improve delivery in the second half of the project?</p> <p><i>Subquestions:</i></p> <p><i>Does the EP provide quality financial reports, PPRs and PIRs and present calls for funds in a timely manner?</i></p> <p><i>Does FAO review/approve reports and arrange for funds transfer in a timely manner?</i></p> <p><i>(Project implementation and execution) To what extent did the OPIM implementation and execution modalities facilitate or hampered project execution and contribution to the project objectives?</i></p>

	<p>5.3 (Financial management and Co-financing) What have been the challenges related to the financial management of the project and to what extent has the pledged co-financing been delivered?</p> <p>5.4 (Project oversight, implementation role) To what extent has FAO delivered on project identification, concept preparation, appraisal, preparation, approval and start-up, oversight and supervision?</p> <p>5.5 (Partnerships and stakeholder engagement) Have other actors, such as civil society, indigenous population or private sector, been sufficiently involved in project design and implementation, and what has been the effect of their involvement/non-involvement on the project results? What are strengths and challenges of the project’s partnerships?</p> <p>5.6 (Communication and knowledge management) How effective has the project been in communicating and promoting its key messages and results to partners, stakeholders and a general audience? How can this be improved?</p> <p>5.7 (M&E design) Is the M&E plan practical and sufficient?</p> <p>5.8 (M&E implementation) Does the M&E system operate as per the M&E plan? Has information been gathered in a systematic manner? To what extent has information generated by the M&E system during project implementation been used to adapt and improve project planning and execution, achievement of outcomes and ensure sustainability?</p>
<p>6. Cross-cutting priorities</p>	<p>6.1 (Gender and minority groups) To what extent were gender considerations taken into account in designing and implementing the project?</p> <p>6.2 (Environmental and social safeguards) To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project?</p>

26. It should be noted that GEF is placing increased emphasis on gender concerns and how its programmes and projects contribute to gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEF, 2017a; 2017b; 2018a; 2018b). Consequently, the MTR should, as much as possible, collect and report sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive indicators and results (further questions for assessing gender concerns are suggested in Annex 12 of the MTR Guide). GEF is also paying more attention to stakeholder engagement and development, the use of knowledge products and the identification of good practices. All of these areas require specific reporting when the MTR report is uploaded to the GEF Portal webpage.

27. A programme assessment should include specific questions to examine the programme’s coherence with “child project” theories of change, indicators and expected/achieved results. It should also measure and demonstrate the added value of the programmatic approach over the same level of investment made through comparable alternatives (GEF IEO, 2019).

Methodology

28. The MTR will adhere to the UNEG Norms & Standards (UNEG, 2016) and align with the FAO–GEF MTR Guide and annexes detailing methodological guidelines and practices. The MTR will adopt a consultative and transparent approach, keeping internal and external stakeholders informed throughout the MTR process. The evidence and information gathered will be triangulated to underpin its validity and analysis and to support its conclusions and recommendations. The MTR must provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful.
29. The main evaluation tools and methods will include the following:
- A **desk-review** of existing project documents and reports (e.g. annual work plans, project implementation review, progress reports, backstopping missions, etc.). An extensive review of documents produced by - or related to - the project will be key to answer to **evaluation questions 1, 2, 3 and 5**.
 - **Semi-structured interviews (in-person or remote)** with key stakeholders in Beijing and Jiangxi province that were involved in - or affected by - the project design and/or implementation will serve to collect primary data to answer to **all evaluation questions**.
 - **Field visits** (if authorised) to a selected sample out of the 23 Nature Reserves (at least six of them) will technically assess and analyse project implementation and results in the field, the views and opinions as well as capacities of the local stakeholders on the project. Face-to-face interviews will be carried out during the field visits, while phone or Skype interviews will be undertaken for the institutions not visited by the evaluation team. Interviews will be supported by checklists and/or interview protocols to be developed by the ET during the inception phase. This will answer the evaluation questions related to **results, efficiency, impact, partnership and sustainability**.
 - A **workshop** may be held at the beginning of the field mission to validate the project's **Theory of Change (ToC)** with project management and national stakeholders. The ToC will outline the multiple linkages between the project objectives, outputs and outcomes to the national goals, and will support the evaluation process. A **second workshop** may be held at the end of the field mission to share initial findings and conclusions with the Project Coordination Unit, members of the PSC (including the GEF Operational Focal point in China and FAOR China if possible).
30. Final decisions about the specific design and methodology for the MTR should emerge from consultations between the project team, the MTR consultants and key stakeholders on what is appropriate and feasible in order to meet the MTR's purpose and objectives and answer the MTR's questions.

Roles and responsibilities

31 This section briefly describes the different roles that key stakeholders play in the design and implementation of the MTR.

32. The **BH** is accountable for the MTR process and report and is responsible for the initiation, management and finalization of the MTR process. Depending on availability and commitments, the BH has designated Yao Chunsheng as the **RM**, to act on their behalf.

33. With the assistance of the project's **LTO** and the **GCU, FLO and MTR focal point**, and guidance from this document and the main MTR Guide, the BH/RM is responsible for the drafting and finalizing the terms of reference and providing input to the background and context section. The BH/RM is also responsible for identifying and recruiting the MTR team members, in consultation with the GCU and the LTO. In collaboration with the GCU, the BH/RM also briefs the MTR team on the MTR methodology and process and leads the organization of MTR missions. The BH/RM and the GCU's MTR focal point review the draft and final MTR reports to assure their quality in terms of presentation, compliance with the terms of reference, timely delivery, quality, clarity and soundness of evidence and analysis supporting the conclusions and recommendations. The BH is also responsible for leading and coordinating the preparation of the FAO Management Response and the associated follow-up report, supported by the LTO and other members of the PTF. Further details on the Management Response can be found in the MTR Guide.

34. The **GCU** will appoint a focal point to provide technical backstopping throughout the MTR process, including guidance and punctual support to the BH/RM and MTR team on technical issues related to the GEF and the MTR. This includes support in identifying potential MTR team members,⁵⁶ reviewing candidate qualifications and participating in the selection of consultants, as well as briefing the MTR team on the MTR process, relevant methodology and tools. The GCU also follows up with the BH to ensure the timely preparation of the Management Response.

35. **PTF** members, including the BH, are required to participate in meetings with the MTR team, make all necessary information and documentation available and comment on the terms of reference and MTR report. However, their level of involvement will depend on team members' individual roles and level of participation in the project.

36. The **National Project Director** (NPD) facilitates the participation of government partners in the MTR process and supports the PMU in ensuring good communication across government. Also the **Project Steering Committee** (PSC) facilitates government and other partner and stakeholder participation in the MTR process.

37. The **MTR team** is responsible for developing and applying the MTR methodology, producing a brief MTR inception report, conducting the MTR and producing the MTR report. All team

⁵⁶ The BH/RM should be responsible for the administrative procedures associated with the recruitment of the MTR consultants.

members will participate in briefing and debriefing meetings, discussions and field visits. They will contribute written inputs to the draft and final versions of the MTR report, which may not reflect the views of the government or of FAO. The MTR team leader will guide and coordinate the MTR team members in their specific tasks and lead the preparation of the draft and final reports. The team leader will consolidate team inputs with his/her own and will have overall responsibility for delivering the MTR report. The MTR team will agree with the GCU MTR focal point on the outline of the report early in the MTR process, based on the template provided in Annex 12 of the MTR Guide. The MTR team is free to expand the scope, criteria, questions and issues listed above, and develop its own MTR tools and framework, within the timeframe and resources available and based on discussions with the BH/RM and PTF. Although an MTR report is not subject to technical clearance by FAO, the BH/RM and GCU do provide quality assurance checks of all MTR reports.

38. The **GEF Operational Focal Point** (OFP) in China will be involved in this MTR, in accordance with the GEF Evaluation Policy (2019). The BH will inform the OFP of the MTR process and the MTR team is encouraged to consult with him/her during the review process. The team should also keep the OFP informed of progress and send him/her a copy of the draft and final MTR reports.
39. More detailed guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the key individuals and groups involved in the MTR can be found in Annexes 2 and 3 of the MTR Guide.

MTR team composition and profile

40. The skills, competencies and characteristics needed in the MTR team are specific to the MTR. The likely structure and composition of the MTR team, including the roles and responsibilities of its members, should be set out in the terms of reference for individual consultants.
41. The MTR consultants will be independent of any organizations that have been involved in designing, executing or advising on any aspect of the project being evaluated in the MTR and will not have been involved in any aspect of the project previously.
42. The lead international MTR consultant should have the following minimum technical requirements:
- an advanced university degree in evaluation, agriculture, natural-resource management, social and economic development, or a related field
 - five years of relevant experience in supporting, designing, planning and/or conducting development evaluations;
 - knowledge of FAO and GEF work/procedures, or other UN agencies, would be an asset as would appropriate language skills.
43. The national consultant should have the following experience:
- a university degree in evaluation, agriculture, social and economic development, or a related field
 - three years of experience in wetland management and biodiversity conservation or relevant technical area and a good understanding of the national and/or local context, as appropriate;
 - ideally, experience in supporting, designing, planning and/or conducting development evaluations; and
 - knowledge of FAO and GEF work/procedures, or other UN agencies, would be an asset as would appropriate language skills.
44. Both consultants are expected to demonstrate the following competencies:
- results focus
 - teamwork
 - excellent communication skills (both written and oral) in English
 - building effective relationships
 - knowledge sharing and continuous improvement

MTR products (deliverables)

45. This section describes the key deliverables the MTR team is expected to produce. At a minimum, these products should include the following:

- **The MTR inception report.** The MTR team will prepare an inception report before beginning data collection. This should detail the MTR team's understanding of what is being assessed and why, and their understanding of the project and its aims (set out in a theory of change). It serves as a map and reference for planning and conducting an MTR and as a useful tool for summarizing and visually presenting the MTR design and methodology in discussions with stakeholders. The inception report details the GEF evaluation criteria, the questions the MTR seeks to answer (in the form of an MTR matrix), the data sources and data collection methods, analysis tools or methods appropriate for each data source and data collection method, and the standard or measure by which each question will be evaluated. The inception report should include a proposed schedule of tasks, activities and deliverables, designating a team member with lead responsibility for each task or product (as appropriate).
- **The draft MTR report(s).** The project team, BH/RM, GCU and key stakeholders in the MTR should review the draft MTR report to ensure its accuracy and quality in two review rounds: (a) a first review, taking around 10 working days, by the project team and FAO (BH, LTO, FLO and GCU MTR focal point), then a second review, also taking around 10 working days, by the government counterpart(s), key external partners and stakeholders.
- **The final MTR report.** This will include an executive summary and be written in English. The executive summary will include the following paragraphs in order to update the GEF Portal: (1) information on progress, challenges and outcomes on stakeholder engagement; (2) information on progress on gender-responsive measures; and (3) information on knowledge activities and products. The template for the MTR report can be found in Annex 11 and guidance on writing the report in Annex 12 of the MTR Guide.
- **A two-page summary** of key findings, lessons, recommendations and messages from the MTR report, produced by the RM and PMU, in consultation with the MTR team, that can be disseminated to the wider public for general information on the project's results and performance to date. This can be posted as a briefing paper on the project's website but more creative and innovative multimedia approaches, such as video, photos, sound recordings, social media, short stories (for suitable cases or country studies), infographics or even comic or cartoon format, may be more effective depending on the circumstances.
- **Participation in knowledge-sharing events**, such as stakeholder debriefings, as needed.

MTR timeframe

46. This section lists the due date or timeframe of the MTR and describes all tasks and deliverables (such as briefings, the draft report and final report), as well as the associated roles and responsibilities of the key MTR individuals and groups.

Table A4.2 Suggested MTR timeline

Task	When/duration (recommended)	Responsibility
Terms of reference preparation	February, 2020	BH/RM, LTO, FLO and GCU MTR focal point
Terms of reference finalization	March, 2020	BH/RM
Team identification	December, 2019	BH/RM, LTO, FLO and GCU MTR focal point
Team recruitment	March, 2020	BH with input from the GCU for international and national consultants
Briefing of MTR team	July 13 th , 2020	BH/RM, supported by PTF and GCU as necessary
Reading background documentation	July 13 th to 17 th July, 2020 (after the first draft of GEF056 is submitted)	MTR team in preparation for the MTR
MTR inception report	July 17 th , 2020	MTR team
Quality assurance and clearance of the MTR inception report	July 21 st 2020	BH/RM and the GCU MTR focal point
TenCent interviews	July 21 st to 28 th July 2020	MTR team with the support of the PMU
Production of first draft report for circulation	August 21 st , 2020	MTR team
Circulation and review of first draft MTR report	August 24 th , 2020	BH/RM, PMU, GCU MTR focal point, LTO for comments and quality control (organized by BH/RM)
Production of second draft MTR report	September 10 th , 2020	MTR team
Circulation of second draft MTR report	September 11 th , 2020	BH/RM and key external stakeholders (organized by BH/RM)
Final group debriefing involving stakeholders from projects 052, 056 and 057	September 21 st , 2020	BH, RMs, GCU, National stakeholders
Management Response	September 28 th , 2020	BH

Travel arrangements and organization of the agenda and travel itinerary in country for the field mission	Pending authorisation due to the coronavirus pandemic	BH/RM, project team and MTR team
MTR missions – confirmation of interviews, meetings and visits	7 (extra) days for the MTR field mission + travel days (if authorised)	MTR team with the support of the PMU
Production of final MTR report	TBC (if field mission is approved)	MTR team
Follow-up reporting in FAO PPR or GEF PIR	January 15 th , 2021	BH

Annexes

Annex 1: Project log frame

Project Strategy	Objectively verifiable indicators				
Goal	Contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of globally significant wetland biodiversity in Jiangxi Province, China				
	Indicator	Baseline	Target (at end of project)	Sources of Verification	Risks and Assumptions
Project Objective: Catalyze the management effectiveness of Jiangxi's wetland protected area system to conserve globally important biological diversity	Increase in the area of effective management and protection of wetlands in the Poyang Lake region, through the improvement in management and protection in existing PA hectares (area within PLNNR, Nanji and Duchang reserves)	0 hectares	96,800 hectares	PLNNR annual reports Field station monitoring reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> County governments and line agencies for land resources support zoning and zone-based management Neighboring communities support and participate in co-management
	Increase in the area of effective management and protection of wetlands in the Poyang Lake region, through the expansion of monitoring and patrolling (from 6-7 newly established PLNNR field stations) outside of the boundaries of the PLNNR, Nanji and Duchang wetland reserves	0 hectares	93,357 hectares Total: 190,157 hectares		
	Increase in the area of wetland reserves outside of the Poyang Lake region that are strengthened through new provincial level management, planning, information, financing and training frameworks	0 hectares	5,662 hectares	County Forestry Bureau reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government development and land use planning incorporates the
	No. of county wetland reserves in the Poyang Lake region effectively managed and protected, with adequate capacities and management plans	0 County Wetland Reserves	3 County Wetland Reserves ⁵⁸	County Forestry Bureau reports	

⁵⁸ The 3 County Wetland Reserves are: Nan Lake Nature Reserve (3,330 ha); Xiesshan Grey Heron Nature Reserve (3 ha.); and Kangshan Lake Area Migratory Bird Nature Reserve (35,000 ha.). These 3 reserves are part of the area that will be monitored and protected by the 6-7 new field stations; thus their area of 38,333 hectares is a subset of the 93,357 hectares in the second indicator.

