



Mid-Term Review of FAO-GEF Project

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Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality Targets of Georgia through Restoration and Sustainable Management of Degraded Pasturelands

Final Report

MTR conducted in October 2022

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

APA - Agency of Protected Areas under MEPA
CENN - Caucasus Environmental NGO Network
CSO - Civil Society Organization
CU - Coordinating Unit
FAO - Food and Agriculture Organization
FGD – Focus Group Discussion
GEB - Global Environmental Benefits
GEF - Global Environment Facility
GIZ - German Agency for International Development
IFAD - International Fund for Agricultural Development
KII – Key Informant Interview
LADA - Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands
LDN - Land Degradation Neutrality
MEPA - Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture
MESD – Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development
MTR - Midterm Review
NACRES – Centre for Biodiversity Conservation and Research
NAPR – National Agency of Public Registry under the Ministry of Justice
NASLM – National Agency for Sustainable Land Management and Land Use Monitoring under MEPA
NASP- National Agency of State Property under MESD
NGO - Non-Governmental Organization
OPA – Operational Partner Agreement
PMU - Project Management Unit
PPG - Project Preparation Grant
PRAGA - Participatory Rangelands and Grasslands Assessment methodology
PSC - Project Steering Committee
PTF - Project Task Force
RBM - Results Based Management
RDA - Rural Development Agency under MEPA
RECC - Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus (REC Caucasus)
SLM - Sustainable Land Management
TOR - Terms of Reference
UNCCD - United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNEG - United Nations Evaluation Group

Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Mid-Term Review (MTR) for the project “Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality Targets of Georgia through Restoration and Sustainable Management of Degraded Pasturelands”.

The project objective is to “Support the national efforts to implement Land Degradation Neutrality targets of Georgia through restoration and sustainable management of the degraded pasturelands (National Targets 1, 4 - Target 1: Integrate LDN principles into national policies, strategies and planning documents; and Target 4: Degraded land will be rehabilitated)” through the following components: Component 1. Strengthening the regulatory and institutional framework for sustainable management of pasturelands in Georgia; Component 2: Demonstration of sustainable pastureland management practices and scaling up successful approaches; Component 3: Capacity building of the key stakeholders on sustainable management of pasturelands and achieving land degradation neutrality; and Component 4: Effective Knowledge Management through Results Based Management (RBM), monitoring and evaluation.

The purpose and scope of the MTR is determined by the Terms of Reference (ToR, see Annex 2). The MTR focuses on the review of the current project implementation progress, taking into account the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. The MTR aims to provide information to managers and other responsible stakeholders on the project’s achievements, shortcomings and also draw on recommendations to improve the project’s performance and achievement of set objectives. The MTR covers the project implementation period from the approval in 2019 up to July 2022 including project design phase. The MTR follows the FAO-GEF MTR Guide which is aligned with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Evaluation Criteria and the GEF Rating Requirements as follows: Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability, Factors affecting performance, and Cross-cutting dimensions.

The MTR was carried out according to the UNEG Evaluation Norms and Standards (2017 revision), and the Guide for planning and conducting mid-term reviews of FAO–GEF projects and programmes (2020) along with the annexes detailing methodological guidelines and practices. The MTR was based on a Mix-Methods Approach that included: Desk review of project outputs and progress reports, etc., Individual Key Informant Interviews (KII) with project stakeholders, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with local farmers/producers in selected pilot villages, and on-site observation in selected pilot villages. The evidence and information gathered through the above listed tools and methods were triangulated to support its validity and subsequent analysis is reflected in the given report catalysing relevant conclusions and recommendations.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1 – Relevance (S). The project is aligned to national land degradation neutrality (LDN) targets (HS). One of the targets is rehabilitation of degraded lands and through this project, this will be done in pasture lands. The project objectives are deemed as highly relevant across national stakeholder groups as it addresses some key challenges the country is facing, namely the lack of policy or legislation to guide sustainable pasture management, lack of inventory on pastures and the ongoing degradation of pastures (HS). The stakeholder engagement processes during the project preparation grant phase (PPG) and the project implementation is deemed adequate. The pilot site approach in testing outcomes of the policy process is considered good strategy but has limitations such as the considerable time needed for policy and legislation negotiation processes that have subsequently delayed pilot site activities (MS). Overall, the relevance of the project can be assessed as Satisfactory.

Conclusion 2 – Effectiveness (MU). The overall project design shows strong links across Component 1, 2 and 3. However, there is discord in the implementation of these components. For example, there have been considerable delays on Component 2 as they wait for the policy and legislation guidance. This implies the processes are not benefitting adequately from inputs from the local level. At the same time, capacity building and awareness creation activities have advanced so much in parallel to the policy and legislation activities. For outcome 1 the Project had considerable success in engaging its national stakeholders in the pasture policy and interrelated legislation negotiations including within the LDN framework through active participation of the LDN focal point and commitment of target pastures for restoration. Outcome 2 has made limited progress to date due to the pandemic, focusing substantial efforts and time resources on Component 1, and administrative issues on the use and access to pastures. There are ongoing activities to empower national and local stakeholders on SLM in pasturelands, under Outcome 3, but this needs better targeting. Project monitoring activities under Outcome 4 are on track. MEPA, FAO, RECC and CENN have been supporting the delivery of the project based on their respective comparative advantages. Overall project delivery has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Effectiveness of the project can be assessed as Moderately Unsatisfactory.

Conclusion 3 – Efficiency (MU). In terms of concrete deliverables, outputs under the outcomes 1, 3 and 4 are being achieved at reasonable costs, while few outputs under outcome 2 are delayed, somewhat reducing delivery efficiency for the other outcomes. The main cause of this low efficiency is the delay in the delivery of Outcome 1 which was being implemented as sequential to Outcome 2 due to a number of force majeure related to the plot ownership¹. Further delays can also be attributed to difficulties experienced in some pilot sites. The MTR team has noted the impact of the delay and there is a need to accelerate implementation of outputs under outcome 2. The project was affected by operational delays in signing and setting up the implementation structures (such as signing of OPA) and largely by the Covid-19 pandemic and the delays of the expected handover of the pastures to the local authorities. To enable achievement of the targeted results, the project requires 1.5-year non-cost extension with relevant budget and work plan revision. Overall score for the Efficiency is Moderately Unsatisfactory.

Conclusion 4 – Sustainability (ML). Overall, the MTR team sees good prospects for sustainability. There is a strong ownership of the project at national level where the project is responding to pressing country needs such as lack of policy and legislation to guide sustainable pasture management, need to tackle land degradation and also meeting international obligations like LDN. At the local level, this is mixed as in pilot sites where farmers are totally committed to the project, we see prospects of good sustainability compared to pilot sites where farmers do not fully understand the project intentions. Participating local governments are also keen to support the project and will be key in developing an exit strategy for the project. There are opportunities to use and scale out some of the project outcomes. The pasture inventories have elicited interest from development partners, who see the potential to use it in other municipalities. MEPA's incremental approach to the use of GEF resources such as incorporating scaling out in projects under GEF 8 financing, provides pathways for replication and increasing sustainability of results. Sustainability therefore can be rated Moderately Likely.

¹ The delay in outcome 2 (implementation of the pilot pastures restoration plans) were related to land registration by pilot municipalities as most of the pilot pastures are state property by default managed by the National Agency of State Property, or not registered. The local governments faced difficulties to solve the emerging ownership issues, prompting the project to further support the municipalities and facilitate smooth registration of the pilot pasturelands (in case of unregistered pilot sites in Sno village of Kazbegi municipality) or transfer of pilot pasturelands to the municipal ownership (in case of state-owned pasturelands in Ganakhleba village of Dmanisi Municipality and Naniani village of Gurjaani municipality).

Conclusion 5 – Factors affecting performance (S). The project duration and activities have been negatively impacted by the long hiatus between the PPG phase, CEO endorsement and signing of the OPA agreement that allowed the project activities to commence. The policy process is advanced but the pilot process is greatly delayed and hampering the quality of results of the other outcomes. In the preliminary scenario, it was envisioned that the policy and legislative processes would go in parallel to actual pilot site activities. The delays coupled with relatively low levels of integration between Outcome 1, 2 and Outcome 3 have also impacted overall performance of the project. FAO with additional technical backstopping from the Lead Technical Officer (LTO) and Funding Liaison Officer (FLO), could have helped the project bridge these gaps through backstopping missions. However, these were also hampered by travel restrictions. This has been scored Satisfactory by MTR.

Conclusion 6 –Cross-cutting dimensions (S). The project has developed a Gender Action Planned for mainstreaming the gender issues in all relevant outputs. The milestones set under the GAP have been reported to FAO annually based on a bottom-up approach of information generation from the target municipalities (Gender Focal Points) and CENN in case of Component 3 activities. Overall implementation of GAP milestones seems to be on track unless taking into account some of the gender related targets that are seen challenging to be achieved due to the share of women engaged in the sector (S). Besides, the MTR has observed positive collaboration experience among the project and the municipality of Dmanisi (both - local government and farmers), which is populated with the ethnic minorities (S).

Recommendations

- ✓ Strengthen coordination among RECC and CENN to seek better integration of the activities of component 2 and 3 e.g., through joint planning and reporting of activities, frequent meetings that also includes MEPA and joint activities in the pilot sites such as trainings;
- ✓ Leverage on CENN's grassroots mobilisation comparative advantage;
- ✓ Ensure more intensive engagement of MEPA in Component 3 activities;
- ✓ Intensively consult with and seek the support of relevant agencies/entities to ensure achievement of the targeted 747 ha. FAO to keep GEF informed on these discussions;
- ✓ FAO to strengthen its monitoring missions (LTO and BH) to the field;
- ✓ FAO PTF to actively offer guidance to the project on thorny issues such as stalemate on pilot sites. PTF can also help the project identify other FAO initiatives in other countries where the project can share and learn some best practices from including on organisation of farmers, pasture law development, piloting and scaling out SLM;
- ✓ Include Dmanisi (Ganakhleba) entire village pastures to 440 ha under the pilot activities;
- ✓ Follow up discussions with the Minister MEPA to emphasise and follow-up on this;
- ✓ As the NPMPD is at an advanced stage, the project can gain time by advancing on negotiations for the legislation including by taking advantage of the current active engagement of the policy ISWG;
- ✓ Incorporate joint planning of activities by MEPA, FAO, RECC and CENN in the current M&E system. Also agree on frequency of joint coordination meetings by all the four organisations (FAO to coordinate) for planning, reporting and for coherence, production of some joint knowledge products; Production of some joint knowledge products. Potential topics could include joint publications on best practices on pasture restoration in Georgia, Multi-stakeholder policy elaboration processes for sustainable pasture management in Georgia. These publications will enable documentation and sharing of the achievements in Georgia and done jointly, allows sharing of broad framings and ownerships;
- ✓ Follow up on the recommendations developed in frame of the Study on Possible Legal Solutions for PUU Establishment and advocate for the suggested legal changes;
- ✓ Hasten start of pilot site activities according to respective needs for first steps;
- ✓ Carry out pending studies on water availability and water quality issues in Guurjani;

- ✓ Ensure co-financiers understand obligations and develop a clear co-financing reporting structure;
- ✓ Enable to indicate the information on training participants' location (village) in the training signing sheets so that it is measurable what share of population from the pilot villages are engaged in capacity building activities;
- ✓ Integrate future climate projections (e.g IPCC scenarios) into the restoration plans in order to anticipate, identify and mitigate potential site-specific impacts of climate change on the plans. Possible frameworks: Simonson et al, 2021: Enhancing climate change resilience of ecological restoration — A framework for action. Transformative adaptation pathway approach for restoration: Pramova et al, 2019: Adapting land restoration to a changing climate: embracing the knowns and unknowns;
- ✓ Coordination and concentration of activities by various donors in the pilot sites to improve the entire livestock value chains, from pastures to veterinary services and livestock product development;
- ✓ 1.5-year non-cost extension will be required (including OPA) to enable achievement of the targeted results in Component 2 (unless it is decided to be cancelled) and subsequent revision of the budget and work plan;
- ✓ Advocate prioritisation of pilot site farmers among donor-funded and government-funded grant and no-interest credit programmes, facilitate scaling up of this approach for further interventions;
- ✓ Elaborate and communicate holistic vision of the tangible incentives/perspectives with local communities/ farmers;
- ✓ Structured and “intense” communication of project results especially field/pilot results;
- ✓ Ensure clear communication to cultivate clear expectations among the local communities (e.g. expected taxation, etc.);
- ✓ Schedule the training activities for farmers mostly during the winter season (unless the training does not require practical sessions in the field during a particular season);
- ✓ Gender targets for Output 1.1.4 and 3.1.3 need reconsideration based on consultations with local gender focal points in target municipalities;
- ✓ Review quarterly reporting requirement on GAP and adjust it to the annual reporting.

