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GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY
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Mid-term review Report of project

"A new green line: mainstreaming biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China's water resources management policy and planning"

GCP/CPR/057/GFF

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FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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MTR team

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- *Yu Xiubo (national consultant)*

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- *Ms Genevieve Braun, Programme Officer, MTR Focal Point*
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Acronyms and abbreviations

BH	Budget holder
CPF	Country Programming Framework
CSO	Civil society organisation
EO	Expected outcome
FAO-CN	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in China
FLO	Funding liaison officer (FAO)
FPMIS	Field Project Management Information System
EES	Environmental and social safeguards
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GCU	GEF Coordination Unit (Rome)
IEM	Integrated Ecosystem Management
IETCEC	The International Economic and Technical Cooperation and Exchange Centre (Ministry of Water Resources)
iNGO	International Non-governmental organisations
IDWG	Inter-Departmental Working Group on new operational modalities
IWHR	Institute of Water Resources and Hydropower Research
LTO	Lead technical officer
MEE	Ministry of Ecology and Environment
MTR	Mid-term review
NBCSAP	National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and Action Plan
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MW	Megawatts
MWR	Ministry of Water Resources
OED	Office of Evaluation in FAO
OPIM/MS-701	Operational Partners Implementation Modality - Manual Section 701
PES	Payments for environmental services
PIMM	Project Implementation Management Manual
PMO	Project Management Office
PMU	Project Management Unit
PIR	Project Implementation Report (for GEF)
PPR	Project Progress Report (for FAO)
PSS	Project Support Services (FAO)
PTF	Project Task Force
RLHRS	River/Lake Health Report Scorecard
RM	Mid-term review manager
SMART	Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound
SO	FAO Strategic Objective
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
UNEP	UN Environment Programme
WRM	Water resources management
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
YREB	Yangtze River Economic Belt

0. Executive summary

0.1 Introduction

1. The main purpose of the MTR is to assess the progress of project GCP/CPR/057/GFF, "*A new green line: mainstreaming biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China's water resources management policy and planning*" in meeting its expected outputs and results (outcomes) at the mid-way point of implementation, identify reasons for positive or negative variance, and provide recommendations and lessons learned to support the project reach its objectives and optimise its wider impact. The scope of the MTR covers the execution of the project's three main components by the International Economic and Technical Cooperation and Exchange Centre of the Ministry of Water Resources (MWR/IETCEC) between the start of operations on 29 September 2016 to 31 March 2020. The MTR was carried out between 1st April 2020 to 30 September 2020. Due to the limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic, a field mission was not possible, so the work methodology focused on a desk evaluation of project documents supported by remote semi-structured interviews of a wide sample of direct stakeholders in the project. To aid the interviews process of different stakeholders, the MTR team produced a detailed evaluation matrix in which indicators and judgement criteria were identified in relation to the MTR's main evaluation questions and sub questions established in its terms of reference. The main questions assessed by the MTR are summarised under each of the evaluation criteria in the next sub-section.

0.2 Main findings

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

2. **Satisfactory:** The MTR found significant evidence to confirm the project continues to have a high level of strategic relevance to the government of China and the Ministry of Water Resources in particular. In particular, the project fills an important gap in the government's quest to attain effective and sustainable water resources management (WRM). This has been demonstrated by the project's contribution to developing a strong understanding within MWR/IETCEC on the inextricable link between the conservation of aquatic biodiversity and protecting ecological flow (e-flow) in the country's small and medium-sized rivers. This has facilitated a strong commitment to reform the water sector by successfully mainstreaming biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection the policy, legal and regulatory framework. The reform process is also supported by MWR/IETCEC's commitment to support President Xi Jinping's "Beautiful Rivers and Lakes Initiative" and stepping up of ecological civilisation in 2019.
3. The MTR also found the project's relevance is high at the local level in the four pilot sites in Zhenyuan and Jingdong Counties in Yunnan Province (Enle/Buma and Chuan Rivers) and in Jiangjin and Banan Districts in Chongqing Municipality (Tang and Wubu Rivers). Furthermore, project relevance appears to have been significantly enhanced by the

establishment of a new tiered River Chief System in partnership with civil society in both pilot provinces. Similarly, the project’s alignment with GEF-5 and FAO priorities and strategic objectives also continues to be highly pertinent. In particular, the MTR found it fully supports GEF-5 Objective 2 (BD2) in terms of mainstreaming biodiversity conservation and its sustainable use in the pilot provinces and using them to support national reforms in WRM.

4. However, one area where the MTR found the project’s relevance is affected concerns the establishment of an effective inter-institutional coordination mechanism with institutions such as the Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE), which is responsible for the implementation of the country’s National Biodiversity Conservation Strategic Action Plan 2011-2030 (NBCSAP) and has a mandate to monitor biodiversity. Likewise, the Fisheries Bureau within the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs has responsibility to manage fish stocks.

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

5. **Moderately satisfactory.** The project’s effectiveness in achieving outputs and planned outcomes has improved over the last year, following a lengthy period of low activity due to a major institutional reshuffle (see Appendix 6). The MTR found MWR is demonstrating a strong commitment to intensify its main activities. Indeed, reforms to plans and guidelines have already taken place at the national level and reform of the Water Law is on-going. Progress is also evident in the pilot provinces of Yunnan Province and Chongqing Municipality¹. This includes the introduction of plans to protect water resources and water use in Yunnan Province, which also stated it is aiming to be the centre of biodiversity in China, and an e-flow control plan is being tested at on the Wubu River in Chongqing Municipality. In addition, two significant outcomes have been achieved.
6. The first main outcome concerns the adoption of a new tiered approach to the River and Lake Chief System in partnership with civil society, which is already being applied at small and medium-sized rivers in both pilot provinces. The engagement of civil society in this way, which includes the nomination of civil river chiefs at the township and/or village levels, has proved to be an effective way to implement the project’s on-the-ground activities and raise awareness at the same time. For example, clean-up campaigns collected 900 MT of rubbish at just one site (Tang River), over 34 ha of habitat restoration (Inle/Buma and Chuan Rivers) and a number of dams on all pilot rivers have been modified with fishways and other interventions to protect e-flow. The second main outcome identified concerns clarification on how the “Green-Line Scorecard” (GLS) concept, proposed in the Prodoc without guidance on how, can be implemented through a revised version of River and Lake Health Assessments (R/LHAs). This revision includes the addition of a new protocol to assess biological integrity in the new technical guidelines for R/LHAs, which are based on five protocols in total. Both the project management office (PMO) and MWR staff interviewed in Chongqing Municipality confirmed the new R/LHA guidelines have been tested at the Chuan, Wubu and Tang Rivers and this has contributed to MWR’s decision to pilot the new R/LHAs in various other provinces in China.