	Improved score on Ecosystem Health Index (EHI) ⁵⁹ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve • Guanshan National Nature Reserve • Jiangxi Yiyang Chinese Merganser Nature Reserve 	50%	64%	EHI Monitoring Protocols	JPWPAMS ⁵⁷ , and bans illegal use activities
		87%	Stable or improved		
	No net increase in the area of production activities (illegal plantations and aquaculture operations) within Poyang Lake region in habitat areas for migratory bird species	To be determined during year 1 of project	0% increase	Reports of the Project Management Unit	
Component 1: Improved and consolidated wetland PA system within the larger landscape context in Jiangxi Province	Jiangxi Province Wetland PA Management Strategy (JPWPAMS) is drafted, which defines approaches, tools, and processes for guiding the expansion and consolidated management of wetland PAs in Jiangxi Province.	No strategy exists	Strategy developed and adopted by end of year 3 of project	JPWPAMS document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial government line agencies agree to implement the JPWPAMS
	Partnership with relevant sectoral line agencies strengthened to disseminate Wetland PA Management concepts and incorporate them into sectoral development planning and project appraisals	Very low levels of cooperation among various government agencies on activities that can support wetland conservation	Facilitate the development of organic agriculture pilot projects and their replication (with Dept. of Agriculture); and develop / implement eco-tourism guidelines (with tourism agencies), by end of year 3	Reports of agriculture pilot projects; eco-tourism guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County governments in nearby and outer regions accept and implement the JPWPAMS and support

⁵⁹ Biodiversity health is reflected in the ability of a site to maintain its biodiversity values. Many wetland sites are very dynamic and it is important to measure this ability, as this will become increasingly important as climate and water flow patterns change. During the project preparation phase, an ecosystem health index was established to measure habitat suitability in each site for important biodiversity and to monitor its status as a means of measuring biodiversity health and potential to adapt to climate induced change. However, the targets indicated for the Guanshan and Jiangxi Yiyang reserves are only estimates of what it is hoped will change by the end of the project, since these two sites are control sites and outside of the direct influence of the GEF project.

⁵⁷ Jiangxi Province Wetland Protected Areas Management Strategy

					wetland reserve management
	Measures for Ecological Compensation Operational Regulations (Draft) in the framework of the existing Jiangxi Wetland Protection Ordinance	No measures allow for implementation of ecological compensation	Measures formulated and put into operation by end of year 3	Draft regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National regulations in place to support implementation of ecological compensation measures
	PA Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) scores improved over baseline values across 9 county-level wetland PAs within the Poyang Lake region	To be determined during project inception	To be determined during project inception	Tracking Tool (filled out at start, midterm, and end of project)	
	County forestry bureaus implementing activities with approved management plans for 3 county wetland reserves in Poyang Lake region	0	3	Management plans for county wetland reserves	
<p>Output 1.1: Wetland Protected Areas Strategy for Jiangxi Province</p> <p>Output 1.2: Expansion of geographic coverage of operationally effective wetland protected areas in Poyang Lake region</p> <p>Output 1.3: Strengthened Provincial-Level Wetland PA Coordination and Management Structures</p> <p>Output 1.4: Strengthened Legal, Regulatory and Planning Frameworks for Wetland PAs in Jiangxi Province</p>					
Component 2: Wetland PA Management Capacity is strengthened at selected demonstration sites	<p>PA Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) scores improved over baseline values for 2 national and 1 provincial wetland PAs within the Poyang Lake region</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve Nanji National Nature Reserve Duchang Provincial Nature Reserve 	69 61 44	83 79 64	Tracking Tool (filled out at start, midterm, and end of the project.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communities within and around targeted PAs support and participate in co-management processes Provincial and county agencies

Management plans approved and under implementation for two national and 1 provincial wetland PAs	0	3 plans by end of year 3	Official management plans	agree to support the PWEPA Management Framework and individual PA management plans
Cost-effective wetland rehabilitation and restoration techniques tested and best practices documented for replication across the entire Poyang wetland biome ⁶⁰	No techniques tested	Wetland vegetation restoration techniques tested in field conditions	Reports from 2 field sites	
Strengthened capacity for PA management, as measured by an increase in the Total Capacity Development Score in the UNDP-GEF Capacity Scorecard, for all PAs within the PWEPA system.	Total score 66 (69%)		Total score 72 (75%)	
	Capacity Level	Baseline	Capacity Level	Target
	Systemic	20 (66%)	Systemic	23 (77%)
	Institutional	31 (69%)	Institutional	32 (71%)
	Individual	21 (71%)	Individual	17 (81%)
Strengthened staff competence levels of nature reserve staff in PWEPA demonstration sites cover key skills required for the operational management of wetland PAs (co-management, enforcement, compliance, wetland ecosystem management, species surveys and monitoring, restoration and rehabilitation works).	Current staff have limited capacities in many aspects of wetlands management	No. of staff who received training: 150	Performance and qualification assessment results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Village Committees agree to lease small lakes to Wetland Reserves on a short-term basis to allow for seasonal draining at controlled rates • County/village authorities help to capitalize mutual-assistant microfinance funds • Provincial authorities (e.g. Forestry and Agriculture Departments) actively
No. of co-management agreements signed between wetland reserve field stations and village committees (e.g. agreements that the field stations will take action against villagers committing illegal hunting / fishing activities if they are so notified by one of the village committees, and agreements on communication and information sharing)	0	11	Signed agreements	
Reduced number of illegal resource use incidents (hunting; illegal polders; fishing out of season; etc.) in 3 targeted PAs attributed to protection effort,	To be determined during year 1 of project (all 3 PAs have	30% by end of project	PA records of illegal resource use incidents	

⁶⁰ Wetland restoration strategies and techniques will be tested in wetland field settings, and if any of them prove to be effective and cost efficient, those practices will be documented and promoted for replication throughout the province (replication would only happen after the GEF project).

	strengthened regulations, establishment of new field stations, and training of PA staff and local residents.	record systems, but these will need to be consolidated)			collaborate on species conservation activities
	<p>Species conservation plans, including strengthened monitoring, patrolling and training in species-level management, increases the number of globally significant and threatened / endangered species under targeted protection in the Poyang Lake region, for the following species:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Siberian Crane (<i>Grus leucogeranus</i>) • Oriental Stork (<i>Ciconia boyciana</i>) • Swan Goose (<i>A. cygnoides</i>) • Tundra Swan (<i>Cygnus columbianus</i>) • Chinese Water Deer (<i>Hydropotes inermis</i>) • Finless Porpoise (<i>Neophocaena phocaenoides</i>) 	0 species conservation plans	6 species conservation plans developed and implemented	Annual reports of each conservation plan	
<p>Output 2.1: Cost-effective wetland ecosystem management techniques tested and incorporated into PWEPA for replication</p> <p>Output 2.2: PWEPA Management Framework</p> <p>Output 2.3: Strengthened Capacity for Participatory Management of PWEPA Wetland Reserves</p> <p>Output 2.4: Conservation and Monitoring of Priority Habitats and Species</p>					
Component 3: Institutional & stakeholder capacities to manage consolidated wetland PA system in Jiangxi Province	No. of staff from all county forestry bureaus in Poyang Lake region and three counties outside of Poyang Lake Region trained in migratory bird monitoring and protection, including use of equipment; knowledge of relevant laws and regulations; identification of migratory birds; dissemination of information on laws, regulations, wetland conservation to the public; and cooperative management of county wetland reserves with PLNNR field stations	0	30	Performance and qualification assessment results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial and county government line agencies utilize and contribute to the Jiangxi Wetlands Information Management System

<p>Jiangxi Wetlands Information Management System is established and operational for data sharing between PA sites, and providing information to sectoral agencies for improved wetland and PA management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of institutions (PA units; provincial and county agencies) using the wetlands database platform to input and update wetland data in Jiangxi provincial wetland PAs • Number of people per year who visit the wetlands database platform website to find data about wetlands in Jiangxi Province 	<p>No system in place</p> <p>0</p> <p>0</p>	<p>Information system is operational by end of year 3</p> <p>At least 5 by end of year 3</p> <p>10,000</p>	<p>Data reports generated by Information Management System</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County and village leaders help to disseminate and promote messages regarding new regulations / restrictions to protect wetland ecosystem functioning and wetland biodiversity, as well as the socio-economic values of wetlands
<p># of visitors per year to Poyang Lake Nature Reserve Visitor Centre (if established in Nanchang)</p>	<p>0</p>	<p>30,000</p>	<p>Visitor center records</p>	
<p>Improved understanding on the values of wetlands and the wetland PA system, indicated by Knowledge, Attitude and Practices surveys</p> <p>All Respondents in Jiangxi Province:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge • Attitudes • <u>Practices</u> • Overall Average <p>Key Groups (decision makers and rural residents; evenly weighted) in Jiangxi Province with a significant impact on wetland conservation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge • Attitudes • <u>Practices</u> 	<p>50%</p> <p>73%</p> <p><u>48%</u></p> <p>54%</p> <p>52%</p> <p>73%</p> <p><u>54%</u></p>	<p>65%</p> <p>85%</p> <p><u>62%</u></p> <p>70%</p> <p>68%</p> <p>90%</p> <p><u>70%</u></p>	<p>KAP Survey filled out at project start and end of project</p>	

	Overall Average	56%	73%		
<p>Output 3.1: Strengthened information and data system supporting coordinated and cost effective wetland PA management</p> <p>Output 3.2: Strengthened Capacity for Coordinated Management of all Wetland PAs in Jiangxi Province</p> <p>Output 3.3: Public awareness improvement and outreach on wetland conservation and sustainable use in local communities</p>					

- **Annex 2:** *FAO–GEF project MTR report outline, including the GEF rating table* – This is available in Annex 11 in the MTR Guide.
- **Annex 3:** *Documents to be consulted* – This is a list of important documents and web pages the MTR team can consult at the outset, before finalizing the MTR’s design and inception report. A list of key documents to be included in the “project information package” can be found in Box A4.2.

Box A4.2. Documents to be provided to the MTR team (“project information package”)

1. GEF PIF with technical clearance
2. Comments from the GEF Secretariat, the GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) and GEF Council members on project design, plus FAO responses
3. FAO concept note and FAO Project Review Committee report
4. Request for GEF CEO endorsement
5. FAO–GEF project preparation grant document
6. GEF-approved project document and any updated approved document following the inception workshop, with latest budgets showing budget revisions
7. Project inception report
8. Six-monthly FAO PPRs
9. Annual workplans and budgets (including budget revisions)
10. All annual GEF PIR reports
11. All other monitoring reports prepared by the project
12. Documentation detailing any changes to the project framework or components, such as changes to originally designed outcomes and outputs
13. List of stakeholders

14. List of project sites and site location maps (for planning mission itineraries and fieldwork)
15. Execution agreements under OPIM and letters of agreement
16. Relevant technical, backstopping and project-supervision mission reports, including back-to-the-office reports by relevant project and FAO staff, including any reports on technical support provided by FAO headquarters or regional office staff
17. Minutes of the meetings of the PSC, FAO PTF and other relevant groups
18. Any ESS analysis and mitigation plans produced during the project design period and online records on FPMIS
19. Any awareness-raising and communications materials produced by the project, such as brochures, leaflets, presentations for meetings, project web address, etc.
20. FAO policy documents in relation to topics such as FAO Strategic Objectives and gender
21. Finalized GEF focal-area tracking tools at CEO endorsement, as well as updated tracking tools at mid-term for GEF-5 projects (and for GEF-6 and GEF-7 projects with Biodiversity Focal Area (BD) Objective 2 and management of protected areas) and/or review of contribution to GEF-7 core indicators (retrofitted) for GEF-6 projects, and GEF-7 core indicators for GEF-7-approved projects, as defined in the Core Indicators Worksheet (GEF, 2019a)
22. Financial management information, including an up-to-date co-financing table, a summary report on the project's financial management and expenditures to date, a summary of any financial revisions made to the project and their purpose, and copies of any completed audits for comment (as appropriate)
23. The GEF Gender Policy (GEF, 2017), GEF Gender Implementation Strategy (GEF, 2018a), GEF Guidance on Gender Equality (GEF, 2018b) and the GEF Guide to Advance Gender Equality in GEF Projects and Programmes (GEF, 2018c)

The following documents should also be made available to the MTR team on request or as required:

24. FAO Country Programme Framework documents, the FAO Guide to the Project Cycle (FAO, 2012b), FAO Environment and Social Management Guidelines (FAO, 2015), FAO Policy on Gender Equity, the Guide to Mainstreaming Gender in FAO's Project Cycle (FAO, 2017a) and the Free, Prior and Informed Consent Manual (FAO, 2016)

For programmes:

- 25. CEO endorsement/approval of child projects under the programme
- 26. Programme framework documents and child project titles or concepts

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

Due to the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic, all field missions have been suspended until further notice.