Introduction

1.1. Purpose and scope of the MTR

1. The Midterm Review (MTR) is requested by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for full size projects and encouraged for medium size projects. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) requires the MTR for project monitoring, reporting, and learning purposes. This report presents findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the MTR for the project “Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality Targets of Georgia through Restoration and Sustainable Management of Degraded Pasturelands.”
2. The purpose and scope of the MTR is determined by the Terms of Reference (ToR, see Annex 2). The ToR was followed closely and, therefore, the MTR focuses on the review of the current project implementation progress, taking into account the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. The MTR aims to provide information to managers and other responsible stakeholders on the project’s achievements, shortcomings and also draw on recommendations to improve the project’s performance and achievement of set objectives. In that sense, this MTR aims to:
 - (i) provide accountability: to respond to the information needs and interests of policymakers and other actors with decision-making power;

- (ii) improve the project: provide valuable information to managers and others responsible for regular project operations (the PMU, project task force (PTF), FAO GEF coordinating unit (FAO GEF CU) and PSC);
 - (iii) contribute to knowledge: in-depth understanding and contextualization of the project and its practices, of particular benefit to the FAO GEF CU, FAO staff and future developers and implementers.
3. The scope of the MTR is national, with a focus on the local activities established on the field at municipality level.
 4. The MTR covers the project implementation period from the approval in 2019 up to July 2022 including project design phase.

1.2. Objective of the MTR

5. The MTR objectives include the following:
 - a. Review the intervention's design, the readiness of implementation partners and stakeholders and complementarity with existing interventions.
 - b. Assess the degree to which the intervention is expected to achieve results considering key factors influencing the results.
 - c. Assess the capacity of the relevant partners to ensure the delivery of results by the end of project and beyond and the likelihood of mid- and longer-term impacts, including the capacities for project execution, including project management, project partnerships and stakeholder involvement, the political support from government, institutional support from operating partners.
 - d. Analyse the cost-effectiveness of the project and timeliness of activities including the financial management and mobilization of co-financing and its impact on resources for future implementation (funds, personnel, expertise, equipment, etc.) into considering the request for no cost extension and budget revision.
 - e. Provide recommendations on the future implementation of the project, in the light of the current situation, ensuring achieving the project objective
6. The MTR follows the FAO-GEF MTR Guide which is aligned with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Evaluation Criteria and the GEF Rating Requirements as follows:
 - a. 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.
 - b. 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).
 - c. Efficiency: the cost-effectiveness of the project and timeliness of activities.
 - d. 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.
 - e. Factors affecting performance, including but not limited to:
 - project design and readiness for implementation;

- project execution, including project management;
 - 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;
 - communication, public awareness and knowledge management;
 - application of an M&E system, including M&E design, implementation and budget.
- f. Cross-cutting dimensions: gender and minority groups and a review of the Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS) risk classification.
7. In addition to the above listed, the MTR tried to look at the relationship of the project with key stakeholders – e.g., national and local governments, local level stakeholders, and NGOs working in this field, etc; the intended and unintended consequences of the project; and perceptions of the main stakeholders on the project including the ability of the project to meet its objectives.
8. The MTR sub-questions and indicators were developed/specified during the inception phase as given in the MTR matrix presented in Appendix 4. The MTR matrix indicates relevant indicators and data sources and methodology of data collection (desk review, Key Informant Interviews, Focus Groups, on-site observation) for each review question/sub-question under the various criteria.

1.3. Intended users

9. The primary intended users of the MTR are FAO (BH, the Project Management Unit, the PTF the Funding Liaison Officer, the lead technical officer and other FAO technical staff), the operational partner (RECC) and implementing partner (CENN) and the relevant Governmental stakeholder institutions.
10. Based on a review of the stakeholder engagement matrix and preliminary consultations with the representatives from FAO, RECC and CENN during the inception phase, the groups of key respondents/interviewees was identified, as follows:
11. **Central Government level:** Deputy Minister of MEPA; representatives of Hydromelioration and Land Management Department at MEPA; Head of Land Resources Protection Division of the Land Melioration and Land Management Department at MEPA; Head of Agriculture Division, Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development at MEPA; Head of the National Agency for Sustainable Land Management and Land Use Monitoring (NASLM) under MEPA; representative of the National Agency of State Property (NASP) under the Ministry of Economic and Sustainable Development (MESD);
12. **NGOs, international organizations/stakeholders:** German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), the Centre for Biodiversity Conservation & Research (NACRES), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Georgian Farmers' Association (GFA), trainers/experts who delivered trainings in pasture and land degradation, animal welfare/veterinary, and breeding.
13. **Local/municipality level:** Representatives of local governments of target municipalities, local farmers in pilot villages, representatives of information consultation/extension centres of the Rural Development Agency (RDA) operating under MEPA.
14. The list of stakeholders interviewed during the MTR, is provided in the Appendix 3.

1.4. Methodology

15. The MTR was carried out according to the UNEG Evaluation Norms and Standards (2017 revision), and the Guide for planning and conducting mid-term reviews of FAO–GEF projects and programmes (2020) along with the annexes detailing methodological guidelines and practices.
16. The MTR was based on a Mix-Methods Approach that included:
 - i. Desk review of project outputs and progress reports submitted by the project, secondary data, relevant strategic documents/policy documents, etc.;
 - ii. Individual Key Informant Interviews (KII) with: a) project management and implementing partners (FAO, RECC, CENN); b) national level stakeholders including representatives of government agencies (ministries, Legal Entities of Public Law (LEPL) etc.), relevant NGOs, donor organizations and trainers/experts delivering trainings; c) municipality representatives, including the Mayors and/or other relevant representatives of local self-government bodies and representatives of the information consultation/extension centres of RDA.
 - iii. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with local farmers/producers in selected pilot villages;
 - iv. On-site observation in selected pilot villages.
17. The project has selected 3 target municipalities with 4 pilot pasture areas (Sno in Kazbegi municipality; Naniani and Melaani in Gurjaani municipality; and Ganakhleba in Dmanisi municipality). Based on preliminary discussion with the operational partner (RECC) and review of relevant project documents, MTR team deemed appropriate to visit the following pilot sites:
 - a. Gurjaani/Naniani: the consultations with the local communities has gone well and the project is well received by local populations. The aim will be to capture the positives that can be shared with other pilot sites. However, there are technical challenges on herd composition vis a vis the grazing approach being proposed and the MTR will seek to understand how these will be dealt with by the project.
 - b. Gurjaani/Melaani: the pastures are under intense use all year round and can benefit from project activities. However, the local community who are central to implementation of the project have so far been hesitant to participate in the project. The pilot site was selected to follow up on these difficulties and give operational recommendations.
 - c. Dmanisi/Ganakhleba: while positive results have also been reported in Ganakhleba, part of this has been attributed to the location of some pastures within the vicinity of protected areas, which is not a true representation of the other pilot sites. For this reason, we observe that there are positive impacts from Ganakhleba that can be shared with other pilot sites, however, it will only be visited if logistical arrangements permit.
18. The desk review provided necessary information on project design, targets and progress as of mid-term, while the KIIs and FGDs enabled to obtain the perception of the project stakeholders regarding the project results, challenges and opportunities. On-site observations and meetings with local communities contribute to reality check.
19. The evidence and information gathered through the above listed tools and methods were triangulated to support its validity and subsequent analysis is reflected in the given report catalysing relevant conclusions and recommendations.

1.5. Limitations

20. Logistical challenges and time constraints: The MTR team was unable to visit all 4 target pilot areas due to limited time of the mission and logistical challenges, especially, the pilot site in Kazbegi/Sno.
21. Lack of cooperation by local stakeholders: In Gurjaani/Melaani, where locals at PPG stage were interested and likely to be engaged in the project, however later became lukewarm to pilot activities, the MTR team was unable to conduct a visit and talk to the local farmers.
22. Lack of relevant respondents among the local farmers: the meeting with local farmers in Gurjaani municipality was attended mostly by representatives from other villages rather than Naniani (2 farmers out of 4 were from Naniani, but none of those were using the pasture targeted for the pilot site).
23. Lack of adequate gender representation: women were underrepresented at the meeting with farmers in Gurjaani.

2. Project background and context

24. Approximately 43% of the territory of Georgia is considered as agricultural lands, which also includes hay meadows and pastures. Out of this, the total area of pasturelands amounts to 1,796,000 ha (i.e. approx. 59% of the total agricultural lands). More than 70% of the pastures are located in the Eastern and Southern parts of Georgia (especially in Kakheti and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions). 75% of these pasturelands is state-owned and governed by the NASP² under MESD, 20% of pastures are privately owned, 3% is under municipal ownership and 2% is owned by the state and directly managed by the Agency of Protected Areas (APA) under MEPA³.
25. It is assessed that the pasturelands in Georgia are undermanaged, understocked, overgrazed, and under-invested, with little maintenance of pastoral productive infrastructure or soil fertility strategies. Community members utilize pastures mainly on informal basis with little organizational or planning strategies, which pushes the system to unsustainable limits, thus degrading the ecosystem services for the community as a whole.
26. The barriers that contribute to pasture deterioration and land degradation include: 1) gaps in the legal framework, 2) institutional weakness of the relevant state agencies, 3) lack of scientific information and data on the actual conditions of the land, 4) unclear land tenure and management issues, 5) absence of delineated borders and official registration in NAPR system, 6) inadequate incentives, 7) lack of skills and knowledge on sustainable use of pasturelands and related financial risks.
27. In October 2019 the ecological assessment of Georgian community managed grasslands for Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) baseline development using the PRAGA Methodology was conducted under the Project Preparation Grant (PPG) for the development of the project, which served as a basis for the development of the Project Document.

² NASP does not have any responsibilities for direct management of these 75% of state-owned pastures. NASP is responsible only for preparation of documentation for official cadastral registration of state-owned pastures and leasing of already registered state-owned pastures.