¹ Chongqing is a direct-controlled municipality in the Chinese administration, but has provincial-level status.

7. Both these outcomes have been achieved with the support of river biodiversity analysis carried out in 2019, (includes an ecological baseline survey on river ecotopes, environmental flow analysis and the initiation of river water resource accounting at the pilot rivers), together with a number of training courses provided by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to support the mainstreaming process. So far TNC has provided training to over 200 MWR staff, which includes support in developing the GIS-based river biodiversity information system. In addition, more than 28 500 members of civil society are reported to have had access to training relating to on-the-ground activities in the pilot sites. However, training and general progress on biodiversity monitoring and information systems management was found to be well behind schedule (around 20 per cent of planned activities). The MTR found this is a much more complex area to develop than recognised in the Prodoc. This is not aided by inadequate levels of inter-institutional coordination and synergies in place with institutions such as MEE or MARA that have capacity in this area and there is high dependency on scientific support from two local universities based in the pilot provinces. In addition, the low number of biodiversity monitoring sites in place at the pilot sites indicates the project is not tracking progress at key sites where it is supporting change (such as fishways) and signifies only general information and trends can be identified. This also has implications for the development of the information system to manage biodiversity data and support decision-making. However, the TNC has supported progress in identifying 12 GIS datasets that will form an integral part of the information system.

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

8. **Moderately satisfactory.** The project has experienced difficulties in converting its resources into results in the period 2017-2018, but has improved significantly since 2019. In the first two years of operations the project experienced delays in setting up the PMO, signing the service contract with TNC and operating without a Chief Technical Adviser. In addition, FAO spent considerable resources to support the execution of the project by MWR/IETCEC based on a set of conditions set by FAO's Senior Management. These conditions included the assignment of additional human resources to the BH in FAO-CN, but did not assign sufficient funding to cover their employment as foreseen, nor ensure regular supervision missions could be carried out in the field. The MTR found this situation has still not been resolved to date. Moreover, there is a widespread belief that the project is applying the partner's implementation modality in line with Manual Section 710 (OPIM/MS-701), on the grounds many of the conditions applied by Senior Management echo those in the OPIM/MS-701. However, the MTR found this is not the case and, instead, is applying an *ad hoc* national execution approach, given all the conditions in the OPIM/MS-701 (which includes budgeting for assurance activities such as spot checks and field visits) are not applied. In the light of this situation, the MTR found FAO has not put a suitable communication mechanism in place to resolve these shortcomings quickly among the plethora of FAO services associated with the project (LTO, FLO, FAO/GEF CU, PSS, IDWG, FAO-CN, Senior Management, etc.). In another example, the recruitment of TNC as an executing partner foreseen in the Prodoc also experienced significant delays on the grounds the Chinese authorities were unable to contract international non-

governmental organisations (iNGOs), nor pay them in a foreign currency such as US Dollars. To resolve this problem, the Letter of Agreement (LoA) was signed between TNC and FAO. However, this was not concluded until March 2019, due to a lengthy process concerning the amendment of the Operational Partner Agreement.

9. Improvements in project efficiency since 2019 are evidenced by the fact that its physical advance has increased to approximately 40 per cent (to 31 December 2019) and spent 21.7 per cent of the GEF grant (from 6 per cent the year before). This is mainly attributed to advances under components 1 and 2 of the project, especially those related to biodiversity mainstreaming, on-the-ground initiatives to conserve biodiversity and protect e-flow and piloting of the new R/LHAs. Meanwhile, training and development of the core activities under component 3 have progressed more slowly and are well behind schedule, in particular biodiversity monitoring. Furthermore, the MTR found that the Prodoc did not fully recognise the time and challenges associated with the development of an effective database on aquatic biodiversity and, as a result, it is highly unlikely the partner will be able meet targets before the project's closure.
10. Nonetheless, where the project has made advances, the MTR found a highly satisfactory level of cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness. For example, since 2019, the MTR found the embedding of the PMO in the MWR is proving to be a less costly means to executing the project than through direct execution by FAO. For example, the PMO is demonstrating to be a highly efficient and effective way to recruit consultants through open tenders and the LoA signed between TNC and FAO-CN is providing MWR with access to international best practices relating biodiversity conservation measures and approaches, on developing the GIS database, etc. at relatively low cost (under USD 100 000). The provision of considerable and timely co-finance from MWR at both the central and provincial levels has also contributed to the project's cost-effectiveness. Analysis of financial data to end of 2019 confirms MWR has spent just over 60 per cent of its budget allocation to support project implementation (USD 25 400 000). Interviews confirm this has been instrumental in delivering several outputs, especially relating to on-the-ground activities and supporting the training activities through in-kind support such as hiring of venues and provision of materials.
11. However, the MTR identified areas where efficiency is being compromised. For example, there has been until mid-2020 inadequate levels of coordination with neighbouring MWR provincial offices and other government stakeholders who are directly, or indirectly, active in the watersheds of the pilot sites, despite the fact they have an impact on aquatic biodiversity, which indicates there is a high risk of overlaps, or duplication of activities. Furthermore, the absence of multisectoral coordination has resulted in a strong vertical approach to biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection, which has precluded opportunities to use the watershed as the unit of analysis to support integrated river ecosystem management (see also "factors affecting performance" below).