Task	When/duration (recommended)	Responsibility
Terms of reference preparation	February, 2020	BH/RM, LTO, FLO and GCU MTR focal point
Terms of reference finalization	March, 2020	BH/RM
Team identification	December, 2019	BH/RM, LTO, FLO and GCU MTR focal point
Team recruitment	March, 2020	BH with input from the GCU for international and national consultants
Briefing of MTR team	July 13 th , 2020	BH/RM, supported by PTF and GCU as necessary
Reading background documentation	July 13 th to 17 th July, 2020 (after the first draft of GEF056 is submitted)	MTR team in preparation for the MTR
MTR inception report	July 17 th , 2020	MTR team
Quality assurance and clearance of the MTR inception report	July 21 st 2020	BH/RM and the GCU MTR focal point
TenCent interviews	July 21 st to 28 th July 2020	MTR team with the support of the PMU
Production of first draft report for circulation	August 21 st , 2020	MTR team
Circulation and review of first draft MTR report	August 24 th , 2020	BH/RM, PMU, GCU MTR focal point, LTO for comments and quality control (organized by BH/RM)
Production of second draft MTR report	September 10 th , 2020	MTR team

Circulation of second draft MTR report	September 11 th , 2020	BH/RM and key external stakeholders (organized by BH/RM)
Final group debriefing involving stakeholders from projects 052, 056 and 057	September 21 st , 2020	BH, RMs, GCU, National stakeholders
Management Response	September 28 th , 2020	BH
Travel arrangements and organization of the agenda and travel itinerary in country for the field mission	Pending authorisation due to the coronavirus pandemic	BH/RM, project team and MTR team
MTR missions – confirmation of interviews, meetings and visits	7 (extra) days for the MTR field mission + travel days (if authorised)	MTR team with the support of the PMU
Production of final MTR report	TBC (if field mission is approved)	MTR team
Follow-up reporting in FAO PPR or GEF PIR	January 15 th , 2021	BH

Appendix 3. Table 5 - List of stakeholders prioritised for interview (following stakeholder analysis)

Key stakeholders	Role in the project	Reason for their inclusion/ exclusion from the MTR	Priority for MTR 1 = essential 2 = desirable 3 = complementary	How and when should they be involved in the MTR* (Desk &/or Field Phase)
1. Active stakeholders with direct responsibility for the project, e.g. FAO, executing partners				
FAO-CN & GEF				
Dr. Li He (F)	Lead Technical Officer (LTO), FAO	LTO provides technical advice and backstopping to the project, and monitor and certify the technical quality of each Operational Partner's activities	1	Desk phase (Tencent, Zoom meeting) 2020/8/3 (Fri) Bangkok: 2-4pm; Beijing: 3-5pm; London: 08-10am
Zhang Zhongjun (M)	Acting Budget Holder (BH), FAO Rep assistant	BH is responsible for oversight and supervision on the use of funds by the executing partner and achievement of project results.	1	Desk phase (Tencent, Zoom meeting) 2020/8/5 (Wed) Beijing: 3:00-5:00 pm; London: 8:00-10:00 am
Chunsheng Yao (M)	FAO Project Manager	PTM supports the BH in the supervision of financial management, project progress, procurement and contracting processes, and in the provision of technical guidance to the project, in close consultation with the LTO	1	Desk phase (Tencent, Zoom meeting) 2020/8/4 (Tue) Beijing: 3:00-5:00 pm; London: 8:00-10:00 am
Jeffrey Griffin (M)	Senior Coordinator, GEF-FAO Coordination Unit	Responsible for coordinating GEF funding in China in line with Fee Guidelines of FAO.	1	Desk Phase (Zoom meeting)

				2020/09/17 (Fri) Rome 10 am; London 9 am.
Olga Abramova (F)	Responsible for the application of the OPIM modality	To assess how far the project applied the OPIM modality in conformity with OPIM/MS-701	1	Tele interview (Zoom) on 29 September 2020. 11-12 pm (Rome); 10-11 am (London)
Project Consultants				
Prof. Liu Yonggong (M)	CTA	Responsible for overseeing all technical aspects of the project's implementation	1	Desk phase (Tencent meeting) 2020/7/27 (Mon) Beijing: 5:00-7:00 pm; London: 10:00-12:00 am
Prof. Xue Dayuan (M)	Consultant of Wetland Management Strategy	for formulating the Wetland PA Management Strategy in Jiangxi Province	1	Desk phase (Tencent meeting) 2020/7/28 (Tue) Beijing: 3:00-3:45 pm; London: 8:00-8:45 am
Prof. Yu Xiubo (M)	Climate Change and Wetland Rehabilitation	<i>for providing technical guidance in piloting wetland restoration in Poyang Lake, conduct studies on the impacts of climate change and hydrologic changes and formulate mitigation plan</i>	1	Desk phase (Tencent meeting) 2020/7/28 (Tue) Beijing: 3:45-4:30 pm; London: 8:45-9:30 am
Dr. Zhang Manyin (M)	Wetland Valuation & GAP Analysis Specialist	Responsible for carrying out gap analysis of the wetland management in Jiangxi Province and responsible for evaluation of economic values of wetland ecosystem	1	Desk phase (Tencent meeting) 2020/7/28 (Tue) Beijing: 4:30-5:15 pm;

				London: 9:30-10:15 am
Dr. Fang Longqing (M)	Wetland Management Planning	Subcontractor of Wetland Management Planning for developing management plans for 3 demonstration NRs and 3 piloting county NRs, and formulating PWEPA management framework	1	Desk phase (Tencent meeting) 2020/7/28 (Tue) Beijing: 5:15-6:00 pm; London: 10:15-11:00 am
PMO				
PMO Members		Key PMO staff responsible for implementation of the project through the PLNNR		Desk phase (Tencent) 2020/7/29 (Wed) Beijing: 3:00-3:40 pm; London: 8:00-8:40 am: 1) PPT Presentation on Project achievements and impacts by PMO Project Manager; 2) Video on Project field activities, etc.
Mr. Xu Zhiwen	DG of PLNNR	In charge of management and administration of Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve (PLNNR)	1	Desk phase (Tencent) Group Meeting
Mr. Yu Jun,	Deputy Project Director	Be responsible for planning and management of the FAO/GEF project	1	2020/7/29 (Wed) Beijing: 3:40-6:00 pm; London: 8:40-11:00 am
Mr. Zeng Nanjing	Project Manager, PLNNR Chief Engineer	Be responsible for ensuring quality of technical outputs	1	
Mr. Xiong Chaoyi (Madam Wu Yaping)	Project Manager, PLNNR	Daily coordination and management, including financial management.	1	

Mr. Xu Xiang	Staff member of PMO	Responsible for procurement	2	
Other stakeholders of Project Partners				
Madam Wan Qing	DDG of Nanji NR, PSC member, project focal point	Coordination with PMO on implementation of project activities in Nanji NWNRR	1	Desk phase (Tencent meeting) 2020/7/30 (Thu) Beijing: 3:00-4:00 pm; London: 8:00-9:00 am
Mr. Li Yue	Director of Duchang NR, PSC member, project focal point	Coordination with PMO on implementation of project activities in Duchang DPMBNR	1	Desk phase (Tencent meeting) 2020/7/30 (Thu) Beijing: Beijing: 4:00-5:00 pm; London: 9:00-10:00 am
Mr. Jiang Sulin	DG of Lushan NR, Deputy Director of Lushan City Forestry Bureau, project focal point	Coordination with PMO on implementation of project activities in Yugan NR	1	Desk phase (Tencent meeting) 2020/7/30 (Thu) Beijing: 5:00-6:00 pm; London: 10:00-11:00 am
Three pilot NRs Partners (group interviews with 2-3 persons conducted by national expert)				
Liu Fangng(F)	Staff member of PLNRR, direct participator	Responsible for public publicity of GEF project	1	Desk phase (Tencent meeting) 2020/7/30 (Tue)
Huang Jiang (F)	Staff member of PLNRR, direct participator	Assist to organize workshops, draft relevant documents for training, workshops, etc.		Beijing: 9:00-11:00 am;
Guo Huicai (M)	Staff member of Nanji NR, direct participator	be responsible for coordinating the implementation of management plans and biodiversity monitoring activities in Nanji NR	1	Desk phase (Tencent meeting) 2020/7/31 (Fri)

Yu Guanjun (M)	Staff member of Nanji NR,direct participator	be responsible for co-management activities in Nanji NR		Beijing: 9:00-11:00 am
Chen Rongchun (F)	Staff member of Duchang NR,direct participator	be responsible for public publicity of GEF project in Duchang NR	1	Desk phase (Tencent meeting) 2020/8/3 (Mon)
Liu Wenjun (M)	Staff member of Duchang NR,direct participator	be responsible for coordinating GEF project activities in Duchang NR, files and archive		Beijing: 10:30-12:30 am
2. Active stakeholders with authority to make decisions on the project, e.g. members of the PSC				
Ms. Tu Ruijuan	Deputy Division Chief of Provincial Finance Department,	authorized signer for FAO/GEF Jiangxi Project, oversight of use of financial funds; assumed her post in August 2019	1	Desk phase (Tencent, Zoom meeting) 2020/7/31 (Fri) Beijing: 3:00-4:00 pm; London: 8:00-9:00 am
Mr Wu Yinghao	Researcher of Wildlife Protection Administration Bureau; Deputy Director of the Wetland Office of Jiangxi Forestry Department,	Assumed their posts in June 2017.	1	Desk phase (Tencent, Zoom meeting) 2020/7/31 (Fri) Beijing: 5:00-6:00 pm; London: 10:00-11:00 am
Mr. Yan Cheng	DDG of Provincial Forestry Department, PSC director, responsible leader of wetland conservation	Assumed his post in March 2020	1	Desk phase (Tencent, Zoom meeting) 2020/7/31 (Fri) Beijing: 4:00-5:00 pm; London: 9:00-10:00 am
To be confirmed	The OFP of GEF in China	Contact person from China Ministry of Finance	2	Field phase (if authorised)

3. Stakeholders at grassroots level who benefit directly or indirectly from the intervention (gender disaggregated where possible)				
Duan Qingxian (M)	Bird Rescue Station in Tangkou, Duchang County	Involved in project community co-management activities in Duchang DPMBNR	1	Desk phase (Tencent, Zoom meeting) 2020/8/3(Mon) Beijing: 8:30-9:30am
Xu Xiaohua (M),	Deputy Director of the Wild Geese Protection Association in Maying Lake, Duchang County;	Involved in project community co-management activities	1	Desk phase (Tencent, Zoom meeting) 2020/8/3 (Mon) Beijing: 9:30-10:30pm
Liang Zhengshen (M),	GEF project recruited part-time Bird protection worker		1	Desk phase (Tencent, Zoom meeting) 2020/8/5(Wed) Beijing: 9:00-10:00am
Tao Xuerong (M),	staff member of Caicha Opera	performed folk operas on wetlands and birds related issues with the support of FAO/GEF project	1	Desk phase (Tencent, Zoom meeting) 2020/8/5(Wed) Beijing: 10:00-11:00am
4. Secondary stakeholders (only indirectly or temporarily affected)				
To be confirmed	Identified at start of field phase (if authorised)	Contact persons who are aware of the project's main activities and objectives	2	Field phase (if authorised)
5. Stakeholders at grassroots level who do not benefit from the intervention (gender disaggregated where possible)				

To be confirmed	Identified at start of field phase (if authorised)	Contact persons who are aware of the project's main activities and objectives	2	Field phase (if authorised)
6. Other interest NGOs working in the area, civil-society organizations				
Yang Fan (M)	President of Poyang Lake Ecological Photographic Association in Duchang County	This association was awarded as advanced social civil organization by the Poyang Lake Wetland Management Coordination Committee.	3	Field phase (if authorised)
Liu Tao (M)	ICF project officer	ICF is a main partner in the project	1	Desk phase (Tencent meeting) 2020/8/4 (Mon) Beijing: 10:00-11:00 am
Zhang Yimo (M),	WWF project officer	Has work experience in wetland management in Jiangxi Province	2	Desk phase (Tencent meeting) 2020/8/4 (Mon) Beijing: 11:00-12:00 am

* "When" interviews should start should be grouped as follows: 1) with FAO-CN staff, then 2) Project Management Unit/OPIM staff, then 3) provincial NFGA staff, then 4) grassroots CSOs and NFGA staff at county level (national expert will be delegated do these by himself with questions agreed with me in advance and then report back to me) and then 5) research centres/universities, indirect stakeholders, etc.

Appendix 4. MTR matrix (review questions and sub-questions for selected stakeholders)

Eval Criteria & ToR No.	Questions and sub questions	Indicators and judgement criteria	Sources of information/Brief summary of methods	Responses
1. Strategic relevance: Are the project outcomes congruent with current country priorities, GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework and the needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries				
1.2a Alignment & ownership	<p>Has there been any change in the relevance of the project since its design, such as new national policies, plans or programs that affect the relevance of the project objectives and goals?</p> <p>Question 1: Do you think the project remains fully aligned with the <u>current</u> institutional and policy, legal and regulatory framework at provincial and national level taking into account the barrier analysis in the Prodoc stated the framework was insufficient to enable inter-institutional coordination of wetland PAs (i.e. does it now support effective management, planning, financing of a PA system)</p>	<p>1.1.1 Level of project alignment to relevant national, sector and provincial policies and plans</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>(a) The Prodoc conforms with government (central/ provincial) priorities on PA management?</p> <p>(b) Prov government (and central gov.) shows willingness to support project by providing resources to support policy/strategy/plan reform to promote PAM?</p>	<p>1) Prodoc 2) Aichi Targets (8, 11, 14) 3) National Biodiversity Strategy (NBCSAP) 4) National Development Plan 2015-2020 5) National sector policies, strategies and plans (forestry, agriculture, land use/environment, etc.) 6) National statistics on forestry, carbon sinks, biodiversity 7) Theory of change 8) Interviews with central/provincial government stakeholders, project staff, FAO/GEF-China</p>	

<p>1.2b Alignment and ownership</p>	<p>Question 2: Local relevance - does the project respond to local community needs who depend on the eco-services of the wetlands in the province in general and Lake Poyang region in particular?</p>	<p>1.2.1 Level of alignment with local needs and priorities Judgement criteria: (a) Prodoc designed following stakeholder analysis? (b) Adoption of a participatory approach to project design and implementation through its annual work plans? (c) Level of focus on specific needs of end beneficiaries - relationship between biodiversity conservation and food security.</p>	<p>1) Prodoc 2) Needs analysis, gender assessments 3) Jiangxi Province Wetland Protected Areas Management Strategy 4) Interviews with local government stakeholders, heads of civil society, members of end beneficiaries, education and research institutions</p>	
<p>Factor affecting progress 5.1</p>	<p>Question 3: Is the project design (based on three main components) appropriate for delivering the expected outcomes and objectives?</p>	<p>1.5.1 To what extent are the project's objectives and components, clear, practical and feasible within the timeframe?? Judgement criteria: (a) Level of coherence in the intervention logic (in particular does promoting PA system management at provincial level have limits where there is a need for inter-provincial cooperation) b) Are the components clear without overlaps and mutually reinforcing? c) Are the implementing partners the right ones to deliver results taking into account the barriers identified in the Prodoc relate to pressures from agriculture, housing, public works, mining, tourism, lack of law enforcement, etc? d) Does the SFGA at the provincial level have the authority to convoke the decision-makers</p>	<p>1) Prodoc/logical framework; 2) FAO/OED Capacity Development Assessment; 3) GEF/OPIM Guide; 4) Association Agreements and contracts; 5) Interviews with OPIM staff, government stakeholders, end beneficiaries</p>	

		at the provincial and national level to support project implementation and up-scaling? e) Local actors and civil society participated in the project design?		
1.3 (MTR) Alignment with FAO Strategic Objectives and Country Programming Framework	MTR to assess from document analysis only	1.1.1a Level of alignment with FAO OE2 and CPF P1 Judgement criteria: (a) Prodoc and work plans provide evidence of supporting BD1 (and BD4), OE 2 and CPF P1? (b) Level of commitment of stakeholders/project to meeting OE 2 and CPF P1? (c) Internal monitoring includes tracking of indicators relating to OE2 and CPF P1?	1) Prodoc 2) Strategic documents of FAO (Our Priorities - Strategic Objectives, CPF 2016-2020); 3) Work plans; 4) Interviews	
1.3 (MTR) Alignment with GEF5 Priorities	MTR to assess from document analysis only	1.1.1b Level of alignment with GEF5-BD1 Planning: Judgement criteria: See above	1) Prodoc; 2) GEF-5 Programming Directions 3) Work plans and interviews	
2. Effectiveness	To what extent has the project delivered on its outputs, outcomes and objectives?			