³ <https://rec-caucasus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/1574947976.pdf> p. 8

28. As a result, four pilot sites⁴ in three municipalities were selected for field activities following consultations and based on the following criteria:
- I. Existence of multiple typical problems regarding pasture management in Georgia, such as land degradation due to natural conditions (wind or water erosion) and unsustainable use, complexity of terrain and geographic features, types of soil layers, patterns of the local agricultural activities and lack of regulatory mechanisms leading to land degradation;
 - II. The importance of the livestock sector to the region (GDP share and share of the population employed), with the focus on cattle and sheep;
 - III. Dependence of rural population on pastures and livestock sector as a source of livelihoods, with the focus on cattle and sheep;
 - IV. Land degradation severity and hot spots from the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) assessment; and
 - V. Complementarities with other relevant on-going projects.
29. The pilot sites are represented with diverse land tenure, biophysical and socio-economic characteristics, reflecting other pastures in the country.
30. During the project inception phase (July – November 2020) Operational Partner Agreement (OPA) was signed with the Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus (RECC) for the implementation of the 1st, 2nd and 4th components, and contract was signed with Caucasus Environmental NGO Network (CENN) for the implementation of 3rd component of the project. Consultations have been undertaken with the project beneficiary - the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (MEPA) on creation of the Project Steering Committee and the kick-off of the project.
31. A Project Steering Committee (PSC) consisting of 16 members (11 men and 5 women) has been created and members drawn from line ministries, international organizations and civil society organizations (CSOs), chaired by the deputy minister of the MEPA. Project Management Unit (PMU) has been established within RECC in a form of RECC's Project Core Team.
32. The project started on 1st June 2020 and is expected to end on 31st May 2023⁵. The project budget is USD 1,945,250⁶ with an additional co-financing of USD 12,245, 000.

3. Theory of change

33. The project objective is to “Support the national efforts to implement Land Degradation Neutrality targets of Georgia through restoration and sustainable management of the degraded pasturelands (National Targets 1, 4 - Target 1: Integrate LDN principles into national policies, strategies and planning documents; and Target 4: Degraded land will be rehabilitated)”.

34. The project aims to tackle the above mentioned issues through the following components:

Component 1. Strengthening the regulatory and institutional framework for sustainable management of pasturelands in Georgia

- Outcome 1.1: Enhanced policy and institutional frameworks for Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) with the focus on the implementation of Sustainable Land Management (SLM) principles on pasturelands

⁴ Kazbegi Municipality (Sno village), Gurjaani Municipality (Naniani and Mellani villages), and Dmanisi Municipality (Ganakhleba)

⁵ OPA agreement is concluded with RECC until April 30, 2023.

⁶ This includes agency fees totaling USD 168,766

Component 2: Demonstration of sustainable pastureland management practices and scaling up successful approaches

- Outcome 2.1: LDN target # 4 is implemented via SLM practices on degraded pasturelands by local land users with the support of the coordination mechanism

Component 3: Capacity building of the key stakeholders on sustainable management of pasturelands and achieving land degradation neutrality

- Outcome 3.1: National and local stakeholders are empowered and have capacity to implement SLM practices in pasturelands

Component 4: Effective Knowledge Management through Results Based Management (RBM), monitoring and evaluation

- Outcome 4.1: Project implementation based on RBM and lessons learned/good practices documented and disseminated

35. The project Theory of Change well illustrates the project components and outcomes, Pressures and Drivers (based on household survey, Collect Earth, Participatory Rangelands and Grasslands Assessment methodology (PRAGA), and stakeholder consultations), barriers, Global Environmental Benefits, Co-Benefits and relevant indicators. In addition, it depicts the status and type of land degradation in selected target areas (based on Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands (LADA-regional rapid assessment). On the other hand, the ToC lacks a section of assumptions and outputs, however those are reflected in the project Results Framework.

4. Key findings and MTR questions

4.1. Relevance

Evaluation rating: Satisfactory

36. **Main Finding 1:** The project is aligned to national land degradation neutrality (LDN) targets. One of the targets is rehabilitation of degraded lands and through this project, this will be done in pasture lands. The project objectives are deemed as highly relevant across national stakeholder groups as it addresses some key challenges the country is facing, namely the lack of policy or legislation to guide sustainable pasture management, lack of inventory on pastures and the ongoing degradation of pastures. The stakeholder engagement processes during the project preparation grant phase (PPG) and the project implementation is deemed adequate. The pilot site approach in testing outcomes of the policy process is considered good strategy but has limitations such as the considerable time needed for policy and legislation negotiation processes that have subsequently delayed pilot site activities.

37. The project objectives and outcomes are therefore well aligned to national development strategies and aspirations and overall aligned to GEF and FAO's strategies. The review of the project documents and reports and interviews with the key stakeholders at national and local levels confirmed that the project objectives and outcomes are seen as timely and highly relevant by national government, development organisations, researchers, academia, local governments and farmers.

38. Most stakeholders at national and local level agree that a policy and legislation on pastures is needed to clearly delineate and develop pastures' use plans for different types of pastures: State, Private and municipalities owned pastures.

39. Table 1 below shows trends in livestock numbers in the country, and these have not increased substantially in the last years. However, land degradation is still ongoing and is linked to abandonment of rotational grazing practices and therefore the project offers an opportunity to work with farmers on pasture land use to avoid and prevent land degradation.

Table 1. Livestock numbers, thousand heads (source: GeoStat)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Bovine animals	970.0	992.1	962.7	909.7	878.9	869.5	925.8	928.6
Of which dairy cows and buffaloes	563.0	545.0	509.3	477.4	458.0	441.8	450.8	451.7
Sheep/goat	919.6	891.4	936.5	907.0	869.5	891.5	946.5	956.8

40. For local communities, the project is a means to sustainably manage pastures but also ensure security of access of farmers to village pastures. The proposed controlled grazing is seen as an instrument to organise farmers into following a rotational grazing method that will allow pastures to rest and recover. While the farmers know this is necessary, without defined structures⁷, this is not always followed. However, this can be realised through strengthening of already existing organisational activities among farmers e.g. joint herding of animals.

41. The project has been able to leverage and create synergies with some national donor organisations such as IFAD and GIZ. The former is working with the project operational partner RECC and there are discussions to scale the inventory of pastures to IFAD project areas. GIZ had similar exercise but in protected areas and provided RECC with materials and methodologies that have informed the project's "Pasture Management in Protected Areas," study.

42. The pilot site activities were meant to bolster negotiations on what to include in the legislation and pasture policy document from pasture users' perspective. However, the aim to test the policy through the pilot sites has not been realised as it lags behind. Currently, the National Pasture Management Policy Document (NPMPD) is advanced and is already presented to the MEPA for a final round of comments before it can be officially shared with the Central Government (Cabinet of Ministers) for further formal approval. As for the pasture legislation elaboration, this process will be based on and guided by parameters of legal reform under formally approved NPMPD and may take considerable time as the legislation process in the country takes approximately 1.5 years. In general, delays in policy development have also been experienced due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

43. Pilot sites were also selected based on various criteria including willingness/readiness of the municipalities to participate in the process, however, challenges of implementations have been experienced.

44. The project aims to tackle land degradation through sustainable pasture management and therefore, this is relevant to the national and local governments considering multiple issues

⁷ This can include hard infrastructures such as water points, fences but also soft structures such as organisational capacities of farmers e.g. joint herding of animals.

contributing to the land degradation (including overgrazing, etc.) and absence of relevant mechanisms and legal frameworks for control and management of pasture use.

45. For local governments, healthy pastures are key to good productivity of livestock. However, they recommend a coordination and concentration of activities by various donors in the pilot sites to improve the entire livestock value chains; from pastures to veterinary services and livestock product development.
46. In pursuit of the intended scenario of linkages between Component 1 and 2, review of the project Indicative Work Plan (see the list of some activities with relevant remarks in the Figure 1 below) has lead the MTR team to the following understanding: a) Planning for policy document elaboration, approval and drafting the legislation in the same quarter is not in line with policy/legislation development/adoption practices and procedures exercised in the country; b) Timelines considered for the implementation of pilot activities could be assessed as optimistic, considering the time needed for procurement, technical works/studies, implementation of infrastructure activities.

Figure 1. Fragment from the Indicative Work Plan (source: Pro Doc)

Output	Main Activities	Year 1				Year 2				Year 3				Remark
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Component 1: Strengthening the regulatory and institutional framework for sustainable management of pasturelands in Georgia														
Output 1.1.1: A national pastureland management policy contributing to implementation of LDN principles, designed and agreed with key stakeholders	Activity 1: A national pastureland policy integrating LDN principles drafted in participatory manner through series of roundtables, workshops, discussions under the national multi-stakeholder platform	X	X	X	X									
	Activity 2: National Pastureland/LDN stakeholder consultation to discuss and agree on of the national pastureland management policy				X	X	X	X						
	Activity 3: Dissemination of national pastureland policy document for wider public review and facilitation of at national and local levels for governmental approval				X	X	X							
1.1.2: Pastureland management law and supplementary sub-laws drafted	Activity 1: Identification of needs for new legislation and/or revisions of existing legislation based on agreed national pastureland policy and pastureland management law drafted				X	X	X							Planning for policy document elaboration, approval and drafting the legislation in the same quarter is not in line with policy/legislation development/adoption practices and procedures exercised in the country.
1.1.4: Multi-stakeholder pasture management groups established in three target municipalities	Activity 1. Establishment of pasture management groups at municipal level in communities integrating LDN principles in at least three target municipalities				X	X								
Component 2: Demonstration of sustainable pastureland management practices and scaling up successful approaches														
2.1.2: Pasture management plans (strategic and operational) are developed in participatory manner and implemented in three target municipalities	Activity 1: Elaboration of State-owned pastureland management plans for three target municipalities (in total 20,000 ha)				X	X	X							
	Activity 2: Implementation of sustainable participatory pasture management practices (grazing management, weed control, breeding program with local stock, fertilization, terracing, gully prevention, mobile livestock water points, water harvesting, mobile fencing, mobile shade structures, etc.) (in total 747 ha)							X	X	X				Could be assessed as optimistic planning considering the time needed for procurement, technical works/studies, implementation of infrastructure activities.

47. Despite the above, it is important to highlight that the Work Plan had been indicative and was meant for further update. However, it can be concluded that the overall timeline of the project had been already limited to allow step-by-step accomplishment of activities and outputs to be delivered by the end of the project, taking into consideration: preparatory/operational procedures (like OPA), realistic timelines for policy document development, discussion in multi-stakeholder group, government approval (including potentially time consuming discussions among different line ministries), followed by drafting the legislation and further long-term process of its discussions and final approval, and implementation of pilot activities.

4.2. Effectiveness

Evaluation rating: Moderately Unsatisfactory

48. Main **finding 2:** The overall project design shows strong links across Component 1, 2 and 3. However, there is discord in the implementation of these components. For example, there have been considerable delays on Component 2 as they wait for the policy and legislation guidance. This implies the processes are not benefitting adequately from inputs from the local level. At the same time, capacity building and awareness creation activities have advanced so much in parallel to the policy and legislation activities. For outcome 1 the Project had considerable success in engaging its national stakeholders in the pasture policy and interrelated legislation negotiations including within the LDN framework through active participation of the LDN focal point and commitment of target pastures for restoration. Outcome 2 has made limited progress to date due to the pandemic, focusing substantial efforts and time resources on Component 1, and administrative issues on the use and access to pastures. There are ongoing activities to empower national and local stakeholders on SLM in pasturelands, under Outcome 3, but this needs better targeting. Project monitoring activities under Outcome 4 are on track. MEPA, FAO, RECC and CENN have been supporting the delivery of the project based on their respective comparative advantages. Overall project delivery has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Outcome 1: Improved policy and legal frameworks to support implementation of LDN in Georgia with a focus on pastures lands

49. The evaluation of Project effectiveness for Outcome 1 is primarily based on the pasture policy and legislation development processes including stakeholder engagement processes at national and local levels and the perceived role of the policy and legal documents in sustainable pasturelands management in the country.
50. In the first half of 2021 the MEPA established a solid inter-sectoral working group (ISWG) on pasture policy (representative of major line ministries, governmental agencies and other stakeholders) under a ministerial decree to oversee the development of the new national pasture policy and legislation processes with view of LDN considerations. MEPA has provided valuable leadership, credibility and importance to the policy elaboration process.
51. During the interviews, the majority of these stakeholders expressed confidence in the process, supported the need for policy and legislation on pasture management, and are active participants. The fora provided also allowed for free expression of ideas and contributions were given the considerations needed. In many cases, interviewees did not have recommendations on other key stakeholders who had been left out of the processes.
52. Importantly, some of the stakeholders had been engaged in the project from the PPG phase ensuring continuity in the vision and objectives of the project. There are also links in participation in the working groups and the steering committee.
53. In spite of the strong national stakeholder engagement processes, there were missed opportunities to rope in local governments especially pilot municipalities in the policy processes. This could have allowed for valuable exchanges on reality in the field but also for local level stakeholders to learn from the national processes.
54. Competent national and international experts worked closely with MEPA and RECC first on a feasibility study on “Integrated pastures and livestock development in Georgia” which was then validated by a stakeholder group. Other supporting documents including the “Pasture Management Institutional Analysis” and the “Pasture Management in Protected Areas” documents all fed into the advanced and integrated policy draft document “Draft National Pasturelands Management Policy Document (NPMPD),” that the ISWG validated.