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

12. **Moderately satisfactory.** The project will be unable to sustain results unless an extension is granted to achieve the majority of planned outcomes and objectives. However, the likelihood these results will be sustained is high from the perspective that socio-political, institutional, financial and fiduciary risks are currently ranked low to low-medium by the LTO and PMO and the MTR found no evidence to indicate these risks will rise substantially in the foreseeable future, although the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic will need to be monitored in the event of a second wave of cases later in 2020. Furthermore, the embedding of the PMO within the MWR and decision to employ full-time staff have contributed to institutionalising the project and, thus, enhancing the ownership of results. Indeed, interviews indicate that MWR is committed to continuing the biodiversity mainstreaming process well beyond the project.
13. Also supportive of project sustainability are the positive signs from MWR that it is replicating the River Chief System platform established in the pilot provinces in other pilot provinces in the interests of perfecting the platform so it can be rolled-out as part of the new national policy for WRM. Similarly, the new approach to R/LHAs is currently being piloted across the country in the interests of applying it nationally to support biodiversity conservation and protect e-flow.
14. However, the MTR identified high risks to sustainability due to the general lack of integration of risk management in the mainstreaming process. Moreover, some activities such as e-flow analysis are not being developed to support MWR develop risk management services that are of particular interest to key sectors that will increase their impact on biodiversity unless they adopt good practices and adapt to the effects of climate variability and change (such as agriculture, water consuming industries and housing). This situation is also not aided by the absence of inter-institutional collaboration, or the identification of an exit strategy that clarifies the long-term training needs within MWR, in particular relating to biodiversity monitoring and the development of an information system that can support evidence-based decision-making on investment in biodiversity conservation and its sustainable use.

Factors affecting performance - *Question 5: relate to project design, causal logic, stakeholder engagement, degree to which local actors were involved in the project design, delays in implementation, performance of the executing agency, capacity of the PMO, management of risks, availability of co-finance, quality of FAO's support, effectiveness of the project's monitoring and evaluation*

15. **Moderately satisfactory.** The MTR identified three barriers that are having and/or are likely to have an effect on the project's capacity to meet its objectives. The first, concerns some gaps in the project design, such as the application of the GLS concept, which is no longer applicable as biodiversity is being mainstreamed into an existing and legally recognised discipline (R/LHA). In addition, targets in the Results Matrix (RM), such as on establishing biodiversity monitoring and data management in line with international standards are very ambitious to achieve in a four-year project, especially as the Prodoc, provides little information as to how the training activities on conducting biodiversity monitoring should be conducted and financed over the long-term. Indeed, stakeholders interviewed in the provinces stated that they need more guidance and training in these

subjects. In addition, some targets, such as the length of the pilot rivers to be designated "green-line" and the total area of habitats that are to be restored at each pilot site were found to be unrealistic and arbitrary.

16. A second barrier concerns the project's internal monitoring and evaluation system (M&E), which mainly operates to fulfil reporting requirements for GEF and FAO. For example, the activity and results matrices included in the Progress Implementation Reports (PIR) require updates on every activity, output, immediate outcome and final outcome. This not only forces the PMO to adopt a micro-management approach to M&E, but also obliges the reporting to focus primarily on operational progress, outputs and meeting of targets, as opposed to a system designed to stimulate learning and reflection on why results are/are not happening, identifying strengths, gaps and risks, improving understanding on vulnerable groups and their specific needs, etc. and ensuring these findings feed into annual planning and internal reviews on how to meet objectives.
17. Third, in part due to the M&E system applied, the project lacks an effective communication strategy that is designed to stimulate different stakeholders to engage in and/or support the multiplier effect relating to biodiversity conservation. For example, the project is achieving important results in habitat restoration, but there is no information on whether this is contributing to conserving endangered species of global and/or national importance. In addition, due to the lack of a mechanism to both stimulate intra and inter-institutional dialogue and supervise decisions are implemented, there is no communication on the importance of developing the landscape approach to river ecosystem management that was foreseen in the Prodoc. The absence of cross-sector coordination is likely to limit the long-term sustainability of biodiversity conservation; even in rural rivers such as the Tang River, due to rapid urbanisation and the growing demands to produce more food as purchasing power increases in China.

Cross-cutting dimensions (including gender) *Question 6: To what extent were gender considerations (including a gender analysis) taken into account in designing and implementing the project? And To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project?*

18. **Moderately satisfactory.** The MTR found the project has given a low level of attention to developing a gender strategy, or a specific approach on how it works with ethnic minorities in Yunnan Province and where, in Jingdong County, they make up the majority of the population. This is not aided by the Prodoc, which provides limited information and guidance on the gender focus to be applied and no information on the approach to working with ethnic minorities. Furthermore, GEF introduced new guidelines on Gender in October 2017, but it appears FAO in general have provided limited guidance to the PMO on their application in reporting so far. In addition, several interviewees argued that it is not required due to the application of equal pay to men and women in China. In general, the MTR identified stakeholders had the perception that because women make up as much as 70 per cent of the inhabitants at the pilot sites (due to the high rates of migration of men) they are fully participating in the project. A similar view persists in Yunnan Province concerning ethnic minorities. As a result, a strategy targeting the participation of the most marginalised women and ethnic minorities, or those that represent the biggest threat to biodiversity loss,

is absent. In addition, sex-disaggregation and participation of ethnic minorities is not applied in the M&E system.

19. Concerning environmental and social safeguards the MTR assessed the ESS standards identified in 2016 and found the project continues to comply with the standards that are relevant to the project. In particular, the project continues to comply with FAO principles relating to the conservation of natural resources and ecosystems (ESS II) supporting improvements in water resources management, which includes addressing the negative impact of dams on e-flow and, therefore, on aquatic biodiversity (ESS 1) and supports the conservation of wetlands and other aquatic-related habitats.