<p>2.1 Component 1</p>	<p>To what extent has the project contributed to Improving and consolidating wetland PA system within the larger landscape context in Jiangxi Province?</p> <p>Question 4: What is your view on project progress in achieving main outputs under component 1: (i) PA Management Strategy; (ii) expansion of the area under protection in Lake Poyang region; (iii) development of the Coordination Committee; (iv) strengthening the legal, regulatory and planning framework for wetland PA management); (v) enhancing education on wetlands? Can these planned outputs and outcomes be fully achieved before the project ends? If not what should be done?</p>	<p>2.1.1 Progress in meeting main outcome under component 1: effective management and protection of wetlands in PL region delivers increased health to wetland ecosystem in Jiangxi</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Level of progress in elaborating Jiangxi Province Wetland PA Management Strategy (JPWPAMS) and Wetland Management Standards and Guidelines</p> <p>b) Level of progress in establishing the Jiangxi Province Wetland Protected Areas Coordination Committee and degree to which there is evidence of coordination with sector agencies such as MARA to support effective wetland management approaches?</p> <p>c) Progress in review of regulatory framework for Wetland PA System management and integrating its recommendations (on measures for ecological compensation) in Wetland Protection Ordinance, Provincial Gov 5-year development plans and relevant sector plans</p> <p>d) Level of increase in METT/EHI scores to date</p> <p>e) Number of communities/schools targeted for outreach education on wetland management</p> <p>F) Progress in Economic Valuation of Wetland PA Services study</p>	<p>1) Theory of change 2) Progress reports (PIR/PPR) and BTO reports 3) Jiangxi Province Wetland Protected Areas Management Strategy and Guidelines, minutes of coordination meetings, report on eco-compensation regulations, METT/Ecosystem Health Index reports 4) Establishment and Operations of Wetland PA Field Stations 5) Documents on 3 operational demonstration reserves (County Wetland Nature Reserves) 6) Interviews with provincial/county staff working with the project</p>	<p></p>
<p>2.2 Component 2</p>	<p>To what extent has the project contributed to strengthening Wetland PA Management Capacity</p>	<p>2.2.1 Progress in meeting outcome 2: Strengthening management capacity at 3 demo sites (2 national one provincial reserves)</p>	<p>1) Progress reports (PIR/PPR) and BTO reports 2) Specific studies on</p>	<p></p>

	<p>at selected demonstration sites? Question 5: What is your view on project progress in achieving main outputs under component 2, in particular in identifying, testing and applying cost-effective wetland ecosystem management in the PWEPA?</p>	<p>and how far this is/there are plans to replicate the management model in Jiangxi province: Judgement criteria: a) No of management plans identified, approved and in operation incorporating cost-effective rehab and restoration techniques b) Level of progress in training staff in applying these plans c) Level of progress in training local community representatives to support co-management: d) No. of co-management agreements signed and in operation (supporting co-patrolling and other governance issues) e) No. of arrests for illegal practices in the demo sites/province No. of species conservation plans identified, approved being implemented through co-management and monitoring approaches f) Level of progress in METT and Total Capacity Development scores</p>	<p>climate change impacts, hydrological changes, biodiversity/migratory birds, etc. 2) PA Management plans and monitoring data; 3) Co-management agreements; 4) Training manuals and documents 5) Interviews with stakeholders and local beneficiaries at provincial level on PA management practices.</p>	
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<p>2.3 Component 3</p>	<p>To what extent has the project contributed to increasing Institutional & stakeholder capacities to manage consolidated wetland PA system in Jiangxi Province? Question 6: what is your view on the progress achieved in achieving main outputs under component 3, in particular the establishment of an improved information and data system on wetlands PAs in Jiangxi?</p>	<p>2.3.1 Level of attainment of outcome 3: developing informed decision-making within the PWEPA Management Framework (Poyang Lake Wetland Management Coordination Committee)</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) No of staff trained at county forestry bureaus in PL region (target 30) b) Progress in developing Jiangxi Wetlands Information Management System . c) Achievements so far in number of institutions using data from the Info Management System d) No. of public awareness campaigns conducted so far against targets; e) No. of members of local community engaged in monitoring activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Progress reports (PIR/PPR) and BTO reports; 2) Information system established (demonstrated in onlien interview) 3) Project technical and training manuals; 4) M&E data 5) Interviews with stakeholders at national, provincial and local levels who participate in SFM networking 	
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<p>2.4 & 2.5 Unintended results and barriers</p>	<p>Question 7: Are the barriers identified in the Prodoc (fragmented nature of wetlands; lack of a strategic integrated vision and limited institutional and operational capacity to manage wetland PA system) still a problem and have any other barriers been identified that may affect the project from reaching its objectives in the Poyang Lake region?</p>	<p>2.4.1 Level of attainment of outcome 3: developing an effective communication strategy to target different stakeholders Judgement criteria: a) Is data on project targets accompanied by assessments on lessons learned and best practices that feed back into planning and development of the training programmes? b) Does the project conduct reflexion seminars on specific activities such as wetland rehab/restoration good practices? c) Achievements in feeding M&E findings into the communication strategy d) How effective is the communication strategy according to interviewees?</p>	<p>1) Progress reports (PIR/PPR); 2) Project publications, promotions, education campaigns, newsletters and website; 3) Interviews with Forestry Bureaus and local community reps. working in the project 4) Level of perception of the wider needs of wetland habitats and their ecosystems among development sectors</p>	
<p>3. Efficiency: To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently, cost-effectively, and management been able to adapt to any changing conditions to improve the efficiency of project implementation?</p>				
<p>Factor that may be affecting performance OPIM/PSC 3.1a</p>	<p>Have the specific features related to OPIM modality been taken into consideration during project preparation (eg. recruitment and procurement procedures of the EP, etc.) and since start-up in 2016 has the contracting and procurement process been conducted efficiently (did the BH and/or LTO provide support)? Question 8: Is the OPIM modality proving to be an efficient modality to execute the project at the</p>	<p>3.1.1 Level of project execution attained due to OPIM modality and Project Steering Committee decision-making Judgement criteria: a) How far is the PSC guiding planning and implementation, learning from monitoring, etc. b) How far is the executing agency effectively discharging its role and responsibilities in managing and administering the project and ensuring co-finance is channelled to the project as agreed in the Prodoc? c) How far is the executing agency and PSC ensuring the project has the human resources</p>	<p>1) Progress and annual reports; 2) Minutes of PSC and OPIM/PMO/Technical meetings minutes 3) Assessment of project budgets 4) OPA 5) Interviews with project staff, FAO-China, GEF-China and key stakeholders involved in the OPIM.</p>	

	<p>provincial level? Please provide examples where the OPIM implementation and execution modalities facilitate or hampered project execution and contribution to the project objectives?</p> <p>What have been the main challenges in relation to the management and administration of the project and what changes are needed to improve delivery in the second half of the project?</p>	<p>to carry out project duties in an effective and timely manner (including reimbursement payments)?</p> <p>d) Has the Operational Partner's Agreement been applied efficiently and have any LoAs been agreed to facilitate project implementation?</p>		
<p>5.2 Management Factor that may be affecting performance</p>	<p>Addressed in 3.1</p>	<p>Ability ?</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>(a) Desk analysis confirms coherence between products, outcomes and objectives?</p> <p>(b) Project's key stakeholders find the products, outcomes and objectives are coherent and realistic?</p> <p>(c) Stakeholder groups see their engagement in the project is appropriate to reach expected products and outcomes?</p>	<p>1) Prodoc/logical framework</p> <p>2) Theory of change</p> <p>3) Interviews</p>	

<p>Financial management Factor that may be affecting performance</p>	<p>Question 9: What have been the challenges related to the financial management of the project and to what extent has the pledged co-financing been delivered? How does the project’s cost efficiency (cost/time) compare to that of similar projects?</p>	<p>3.3.1 Level of cost efficiency attained in relation to GEF and government co-finance. Judgement criteria: a) Budget allocations remain relevant? b) Level of delay in receiving GEF funds through FAO-CN; c) Quality of FAO-CN guidance in making payments of GEF funds to the project stakeholders (e.g. on payment of reimbursed fees using third-party inspections)</p>	<p>1) Progress and annual reports; 2) Assessment of training budgets and costs 3) Interviews with OPIM staff, FAO-China, GEF-China and Ministry of Finance</p>	
<p>Factor that may be affecting performance Risks 5.1</p>	<p>Has project management been able to adapt to any changing conditions/risks to improve the efficiency of project implementation? Question 10: Has the project adopted efficient risk management to ensure external factors such as institutional reforms, staff rotation, weather events, the coronavirus pandemic, financial flows, etc. have not caused major inefficiency on project implementation?</p>	<p>3.2.1 How far has the management of risk facilitated efficient implementation of project actions (to reduce delays to a minimum)? Judgement criteria: a) Are risks being regularly assessed by PMO and PSC and updated to reduce delays/enhance implementation as planned b) Have any risk mitigation measures actually sped up execution and provide lessons or good practices? c) Do the project activities produce unintended positive or negative results in project implementation?</p>	<p>1) Progress and annual reports; 2) Interviews with OPIM/PMO/NFGA staff, CSOs, FAO-China, GEF-China</p>	

<p>3.2 Coordination and Synergies</p>	<p>Question 11: To what extent has the project built on existing agreements, initiatives, data sources, synergies, complementarities with other projects and partnerships, etc, and avoid duplication of similar activities (i.e. through joint training and other activities that support the sharing of costs and expertise)?</p>	<p>3.4.1 Synergies and data sharing are producing a positive effect on project implementation Judgement criteria: a) No. of synergies in place that have avoided the duplication of project resources (cost savings) at: (i) institutional level in particular with MEE (biodiversity monitoring, habitat restoration), MWR (Hydraulic monitoring, wetland restoration), MNR (land-use planning, disaster risk management), MARA (pollution control and patrols)? (ii) non-government sector including provincial universities; (iii) private sector; and (iv) civil society/local communities b) Synergies with other GEF projects (such as 057 which is also working on wetland restoration), Sino-German initiatives, WWF (conservation of rare species)</p>	<p>1) Progress reports 2) Interviews with OPIM staff, FAO-China and provincial stakeholders on their perception of the synergies in place</p>	
<p>3.3 Cost-effectiveness</p>	<p>Question 12: Is the project achieving a satisfactory level of cost-effectiveness (i.e. conversion of resources into results)?</p>	<p>3.5. Project cost/time versus output/outcomes compared to that of similar projects? Judgement criteria: a) Is the OPIM modality proving to be more cost-efficient and cost-effective in relation to direct execution by FAO-CN? b) Are the costs of the trainings (per capita) achieving their planned results? c) Are the above-mentioned synergies resulting in cost savings to produce outputs?</p>	<p>1) Prodoc; 2) Progress and annual reports and budgets; 3) Interviews with GEF-China, FAO-China and PMO</p>	

<p>5.4 FAO oversight Factor that may be affecting performance</p>	<p>To what extent has FAO delivered on project identification, concept preparation, appraisal, preparation, approval and start-up, oversight and supervision? Question 13: Does FAO add value to the project's administration and implementation through the guidance, supervision and technical backstopping it provides?</p>	<p>3.6.1 Level of FAO intervention in the project: Judgement criteria: a) General perception of PMO/NFGA of quality and timeliness of FAO's admin support (FAO-CN) and technical support (LTO, based in FAO-RAP); b) How far do FAO and GEF procedures increase bureaucracy and affect efficiency? c) Do regular staff rotations in FAO (project manager, LTO, BH, etc.) affect the project's implementation rate?</p>	<p>1) Progress and annual reports; 2) Interviews with FAO/GEF/PMO/NFGA staff and advisers</p>	
<p>5.6 & 5.7 M&E & communication Factor that may be affecting performance</p>	<p>Question 14: Is the project's M&E system based on a plan that includes linking up with the communication strategy to support learning on project results (outputs and outcomes) and create incentives to adopt sustainable wetland PA system management?</p>	<p>5.7.1 Efficiency and effectiveness of the M&E system Judgement criteria: a) Perception of stakeholders of the indicators applied in relation to national indicators relating to PA management? b) Is data on project targets accompanied by assessments on lessons learned and identification of best practices that feed back into planning and development of the training programmes? c) Does the project conduct reflexion seminars on specific activities such as wetland rehab/restoration good practices? d) Achievements in feeding M&E findings into the communication strategy e) How effective is the communication strategy according to interviewees?</p>	<p>1) Progress reports (PIR/PPR); 2) Project publications, promotions, education campaigns, newsletters and website; 3) Interviews with stakeholders and local community reps. working in the project 4) Level of perception of the wider needs of wetland habitats and their ecosystems among development sectors such as MARA.</p>	