55. NPMPD Document sets out the vision and principles, defines issues of ownership and rights, institutional arrangements, economic and fiscal aspects, use planning and monitoring. The document which has a special focus on integration of LDN principles has been shared with the Minister for Environment Protection and Agriculture for comments. Successful completion of this phase will lead to the document being forwarded to the Cabinet for discussions among relevant line ministries and other government entities and comments/adoption.
56. Budgetary allocations are yet to be earmarked for implementation of the priorities of NPMPD as this is still a draft policy that is yet to be formally adopted. We recommend that follow up discussions with the Minister for Environment Protection and Agriculture emphasise and follow-up on this.
57. The legal implications of the draft NPMPD have provided recommendations to incorporate in the draft legislation and have integrated a review of existing legislations. The draft legislation is considerably behind as it is currently planned as sequential to the NPMPD document approvals. As the NPMPD is at an advanced stage, the project can gain time by advancing on negotiations for the legislation including by taking advantage of the current active engagement of the policy ISWG.
58. Municipal LDN Working Groups (LDN-WGs) were established in all 3 target municipalities on the respective orders of Mayors of the target municipalities. MoUs are signed between the RECC and all three target municipalities for cooperation on pasture management issues. This, *inter alia*, includes the need to transfer the right-of use of pilot pastures from state to target municipalities for further use by farmers. Additionally, as most pilot pastures are owned by the State, there has been ongoing efforts to transfer the right-of use- of these pastures by the State to municipalities who can then allow farmers to use them.

Outcome 2: LDN target # 4 is implemented via SLM practices on degraded pasturelands by local land users with the support of the coordination mechanism

59. The evaluation of project effectiveness along this pathway is primarily based on the extent to which LDN principles are contextualised in field-based activities including thorough tools and methodologies, the choice of pilot sites, pilot pasture sites' management plans (*pasture restoration plans*) and stakeholder interactions (at national and local levels) in support to rehabilitation of degraded pasturelands.
60. The pilot sites were selected to help with the realisation of LDN targets in Georgia and are well anchored on the principles of avoiding, reducing and reversing land degradation.
61. Pasturelands in Georgia are often undermanaged, overgrazed in some places especially the pastures near settlements (such as winter pastures) and under grazed in areas further from settlements (such as the summer pastures).
62. The main criteria for pilot site selection at PPG phase included:
 - Existence of multiple typical problems regarding pasture management in Georgia, such as land degradation, unsustainable use, complexity of terrain and geographic features, types of soil layers, patterns of the local agricultural activities and lack of regulatory mechanisms leading to land degradation;
 - The importance of the livestock sector to the region (GDP share and share of the population employed), with the focus on cattle and sheep;
 - Dependence of rural population on pastures and livestock sector as a source of livelihoods, with the focus on cattle and sheep;
 - Land degradation severity and hot spots from the UNCCD assessment; and
 - Complementarities with other relevant on-going projects.

63. According to the ProDoc selected pilot sites were Sno in Kazbegi municipality (207ha), Ganakhlana in Dmanisi municipality (254 ha), and Melaani (176 ha) in Guurjani municipality, and Naniani in Gurjaani municipality (110 ha). Therefore, the total area that was committed to be restored under SLM was 747ha. Smallholder households in the selected villages practice informal collective use of nearby pastures (s.c. “*village pastures*”) that, in turn, are under varied ownerships (mainly owned by the State and also by municipalities).
64. The project was successful in applying existing methodologies such as Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands (LADA), Participatory Rangelands and Grasslands Assessment (PRAGA) and Collect Earth in developing methodologies for pasture inventories and grazing capacities in the three municipalities. Pasture Management Plans (Pasture Restoration Plans) have been developed for all 4 pilot pasture sites in 3 target municipalities. However, these activities have been affected by emerging dynamics in the pilot sites.
65. In **Gurjaani**: Based on the selection criteria above, the MTR interviews established that the livestock sector is not the most important one in Gurjaani municipality. Majority of the farmers engage in arable and fruit/grape producing farming. The implementation of project activities in Naniani village was set to continue on an area of 52.2 ha. There were problems in Melaani village (176ha), where local farmers were no longer interested in the project. The reason for change in interest in Melaani were attributed to a number of factors including, but not limited to, internal tensions between various interest groups within community, outside influences and the fact that the farmers there have alternative activities in addition to livestock production. The MTR team was not able to meet the farmers from Melaani, but met representatives from Naniani village. The efforts made from the Gurjaani municipality to transfer the ownership (and later right of use) from the state to the municipality, have been rejected and it seems unlikely that pilot activities will continue in Gurjaani. The implication of this is the reduction in the total number of pilot land committed for SLM practices.
66. **Kazbegi**: This pilot site was not visited by the MTR team due to logistical challenges and time limitation during the mission. Based on interviews with the project team, the local community is willing and ready to work with the project. Following recent development, 57.5 ha of land that was earmarked for the pilot site in Kazbegi has been designated as a protected area by the government, thereby restricting project pilot activities in that area. Land available for pilot activities is now 150,3 ha. Similar to Gurjaani, there are issues with transferring the ownership/right-of use by the government to the municipality, however further clarification on this is still pending by the government.
67. **Dmanisi**: In Galakhleba village, 254 ha of land was initially designated for pilot site (of which 199,2 ha has been established as a priority for the project supported pasture management/restoration activities under Ganakhleba Pilot Site Pasture Management Plan/Pasture Restoration Plan). However, the local farmers from the onset indicated that they preferred that the entire village pastures (440ha) be put under the pilot activities. This is because the local farmers argued that 254 ha was too small to cater for all the livestock in the village and could lead to overgrazing and also a source of farmer-to-farmer conflicts and cattle to cattle conflicts. The project was hesitant about this as they aimed for equal investments across the three municipalities. During the field visit, the local farmers reiterated the need for investment on the entire village pastures. The situation in Dmanisi is complicated by the confirmation by the National Agency of Mineral Resources on presence of andesite and sand-gravel deposits on the pasture, and administrative proceedings are underway, in order to issue a mining license later. This means that these pastures will not be available for use by the farmers and by the project.
68. Out of the 747ha committed for restoration at CEO endorsement, the project only stands a chance to be implemented in Kazbegi municipality (52.2 ha), taking into account the current

circumstances. This has implication on the achievement of GEF Core indicator 3, “Area of land restored,” and specifically Indicator 3.3, “Area of grass and shrublands restored”, and Core indicator 4, “Area of landscape under improved practices”. At MTR, this outcome indicator has not been achieved as it was initially affected by the delays in the commencement of pilot site activities. At the moment, the achievement these indicators are threatened by the unavailability of pilot sites due to lack of user rights. As stated earlier, based on current pilot sites, it is only in Kazbegi municipality where the project could be implemented as clarification is sought on its availability for use.

69. Pasture management plans MP (Pasture Restoration Plans) were elaborated for all 4 pilot pasture sites in 3 target municipalities. However, planning processes have been affected by the emerging dynamics in the pilot sites. The plans will need to be revised to fit the needs of the revised target area for rehabilitation and SLM. In the plans, controlled grazing will be implemented as an approach to encourage rotational use of pastures allowing for rest and recovery of pastures. The success of controlled grazing will be anchored on the level of pasture user organisation and diligent following of grazing calendars. While it appears that the farmers are not organised, they already have informal mechanisms for collaboration amongst themselves such as joint herding of livestock and payment of herders. These opportunities can be used to guide the establishment of the pasture user unions (PUUs).
70. The Study on Possible Legal Solutions for PUU Establishment had been conducted and thoroughly analysed the legal forms existing in Georgia, taxation policies and regulations for each type of legal entity, and particular recommendations on different alternatives for legislative changes. This activity has not advanced much as it is also affected by the delay in commencement of pilot site activities on one hand, but most importantly by delay in formal approval of the scope and extent of possible legal changes (legal reform) under officially approved NPMPD. The formation and functioning of the PUUs will need a careful thought process that takes into account potential changing of attitudes of pasture users’ engagement in the project and specifically on controlled grazing, to guard against external influences. During our interviews, the farmers also expressed the desire to visit and see case studies where such arrangements work. This type of capacity building can be targeted at leaders of the farmers; those with technical respect among peers and those with political persuasion. Opportunities for these are available including those organised and led by specialised organisations such as PROCASUR learning routes: <https://procasur.org/en/learning-route/>
71. FAO’s experience and expertise was leveraged to create a Decision Support System (DSS) that mirrors other LDN projects with similar objectives and therefore sufficiently incorporated the 3 LDN indicators; land cover, land productivity and soil organic carbon stocks. An interactive mapping and data analyses application was developed in which digitised data from various sources on pasturelands and land degradation has been incorporated and allows multi-criteria analysis of pasture areas of interest. However, the use of the system in the target municipalities will be implemented once field activities are initiated by guidance from FAO

Outcome 3: National and local stakeholders are empowered and have capacity to implement SLM practices in pasturelands

72. Capacity Needs Assessment of Key Stakeholders at Central, Regional and Municipal Levels carried out by CENN was used as the basis for planning the capacity building program for local communities and representatives of the information-consultation centres of the Rural Development Agency (RDA) under MEPA. Assessment included interviews with the representatives (including top and middle managers) of relevant units and agencies of the MEPA, representatives of municipalities (Mayors/Deputies, Heads of relevant units/departments) and farmers from target municipalities (40 persons in total). The mid-term target states that “10 people involved in elaboration of the National Capacity Building Program

on Application of the SLM/LDN (30% women)”, however, as it is interpreted by CENN, involvement in the capacity needs assessment in a role of a respondent is deemed as involvement in elaboration of the capacity building program, thus it is perceived as achievement of the output indicator target. This has been clarified with and confirmed by FAO that it implies a participatory approach and no objections were expressed in this regard.

73. The MTR has found the CENN successfully collaborating with the RDA Information-Consultation Centres to ensure recruitment of training participants from targeted municipalities and organisation of the training events in the field. Capacity development activities started in September 2020 and are ongoing up to now. In total 472 participants (including 21% women, and 15% youth) have taken part in various training sessions listed on the table below (this may include double counting of those attending different trainings). Some of the training sessions were conducted in an online mode, which has somehow affected the effectiveness, however, integration of theoretical and practical training sessions was assessed as useful during the interviews with the farmers and RDA staff in target municipalities.