Knowledge activities/products

20. The project has mainly focused on the production of seven newsletters to the end of 2019. The newsletters were found to be well written (in English and Chinese) and provide important narratives of the project's main meetings and events, including information on trainings and exchanges abroad such as to Japan and the Republic of Korea. However, the absence of a communication strategy, based on the systematisation of results, means the project's knowledge products are not geared to stimulating learning and information exchange among stakeholders, public institutions, or the private sector in the interests of out-scaling and up-scaling WRM in general and the conservation of aquatic biodiversity in particular.

Stakeholder participation

21. The establishment of the OPA with the NFGA has made a positive contribution to engaging the active participation of the MWR in the project's execution. Furthermore, project planning, implementation and monitoring has been aided by the establishment of PMO offices at the national and provincial levels as well as focal points at county/district levels. This has facilitated the direct participation of the Department of Water Resources located in Yunnan Province and Chongqing Municipality as well as at the county/district level where the pilot rivers are located. Furthermore, the Letter of Agreement established between FAO and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), has facilitated national stakeholders to come together to gain access to training on WRM practices, international good practices and information on case studies of interest for international study tours. Meanwhile, local community participation at the pilot river level has been enhanced through the expansion of the River Chief system. This now includes the participation of nominated village and township river chiefs from the local community that has facilitated both capacity development and the engagement of civil society in project activities such as rubbish clean-up campaigns and river/wetland restoration projects. In addition, the engagement of local universities from Yunnan Province and Chongqing Municipality has made a positive contribution to engaging government staff and civil society on the development of the national monitoring system for aquatic biodiversity.

Progress towards achieving the project's development objective

22. The MTR rates overall progress to achieving the project's overall objective (mainstreaming biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China's water resources management policy and planning) and development objective (catalysing a profound change in China's approach to river biodiversity conservation) as **moderately likely**. This is due to the project's progress in implementing activities and outputs under components 1 and 2 that are already resulting in some positive outcomes, in particular the integration of biodiversity conservation into national guidelines relating to water resources management and in the R/LHAs. However, the effective application of biodiversity monitoring and information systems development still requires several years to consolidate and some barriers remain that are restricting the opportunities to optimise effectiveness and efficiency, in particular relating to cross-sector coordination in river watersheds.

Overall risk rating

23. The MTR rates the project's level of risk to be medium and therefore it is **moderately likely** it will reach the majority of its targets if an extension of at least two years is granted and the recommendations below are addressed.

0.3 Conclusions

24. **Conclusion 1 on question 1 (Relevance): Overall, the MTR found the project's three main (final) outcomes are satisfactory in that they are congruent with priorities of GEF, FAO and MWR and are mutually reinforcing, which has strengthened its intervention logic and enhanced the opportunities to raise awareness on biodiversity conservation and e-flow at all levels of government. However, the project's relevance is let down by a long list of immediate outcomes to achieve final outcomes that are, in many cases, confusing as they relate to activities or outputs. Moreover, the project plays down the importance of synergies with other ministries, such as MEE on biodiversity monitoring, or MNR on land-use planning in the river catchments where key sector ministries such as MARA have a direct impact on water resources and biodiversity. There is also a gap in coordination with neighbouring provinces that share the upper reaches of some of the selected pilot rivers (especially in Chongqing municipality with Sichuan Province). As a result, the MTR found the project retain a strong sector approach to biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection, rather than one that stimulates cross-sector coordination and collaboration to support the river's ecosystem (or landscape).**
25. **Conclusion 2 on question 2 (Effectiveness): Delays amounting to as much as two years in implementation (including current COVID-19 restrictions) has had an effect on the delivery of planned outputs and outcomes, although positive outcomes are evident since 2019, which demonstrate the MWR/IETCEC is in a position to deliver most of its outcomes and objectives relating to the mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation in WRM. However, this will require a project extension period of two years to achieve. The most significant outcome so far is that over 28 500 members of civil society and over 300 MWR staff and local leaders have increased their capacity to apply biodiversity conservation and protect e-flow and that this is now**

being applied throughout both pilot provinces through the River/Lake Chief System. The mainstreaming of biological integrity into R/LHAs also provides clarity on how the GLS concept can be successfully applied to safeguard aquatic biodiversity and e-flow requirements, as well as guide decisions on where public investment can add most value. Furthermore, the MTR found these outcomes also help to motivate MWR advance reforms on the mainstreaming of biodiversity into water resources management policy and its legal framework, which can already be seen through important revisions to guidelines designed to pilot the new River/Lake Chief System and R/LHAs country-wide. Nevertheless, to support informed decision-making, the MWR, civil society and other government stakeholders will need effective biodiversity monitoring and data management. However, the MTR found slow progress in this area, which is not aided by the lack of inter-institutional coordination, or by an M&E system and communication strategy that focus too much attention on reporting operational progress rather than establishing a learning mechanism that feeds into planning and communications.

26. **Conclusion 3 on question 3 (Efficiency): The MTR found the projects capacity to convert its resources into results (outcomes) since 2019 is moderately satisfactory, with a physical advance averaging almost 40 per cent against expenditure of 21.7 per cent of GEF funds to the end of 2019 (USD 2.64 m.), whereas before 2019 it was unsatisfactory with a financial advance standing at just 6.5 per cent due largely to problems associated with the start-up of operations, (national policy changes, institutional reforms, absence of the CTA, lack of full-time staff, staff rotation within the PMO and FAO-CN, etc.). Meanwhile, expenditure of co-finance from MWR confirms over 65 per cent of planned funds have been disbursed (USD 16.9 m.) over the same period. The MTR concludes the project's efficiency has improved significantly due to a combination of cost-efficient and cost-effective measures. These measures include the Project Steering Committee (PSC) taking important decisions in 2019 to increase the project's internal technical capacity at relatively low cost and at the same time ensuring co-finance was targeted where it was needed most at both the national level and in the pilot provinces. Furthermore, the LoA signed between FAO-CN and TNC has facilitated access to international best practices on WRM and technical expertise at relatively low cost (USD 99 000 over one year). Furthermore, its support on the development of the tiered River Chief System in both pilot provinces has demonstrated a cost-effective way for MWR to engage civil society proactively in biodiversity conservation at all levels of the Department for Water Resources in the pilot provinces, in particular at the village and township levels, which previously had no River Chief system in place. Nonetheless, the MTR found the project still faces shortcomings that are likely to prevent it from optimising its efficiency. On the one hand, the national execution of the project is based on an OPA that include conditions that do not have the funding needed to fully implement them. In particular, the BH faces significant budgeting challenges to fund the administrative team he needs to supervise the project's implementation, conduct frequent field visits, etc. On the other, there is no mechanism in place to facilitate intra and inter-institutional dialogue and decision-making, supported by a secretariat or similar institution that has the**