4. Sustainability: What is the likelihood that the project results can be sustained after the end of the project?				
4.1 Risks and barriers	Question 15: What are the key risks that may affect the sustainability of the project results and its benefits (financial, socioeconomic, institutional and governance, and environmental aspects, as well as the risks identified in the project document)?	51.1. How far do high/medium risks, including the pandemic and lack of ownership of results, pose a threat to sustaining the main outputs and outcomes achieved? Judgement criteria: a) Capacity to continue managing risk as an integral part of NFGA initiatives in the pilot areas b) Level of risk mitigation that can be sustained with national/provincial/local resources in the pilot areas c) Level of fiduciary risk following project's end, especially at the provincial level	1) Prodoc 2) Work plans and progress/annual reports; 3) Technical, training and workshop reports; 4) M&E reports 5) Project communications 6) Group and individual interviews government stakeholders	
4.2 Long-term ownership	Question 16: Did the OPIM modality contribute to establishing sustainable institutional arrangements and cross-sector partnerships at the national, provincial and municipal levels?	5.2.1 Degree to which the beneficiary institutions and CSO partners can continue to operate and maintain project outputs and sustain outcomes Judgement criteria: a) Mechanisms identified/in place to continue the OPIM modality and partnerships with other government, international institutions and civil organisations beyond project closure; b) Funding and support identified/in place for BD and/or carbon monitoring at pilot sites; c) capacity of government institutions identified/in place to upscale good practices from the project; d) stakeholders have identified how the communication strategy should be continued	1) Prodoc 2) Work plans and progress/annual reports; 3) Technical, training and workshop reports; 4) M&E reports 5) Project communications 6) SFM policy documents and plans 7) Group and individual interviews with project staff, government and CSO stakeholders	

		and amplified for all parties involved; e) Internal capacity of CSOs to operate as planned beyond the project in BD and/or carbon monitoring, applying sustainable use of biodiversity through suitable land use practices, etc.		
4.3 (MTR) Exit Strategy	Question 17: Has the exit strategy been identified in the project design, or during implementation so far, to clarify how all resources and materials will be transferred to stakeholders?	5.3.1 Degree to which the exit strategy has been identified to date? Judgement criteria: a) Work plans show evidence of main actions to be incorporated in the exit strategy as and when planned outputs and outcomes have been reached; b) How far PSC, OPIM and FAO-China have discussed the exit strategy and incorporated it in planning, especially work plan for 2020-2021; c) Key stakeholders interviewed confirm they are satisfied they know how training and technical supervision on applying PA system management techniques in a cost-effective manner, continue monitoring, data analysis, etc. d) Has the systematisation of results, findings, lessons and good practices been contemplated in the communication strategy?	1) Prodoc 2) Work plans and progress/annual reports; 3) NFGA provincial policy documents and plans 4) Interviews with stakeholders on the exit strategy and lessons to be incorporated into this strategy	
5 Factors affecting performance				
Addressed under the evaluation criteria				

6. Cross-cutting priorities: To what extent have gender consideration been taken into account in project design and implementation?				
<p>6.1 Gender & ethnic minorities</p>	<p>Question 18: To what extent were gender and ethnic minority rights and considerations taken into account in designing and implementing the project?</p>	<p>4.1.1 Women, youths and ethnic minorities participate actively in the project's planning and implementation in line with GEF and FAO policies and guidelines Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Evidence of gender analysis and FPIC in the design and its incorporation in the project design and M&E system (includes sex-disaggregated baselines, indicators and targets)</p> <p>b) Do the staff in the PMU have gender sensitive skills to ensure women are fully heard during project planning and implementation, in M&E and communications, etc.?</p> <p>c) Perception of women and youths concerning their level of access to information, training, resources, etc. and benefits derived from project actions (including specific results/benefits for women)?</p> <p>d) Is training focused on both women and men so the latter can value and recognise the role of women in biodiversity conservation?</p> <p>e) Number of women and youths who have assumed leadership roles in co-management partnerships established so far</p> <p>f) Positive or negative developments on women due to project's actions (e.g. on increasing workload disproportionately more than men)</p>	<p>1) Prodoc 2) Work plans; 3) Technical, training and workshop reports; 4) Assess M&E system 5) FAO/GEF Gender objectives and guidance documents 6) PA system national and provincial policies, plans and guidelines include gender focus 7) Group and individual interviews with women and youths to determine the value and quality of their participation and access to resources and project benefits (to be expanded in the event the field mission is authorised)</p>	

<p>6.1b</p>	<p>MTR assessment only: Does the project have a socially inclusive approach promoted in the design and in the implementation of the project (i.e. in line with GEF and FAO guidelines on meeting the needs and aspirations of the ethnic minorities)?</p>	<p>4.2.1 Level of participation of vulnerable groups (ethnic minorities, families under the poverty line, disabled, etc.) in the design, planning, implementation and monitoring of the project's actions Judgement criteria: a) Level of application of FPIC as per FAO guidelines b) Perception of project staff, FAO-China, GEF-China and government stakeholders on inclusion of ethnic communities and other vulnerable groups and how far this is monitored by the M&E system; c) How far have project methods and dialogue channels been adapted to meet the needs and priorities of vulnerable groups?</p>	<p>1) Prodoc 2) Work plans; 3) Technical, training and workshop reports; 4) Assess M&E system 5) FAO/GEF objectives and guidance documents on FPIC and the rights of ethnic minorities 6) Field interviews if field mission is authorised</p>	
<p>6.2 Environmental and social safeguards</p>	<p>MTR assessment only: to what extent were environmental concerns (such as forest habitat health and forest ecosystem management) taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project?</p>	<p>4.3.1 How far is the project still applying the ESS (in particular relating to biodiversity conservation within the wider context of sustaining the wetland ecosystem)? Judgement criteria: a) Assess level of consistency with ESS b) Level of integration of the ecosystem approach in the projects main activities at provincial level (sustainable use of biodiversity is fully applied) c) Views of locals on their ability to manage immediate needs with long-term sustainability of endangered biodiversity</p>	<p>1) Prodoc 2) Work plans; 3) Technical, training and workshop reports; 4) Use of MEE guidance on biodiversity monitoring, reporting and verification; 5) Coordination with FAO best practices from around the world on PA system management 5) Interviews with project staff and government</p>	

			officials at national, provincial/local levels	
7. Lessons and good practices: Are there lessons learnt, or good practices identified to support GEF/FAO guide future projects planned in China and elsewhere?				
7.1 (in addition to ToR)	Question 19: have you identified any lessons learnt for future planning and implementation, or good practices to help sustain and up-scale project activities? For example, Are you happy the project is supporting FAO's efforts to safeguard food security and nutrition while at the same time promote sustainable use of fish stocks, remove use of skynets, refrain from over grazing, etc.?	6.1.1 Level of lessons learned and good practices that are feeding into project planning and implementation Judgement criteria: a) Lessons and good practices are being reported by the project as outputs and outcomes happen or are monitored b) Interviewees confirm they are using lessons learned and good practices to conserve biodiversity	1) All documents consulted 2) Interviews with stakeholders	
7.2 (in addition to ToR)	Question 20: Is the project producing a catalytic effect in other provinces in China concerning biodiversity conservation and sustainable use in the water and/or other sectors?	6.2.1 Number of provinces that have shown an interest to/will replicate project activities, or participate in seminars, trainings, workshops, receive communications, etc. Judgement criteria: a) Interviewees confirm one or more new provinces have contacted the project and/or participated in project activities b) Government at the national level agrees to test the project model in other provinces as part of its drive to step up ecological civilisation, increase resilience and promote sustainable development	1) Interviewees with stakeholders	

Appendix 5. List of documents consulted

Documents consulted that are not available on the internet

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JxFoD/FAO. Operational Partners Agreement, 30 September 2016

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JxFoD/PMO. Minutes of the meetings of the Project Steering Committee (March 2018), (April 2019)

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JxFoD/PMO. Project brochures, (2017 and 2020)

JxFoD/PMO. Spot Check Report 2017.4.7-12.31, Spot Check Report 2018.7.1-12.31, Audit report 2018.1.1-6.30

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1. Jiangxi Provincial Wetland Protected Areas Management Strategy
2. Provincial wetland PA standards & guidelines
3. Survey Report of Organic Agriculture in Jiangxi Province
4. Study Report of Eco-compensation Mechanism
5. Jiangxi Province Wetland Eco-tourism guidelines
6. Wetland Eco-Compensation Measures in Jiangxi Province
7. Activity Report on Knowledge Promotion of Wetland Policies and Regulations
8. Wetland eco-compensation measures in Jiangxi
9. Evaluation report on institutional capacity
10. Capacity Building Research Report
11. METT baseline scorecards for 12 nature reserves in Poyang Lake region

12. METT middle term scorecards for 12 nature reserves
13. Wetland Management Gap Analysis report
14. Economic value assessment report
15. Management plans for 6 NRs
16. Poyang Lake Wetland Restoration Pilot Project Design
17. Study report on impacts of climate change on Poyang Lake wetlands
18. Eco-tourism Evaluation Report on Poyang Lake PA
19. Community Co-management Baseline Survey Report
20. Community Co-management Implementation Plan
21. Community Co-management Guidelines
22. Wetland PA (PWEPA) sustainable financial input and management plan
23. Monitoring and Survey Plan for Finless Porpoise
24. Threats Analysis Report on Finless Porpoise
25. Conservation Plan of Finless Porpoise
26. Wild Release and GPS Tracking Plan for Water Deer
27. Monitoring and Protection Plan for Water Deer in Poyang Lake
28. Overall plan for training and workshops
29. Implementation plan for biodiversity monitoring
30. EHI monitoring plan
31. Monitoring and protection plan of migratory birds in PY lake
32. 9 co-management agreements with PLNNR
33. Summary report for co-management program
34. Monitoring report for wintering birds in Duchang NR
35. KAP baseline survey report
36. KAP middle term survey report
37. Development of Jiangxi wetland reserves information management system
38. Develop school wetland protection education curriculum and school outreach program

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FAO/GEF. Project identification form, 2014

GEF. GEF secretariat comments, 2014

GEF. GEF Secretariat Review of project: CBPF-MSL: Piloting Provincial-level Wetland Protected Area System in Jiangxi Province, 19 June 2012

GEF. CEO Endorsement of Project CPR/GCP/052/GFF - CBPF-MSL: Piloting Provincial-level Wetland Protected Area System in Jiangxi Province (under parent programme: China: CBPF-MSL Main Streams of Life Wetland PA System for Biodiversity Conservation (PROGRAM)) - ID 4646, 05 September 2014.

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Appendix 6: Results matrix at 30 April 2020 with MTR ratings & observations*

Results Chain	Indicators	Baseline	Progress to date (30 April 2020)	End of project targets (06 April 2022)	Achievement rating (HS, S, MS, MU, U, HU)	Justification for rating
Component 1	Improved and consolidated wetland PA system within the larger landscape context in Jiangxi Province					
Outcome 1	Increase in coordinated management of the wetland PA system throughout Jiangxi Province					
Output 1.1	Jiangxi Province Wetland PA Management Strategy (JPWPAMS) and Wetland Management Standards and Guidelines are developed (defining approaches, tools, and processes for guiding the expansion and consolidated management of wetland PAs in Jiangxi Province) and adopted by JXFOD/Provincial Government	No strategy exists	Drafted the outline of the JPWPAMS and accompanying Standards and Guidelines. First drafts reviewed and second draft submitted to PSC in April 2020. Interviews confirm third drafts have been produced and are under review as of July 2020.	JPWPAMMAS and Wetland Management Standard & Guidelines developed, reviewed and adopted by end of year 3 of project	MS	The project is advancing with the elaboration of the JPWPAMS, but will not meet planned deadline due to provincial reforms which prevent a provincial coordination committee for the wetland PA system in Jiangxi to be established. Instead the project relies on an <i>ad hoc</i> cross-sectoral coordination mechanism to operate at its workshops and through lobbying of the director of the JXFOD in provincial government meetings. Also, it is not clear as to the body that will be responsible for implementing decision-making on the JPWPAMS and enforcing standards and guidelines.