Table 2. The list of trainings and number of participants (source: CENN)

Training topic	Number of participants	Women %	Men %	youth %
2020 - Investment Access for Farmers	60	23%	77%	15%
2020 - Animal genetic resources (AnGR)	54	11%	89%	20%
2021 - Climate Change and Land/Pasture degradation	100	40%	60%	22%
2021 - FFS - Intensification of livestock production	53	6%	94%	13%
2021 - Farmers training via ICC (first round)	41	15%	85%	17%
2021 - Farmers training via ICC (Second round)	31	16%	84%	6%
2021 - Animal health and veterinary	40	28%	73%	18%
2022 - Technical workshop on LDN oriented pasture management (in Zoom)	25	32%	68%	0%
2022 - Effective communication, training planning and facilitation (for RDA)	25	8%	92%	8%
2022 - LDN and Pasture Management	43	14%	86%	12%
Total Sum	472	21%	79%	15%

74. Training topics were selected mainly based on the capacity needs assessment recommendations and consultations with the FAO team, while there was more room for higher integration of the training topics with Component 2 (pilot) activities through close coordination and planning with RECC. Given that Component 3 has been started in line with the planned timelines, while Component 2 activities are lagging behind. The integration of these two components was challenging in the beginning. On the other hand, another factor contributing to the lack of coordination between these two components could be the structure of project administration/management meaning that both organisations are accountable to FAO, but do not have direct contractual obligations to each other.
75. During the meetings with local RDA representatives and farmers, the MTR has found out that the engagement of farmers in training activities has been challenging due to their busy schedule especially during those seasons when agricultural activities are in active phase (except the Winter season). Therefore, it was recommended to schedule the training activities for farmers mostly during the winter season. This recommendation can be taken into account for those trainings, which do not require practical sessions in the field during a particular season.
76. As observed during the MTR meetings, training participants were selected from different villages of the target municipalities and it is difficult to estimate the share of residents of those villages where pilot pastures are located. Information on training participants is being systematically collected by CENN and precisely reported by gender and age disaggregation, however, since participants' signing sheets do not include the data on participants' location (village), disaggregation by location is not feasible. In addition, it should be mentioned that the RDA representatives highlighted the problem of recruitment of the farmers for the training,

therefore it was challenging to fulfil the gender (targeted 30% of women) and geographic criteria.

77. Despite the training activities, CENN has developed knowledge materials, including the videos on Climate Change and Land/Pasture Degradation⁸, Intensification of livestock production⁹, Animal Health and Veterinary¹⁰, LDN Oriented Sustainable Pasture Management¹¹, Effective Communication, Facilitation and Training¹², and printed materials on Sustainable Pasture Management in Kazbegi, Dmanisi and Gurjaani Municipalities ([here](#)), and Intensification of Livestock Production ([here](#)). As revealed during the meetings with the local communities, printed materials were distributed among the training participants, and also handed to the RDA local staff for further dissemination, while video materials were distributed through different media tools.
78. Media outreach activities have been conducted intensively through: 1. posts on project activities on social media; 2. press releases on project activities; and 3. uploading knowledge material on the educational portal and CENN's YouTube channel. Considering a number of followers (42,572 followers on CENN Facebook page) and subscribers (25,000 subscribers to Info CENN mailing list and 659 subscribers on CENN's Youtube channel), it can be assumed that the total reach of awareness raising and educational campaign was rather substantial. However, MTR is not in a position to judge to what extent this reach could be targeted on pilot municipalities, farmers, local communities and pilot villages in general. The project can ensure better targeting on local communities through showing the video materials (or providing information on where to find them) during the upcoming training activities.
79. The study tour to Turkey on SLM on pasturelands that was planned during the project design phase was not feasible due to Covid19 pandemic and it is still pending. This was compensated to some extent by the study visit to Macedonia implemented for two representatives from MEPA and MEPA's National Agency for Sustainable Land Management and Land Use Monitoring (NASLM). The visit was assessed as very informative, useful and relevant to current context and needs in Georgia in the field of pasture management and land degradation. As noted, the case of Macedonia and practices observed during the study visit were numerously referenced during the discussions held in a ISWG on development of the policy document.

Outcome 4: Project implementation based on RBM and lessons learned/good practices documented and disseminated

80. Results-Based Monitoring Action Plan (with gender considerations) with baselines and targets for the project was elaborated by RECC during the project inception phase (attached as annex to the Inception Report). RECC has hired M&E person who has updated the Action Plan and specified sub criteria for measuring the estimated progress to final targets in percentages. This approach has been successfully used in progress reporting to illustrate the project achievement in quantitative measures.
81. Before sharing the progress reports to FAO and MEPA, RECC collects the information on progress of Component 3 from CENN, which is mutually discussed, processed and then presented in the report for dissemination. There is room for more active engagement from the FAO side in terms of effective use of RBM system for planning and decision making, to ensure

⁸ Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mJsJcg6o1l8>

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OVbc3wzXui0>

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h-FbZfjdlZw>

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkE3bUwRSzM>

¹² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=US_mD1GldZA

integration of component activities and smooth flow of information with the MEPA, GEF, RECC and CENN on project progress and threats in achievement of targets.

82. Project has a Communication and Knowledge Management Strategy in place and project results have been communicated through various channels.
83. Overall, it can be observed that the project has modified and adapted the plans/approaches in response to the changes of circumstances and context (e.g. due to Covid19 and prolonged implementation of Component 1 activities, decision to start the Component 2 (pilot) activities in parallel to the Component 1).

4.3. Efficiency

Evaluation rating: Moderately Unsatisfactory

84. **Main finding 3:** In terms of concrete deliverables, outputs under the outcomes 1, 3 and 4 are being achieved at reasonable costs, while few outputs under outcome 2 are delayed, somewhat reducing delivery efficiency for the other outcomes. The main cause of this low efficiency is the delay in the delivery of Outcome 1 which was being implemented as sequential to Outcome 2 due to a number of force majeure related to the plot ownership¹³. Further delays can also be attributed to difficulties experienced in some pilot sites. The MTR team has noted the impact of the delay and there is a need to accelerate implementation of outputs under outcome 2. The project was affected by operational delays in signing and setting up the implementation structures (such as signing of OPA) and largely by the Covid-19 pandemic and the delays of the expected handover of the pastures to the local authorities. To enable achievement of the targeted results, the project requires 1.5-year non-cost extension with relevant budget and work plan revision.
85. With regard to the progress made in the implementation and completion of its activities, the Project is experiencing delays in respect of the proposed time frames in the Prodoc. The delays have also affected financial delivery of activities (Table 3). Delays are particularly significant for the delivery of activities related to outcome 2, while the project has made substantial progress under outcome 1, 3 and 4. Overall, the Project was affected by operational delays in signing and setting up the implementation structures (such as signing of OPA) and largely by the Covid pandemic. The delays in outputs under Outcome 2 has impacted the quality of delivery of outcomes 1 and 3. Under outcome 1, the policy document could have been tested through field activities under Outcome 2, that would have then strengthened it while also feeding into the legislation elaboration process. There are opportunities to realise the latter, in the next phase of the project. Equally, has the Governmental transfer of plots at the pilot site activity started early, capacity development activities under Outcome 3 would have been better

¹³ The delay in outcome 2 (implementation of the pilot pastures restoration plans) were related to land registration by pilot municipalities as most of the pilot pastures are state property by default managed by the National Agency of State Property, or not registered. The local governments faced difficulties to solve the emerging ownership issues, prompting the project to further support the municipalities and facilitate smooth registration of the pilot pasturelands (in case of unregistered pilot sites in Sno village of Kazbegi municipality) or transfer of pilot pasturelands to the municipal ownership (in case of state-owned pasturelands in Ganakhleba village of Dmanisi Municipality and Naniani village of Gurjaani municipality).

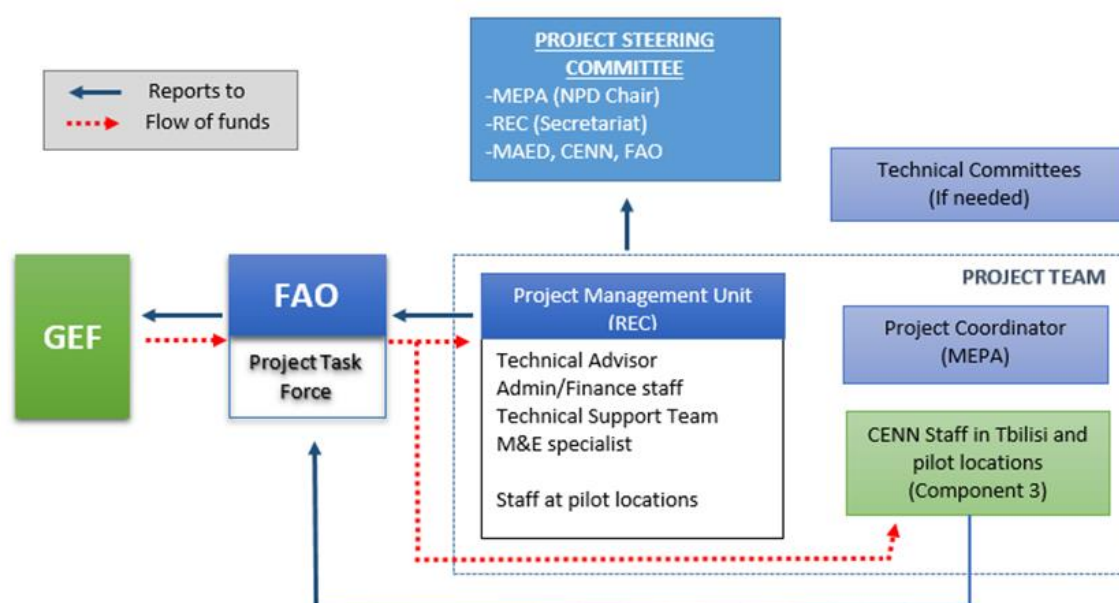
linked and targeted. There are opportunities to deliver better targeted trainings to farmers from the pilot sites by CENN in the next phase of the project.

Table 3. Financial expenditures as of September, 2022 (source: FAO)

	Planned (USD)	Actual (As of Sept, 2022)	Balance unspent
Component 1 (RECC)	116,238	84,231.76	32,005.74
Component 2 (RECC)	991,038	41,261.44	949,776.06
Component 3 (RECC)	60,000	0	60,000
Component 3 (CENN)	221,339	181,139	40,200
Component 4 (RECC)	73,088	34,858.75	38,228.75
Component 4 (FAO)	106,880	12,860	84,020
PMC (RECC)	37,600	49,206.43	-11,606.43
PMC (FAO)	164,000	149,571	14,429
Total	1,770,183	563,128	1,207,053

86. In December 2021, the project Steering Committee discussed the proposal for a 1-year non-cost extension for the project implementation accompanied by subsequent revised budget and work plan. Some reallocations were made within and between the budget headlines. Budget revision offers that part of the work to be provided under the external contracts will be performed by the international and national experts, hence reallocating the resources between the budget headlines. Some budget lines within the contract headline were also proposed to decrease based on project implementation experience. These reallocations will not negatively affect project outputs.
87. Since the time when 1-year non-cost extension was proposed, the project has faced the reality of cancellation of one of the pilot sites (Melaani), which now requires additional time to search for possible solutions and find substitute areas. Based on feedback from the partners, 1.5-years non-cost extension is deemed as the most plausible option to enable achievement of the targeted results.
88. No overall conclusion can be drawn yet to the activities that are still to be implemented in particular under Outcome 2.
89. The project's implementation structure is shown below in Figure 2. FAO is the GEF implementing agency and has signed the OPA agreement with operational partner (RECC) and service agreement with implementing partner (CENN) as the budget to be managed by RECC exceeds \$1,000,000. RECC is responsible for the day-to-day technical and financial implementation of Outcome 1 and 2 while contributing to Outcome 4. CENN is responsible for outcome 3.