authority to ensure decisions are implemented. In addition, the high level of dependency on participating universities to conduct biodiversity monitoring is likely to become costly (especially if the biodiversity sampling sites are increased to meet international standards), become increasingly susceptible to staff and student rotation and reduce civil society's sense of ownership in the project.

- 27. Conclusion 4 on question 4 (Sustainability): The MTR found that the institutionalisation of the PMO is an important indicator that key activities concerning the mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection are likely to be consolidated and sustained over the medium to long-term. Furthermore, political, social, financial and institutional risks are currently ranked low. However, current capacity levels within the MWR, especially at the provincial level, still need further consolidation through an extension of training and other support services provided by the project., However, an extension of the project should also be seen as an opportunity to address the factors affecting the project's performance, as these are currently preventing the project from optimising its efficiency and effectiveness. These factors are listed in the next conclusion.**
- 28. Conclusion 5 on question 5 (Factors affecting performance): The Prodoc has some shortcomings in its design, some of which have been addressed by the PSC, such as the agreement to replace the GLS concept by applying biodiversity conservation in an ecological module within R/LHAs. However, some shortcomings remain which the MTR team found still need to be addressed by the project to enhance the sustainability of some key activities/outputs. The first concerns the lack of clarity in the Prodoc on how the biodiversity monitoring should be implemented. In particular, it is not clear which stakeholders should be involved, how it should be applied (ensuring an adequate number of sampling sites) and how it should be financed. Currently the MTR found the current approach places heavy dependency on expertise from universities, which is considered unlikely to lead to the establishment of a robust and effective information system that supports decision-making. Second, specific aspects of project such as its M&E system, communications, and gender and ethnic minority strategies focus primarily on fulfilling reporting requirements as opposed to opportunities to develop learning. Most significant is the view of the majority of stakeholders interviewed that gender or ethnic issues are not major issues on the grounds women and men enjoy equal pay and have equal access to training, information and resources. However, inadequate attention is given to assessing the access to these services among the most vulnerable, who according to some interviews are a major cause of biodiversity loss (through illegal fishing and other forms of extraction, habitat encroachment, etc.). Third, the project design provides little or no guidance on the importance of integrating risk management as a cross-cutting issue that not only ensures WRM is able to reduce the effects of climate change, but actually defend it by using e-flow data to support adaptation to climate change in key sectors such as agriculture, housing and industry as well as support them and civil society develop early warning systems and other actions that save lives and the local economy.**

29. **Conclusion 6 on question 6 (Cross-cutting priorities):** Due to project design defects and general beliefs mentioned in the previous conclusion on gender and ethnic minorities, the MTR found the project does not include specific strategies on gender and working with ethnic minorities that cross-cut its planning and operations in the pilot sites. This is also justified by the belief that women make up the majority of inhabitants in the pilot sites due to the migration of men to the cities and the fact that ethnic groups are only present in the two sites in Yunnan Province where they are fully included as recipients of project support.

0.4 Recommendations

30. **Recommendation 1 - Strategic relevance and efficiency – for FAO-GEF Coordination Unit (GCU), LTO and FLO in FAO-Rome, FAO-CN, LTO/FAO-Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (FAO-RAP), MWR/IETCEC/PMO:** The MTR considers it is fully justified to recommend:
- a) An extension of the project for a period of two years from 31 May 2020;
 - b) That the extension is granted with the following conditions to strengthen its strategic relevance:
 - Adopt the theory of change proposed in Appendix 9 following analysis and final modifications by the PSC and use this to clarify the vision and mission of the project to support the identification of the project's exit strategy at the start of the extension period. Particular attention should be given in the exit strategy to clarifying how training on biodiversity monitoring and data management will be continued after the project and how data will be used (in the GIS information system identified with the support of TNC) will be used and sustained beyond the project to guide and support informed decision-making. In particular, this decision-making should focus on key issues, such as where to prioritise biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection in the pilot provinces;
 - The LTO, FLO, FAO-CN and the PMO review and revise the Results Matrix with the aim of removing repetitive outcomes, adjusting indicators so they are either specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound (SMART), or focus on qualitative issues measured through surveys, questionnaires, etc.) and applying realistic targets where they have over-estimated (in accordance with capacity and resources available). The MTR proposes all references in the RM to the Green Line Scorecard (GLS) should be replaced with "River/Lake Health Assessment" (R/LHA). On this it is also recommended the R/LHA Report is renamed to, for example, "R/LHA Scorecard" to attract public interest, guide public investment and facilitate a national ranking system designed to support, among others, ecological civilisation and participation in the Beautiful Rivers and Lakes initiative of President Xi Jinping. The MTR suggests Other more specific revisions to be considered and proposed to the PSC for official approval are:
 - (i) Outcome 1: the renewal of results under the gap analysis at all levels of MWR (outcome 1.1) should be conducted on a yearly basis. Main

findings should be incorporated into annual progress reporting (both PIR and the Ministry's own annual review) and used to guide the next annual plan. In addition, the mainstreaming of biodiversity into at least 3 important national level and 3 provincial level regulations (outcome 1.2.1) should be subject to an internal review to determine which regulations are required, so that the target is realigned to MWR needs and capacity, as opposed to an estimate in the Prodoc;