<p>Output 1.3</p>	<p>(i) PLWMCC is restructured into the Jiangxi Province Wetland Protected Areas Coordination Committee (JPWPACC) to apply the JPWPAMS in sector development plans and project appraisals;</p> <p>(ii) wetland conservation measures identified in the JPWPAMS are fully integrated into government development plans at provincial, municipal and county levels, including PLEEZ, (taken from output 1.4 in Prodoc);</p> <p>(iii) wetland conservation recommendations integrated into productive sector plans and practices (taken from output 1.4 in Prodoc);</p> <p>(iv) strengthen capacity of the PLWMCC to conduct multi-stakeholder coordination, before evolving into the JPWPACC to implement the JPWPAMS and guide implementation of</p>	<p>(i) Inactive collaboration and cooperation among various government agencies on applying wetland conservation;</p> <p>(ii) Inadequate integration and application of wetland conservation measures in government development plans;</p> <p>(iii) Inadequate integration and application of wetland conservation in agriculture, tourism, mining and other sector development plans</p> <p>(iv) Low level of inter-institutional coordination in Jiangxi Province to oversee development and application of wetland management plans in the province in general and the PWEPA in particular.</p> <p>(v) Policy makers and institutional leaders</p>	<p>(i) Partnership and coordination mechanism established with relevant provincial line agencies at workshop held on 22 May 2019, where agreement is reached to apply the JPWPAMS in accordance with standards and guidelines;</p> <p>(ii) wetland conservation recommendations identified by consultants and in consultation process with relevant government authorities</p> <p>(iii) wetland conservation recommendations identified by consultants and in consultation process with Agriculture Department, tourism agencies and other relevant line agencies before integration in their sector development plans</p> <p>(iv) Performance analysis plan of PLWMCC produced with the committee, and carried out the evaluation and awarding of individuals and organizations applying good wetland conservation practices, but capacity building/training for members of PLWMCC not yet started;</p> <p>(v) Capacity assessment completed and used to</p>	<p>(i) Coordination leads to the application of new sector-based approaches including: organic agriculture pilot projects and their replication with Dept. of Agriculture and eco-tourism initiatives with tourism agencies by end of year 3;</p> <p>(ii) Wetland conservation recommendations integrated into governmental Development Planning Processes</p> <p>(iii) wetland conservation recommendations integrated into Productive Sector Management Plans and Practices;</p> <p>(iv) JPWPACC established and coordinating implementation of wetland PA management plans in PWEPA and rest of Jiangxi Province;</p> <p>(v) Wetland PA system inter-sectoral coordination and</p>	<p>MS</p>	<p>(i) The project is in the process of establishing the coordination mechanism needed with key development sectors at the provincial level. However, due to institutional reforms this relies on holding project workshops to bring stakeholders together. As a result, there is no official body established at the Prov. Government level to guide and monitor implementation of the JPWPAMS;</p> <p>(ii) wetland conservation recommendations identified and facilitating dialogue within JXFOD and provincial, municipal and county government authorities;</p> <p>(iii) wetland conservation recommendations identified and facilitating dialogue with Department for Agriculture, tourism agencies and Water Resources Department on sand mining quotas.</p> <p>However, little or no information provided on</p> <p>How far project 052 is sharing strategies, lessons and good practices on</p>
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	<p>wetland PA management plans in PWEPA (taken from output 2.2)</p> <p>(v) Cross-Sectoral capacity building for PA System coordination and planning (output 3.2)*</p>	<p>responsible for wetland PA management not trained in coordinating their activities to implement the JPWPAS, facilitate expansion of wetland PA system in Jiangxi Province and develop the JWIMS (output 3.2)</p>	<p>elaborate the capacity building training plan.</p>	<p>planning agreed and in operation</p>		<p>mainstreaming wetland conservation in similar productive sectors in the 6+1 programme (in particular in Anhui and Hubei provinces) wetland conservation</p> <p>(iv) JPWPACC only operating through the project rather than as an integral part of Prov. Govt and sector level sustainable development planning. It is not clear if the committee has included identification of institutions, organisations and individuals that need to adopt good wetland management practices (and supports law enforcement);</p> <p>(v) Capacity building experiencing significant delays due to COVID-19 and institutional reforms</p>
Output 1.4	<p>(i) Improved legal and regulatory framework for wetland PA system management established in the Jiangxi Wetland Protection Ordinance to guide application of the JPWPAMS and</p>	<p>(i) Lack of wetland ecosystem management in Jiangxi Province in general and in the PLNNR in particular;</p> <p>(ii) ecological compensation largely</p>	<p>(i) Legal and regulatory study of Jiangxi Province completed.</p> <p>Recommendations of the study are currently under review with relevant line agencies before they can be submitted to prov.</p>	<p>(i) Legal and regulatory review completed and recommendations adopted and implemented by Prov. Gov.</p> <p>(ii) Guidelines on ecological compensation</p>	S	<p>(i) The project has completed the legal and regulatory review (including on the application of ecological compensation) and dialogue with key sectors is on-going on their modification and/or adoption in the Jiangxi</p>

	<p>application of ecological compensation</p> <p>(ii) increase in ecological compensation payments in Jiangxi Province</p> <p>(iii) community outreach education for implementing Jiangxi Province Wetland Protection Ordinance conducted in all counties where there are wetland PAs in PL region and in at least 3 counties outside the PL region;</p> <p>(iv) Economic valuation of wetland PA goods and services in Jiangxi Prov.</p>	<p>unavailable, except in pilot programmes;</p> <p>(iii) No community outreach education programme in place in the PL region or province as a whole.</p> <p>(iii) No economic valuation of wetland PA goods and services available in Jiangxi Prov.</p>	<p>government for approval and implementation;</p> <p>(ii) ecological compensation standards and regulations identified and under review</p> <p>(iii) Community outreach education on Ordinance is on-going.</p> <p>(iii) Economic valuation study completed and submitted for review at end of 2019.</p>	<p>payments finalised, differentiated for national, provincial and county level wetland PAs and applied in PL region to the benefit of, among others: a) fishermen applying close seasons/ fishing bans; b) farmers who leave rice paddies flooded and untouched after harvesting; and c) farmers who change agriculture/ aquaculture practices to protect water quality around PAs;</p> <p>(iii) Education outreach activities on the Ordinance completed in PL region and prioritised counties elsewhere in the province;</p> <p>(iv) Economic valuation report finalised, approved by PSC and used to support education and guide decisions on JPWPAMS, sector planning, hydrological management in province/ Yangtze River basin, etc.</p>		<p>Wetland Protection Ordinance;</p> <p>Ecological compensation study submitted to PSC for review</p> <p>(iii) community outreach activities have started;</p> <p>(iv) Economic valuation study completed and submitted. Highlights the total value of ecological goods and services of wetland PAs in Jiangxi stands at CNY 4.880 b. (USD 697 m.) of which flood control and water storage is the most important service (34.4% of total value). Also highlights under exploitation of tourism services (only 2.3% of total value).</p>
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Component 2	Internal wetland PA management capacity is strengthened at selected demonstration sites leading to an increase in the area of wetland PAs under effective management in Jiangxi Province					
Outcome 2	Integrated and effective management demonstrated at PLNNR, NWNRR and DPMBNR and replicated in the Poyang Lake Wetlands Ecosystem PA (PWEPA)					
Output 2.1	Increase in resilience of PLNNR and NWNRR to the effects of climate variability and change, based on cost-effective wetland ecosystem management at PLNNR and NWNRR.	Lack of cost-effective techniques and integration of risk management in wetland PA policies, strategies and plans to mitigate climate variability and change within the PWEPA	(i) climate change impact studies and hydrological studies conducted and reports submitted highlighting best practices to mitigate climate variability and change and manage water balance, flows and quality in the PWEPA to conserve globally important biodiversity; (ii) Pilot grassland restoration and other activities on-going in Changhuchi wetlands (PLNNR) since 2019, but not yet started in Nanji NR.	Best practices for wetland vegetation rehab/ restoration identified and adopted for replication throughout the PWEPA	MS	Climate change impact and hydrological studies completed; pilot activities on-going at one PA, but more coordination needed with 6+1 programme in Hubei and Anhui provinces. No explicit information on the integration of risk management in PA planning and implementation of activities in coordination with key sectors to mitigate climate change and enhance effective hydrological management with provincial departments for Water Resources, Agriculture, Housing, Industry, Land Use planning, etc.
Output 2.2	JPWPACC management framework facilitates the establishment of: (i) 3 coordinated management plans for PLNNR, NWNRR and DPMBNR based on common objectives, milestones, targets and	No coordinated management framework in the PWEPA; (i) Lack of wetland management plans in the PWEPA to cover adjacent land and natural resources,	(i) Completed surveys and training to support elaboration of 3 management plans, but implementation of management pilot activities not yet started. (ii) Completed consultations with relevant stakeholders on finalizing the policy and institutional review. Survey on	(i) 3 wetland management plans for the PWEPA approved and implementing the JPWPAMS in a coordinated manner in PWEPA at all 3 wetland PAs	S	3 management plans and framework have been identified, but financial mechanism still to be finalised and pilot management activities not yet started

	<p>cost estimates to support effective law enforcement;</p> <p>(ii) a sustainable financing mechanism to fund the long-term operation and maintenance of coordinated responses to wetland management in the PWEPA.</p>	<p>collective law enforcement, habitat restoration, hydrological management, monitoring and law enforcement, etc.;</p> <p>(ii) lack of a long-term financing mechanism for the PWEPA PAs.</p>	<p>sustainable financing mechanism carried out and recommendations formulated</p>	<p>(ii) Financial mechanism in place to sustain management of wetland PAs in PWEPA</p>		
Output 1.2*	<p>JPWPACC management framework facilitates the expansion of the geographic coverage of operationally effective wetland protected areas in the Poyang Lake region (measured in ha) through:</p> <p>(i) establishment of 6 or 7 new field monitoring stations around the PLNNR to support joint law enforcement with county Forestry Bureaus;</p> <p>(ii) establishment of 3 demonstration county wetland NRs in operation at Yugan, Wannian and Lushan</p> <p>(iii) replication of the demonstration sites in</p>	<p>26 wetland PAs in Jiangxi Prov. covering a total land area of 350,000 ha, of which only 3 in the Poyang Lake region are in operation covering 96,800 ha. (PLNNR, NWNRR and DPMBNR)</p> <p>Poyang Lake region has 12 wetland reserves covering a total of 190,157 ha of which 9 are paper reserves (covering 93,357 ha)</p> <p>(i) 4 field monitoring stations in operation within PLNNR and 0 outside;</p>	<p>So far, the project has contributed to the increasing wetland PA by 93,821 ha in the Poyang Lake region and 51,364 ha outside the PL region;</p> <p>(i) 7 new field monitoring stations established, equipped and training on effective operation around PLNNR (covering different counties) is on-going;</p> <p>(ii) Wetland reserve management plans elaborated for Yugan, Wannian and Lushan NRs. Recommendations on management interventions formulated. Equipment purchased and pilot activities and training (conservation zoning) is on-going. Training evaluation has not yet been conducted;</p>	<p>(i) Increase in effective management of PLNNR, Nanji and Duchang reserves (96,800 ha) and all other wetland PAs in Poyang Lake region (93,357 ha);</p> <p>(ii) Increase in effective management of wetland PAs outside the Poyang Lake region (5,662 ha);</p> <p>(iii) At least 1 replication evident in a county NR by project end</p>	S	<p>The project has met field monitoring targets outside the PLNNR and management plans for 3 county-level NRs which will enable almost 94,000 ha of additional wetland PAs to be managed in the PL region</p>

	other county (and inter-county) wetland NRs.	(ii) 0 county reserves with management plans and equipped to operate effectively; (iii) 0 replication sites	(iii) 0 replications			
Output 2.3	<p>Increase in participatory management capacity within the PWEPA, through:</p> <p>(i) staff training on wetland ecosystem-based planning, management and monitoring; business planning and income generation; law enforcement and conflict resolution; outreach and awareness activities;</p> <p>technical capacity building; equipment procurement to enhance hydro-meteorological monitoring, bird migrations, etc.;</p> <p>(ii) increase in site-level community co-management with village communities applied in PLNNR and NWNNR</p>	<p>(i) Management effectiveness tracking tool (METT) scores at PLNNR, NWNNR and DPMBNR at start of project were 69, 61 and 44; None had adequate equipment to do effective hydro-meteo or biodiversity monitoring, or support environmental law enforcement;</p> <p>(ii) Absence of effective co-management plans and operations in PLNNR and NWNNR</p> <p>(iii) Lack of cooperative management to conserve bird habitats in PLNNR and NWNNR</p>	<p>(i) Carried out training on participatory wetland reserve management planning (2018-2019) to support formulation of wetland management plans in 2019; equipment for PA staff procured;</p> <p>(ii) co-management plans completed and consulted with stakeholders in PLNNR and NWNNR;</p> <p>prepared and signed 9 co-management agreements;</p> <p>Implementation of co-management and alternative activities has started.</p> <p>(iii) NWNNR has rewarded fishermen supporting migratory bird counts; PLNNR has issued short-term lease agreements with village communities to regulate draining of wetlands at key sites;</p>	<p>(i) Wetland PA management plans in operation at 3 NRs in the PWEPA and recording an average METT score of 72 (75%);</p> <p>(ii) 13 village communities and 13 field conservation and monitoring stations operating 9 co-management plans in PLNNR and 2 in NWNNR;</p> <p>(iii) At least three agreements in place with local communities to regulate wetland draining practices (from accelerated to natural draining) relating to aquaculture supported by ecological compensation payments where applied correctly.</p>	MS	<p>(i) 3 management plans prepared for PLNNR, NWNNR and DPMBNR support coordinated management of the PWEPA. However, no update on METT score in 2020 so far. Hydro-meteorological equipment, boats, binoculars, telescopes, cameras, etc. have been procured and are being used. But not clear if:</p> <p>a) includes GPS cameras to geo reference bird monitoring and support law enforcement on exact location of illegal practices;</p> <p>b) if boats are flat-bottomed and preferably airboats to protect biodiversity, especially finless porpoise and sediments</p> <p>(ii) Co-management plans and agreements progressing as planned, but community co-management committees</p>

	<p>(iii) increase in cooperative management of water bodies for conserving migratory bird habitats used for aquaculture</p> <p>(iv) Increase in sustainable employment alternatives for local residents</p>	<p>(iv) Lack of support and guidance on switching to alternative, sustainable employment opportunities in the wetland PAs</p>	<p>(iv) Plan for alternative livelihoods formulated and workshop held to develop eco-tourism projects from 2019.</p>	<p>(iv) At least 1 eco-tourism activity established with local community partnership</p>		<p>not established yet to resolve local land-use conflicts, enforce the law, promote alternative livelihoods;</p> <p>(iii) Cooperative management in operation to conserve wetlands from poor aquaculture practices and support bird counts. Ecological compensation payments under review;</p> <p>(iv) alternative livelihoods based on eco-tourism underway, but no partnership signed with 6+1 programme and ICF community-based initiatives.</p>
Output 2.4	<p>Increase in ecological health monitoring capacity of priority habitats and species in the PWEPA measured by:</p> <p>(i) increase in ecological health index (EHI) in the 3 main wetland PAs in PWEPA (supported by targeted surveys to develop baseline and target data for EHI; applying standards to maintain/improve EHI scores; studies on</p>	<p>(i) EHI baseline scores (report No. 30 of consultants reports)</p> <p>(ii) No species conservation plans available in the 3 main wetland PAs in PWEPA;</p> <p>(iii) METT baseline scores at 3 main PAs: PLNNR 69; NWNRR 61;</p>	<p>(i) EHI and biodiversity monitoring plans have been prepared and approved; monitoring activities started, but EHI monitoring score is not yet available;</p> <p>(ii) Plans for monitoring 4 species of birds, finless porpoise and water deer formulated and approved. Training on species monitoring carried out and monitoring started for finless porpoise and water deer monitoring. Protection Plans for</p>	<p>(i) EHI targets not available;</p> <p>(ii)</p> <p>(iii) METT target scores: PLNNR 83; NWNRR 79; DPMBNR 64;</p> <p>County NRs: increase by 30% on baseline score</p>	MS	<p>(i) EHI and biodiversity monitoring plans prepared, but baseline data and targets not yet available. Studies and assessments completed but data and recommendations not yet consolidated;</p> <p>(ii) Species monitoring and conservation plans started for finless porpoise and water deer, but no data available yet on current population numbers;</p> <p>(iii) METT scores for 3 main wetland PAs in PWEPA are</p>