Figure 2. The project organisation structure (source: project document)



90. OPA enables timely oversight, communication, planning and monitoring of the activities through its quarterly financial and technical reports. However, it is laborious for OPA partner (RECC) due to this heavy reporting. With CENN, FAO has signed two letters of agreement (LoA) in support of the implementation. These two modalities (OPA and LoA) have different reporting requirements, with OPA, RECC reports to FAO on a quarterly basis giving updates on the activities and plan for the next quarter and on this basis, funds disbursements are made. Thus, FAO and MEPA are always in the loop on RECC's delivered and planned activities. With the LoA, reporting is only done based on predefined deliverables and is done to FAO. As revealed during the MTR, CENN emails the activity reports to the MEPA SC members, however, there is room for improvement in terms of more active engagement of MEPA in Component 3.
91. The project has solid and competent partners in MEPA, FAO, RECC and CENN, however, it can improve efficiency through better collaboration and coordination of activities among the partners. For instance, in the early stages of the project, there was little integration of activities such as trainings between RECC and CENN. However, both organisations have bridged this gap and plan to also develop joint work plans going forward.
92. The project has a good scope of co-financiers (national government, local government (municipal) and development organisations). RECC and MEPA have been able to solicit co-financing from international partners such as IFAD and US Forest Service for policy development and capacity building activities. However, co-financing reporting and expectations are varied and not clearly understood by some partners. For example, it is not clear who is responsible for reporting on co-financing obligations by the MEPA, the municipalities and from external partners such as GIZ and Government of Turkey. There are also challenges on attribution of co-financing contributions and therefore figures and narratives of contributions from stakeholders (except the FAO, RECC and CENN) are missing. As clarified during the MTR, there is a need for calculation exercises to assess the co-financing, especially those committed from MEPA and target municipalities since it includes in-kind contribution which is difficult to measure. This had been challenging during the Covid19 as it required coordinated work of several departments. This issue needs further follow up to ensure comprehensive and timely reporting on co-financing.

93. FAO financial procedures and financial reports are submitted in a timely manner. The Prodoc provided a good account of how financial management of and reporting on GEF resources will be carried out. This follows FAO's rules and procedures, in accordance with the agreement between FAO and the GEF. The Project has not encountered any particular funds management problem.

4.4. Sustainability

Evaluation rating: Moderately Likely

94. **Main finding 4:** Overall the MTR team sees good prospects for sustainability. There is a strong ownership of the project at national level where the project is responding to pressing country needs such as lack of policy and legislation to guide sustainable pasture management, need to tackle land degradation and also meeting international obligations like LDN. At the local level, this is mixed as in pilot sites where farmers are totally committed to the project, we see prospects of good sustainability compared to pilot sites where farmers do not fully understand the project intentions. Participating local governments are also keen to support the project and will be key in developing an exit strategy for the project. There are opportunities to use and scale out some of the project outcomes. The pasture inventories have elicited interest from development partners, who see the potential to use it in other municipalities. MEPA's incremental approach to the use of GEF resources such as incorporating scaling out in projects under GEF 8 financing, provides pathways for replication and increasing sustainability of results.
95. **Institutional stability:** There is strong government support linked to the relevance of the project outputs to country needs such as the need for policy and legal frameworks to guide sustainable pasture management, degradation issues in pasturelands and overall need to contribute to LDN obligations in the country. MEPA, the leading government ministry in the project, has also ensured participation of relevant agencies from other line ministries. The MTR team was informed about high level support for the project in particular, the policy process.
96. The local governments also have strong ownership and indicated interest to support the project after the official implementation period ends through promotion of maintenance of project infrastructures by local communities.
97. Dmanisi municipality indicated that after the end of the project, the farmers should take the lead in management of the village pastures, however, when needed they will offer financial support such as maintenance to infrastructures such as boreholes, fences, etc.
98. In Dmanisi municipality, the local government has committed to rehabilitation of some of the roads to the pastures, even if to a reduced extent as compared to commitments of the previous administration. They have also stated that there are budgets meant for local community development that could be earmarked to support the maintenance of the project.
99. **Targeted stakeholders:** The local farmers MTR team interacted with and the results of the desk review gave mixed results in terms of enthusiasm for the project. In Melaani, the local farmers are no longer interested in the project, a change from their initial non-binding pledge to participate. In Ganakhleba, the local communities are enthusiastic about the project but are highly keen that it should cover the entire village for them to participate. This is going to be possible as the project seeks to replace Melaani pilot site. In addition, the local communities indicated that the project could be a means to help them have formal guarantee of access to village pastures as this will protect them from being placed under auctions for lease and/or transferring to other land use with subsequent privatization.

100. The sustainability of the project is also pegged on how quickly project results will manifest as for the local farmers, they are interested in seeing the positive impacts of the project. This is also seen as an opportunity to replicate the project model to other municipalities.
101. In addition, the ability to organise farmers will be central for continuity of the innovative rotational grazing under the controlled grazing plan. The farmers indicated that they can ensure this as they are already collaborating on herding of animals.
102. **Organisational stability:** There is a multi-stakeholder engagement in the project especially in realisation of Outcome 1 and to a small extent on preparatory activities under Outcome 2. The project partners, RECC and CENN, have considerable comparative advantages that are beneficial to the project. RECC is well established, a solid and respected partner on natural resources and sustainable pastures management nationally and regionally. CENN has grassroots mobilisation and convening powers that will be essential for capacity development activities at local level.
103. **Catalysis and replication:** There are opportunities to use and scale out some of the project outcomes. The pasture inventories have elicited interest from development partners (e.g. IFAD), who see the potential to use it in other municipalities. MEPA's incremental approach to the use of GEF resources such as incorporating scaling out in projects under GEF 8 financing (e.g. pasture management plans), provides pathways for replication and increasing sustainability of results. The readiness of the local farmers to organise and implement the controlled grazing approach instead of unplanned and non-rotational grazing is an important behaviour change and if implementation work, will imply adoption of a sustainable production approach.
104. **Most of the risks identified in the project document have not materialised**, apart from the risk of climate change which is an ongoing phenomenon. The ProDoc has a well elaborated risk management strategy that outlines identified risks, likelihood of occurrence and mitigation strategy. The identified risks relate to:
105. Political and institutional; lack of ownership of the project by the government and low political will to implement project recommendations (LOW).
- a) Lack of capacities; in particular by MEPA staff to benefit from policy processes from the project and also limited capacities of executing partners to manage the project (MEDIUM)
 - b) Lack of coordination especially at government level (MEDIUM)
 - c) Environmental: climate change risks (MEDIUM)
106. Risks a, b and c did not materialise so far. Risk d on climate change is an ongoing phenomenon and in Ganakhleba, drought effects are impacting water levels in the local lake. Alternative scenarios have been taken into consideration in the project document such as use of boreholes. However, the ProDoc and the pasture management plans have not adequately developed mitigating actions on impact of climate change on pastures. For SLM plans to be sustainable, future climate projections will need to be integrated into the restoration plans. For example, as drought continues, what are the thresholds of some of the plants for water deficits? In one of the discussions, the local farmers seemed to propose irrigation of pastures, however, this is not financially and environmentally sustainable. These are the discussions that the project team also needs to engage in with the farmers. Climate change risk is indicated as medium in the project and it is envisioned that the project will work with another project (DIMMA project) to address climate vulnerability in pasturelands. The links to this project have not happened but needs to do so once pilot site activities start. Table 4 below provides a summary of the risks in the ProDoc (1-6). The MTR has also identified new risks for the project (highlighted, 7-13).

#	Risks	Area	Level	Comment
1	Lack of commitment from MEPA to develop and approve some of the policy recommendations within the scope of the Project		Low	There has been ownership and leadership provided by MEPA
2	Insufficient absorption capacity of the MEPA staff to use fully and benefit from the policy development support provided by the project		Medium	MEPA staff have been actively engaged in the policy process and actively participate in the ISWG
3	Lack of coordination or integration of the actions of the ministries		Medium	So far, various agencies under other ministries have been participating in the project policy process
4	Limited capacities of the operational and implementing partner/s to manage the investment		Medium	MEPA, RECC and CENN are leveraging their comparative advantages to implement respective components including through better coordination between them.
5	Lack of government commitment to ensure agricultural land (pastureland) registration		High	The pasture land plots that were supposed to be transferred to the municipalities have faced significant challenges and the transfer has not been completed. This is a serious risk to the achievement of Component 2.
6	Climate change		Medium	Risks still prevail.
7	Prolonged process of agreement of the policy document and later on the draft legislation document among the line ministries and other relevant institutions	Component 1	High	This has affected the commencement of Outcome 2.
8	Effects of the regional processes on country political and economic environment (war in Ukraine, armed conflicts in neighbouring countries) and thus lower priority given to the policy/legislation discussion and approval processes by the central government	Component 1	Low	Geopolitical location of Georgia makes it predisposed to be affected by high escalations which would also have an impact on government priorities as they would be shifted.
9	Lack of cooperation from the local communities in pilot villages	Component 2	Medium	This was not foreseen but has affected implementation of activities in Melaani. There remains a risk that this could be replicated in other areas especially if it is politically motivated.
10	Establishment of Pasture User Unions (PUU)	Component 2	High	The level of organisation by farmers is quite low and to implement the controlled

#	Risks	Area	Level	Comment
				grazing, a high level of organisation is required.
11	Delays in procurements for Component 2 (pilot)	Component 2	Medium	Procurement activities have not yet started.
12	Lack of interest from the local farmers (from pilot villages) to engage in capacity building and awareness raising activities, also linked to the fulfilment of gender target (30% women) in this regard	Component 3	Medium	This is linked to the overall lack of interest by farmers that can happen.
13	Potential changes in leadership (especially on local level)	Components 2 & 3	Low	This can hamper commitment to the project at local level.

4.5. Factors affecting performance

Evaluation rating: Satisfactory

107. **Main finding 5:** The project duration and activities have been negatively impacted by the long hiatus between the PPG phase, CEO endorsement and signing of the OPA agreement that allowed the project activities to commence. The policy process is advanced but the pilot process is greatly delayed and hampering the quality of results of the other outcomes. In the preliminary scenario, it was envisioned that the policy and legislative processes would go in parallel to actual pilot site activities. The delays coupled with relatively low levels of integration between Outcome 1, 2 and Outcome 3 have also impacted overall performance of the project. FAO with additional technical backstopping from the Lead Technical Officer (LTO) and Funding Liaison Officer (FLO), could have helped the project bridge these gaps through backstopping missions. However, these were also hampered by travel restrictions.
108. **Project design and readiness (MS):** There are gaps in implementation due to the long hiatus between PPG phase, CEO endorsement and signing of OPA agreement. As noted, while the local communities in Melaani were in non-binding agreement to participate in the project at the PPG phase, this has been gradually changed during implementation. The long periods could also be a contributing factor due to the lack of concrete engagement during those periods. In addition, it was not feasible to foresee the risks of Covid19 pandemic in the design, which has affected the project performance. The policy document and draft legislation development (according to the preliminary scenario was planned to go in parallel) VS actual (policy document pending approval first to be followed by development of draft legislation afterwards).
109. **Quality of project execution and management arrangements (S):** At the beginning of the project, there was relatively low level of coordination among project executing partners in integrating and linking the Component 1 & 2 and Component 3 activities in order to seek synergies. This is quite apparent by the relatively low engagement of MEPA in the process of implementation of activities under Component 3. However, this is being corrected including through joint planning between RECC and CENN of upcoming field activities.
110. On execution role, MEPA as a government agency has been instrumental in ensuring buy-in by the government and the Deputy Minister of MEPA is the Chair of the project Steering Committee; RECC is lauded as a solid, technical and well experienced partner on natural resources and pasture management issues and has designated competitive staff to lead and

manage the project; CENN has comparative advantage on grassroots mobilisation and delivering targeted trainings. Nevertheless, these competencies and comparative advantages need better coordination and communication. One way could be through an improved results-based monitoring system (RBM) that could provide a means for better planning and monitoring of project activities.