- (ii) Outcomes under component 2 (2.2.1 to 2.3.5) should be reviewed in accordance with the biodiversity and river habitat analysis already conducted, so that targets are adjusted to what is both possible and feasible in terms of capacity and resources available in the project's extension period. For example, the length of biodiversity conservation measures to be applied (in km), and the area of river habitats to be conserved at each pilot river, should be reviewed according to resources and capacity available and that these resources should their declaration as "protected natural areas" coupled with appropriate enforcement measures coordinated with the River Chief System;**
 - Develops a more results-oriented M&E system designed to promote learning on not only the results being achieved, but why they were achieved, or not. It is recommended the Theory of Change agreed by the PSC is used to guide reflection and planning on what is the "vision and mission" of the project to 2030 (i.e. its impact over the next decade). To assist this, it is suggested to enhance the project's visibility by including an assessment of the project's contribution to meeting national targets in the NBCSAP and as far as possible, contributions to meeting relevant Aichi Targets in China (such as Targets 8 and 11).**

31. Recommendation 2 - Effectiveness – for MWR/IETCEC/PMO supported with oversight/supervision from GCU, FAO-CN, LTO and FLO/FAO-RAP: The MTR recommends:

- a) Establishing a mechanism designed to facilitate greater intra and inter-institutional coordination and decision-making in areas of mutual interest at all levels, but particularly at the provincial level (preferably using the River Chief System as the main vehicle to engage such collaboration). Moreover, the mechanism should ensure it has the capacity to implement decisions from this collaboration and monitor progress (for example, by establishing a secretariat and focal points). For example, it is recommended to forge an alliance with MEE on applying biodiversity monitoring that complies with international standards (in order to support monitoring of project contributions to relevant Aichi Targets, SDGs, etc.) and with MNR on spatial/land-use planning to facilitate dialogue with key sectors, such as MARA, on applying good practices to reduce the risks of soil erosion, pollution of water resources and expansion of agriculture and other sectors in the wetlands and other aquatic habitats that sustain biodiversity of national and global importance;**
- b) Piloting the creation of a biodiversity network and committee at the provincial level that brings together different stakeholders both from within the River Chief**

System and outside who have a mandate, or who are dedicated to nature conservation (including international and grassroot NGOs). The main aim of the network should be to build on the lessons learned from the Biodiversity Protection Committee established in Yunnan Province in 2017 to promote awareness and step up dialogue on how to apply best practices and lesson learnt on WRM in a suitable unit of analysis. This implies refocusing project activities away from aquatic biodiversity conservation per se and more to a wider river ecosystem conservation strategy that uses the watershed as the unit of analysis of choice to support IEM;

- c) Establish a long-term training programme with a dedicated road map to develop aquatic biodiversity monitoring and data management to international standards and with the aim of supporting the government report on progress in meeting relevant goals of the next Five-year Plan and Agenda 2030. To achieve this the training programme will need a training road map that incorporates innovative strategies and practices to ensure it can be carried out, such as through a combination of internet technologies (web-based learning), new field techniques and a wider array of different partnerships that include synergies with institutions that have in-depth experience in areas of mutual interest.**
- d) Enhance on-the-ground river conservation through better communication and nature education in the pilot rivers through the River Chief System, especially at the county/district, village and/or township levels that includes the active engagement of key stakeholders such as MEE, MNR, MARA, etc.**
- e) Provide training and cases studies on how to integrate risk management and adaptation to climate change into the project's planning, implementation and monitoring (especially through the River Chief System). To support this, e-flow data should be used to pilot synergies with MARA on supporting its adaptation to climate variability and change and support moves to establish local coordination mechanisms that establish the watershed as the unit of analysis to initiate a pilot phase of coordinated planning and action in which to identify strengths and weaknesses (gaps), opportunities (synergies) and threats (risk mitigation measures).**

32. Recommendation 3 - Sustainability – for MWR/IETCEC/PMO, PSC, GCU, FAO-CN, LTO/FAO-RAP: The MTR recommends the project's communication strategy is reviewed by an expert in communications and takes on board the following:

- a) Involve the full participation of MWR officials from neighbouring provinces that are responsible for WRM in shared rivers, such as the Tang River in Jiangjin District (Chongqing);**
- b) Tailor communications to the needs of different stakeholders (including women, youths and ethnic minorities) in each province on how they can use biodiversity and e-flow data to support adaptation to climate variability and change, disaster risk reduction, ecotourism, PES, etc.**
- c) Ensure results (outcomes) are systematised annually (using the M&E system proposed at the end of recommendation 1) to inform sub-national, national and international audiences on progress in conserving aquatic habitats for endemic and endangered species of national and global importance and other**

achievements that stimulate learning dialogue and decisions designed to stimulate the multiplier effect (especially in relation to the NBSCAP). It is suggested this is measured in terms of how far civil society, government and the private sector are engaging in practices that support biodiversity conservation, and/or investment in it.