	<p>upstream pressures on wetland ecosystem services; water use and allocation monitoring;</p> <p>assessments on water levels, quantity and quality; Biodiversity monitoring, etc.</p> <p>(ii) Species monitoring and protection plans</p> <p>(iii) Increase in METT scores at 3 main wetland PAs and 9 county NRs</p>	<p>DPMBNR 44;</p> <p>And at 9 county NRs:</p> <p>Nanhu: 30</p> <p>Pingfeng: 34</p> <p>Gutang: 36</p> <p>Liaohuchi: 29</p> <p>Baishazhou: 38</p> <p>Huyun: 32</p> <p>Hexi: 28</p> <p>Kangshanhu: 34</p> <p>Qinglanhu: 25;</p>	<p>water deer and finless porpoise drafted in April 2020</p> <p>(iii) Latest METT scores at PLNNR, NWNRR and DPMBNR not available.</p> <p>METT scores at county NRs:</p> <p>Nanhu: 32</p> <p>Pingfeng: 39</p> <p>Gutang: 38</p> <p>Liaohuchi: 39</p> <p>Baishazhou: 57</p> <p>Huyun: 43</p> <p>Hexi: 34</p> <p>Kangshanhu: 49</p> <p>Qinglanhu: 36.</p>			<p>not available, but interviews indicate scores are likely to have improved due to project training support and equipment provision. METT scores showing an increase at all 9 county NR sites.</p>
Outcome 3	Institutional & stakeholder capacities strengthened to manage consolidated wetland PA system in Jiangxi Province					
Output 3.1	<p>Jiangxi Wetlands Information Management System (JWIMS) established and in operation to support data sharing between PA sites and development sectors integrate wetland and PA management in</p>	<p>No data system available</p>	<p>Subcontractor recruited in September 2019;</p> <p>Work Plan for establishment of information system prepared and approved</p> <p>Design work started in 2019; guidelines for wetland information system drafted.</p>	<p>Information system identified, approved and in operation by end of year 3 (2020)</p> <p>(i) At least 5 government institutions using the JWIMS by end of 2020;</p> <p>(ii) At least 10,000 visits by end of project</p>	MS	<p>(i) Information system management system has been designed, but Prodoc has not factored in the time needed to collect, validate and process reliable data before it can guide decision-making. Also, greater coordination is needed at national level to ensure it forms the basis of a national</p>

	<p>their sector plans and operations. Measured by:</p> <p>(i) Number of institutions (PA units; provincial and county agencies) using the wetlands database platform to input and update wetland data in Jiangxi provincial wetland PAs</p> <p>(ii) Number of people per year who visit the wetlands database platform and retrieve data</p>					<p>management system and has the support needed to ensure its replication in the 6+1 programme as well as in other provinces that have wetlands (taking into account there are over 500 wetland systems in China);</p> <p>(iii) number of visits may not be the best indicator to measure use. In addition, the website should include a short online survey of 3 minutes applied to those who upload/download data</p>
Output 3.2	See output 1.3				MS	
Output 3.3	<p>Increase in public awareness on wetland conservation and sustainable use measured by:</p> <p>(i) Construction of a Wetland PA Visitor Centre and education facilities in PLNNR</p> <p>(ii) Development of a school wetland protection education curriculum and conduct school outreach program</p>	<p>(i) No visitor centres available;</p> <p>(ii) No education outreach programme;</p> <p>(iii) Small awards programme in place for wetland management best practices;</p> <p>(iv) Survey in Jiangxi Province found following baselines: overall 54% respond they have increased awareness about</p>	<p>(i) wetland visitor exhibition designed and construction completed in Nanchang. Over 3,300 visitors to date;</p> <p>(ii) Work plan for development of wetland protection school curriculum submitted and approved by FAO. Materials procured and used in the pilot training;</p> <p>(iii) Improved evaluation of the award system established under the control of the PLWMCC. PLWMCC members went to various counties in the Poyang</p>	<p>(i) At least 10,000 persons go to the Wetland Visitor Centre by end of the project in 2022;</p> <p>(ii) At least 30 schools visit the centre each year</p> <p>(iii) 5 annual performance assessments and award ceremonies;</p> <p>(iv) Of all respondents surveyed in Jiangxi Province, overall, 73% respond they have increased awareness about wetlands and their</p>	HS	<p>(i) Visitor centre completed and received 3,300 visitors so far;</p> <p>(ii) 3 schools have participated in the outreach education so far;</p> <p>(iii) 577 awards were given out to end of 2019, but very few (?) in 2020 due to COVID-19 pandemic</p> <p>(vi) Activities to raise awareness and promote good practices have been applied using the arts (troupe opera), community</p>

	<p>(iii) introduction of annual wetland and bird conservation awards to local NGOs or individuals in the Poyang Lake region</p> <p>(iv) introduction of Outreach and Awareness Raising Programmes on wetland PA management</p>	<p>wetlands and their functions of which: a) 50% knowledge on wetland functions and values; b) 73% have a positive attitude to their conservation; c) 54% confirm application of good practices to conserve wetland PAs Key Groups overall 56% are aware about the importance of wetlands, of which: have knowledge on wetlands: 52%, have a positive attitude towards wetland conservation: 73% and apply good practices: 54%.</p>	<p>Lake region and awarded local orgs. and individuals protecting wintering birds and applying wetland conservation.</p> <p>(vi) Activities implemented, include Caicha Opera, Community Outreach activities carried out in April 2019, and thematic outreach activities conducted during the 2019 Jiangxi Birdwatching Festival, gained very good image among public audience and community residents. But impact needs to be evaluated and cooperation with the media increased</p>	<p>functions of which: a) 65% knowledge on wetland functions and values; b) 85% have a positive attitude to their conservation; c) 62% confirm application of good practices to conserve wetland PAs. Key Groups: overall 73% are aware about the importance of wetlands of which 68% have improved knowledge 90% a positive attitude to wetlands and their conservation and 70% apply good practices.</p>		<p>outreach activities such as International Birdwatching Week are proving to be good practice to communicate the benefits of wetlands with globally important biodiversity, but communication strategy needs to be improved to clarify the costs of holding such events and the economic revenue it generates and environmental benefits/impact so there is dialogue on how to improve such events in coming years</p>
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Source: PMO; *The MTR specific outputs in the Prodoc needed to be reassigned as they either linked to another output in the same component, or relate to a different component. To clarify each component the MTR interpreted Component 1 is focused on strengthening the policy, legal, regulatory, planning and institutional framework at the provincial and local government levels, whereas component 2 is focused on strengthening the internal wetland management capacity of the PA authorities. Meanwhile component 3 focuses mainly on developing information and data management, monitoring and communications, etc.

Indicator assessment key

Green = Achieved	Yellow = On target to be achieved	Red = Not on target to be achieved
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Appendix 7. Co-financing table

Sources of co-financing ⁶¹	Name of co-financer	Type of co-finance ⁶²	Amount confirmed at CEO approval ⁶³		Actual amount materialized (to 31 December 2019)		Actual amount materialized at mid-term (30 Jun. 2020)	Expected total disbursement (07 Apr. 2022)
			Cash	In kind	Cash	In kind		
National Gov.	Office of Three Gorges	Cash	7,530,000		4,137,000		4,137,000	4,137,000
National Gov.	National Development and Reform Commission	Cash	1,600,000		1,600,000		1,600,000	1,600,000
Provincial Gov.	Jiangxi Department of Forestry	Cash	15,850,000		18,160,000		18,820,000	20,800,000
Local Gov.	Nanchang Forestry Bureau & Duchang County Forestry Bur.	In-kind		1,250,000		1,825,000	2,020,000	2,605,000
CAS	Chinese Academy of Sciences	In-kind		0		58,800	58,800	300,000
NGO	ICF	Cash	142,000		142,000		142,000	142,000
FAO	FAO	In-kind		320,000		220,000	250,000	320,000
TOTAL			25,122,000	1,570,000	24,039,000	2,103,800	27,027,800	29,904,000

⁶¹ Sources of Co-financing may include: Bilateral Aid Agency(ies), Foundation, GEF Agency, Local Government, National Government, Civil Society Organization, Other Multi-lateral Agency(ies), Private Sector, Beneficiaries, Other.

⁶² Grants, loans, equity participation by beneficiaries (individuals) in the form of cash, guarantees, in kind or material contributions and other (please explain).

⁶³ The type of co-financing whether cash or in-kind should be indicated separately

Appendix 8. GEF evaluation criteria rating table and rating scheme

Table A11.3 MTR ratings and achievements summary table

GEF criteria/sub-criteria	Rating ⁶⁴	Summary comments ⁶⁵
A. STRATEGIC RELEVANCE		
A1. Overall strategic relevance	HS	The project is operating in an increasingly favourable political and policy environment at both national and provincial level to conserve wetland PAs in recognition they provide important ecological services. The project's recent study on the economic value of these services will help to advance the protection of Jiangxi's wetland PAs further as well as support President Xi Jinping's call to step up ecological civilization in 2019.
A1.1. Alignment with GEF and FAO strategic priorities	HS	The project continues to align with GEF5's BD-1 and contributes to BD-2; and FAO's SO-2 (Outcome 1) and FAO-CN-CPF 2016-2020 Priority Area 1 (Output 1.2).
A1.2. Relevance to national, regional and global priorities and beneficiary needs	HS	The project directly supports national priorities to conserve China's wetlands in the National Wetland Conservation Programme 2002-2030 through its latest Action Plan 2016-2020, which promotes system-based approaches to wetland PA management for the first time. Project also supports NBCSAP 2011-2030 including reporting on relevant Aichi Targets (8, 11, 14). Also supports achievement of SDG 15 (Targets 15.1 and 15.5).
A1.3. Complementarity with existing interventions	MS	The Prodoc places a lot of emphasis on establishing complementarity with existing interventions at government and non-government levels, including the Three Gorges Project (to cover part of the project's budget concerning hydrological studies) and ICF (on baseline survey on biodiversity and ecological health of PAs in PWEPA). In addition, it calls for incorporating lessons learned from previous GEF-funded projects and calls for synergies with the 6+1 programme implemented with support of UNDP in areas such as harmonising provincial strategy plans for PA systems in Jiangxi, Anhui and Hubei provinces

⁶⁴ See rating scheme at the end of the document.

⁶⁵ Include reference to the relevant sections in the report.

		(middle catchment of the Yangtze River basin). However, it provides no clear guidance on how these synergies are to be established and coordinated
B. EFFECTIVENESS		
B1. Overall assessment of project results	S	The project has made good progress since 2018 and is delivering on most of its planned outputs, but also faces new challenges since the Prodoc was prepared in 2014 that have not been resolved to date and which indicate the project will not have enough time to reach some of its expected outcomes and objectives in time.
B1.1 Delivery of project outputs	S	The project has shown it is delivering most effectively on outputs where the JxFoD can implement project activities by itself, in particular under component 2. However, delivery of outputs is behind schedule in the majority of cases and implementation of the JPWPAMS and JWRIMS will not start until 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and record flooding in June-July 2020, the delivery of outputs is expected to experience further delays to end of 2020
B1.2 Progress towards outcomes ⁶⁶ and project objectives	MS	The project is in line to meet the immediate outcomes in the Prodoc that relate to establishing more effective management over a wider area of wetland PAs in the PWEPA, but does not monitor the land area that is under effective management in relation to baselines (in the Prodoc). However, catalysing management effectiveness of Jiangxi's wetland biodiversity is unlikely until a suitable cross-sector mechanism is in place, such as through the spatial/land-use system and greater clarity is provided on financial instruments to fund wetland PA management, ecological compensation, alternative livelihoods and the JWRIMS.
- Outcome 1	MS	The project has successfully progressed to a third draft of the JPWPAMS to promote wetland PA system management in coordination with key sectors. The workshops have acted as an <i>ad hoc</i> replacement to the JPWPACC, which is no longer an option following government reforms. As a result, there is no official government structure in place to oversee integration, implementation and monitoring of the strategy at the

⁶⁶ Assessment and ratings by individual outcomes may be undertaken if there is added value.

		sector level to guide provincial policy, legal and regulatory reforms on wetland management. This situation has also not been aided by a lack of adequate coordination on harmonising strategies with the 6+1 projects in Anhui and Hubei provinces. The economic valuation of wetlands has just been completed, but the project lacks clarity on how to promote it as part of a dynamic communication strategy to lobby for change.
- Outcome 2	S	The project is showing positive signs of expanding the internal management capacity of JxFoD in all 6 demonstration PAs thanks to a new partnership agreement with CAS on wetland restoration and advances in establishing a management framework in the PWEPA that is being supported by management plans (produced for all 6 demonstration PA sites) and co-management agreements (signed with 9 of 11 local communities planned) and installation of 7 new field stations around PLNNR and NWNRR (output 1.2). However, financial mechanisms for the PWEPA network have not been identified so far and are delayed.
- Outcome 3	MS	The JWRIMS faces major challenges in becoming a data monitoring platform to support coordinated multi-sector informed decision-making and planning on wetland PA system management unless the coordination mechanism is clarified and the JPWPAMS is agreed. However, the educational outreach activities have progressed well aided by the first ever International Birdwatching Week in Jiangxi in 2019, which helped mobilise over USD 70 m. in additional funds in preparation for this event.
- Overall rating of progress towards achieving objectives/ outcomes	S	The project's activities are making a positive contribution to developing co-management approaches in the wetland PAs that are raising awareness and attitudinal change on the importance of conserving globally significant wetland biodiversity and its habitats as well as the importance the need to adopt alternative livelihoods that can be sustained in the PWEPA, such as tourism. Despite delays the JPWPAMS and JWRIMS are likely to be launched in 2021. However, it remains unclear whether a cross-sector coordination and funding mechanism will be in place to implement them in Jiangxi Province as planned.