111. On delivery, the project did ensure delivery of activities in spite of the pandemic through virtual delivery (e.g. part of trainings, policy dialogues), however, there are some limitations to the quality of these modalities as compared to face to face interactions.
112. **Project oversight by FAO as the GEF Agency and national partners (S):** FAO has a versatile project management unit. However, covid restrictions have limited LTO and FLO visits to Georgia to provide technical backstopping. FAO's OPA modality ensures that the project stays on track through quarterly reporting that helps with early identification of issues. The OPA agreement, while a risk averse modality, implies very heavy reporting responsibilities for the operational partner -RECC. The project task force (PTF) is in place and has so far met once to deliberate on the pilot site issues including the need to consult the GEF. Important decisions were discussed at the SC meetings with attendance of the FLO and LTO as well. Since the PTF is an internal oversight for the project, there is room for more active engagement in providing timely oversight for the project with the meetings and deliberations documented for future references.
113. **Financial management and co-financing (MS):** The executing partners have systems in place for sound management and reporting on project resources. The outstanding financial challenge is the low expenditures by RECC for Component 2, which is largely due to delays in commencement of pilot site activities.
114. In the project PPG phase, the letters of co-financing commitments with indication of the type (in-kind/grant/public investment), sources and amount of co-financing, have been provided by multiple stakeholders, including FAO, RECC, CENN, central government (MEPA), local government (3 target municipalities), donor agency (GIZ) and Other (General Directorate of Plant Production of Turkey). The latter did not materialise yet due to an unaccomplished study visit to Turkey. The project partners are not very clear on co-financing obligations and reporting on co-financing; therefore the MTR team was not able to obtain information on the actual amount materialised by the Midterm. Additional co-financing has been received through the RECC from the United States Forest Service (USFS) that provided capacity building activities to the national working group on sustainable pasture management. The training was implemented through the request from MEPA by IFAD/DiMMA for conducting Feasibility Study on Integrated Pastures and Livestock Development in Georgia, including Cost-benefit Analysis for Current and Alternative Future Scenarios (FSIPLD). The USFS supported seminars meant to inspire policy scenarios by studying the American grasslands management system under federal and private lands. The IFAD supported Feasibility Study was understood as essential prerequisite to make informed and economically justified findings for defining National Pastureland Management Policy (NPMPD)
115. **Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement (S):** There is good stakeholder engagement at national level with participation and representation of key national stakeholders. However, there is limited engagement of municipalities in the policy document development process.
116. **Communication, visibility, knowledge management and knowledge products (S):** Under outcome 3, knowledge products have been developed and disseminated through various platforms such as YouTube channel, Facebook, printed training materials and guidelines. However, there is a lack of tailored communication to the local communities.

117. **Monitoring and evaluation (M&E), including M&E design, implementation and budget (S):** The project has a monitoring and evaluation system that follows the FAO internal reporting needs and donor reporting to the GEF, including gender disaggregated data collection and reporting. However, there is no dedicated M&E person in FAO, although RECC, as an operational partner, has a dedicated M&E focal point, which collects the information on overall project progress (including CENN on Component 3) and reports it in a cumulative way in progress reports. This mainly addresses reporting needs, however, this can be improved to enable joint planning of activities by MEPA, FAO, RECC and CENN and therefore, active engagement and frequent information-sharing on what each partner is planning to do.

4.6. Cross-cutting dimensions

Evaluation rating: Satisfactory

118. **Main Finding 6:** The project has developed a Gender Action Planned (GAP) for mainstreaming the gender issues in all relevant outputs. The milestones set under the GAP have been reported to FAO annually based on a bottom-up approach of information generation from the target municipalities (Gender Focal Points) and CENN in case of Component 3 activities. Overall implementation of GAP milestones seems to be on track unless taking into account some of the gender related targets that are seen challenging to be achieved due to the share of women engaged in the sector (S). Besides, the MTR has observed positive collaboration experience among the project and the municipality of Dmanisi (both - local government and farmers), which is populated with the ethnic minorities (S).
119. The Gender Action Plan has been developed during the project inception phase. It detailed descriptions of activities aimed at gender mainstreaming of the project and particular milestones by project outputs. The progress on achievement of gender milestones is reported by RECC in the frame of progress reports (separate section on Gender Mainstreaming) on an annual basis. For this purpose, RECC has engaged the Gender Specialist to guide this process during the project lifetime. As clarified during the MTR, RECC accumulates the gender related information from CENN and municipal Gender Focal Points (GFP - position is usually assigned to the Head of the local legislative body - Sakrebulo), and presents it to FAO.
120. The Gender Action Plan (GAP) indicates quarterly reporting, which is challenging for the municipal focal points, as they report on an annual basis, thus quarterly or even semi-annual reporting appears heavy for them. The project is advised to review this reporting requirement and adjust it to annual unless any significant arguments for keeping the same timing.
121. Overall implementation of GAP milestones seems to be on track. Gender balance has been ensured to a great extent throughout the project workshops and conferences, with average participation of women in the events held on national level at 53% and in the events held on a municipal level - at 48%. However, some of the gender related targets have been difficult to achieve due to the reality observed in the field. Namely, achievement of the gender target for the Output 1.1.4 indicator (*number of PUUs for management of s.c. "village pastures" facilitated and assisted to be functional, legally organised and registered in all three target municipalities – with at least 30% of women members*) might appear challenging due to the fact that there is no official data available regarding the households led by women. Besides, the target set for the Output 3.1.3 (*Number of farmers, national and local decision makers, workers of governmental extension services, women groups with improved knowledge on sustainable management of pasturelands - 30% women*) is also being difficult to fulfil. As reported by the

project, additional consultations are being planned regarding this matter with the local GFPs and the targets may need reconsideration according to consultation results.

122. There is mention of engagement of youth groups in Prodoc, however the MTR team was not able to meet any youth group representatives. The local stakeholders underlined the problem of ageing of farmers and reduced appeal for rural activities in general to youth. Out migration of youth from rural areas challenges continuation of rural activities in general.
123. One of the selected pilot sites (Dmanisi) is populated with the ethnic minorities, which may provide a possibility to test and scale up the approaches in other municipalities of the country populated by ethnic minority groups. However, this is always a location specific issue, since there are different ethnic minorities and each municipality/settlement may have individual characteristics in this regard, which requires a tailored approach in any case. The MTR has observed positive collaboration experience among the project, local government and farmers in this municipality.
124. Links were made between climate change and land degradation, climate change and reducing water quantity (Dmanisi), therefore underscoring the need to monitor climate impacts on pasturelands. According to the farmers in Dmanisi, the local lake that was proposed to supply water during the pilot site has been falling in levels due to drought. Alternative sources of water such as boreholes were already factored in the project activities. However, it is expected that this drought phenomenon might also affect pastures primarily through plant species thresholds to climatic factors such as reduced moisture and/ or rising temperatures. This will need to be taken into consideration during planning for SLM practices e.g. based on scenarios, which local species will be able to adapt to different scenarios.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

125. **Conclusion 1 – Relevance (S).** The project is aligned to national land degradation neutrality (LDN) targets (HS). One of the targets is rehabilitation of degraded lands and through this project, this will be done in pasture lands. The project objectives are deemed as highly relevant across national stakeholder groups as it addresses some key challenges the country is facing, namely the lack of policy or legislation to guide sustainable pasture management, lack of inventory on pastures and the ongoing degradation of pastures (HS). The stakeholder engagement processes during the project preparation grant phase (PPG) and the project implementation is deemed adequate. The pilot site approach in testing outcomes of the policy process is considered good strategy but has limitations such as the considerable time needed for policy and legislation negotiation processes that have subsequently delayed pilot site activities (MS). Overall, the relevance of the project can be assessed as Satisfactory.
126. **Conclusion 2 – Effectiveness (MU).** The overall project design shows strong links across Component 1, 2 and 3. However, there is discord in the implementation of these components. For example, there have been considerable delays on Component 2 as they wait for the policy and legislation guidance. This implies the processes are not benefitting adequately from inputs from the local level. At the same time, capacity building and awareness creation activities have advanced so much in parallel to the policy and legislation activities. For outcome 1 the Project had considerable success in engaging its national stakeholders in the pasture policy and interrelated legislation negotiations including within the LDN framework through active participation of the LDN focal point and commitment of target pastures for restoration. Outcome 2 has made limited progress to date due to the pandemic, focusing substantial efforts and time resources on Component 1, and administrative issues on the use and access to pastures. There are ongoing activities to empower national and local stakeholders on SLM in

pasturelands, under Outcome 3, but this needs better targeting. Project monitoring activities under Outcome 4 are on track. MEPA, FAO, RECC and CENN have been supporting the delivery of the project based on their respective comparative advantages. Overall project delivery has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Effectiveness of the project can be assessed as Moderately Unsatisfactory.

127. **Conclusion 3 – Efficiency (MU).** In terms of concrete deliverables, outputs under the outcomes 1, 3 and 4 are being achieved at reasonable costs, while few outputs under outcome 2 are delayed, somewhat reducing delivery efficiency for the other outcomes. The main cause of this low efficiency is the delay in the delivery of Outcome 1 which was being implemented as sequential to Outcome 2 due to a number of force majeure related to the plot ownership¹⁴. Further delays can also be attributed to difficulties experienced in some pilot sites. The MTR team has noted the impact of the delay and there is a need to accelerate implementation of outputs under outcome 2. The project was affected by operational delays in signing and setting up the implementation structures (such as signing of OPA) and largely by the Covid-19 pandemic and the delays of the expected handover of the pastures to the local authorities. To enable achievement of the targeted results, the project requires 1.5-year non-cost extension with relevant budget and work plan revision. Overall score for the Efficiency is Moderately Unsatisfactory.

128. **Conclusion 4 – Sustainability (ML).** Overall, the MTR team sees good prospects for sustainability. There is a strong ownership of the project at national level where the project is responding to pressing country needs such as lack of policy and legislation to guide sustainable pasture management, need to tackle land degradation and also meeting international obligations like LDN. At the local level, this is mixed as in pilot sites where farmers are totally committed to the project, we see prospects of good sustainability compared to pilot sites where farmers do not fully understand the project intentions. Participating local governments are also keen to support the project and will be key in developing an exit strategy for the project. There are opportunities to use and scale out some of the project outcomes. The pasture inventories have elicited interest from development partners, who see the potential to use it in other municipalities. MEPA's incremental approach to the use of GEF resources such as incorporating scaling out in projects under GEF 8 financing, provides pathways for replication and increasing sustainability of results. Sustainability therefore can be rated Moderately Likely.

129. **Conclusion 5 – Factors affecting performance (S).** The project duration and activities have been negatively impacted by the long hiatus between the PPG phase, CEO endorsement and signing of the OPA agreement that allowed the project activities to commence. The policy process is advanced but the pilot process is greatly delayed and hampering the quality of results of the other outcomes. In the preliminary scenario, it was envisioned that the policy and legislative processes would go in parallel to actual pilot site activities. The delays coupled with relatively low levels of integration between Outcome 1, 2 and Outcome 3 have also impacted overall performance of the project. FAO with additional technical backstopping from the Lead

¹⁴ The delay in outcome 2 (implementation of the pilot pastures restoration plans) were related to land registration by pilot municipalities as most of the pilot pastures are state property by default managed by the National Agency of State Property, or not registered. The local governments faced difficulties to solve the emerging ownership issues, prompting the project to further support the municipalities and facilitate smooth registration of the pilot pasturelands (in case of unregistered pilot sites in Sno village of Kazbegi municipality) or transfer of pilot pasturelands to the municipal ownership (in case of state-owned pasturelands in Ganakhleba village of Dmanisi Municipality and Naniani village of Gurjaani municipality).