- d) Provide information on results, lessons learned and good practices on the project web page (in the MWR website) and ensure at least a summary is provided in English.**

33. Recommendation 4 – Efficiency and effectiveness – for FLO, GCU, PSS, FAO-CN, LTO/FAO-RAP, IDWG, Senior Management: The MTR recommends a communication mechanism is established (such as an online meeting group using Zoom) to improve dialogue and find solutions to outstanding problems associated with:

- a) The application of *ad hoc* arrangements governing the national execution of GEF5-funded projects such as project 057 in China. It is recommended a specific solution is found to ensure the BH can perform a satisfactory level of supervision/support to executing partners such as MWR/IETCEC (including assurance activities) in the interest of enhancing FAO's capacity to support project implementation in the proposed extension period;**
- b) The current application of FAO's FEE Guidelines in China. The MTR found the BH does not have enough funds to coordinate the GEF project portfolio in China. It is, therefore, suggested dialogue centres on establishing guarantees (as opposed to the application of percentages) to ensure the BH in FAO-CN does not experience major budget shortfalls in implementing the GEF portfolio of projects and that this is used as a model for other countries facing similar challenges;**
- c) The application of OPIM/MS-701 in China. The MTR suggests the Project Support Services (PSS) of FAO is fully integrated into the project identification and design process to ensure the necessary risk and capacity assessments are supervised and integrated correctly in the Prodoc and OPA. It is also strongly recommended that the mainstreaming of OPIM pays particular attention to ensuring it does not cause a major delay between the design and implementation phases, given project 057 (and other GEF5 projects) experienced significant delays between the identification/design phase and the start of the implementation phase.**

Following this dialogue, it is suggested the agreed solutions are communicated to the Executing Partner to determine how much co-finance may be required to support the fast-tracking of assurance activities needed to remove the payments backlog as soon as possible in the extension period proposed in recommendation 1.

34. Recommendation 5 – cross-cutting priorities – for MWR/IETCEC/PMO in coordination with the LTO: The MTR recommends the project applied sex-disaggregated data on the level of participation of rural women in project activities and, in particular, the number of women who are engaged in decision-making roles, such as village/township river chiefs. Particular attention should be given to targeting vulnerable rural women's groups (single mothers, women who are classified as below minimum poverty standards, subject to domestic violence, etc.).

0.5 GEF rating table

Table 1: GEF Rating Table

GEF criteria/sub-criteria	Rating ²	Summary comments ³
A. STRATEGIC RELEVANCE		
A1. Overall strategic relevance	HS	Continues to be a high priority for national and provincial governments
A1.1. Alignment with GEF and FAO strategic priorities	S	Conforms with BD-2 and SO2. Less direct alignment with CPF
A1.2. Relevance to national, regional and global priorities and beneficiary needs	HS	Highly relevant to the NBCSAP, WRM policies and high-level government initiatives, such as President Xi Jinping "Beautiful Rivers and Lakes Initiative"
A1.3. Complementarity with existing interventions	MU	FAO-CN has organised meetings and exchanges between GEF-funded projects on management and M&E, which allowed PMO staff to exchange phone numbers and WeChat addresses. The LTO has made suggestions in 2019 on inviting consultants from project 052 to assess wetland restoration in project 057, but this has not led to any synergy with project 052 where there are areas of mutual interest (such as concerning wetland management, restoration and development of income streams, etc.). Likewise, information exchange with project 056 is not evident in areas of mutual interest, such as on developing tree nurseries to support restoration work.
B. EFFECTIVENESS		
B1. Overall assessment of project results	MS	Progress was very slow, but since March 2019 has demonstrated a significant increase in project activities thanks to the signature of the service contract with TNC and later the contracting a=of a CTA in August 2019.
B1.1 Delivery of project outputs	MS	The project has achieved reforms in plans, regulations and guidelines and completed on-the-ground activities planned in the pilot sites.
B1.2 Progress towards outcomes ⁴ and project objectives	MS	Overall progress is showing signs the project can fulfil expected outcomes in a two-year extension, except in the case of biodiversity monitoring and data management, which will take longer than two years to develop before it can support decision-making
- Outcome 1	S	Progress is behind schedule, but MWR has already reformed and is piloting/applying new plans and guidelines and has clarified

² See rating scheme at the end of the document.

³ Include reference to the relevant sections in the report.

⁴ Assessment and ratings by individual outcomes may be undertaken if there is added value.

		the application of GLS in R/LHAs and the River Chief System applied in both pilot provinces are both being piloted at the national level before finalising them in policy reforms.
- Outcome 2	MS	The River Chief System has successfully demonstrated the benefits of working in partnership with civil society on advancing biodiversity conservation in the pilot provinces, but there is a general absence of intra-provincial cooperation and inter-institutional coordination and synergies to implement activities of mutual interest such as e-flow analysis and protection.
- Outcome 3	MS	Trainings have covered over 28,500 representatives from civil society and over 400 staff at MWR, but the biodiversity monitoring and data management is still in a rudimentary stage as it is dependent on a limited number of sampling sites and university staff and students to do the monitoring
- Overall rating of progress towards achieving objectives/ outcomes	MS	The project is on track to meet objectives, but there are indications the project placed too much emphasis on developing a highly vertical approach to biodiversity monitoring
B1.3 Likelihood of impact	Not rated at MTR	
C. EFFICIENCY		
C1. Efficiency ⁵	MS	The project has since 2019 demonstrated it can convert its resources in to outputs and positive outcomes, apply cost-efficiency and effectiveness.
D. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES		
D1. Overall likelihood of risks to sustainability	MU	The project faces major challenges in developing effective biodiversity monitoring, because there are a low number of sampling sites on each pilot river and the monitoring is highly dependent on external expertise from educational establishments. This situation may make some project activities (such as the application of R/LHA), difficult to apply and fund over the mid to long-term.
D1.1. Financial risks	ML	MWR has demonstrated it can provide co-finance as planned and remains fully committed to meeting objectives. However, the COVID-19 pandemic remains a threat to how much public co-finance in cash may be made available by end of 2020.

⁵ Includes cost efficiency and timeliness.