B1.3 Likelihood of impact	UA	Not rated in MTRs
C. EFFICIENCY		
C1. Efficiency ⁶⁷	MS	Overall, the project is estimated to have a physical advance of around 45% (53% according to the PMO) yet it has total expenditure of 23%. This would suggest high efficiency, but it seems more likely this is attributed to a combination of delays in payments for work not yet completed and some covering by co-finance (98% of funds already spent to 30 June 2020). Delays in implementation are significant and estimated to have set the project back by around 12 months against plan. The COVID-19 pandemic and major floods in June-July 2020, are also causing further delays, especially group-based activities (around 6 months). The OPIM modality has also contributed to these delays by establishing the PSC with no cross-sector representation, the PMO in a division of the JxFoD that has no direct access to provincial sector departments and difficulty to apply GEF/FAO procedures simultaneously with national ones. However, activities implemented at the PA level indicate high cost-effectiveness due to their “in-house” nature and partnerships with CAS, ICF, local NGOs, etc. which have facilitated cost sharing.
D. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES		
D1. Overall likelihood of risks to sustainability	ML	The project/FAO appear to have under-estimated anthropic/abiotic, financial and institutional risks all of which the MTR found are increasing, such as the worst ever floods in the province in June 2020, institutional challenges due to reforms, lack of institutional coordination mechanisms, inadequate communication with 6+1 programme, high dependency on funding from government rather than internal forms of revenue generation, etc. The MTR found these risks are affecting implementation indicate measures are not in place to institutionalise cross-sector coordination and operate the JWRIMS as a centralised information system to support informed decision-making over medium to long-term.
D1.1. Financial risks	ML	The MTR understands national consultants supporting the identification of the strategy, information system, alternative livelihoods

⁶⁷ Includes cost efficiency and timeliness.

		programme, ecological compensation payments, rewards and bonuses initiative, etc. are exploring various ways to identify suitable public funding to implement them. However, the majority of interviewees confirmed that despite the government's shift to increasing funding for environmental protection in general in China, it has been challenging to identify suitable cross-sector funding mechanisms that are needed to operate and sustain the project's main activities (application of the JPWPAMS, JWRIMS, wetland PA management plans, the educational outreach activities and advance the transition to sustainable livelihoods among fisherfolk and farmers in and around the PAs) as the current project management structure has limited authority to convoke meetings and promote cross-sector agreements at the Provincial Government level.
D1.2. Socio-political risks	ML	Socio-political risks remain low due to the increasing recognition and commitment of the State Council, central and provincial governments to support wetland protection, restoration and sustainable use of its biodiversity (especially through tourism) and increase ecological civilisation
D1.3. Institutional and governance risks	ML	A cross-sectoral coordination mechanism has not been reached to promote coordinated governance structures at provincial level, but at the local level the JxFoD is being strengthened to manage wetland PAs through co-management agreements and new field stations that will help to enhance local inhabitants as the guardians of their wetlands. Nevertheless, more needs to be done to ensure they also have alternative livelihoods to sustain this new role.
D1.4. Environmental risks	ML	The project is fully geared to reducing environmental risks as defined in the ESS template. But an ESS should be applied and risk management needs to form an integral part of the JPWPAMS to communicate the economic value of protecting wetlands (especially regulation of floods and droughts which is also essential to protect bird feeding grounds)
D2. Catalysis and replication	ML	Replication of activities at the local level based on co-management and co-patrolling responses is likely where it is proven to be cost-effective and can be managed from within the JxFoD, but less evident in provincial development and sector planning unless it

		is properly coordinated with a secretariat charged with implementing decisions.
E. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE		
E1. Project design and readiness ⁶⁸	MU	<p>The project has some important design faults that have affected implementation. The EA has been underpinned by a set of conditions set by FAO’s Senior Management that have been difficult to implement in the absence of guidelines and a Prodoc that had been designed prior to the execution of projects through implementing partners.</p> <p>Furthermore, FAO released MS-701/OPIM soon afterwards, which FAO-CN assumed was applicable to project 052. As a result, the project endured high transaction costs supporting the executing partner (JxFoD) apply the EA in line with both the <i>ad hoc</i> arrangement agreed by FAO’s Senior Management and MS-701, which was not applicable. This contributed to significant delays in implementation.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Prodoc obliged the executing partner to establish the PMO in a division of JxFoD (PLNNR), where it does not have the authority to lobby project interests with key sectors in the provincial government (or at the national level) regarding the development, application of the JPWPAMS and its guidelines and standards, the JWRIMS, or the up-scaling of strategic project activities through national wetland policy reforms (including a new White Paper for wetlands launched in 2020). Moreover, some of the project’s outputs were found to be misplaced under their corresponding component to support effective and monitoring of results. Also significant is the absence of cross-sector representation in the PSC, although the MTR observes in the Self-evaluation report of JxFoD (Section 8.1) that provincial departments responsible for Agriculture, Water Resources, Tourism, etc. should be invited to PSC meetings and policy consultation meetings, although the inclusion of representatives from Anhui and Hubei Provinces that participated in the 6+1 programme do not appear to have been included as observers in the PSC.</p>

⁶⁸ This refers to factors affecting the project’s ability to start as expected, such as the presence of sufficient capacity among executing partners at project launch.

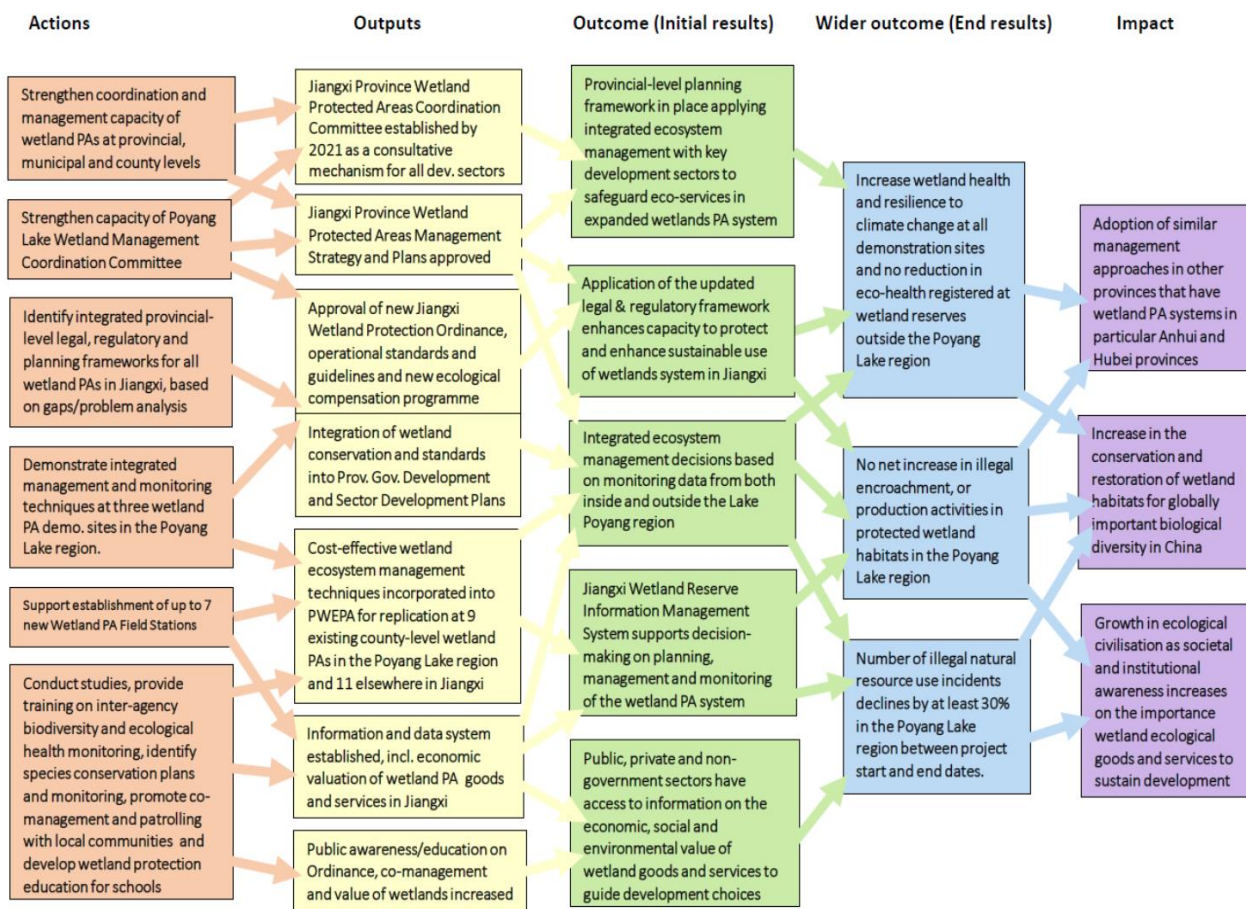
E2. Quality of project implementation	MS	The feedback from most interviewees is that the quality of trainings and capacity building support has been satisfactory under components 1 and 2, with educational outreach activities generally conducted to a highly satisfactory level, thanks to innovative activities such as the Caicha Opera (adapting its shows to include wetlands) and the realisation of the International Birdwatching Week. However, national consultants were observed to be working largely in isolation of each other.
E2.1 Quality of project implementation by FAO (BH, LTO, PTF, etc.)	MS	The quality of FAO support has been satisfactory, but financial challenges persist and this affects the level of technical and administrative support that can be provided to all GEF5 projects. GCU has committed significant resources to establishing the OPIM modality in the JxFoD, but this still resulted in delays of approximately one year of operations in several projects, including 052. The LTO's location in FAO-RAP in Thailand also means there is less scope to promote and supervise the establishment and optimisation of synergies between GEF5 projects. As a result, project 052 appears to have overlaps in areas such as wetland restoration and river/lake health assessments also supported by project 057. In this regard, FAO could and should be doing more to facilitate the development of synergies, in particular with the 6+1 programme in areas such as the harmonisation of wetland management strategies and information management.
E2.1 Project oversight (PSC, project working group, etc.)	S	The MTR identified a high level of evidence to indicate the PSC has provided a satisfactory level of support to the project and the new DG for the PLNNR is taking up a more proactive role in supporting the project's communication with key sectors with regard to the development of the JPWPAMS.
E3. Quality of project execution	S	The MTR found no evidence to confirm the quality of the project's execution has been sub-standard, or poorly supported.
E3.1 Project execution and management (PMU and executing partner performance, administration, staffing, etc.)	MS	The PMO faces major challenges as it depends on PLNNR staff who work on a part-time basis. Moreover, the Project manager has a high workload and no full-time assistant to cover all day-to-day tasks.

E4. Financial management and co-financing	S	The MTR found only minor evidence in the audit report on difficulties in accounting. Substantial co-finance has already been provided to support project activities, but it is not clear from project reports, the breakdown of funding to each component of the project. The fact co-finance currently only has less than 3% remaining indicates additional co-finance may be required.
E5. Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement	MS	The project has enhanced project cost-effectiveness where it has established a LoA with interested parties such as CAS, ICF, local NGOs, etc. Co-management agreements have also helped engage the participation of local communities. However, where there is no formal coordination agreement setting out precise tasks and roles, the project does not appear to have developed effective partnerships, in particular with project staff engaged in projects in Anhui and Hubei provinces under the 6+1 programme.
E6. Communication, knowledge management and knowledge products	MS	The project's educational outreach activities have succeeded in already covering over 10 000 individuals aided by construction of a visitor centre at the PLNNR, a partnership with the Caicha Opera troupe, etc. and the Birdwatching Week attracted a reported 200 000 visitors, including members from the local communities. The project also enjoyed high media coverage in these events. However, the project has not established an effective communication strategy to fully optimise the opportunities to promote change although this is hampered by the location of the PMO in the PLNNR
E7. Overall quality of M&E	MS	The quality of the internal M&E system is geared to reporting on outputs and operations to FAO/GEF, it is thus not designed to stimulate learning on outcomes (best practices) to determine how to maximise project impact. The M&E system is also not geared to facilitate information exchange at all levels.
E7.1 M&E design	MS	The project has established a monitoring and evaluation plan that complies with FAO/GEF requirements to track the status of activities, outputs and meeting of targets. However, it is not aided by a lack of a clear intervention logic between the list of expected outcomes provided in the Prodoc and the 14 outputs selected. Indeed, the MTR found it

		difficult to analyse some outputs as they were found to belong to different components.
E7.2 M&E plan implementation (including financial and human resources)	MS	The MTR found the project is implementing the M&E plan through the submission of progress reports that include matrices on the progress in implementing project activities and on meeting targets. Furthermore, the GEF portfolio manager and LTO have both visited project stakeholders in Jiangxi Province three times and submitted BTO reports. However, the M&E is carried out by part-time staff who have limited resources to get into the field, which means there is less scope to promote learning, information exchange, the development of synergies and networking, etc.
E8. Overall assessment of factors affecting performance	MS	The PSC/PMO are making every effort to implement the project but it is let down by design faults, an internal M&E system geared to tracking outputs that limits room for effective learning on removing barriers and expanding good practices, information exchange and coordinated responses support by an effective communications strategy
F. CROSS-CUTTING CONCERNS		
F1. Gender and other equity dimensions	MU	The Prodoc provides some important insights in to the plight of rural women in the Poyang Lake region, but the project has not adopted a gender strategy based on enhancing equality and empowerment of women and other vulnerable groups and thus provides limited reporting on gender.
F2. Human rights issues	MS	The MTR found the emphasis given to adopting co-management approaches to wetland management supported by joint patrolling with locals to control illegal fishing, aquaculture, farming, etc. enhances good governance. The MTR did not find evidence that human rights are under repression in this region.
F2. Environmental and social safeguards	HS	The MTR found a high level of compliance with the ESS template, even though the ESS has not been applied so far.
Overall project rating	S	

Ratings: Highly satisfactory (HS), Satisfactory (S), Moderately satisfactory (MS), Moderately unsatisfactory (MU), Unsatisfactory (U) Highly unsatisfactory (HU) Unable to assess (UA). Additional ratings for Section E: Likely (L), Moderately likely (ML), Moderately unlikely (MU), Unlikely (U)

Appendix 9. Participatory Theory of Change



Cross cutting priorities → Gender equality, socially inclusive approach, environmental protection, good water governance (including risk management)
 Assumptions → Governmental support, Inter-sectoral cooperation and coordination, Mainstream in sector development plan, Alternative livelihoods