Technical Officer (LTO) and Funding Liaison Officer (FLO), could have helped the project bridge these gaps through backstopping missions. However, these were also hampered by travel restrictions. This has been scored Satisfactory by MTR.

130. **Conclusion 6 –Cross-cutting dimensions (S).** The project has developed a Gender Action Planned for mainstreaming the gender issues in all relevant outputs. The milestones set under the GAP have been reported to FAO annually based on a bottom-up approach of information generation from the target municipalities (Gender Focal Points) and CENN in case of Component 3 activities. Overall implementation of GAP milestones seems to be on track unless taking into account some of the gender related targets that are seen challenging to be achieved due to the share of women engaged in the sector (S). Besides, the MTR has observed positive collaboration experience among the project and the municipality of Dmanisi (both - local government and farmers), which is populated with the ethnic minorities (S).

5.2. Recommendations

Rec. no.	Rationale for recommendation	Recommendation	Responsibility	Timing for actions
Effectiveness				
1	At the beginning of the project, there was a relatively low level of coordination among project executing partners in integrating and linking the Component 1 & 2 and Component 3 activities in order to seek synergies. There is room for more active engagement of MEPA in Component 3 activities to enable obtaining the feedback and exchanges on local level activities for better integration with policy and legislative processes while enabling MEPA to provide technical oversight.	Strengthen coordination among RECC and CENN to seek better integration of the activities of component 2 and 3 e.g. through joint planning and reporting of activities, frequent meetings that also includes MEPA and joint activities in the pilot sites such as trainings.	FAO, RECC, CENN, MEPA	ASAP continued through the project lifetime
2		Leverage on CENN's grassroots mobilisation comparative advantage	FAO, RECC, CENN	
3		Ensure more intensive engagement of MEPA in Component 3 activities	CENN, MEPA	
4	Out of the 747ha committed for restoration, in case of expansion of pilot site in Galakhleba, the project will have a total of 642 ha available for restoration. The deficit is 105ha. This has an implication on the achievement of GEF Core indicators	Intensively consult with and seek the support of relevant agencies/entities to ensure achievement of the targeted 747 ha. FAO to keep GEF informed on these discussions.	MEPA, RECC, FAO	ASAP
5	The delays coupled with relatively low levels of integration between Outcome 1, 2 and Outcome 3 have impacted overall performance of the project	FAO to strengthen its monitoring missions (LTO and BH) to the field. FAO PTF to actively offer guidance to the project on thorny issues such as stalemate on pilot sites.	FAO (BH, LTO, PTF).	Project lifetime

Rec. no.	Rationale for recommendation	Recommendation	Responsibility	Timing for actions
		PTF can also help the project identify other FAO initiatives in other countries where the project can share and learn some best practices from including on organisation of farmers, pasture law development, piloting and scaling out SLM.		
6	Local farmers in Dmanisi/Ganakhleba argued that 254 ha was too small to cater for all the livestock in the village and could lead to overgrazing and also a source of farmer-to-farmer conflicts and cattle to cattle conflicts.	Include Dmanisi (Ganakhleba) entire village pastures to 440 ha under the pilot activities	RECC	According to feasible timelines for Component 2 activities
7	Budgetary allocations are yet to be earmarked for implementation of the priorities of NPMPD as this is still a draft policy that is yet to be formally adopted.	Follow up discussions with the Minister MEPA to emphasise and follow-up on this.	MEPA, RECC	ASAP through Component 1 activity timelines
8	The draft legislation is considerably behind as it is currently planned as sequential to the NPMPD document approvals.	As the NPMPD is at an advanced stage, the project can gain time by advancing on negotiations for the legislation including by taking advantage of the current active engagement of the policy ISWG.	MEPA, RECC	
9	There is room for more active engagement from the FAO side in terms of effective use of RBM results for decision making on a higher level	Incorporate joint planning of activities by MEPA, FAO, RECC and CENN in the current M&E system. Also agree on frequency of joint coordination meetings by all the four organisations (FAO to coordinate) for planning, reporting and for coherence, production of some joint knowledge products. Potential topics could include joint publications on best practices on pasture restoration in Georgia, Multi-stakeholder policy elaboration processes for sustainable pasture	FAO to coordinate with active participation of MEPA, RECC and CENN.	ASAP continued through the project lifetime

Rec. no.	Rationale for recommendation	Recommendation	Responsibility	Timing for actions
		management in Georgia. These publications will enable documentation and sharing of the achievements in Georgia and done jointly, allows sharing of broad framings and ownerships.		
10	Sustainable functioning of PUUs might be affected by multiple factors caused due to legislative environment	Follow up on the recommendations developed in frame of the Study on Possible Legal Solutions for PUU Establishment and advocate for the suggested legal changes.	MEPA, RECC	According to Component 1 activity timelines
Efficiency				
11	Delayed implementation of pilot activities also negatively affects the effectiveness of other components	Hasten start of pilot site activities according to respective needs for first steps.	RECC	ASAP
12	Availability and quality of water resources might affect implementation of the pilot activities	Carry out pending studies on water availability and water quality issues in Guurjani.	RECC	ASAP
13	Actual materialised co-financing is reported partially	Ensure co-financiers understand obligations and develop a clear co-financing reporting structure.	FAO	ASAP continued through the project lifetime
14	Current list of training participants does not allow disaggregation by location, while it would be important to check what is the share of pilot village population engaged in trainings	Enable to indicate the information on training participants' location (village) in the training signing sheets so that it is measurable what share of population from the pilot villages are engaged in capacity building activities.	CENN	ASAP continued through the project lifetime
Sustainability and catalysis/replication				
15	The ProDoc and the pasture management plans have not adequately developed mitigating actions on impact of climate change on pastures. Yet, it was apparent in conversations with farmers that climate change is	Integrate future climate projections (e.g IPCC scenarios) into the restoration plans in order to anticipate, identify and mitigate potential site	RECC	According to Component 2 activity timelines

Rec. no.	Rationale for recommendation	Recommendation	Responsibility	Timing for actions
	already affecting not only some plant species but also water sources such as lakes.	specific impacts of climate change on the plans. Possible frameworks: Simonson et al, 2021: Enhancing climate change resilience of ecological restoration — A framework for action Transformative adaptation pathway approach for restoration: Pramova et al, 2019: Adapting land restoration to a changing climate: embracing the knowns and unknowns		
16	For local governments, healthy pastures are key to good productivity of livestock	Coordination and concentration of activities by various donors in the pilot sites to improve the entire livestock value chains, from pastures to veterinary services and livestock product development	FAO, RECC	ASAP continued through the project lifetime
Factors affecting performance				
17	Implementation of some activities, especially those under Outcome 2 has been delayed due to multiple factors, which also affect overall performance of other components as well. Based on conversations with partners, 1.5 years was deemed as the most plausible option. There's also lack of clarity on pilot sites, which will require additional time as well.	1.5-year non-cost extension will be required (including OPA) to enable achievement of the targeted results in Component 2 (unless it is decided to be cancelled).	FAO, RECC	ASAP
18		Subsequent revision of the budget and work plan.		
19	Communication of particular vision of incentives (potential benefits for farmers) will support smooth cooperation with local communities for successful implementation of Component 2 activities in pilot sites	Advocate prioritisation of pilot site farmers among donor-funded and government-funded grant and no-interest credit programmes, facilitate scaling up of this approach for further interventions	MEPA, FAO	ASAP continued through the project lifetime
20		Elaborate and communicate holistic vision of the tangible incentives/perspectives with local communities/ farmers	RECC, CENN	ASAP continued through the

Rec. no.	Rationale for recommendation	Recommendation	Responsibility	Timing for actions
				project lifetime
21	Farmers eagerly await ripple effect of project outcomes	Structured and “intense” communication of project results especially field/pilot results	RECC, CENN	ASAP continued through the project lifetime
22	Farmers have unclear expectations on possible outcomes and effects that could be resulted from project implementation, especially regarding possible taxation/fees for pasture use. This type of ambiguity of expectations has contributed to challenges faced in Melaani.	Ensure clear communication to cultivate clear expectations among the local communities (e.g. expected taxation, etc.)	RECC, CENN	ASAP continued through the project lifetime
23	Farmers note that they are very busy with agricultural work during spring, summer and autumn, thus it becomes difficult for them to attend the training sessions.	Schedule the training activities for farmers mostly during the winter season (unless the training does not require practical sessions in the field during a particular season)	CENN	ASAP continued through the project lifetime
Cross-cutting dimensions				
24	Some of the gender related targets are difficult to achieve due to the reality observed in the field	Gender targets for Output 1.1.4 and 3.1.3 need reconsideration based on consultations with local gender focal points in target municipalities.	FAO, RECC, CENN	ASAP
25	The GAP indicates quarterly reporting, which is challenging for the municipal focal points, as they report on an annual basis, thus quarterly or even semi-annual reporting appears heavy for them	Review quarterly reporting requirement on GAP and adjust it to the annual reporting	FAO, RECC	ASAP

6. Lessons learned

131. The project implementation has shown the need for better integration of project activities especially among different components.
132. Effective coordination and communication among implementing partners and stakeholders has been proved to be important and necessary for all project components.

133. It is believed that the role and buy in of farmers is vital for implementation of project activities in the field.
134. The need for more active mutual follow up on monitoring results and participative planning for rigorous implementation of the project activities has been observed.
135. Achievement of the gender targets appears unrealistic given the share of women engaged in the sector.

Technical areas for further learning:

136. Some scholars have argued that controlled grazing management (areas under enclosures), perform well and promote species diversity for initial 5-6 years, after which further recovery does not necessarily happen. It will be important to have robust pasture monitoring in place to enable learning and adaptive management in the areas under controlled grazing.
137. In some pilot sites, farmers keep both sheep and cattle and these two have different and differing grazing requirements. While livestock herd diversity is good for overall pasture health, the project team will need to carry out consultations with the farmers to plan the best way to incorporate the different needs of cattle and sheep in use of the pastures.
138. Controlled grazing management can bring order, organise farmers and facilitate rotational grazing. However, it needs high investments that may not be realised in the entire pasture landscapes of Georgia. At the same time, research shows that there are only marginal gains in terms of improved pastures as compared to traditional rotational grazing. Under a project scenario such as this, controlled grazing can deliver more benefits beyond the biophysical benefits on the landscape (e.g. organising and ensuring pasture management plans are followed). However, on a broader landscape, it can hinder mobility (especially of other farmers) when large areas of land are fenced. We therefore propose that controlled grazing act as a catalyst for rotational grazing in Georgia and during the project, lessons can be learnt on how to promote rotational grazing on wider national landscapes.
139. Climate change impacts such as drought will affect plant species. Restoration activities in support of SLM need to integrate scenario based future climate projections (using IPCC projections) to check on viability of activities.

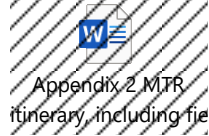
7. Appendices

Appendix 1: Terms of Reference



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



Appendix 3: Stakeholders interviewed during the MTR



Appendix 3
Stakeholders interview

Appendix 4: MTR matrix (review questions and sub-questions)



Appendix 4 MTR
matrix.docx

Appendix 5. List of documents consulted



Appendix 5. List of
documents consulted

Appendix 6. Results matrix showing achievements at mid-term and MTR observations



Appendix 6-Results
Matrix.docx

Appendix 7. Co-financing table



Appendix 7.
Co-financing table.do

Appendix 8. GEF evaluation criteria rating table and rating scheme



Appendix 8. GEF
evaluation criteria rati