D1.2. Socio-political risks	ML	The project enjoys the support of the MWR at all levels and is improving through civil society.
D1.3. Institutional and governance risks	ML	Institutional reforms have been completed and mandates clarified, which indicate minor upheaval only is expected.
D1.4. Environmental risks	MS	The project continues to comply with the same level of risk classification provided in the Environmental and Social Checklist (EES) of 2016 (Low risk). However, on ESS 2.1: <i>"Make reasonable and feasible effort to avoid practices that could have a negative impact on biodiversity, including agricultural biodiversity and genetic resources"</i> the MTR found the project has not placed enough emphasis on working with MEE, MNR, MARA, Ministry of Housing, MWR in Sichuan Province, etc. on land use management in the watersheds of the pilot rivers to address the current and future pressures and drivers of development that put at risk aquatic biodiversity (such as soil erosion and/or contamination of run-off water due to agricultural chemical inputs, inadequate solid waste management, etc.).
D2. Catalysis and replication	ML	The River Chief System and R/LHAs are in the process of being piloted nationwide and projected to be rolled out incorporating lessons learned and best practices from the piloting phase.
E. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE		
E1. Project design and readiness ⁶	MS	The project's design is generally coherent, but contains some over ambitious targets and adopts a vertical approach to developing more effective WRM
E2. Quality of project execution	MS	Stakeholders report general satisfaction on the way the project is executed by the Ministry of Water Resources (International Economic and Technical Cooperation and Exchange Centre – IETCEC) - the operating partner. However, efforts by GCU at project start-up to support the MWR/IETCEC apply some of the <i>ad hoc</i> conditions set by FAO's Senior Management in the OPA proved difficult to fulfil, due to external factors, staff rotation, the part-time nature of the PMO and because the Prodoc had not been designed to fund the application of some of these conditions, such as assurance activities. Furthermore, national rules and regulations

⁶ This refers to factors affecting the project's ability to start as expected, such as the presence of sufficient capacity among executing partners at project launch.

		concerning the management of GEF funds and contracting of The Nature Conservancy (TNC), contributed to delays in the opening of the project bank account, recruitment of consultants and not starting some of the project's main activities until 2019 .
E2.1 Quality of project implementation by FAO (BH, LTO, PTF, FAO CNetc.)	MS	FAO provides a satisfactory level of technical support from FAO-RAP, while administrative support is provided from FAO-CN. but more needs to be done to train staff in advance of project start-up to support the national execution of the project. However, this situation restricts the ability of FAO to attend field visits and technical meetings, especially at short notice
E2.1 Project oversight (PSC, project working group, etc.)	S	PSC and PAC have provided timely levels of support and ensured the PMU has full-time staff and support from a CTA since August 2019
E3. Quality of project execution	MS	The MWR/IETCEC has provided a satisfactory level of support to project execution since 2019. This has been demonstrated by the recruitment of the CTA, establishing full-time staff in the PMO in Beijing and the smooth implementation of the TNC contract (following an amendment to the OPA allowing FAO to manage this contract rather than the MWR/IETCEC. Indeed, the MTR has observed a marked improvement in the delivery of project activities and outputs since 2019 and to a satisfactory standard. For example, the reforms to the R/LHAs has resulted in the inclusion of the ecological protocol and development of the tiered approach to the River Chief System in partnership with civil society. However, there are still demands for better coordination between the PMO in Beijing and the pilot provinces (including the disbursement of funds).
E3.1 Project execution and management (PMU and executing partner performance, administration, staffing, etc.)	MS	Project execution and management experienced major problems in executing the project, but this has improved.
E4. Financial management and co-financing	S	The MWR has provided over 60 % of the planned co-finance in the form of cash and in kind.
E5. Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement	MS	Partnerships with civil society have improved due to the application of the River Chief System. However, partnerships with other stakeholders are either ad hoc, or have not resulted in close coordination and synergies.

E6. Communication, knowledge management and knowledge products	MU	Despite some positives such as the Newsletters, the project's communications are mainly focused on reporting operational progress and outputs. There is no communication expert to support the systematisation of results and develop a strategy to promote learning and engage the private sector or civil society in the up-scaling of biodiversity conservation practices and investments in the proposed extension period and beyond.
E7. Overall quality of M&E	MU	The M&E is based on the RM, but lacks guidance from a ToC to clarify final outcomes and desired impact to support the "vision and mission" of the project. In most cases, outcomes are confused with outputs, or activities rather than their actual outcome (such as the official approval and application of guidelines as the immediate outcome and what results from their application as the wider outcome). Also, there are too many outcomes (over 50) to allow for efficient monitoring.
E7.1 M&E design	MU	The project design together with the mandatory GEF templates applied to all projects on M&E require the PMO to engage in micro management, which is time consuming, increases transactions and is mainly centred on producing reports, rather than the development of a tool for learning, reflection and problem solving.
E7.2 M&E plan implementation (including financial and human resources)	MS	The MTR found the delays of two years in implementation rendered the M&E plan on achieving outputs and outcomes to be out of date. However, the PMO has provided updates on financial and human resources in accordance with the reporting requirements in the PIRs and PPRs. However, a breakdown of co-finance expenditure (for each pilot province and by year) would be allow greater clarity on the current status of expenditure against the allocations agreed in the Prodoc.
E8. Overall assessment of factors affecting performance	MU	There are several factors that need to be addressed in the extension phase to support and facilitate implementation and achievement of planned results.
F. CROSS-CUTTING CONCERNS		
F1. Gender and other equity dimensions	MU	The project provides little or no sex-disaggregated data and its analysis of its support to women and other groups is largely absent.

F2. Human rights issues	MU	The project also provides little or no details on its approach to working with ethnic minorities, or on identifying their specific knowledge on aquatic biodiversity.
F2. Environmental and social safeguards	S	The project continues to meet the standards applied in the ESS produced in 2016 prior to implementation
Overall project rating		MS

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

1. Introduction

1.1. *Purpose and scope of the MTR*

1. The mid-term review (MTR) of project GCP/CPR/057/GFF, “A new green line: mainstreaming biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China’s water resources management policy and planning”, hereafter referred to as project 057, was launched at the end of March 2020 in line with requirements in the project document (Prodoc). The **main purpose of the MTR** is to assess the project’s progress in meeting its expected outputs and results (outcomes) at the mid-way point of implementation, identify reasons for positive or negative variance, and provide recommendations and lessons learned to support the project reach its objectives and optimise its wider impact. For these reasons the terms of reference (ToR) of the MTR stipulate the three main purposes of the MTR are:

- provide accountability – to respond to the information needs and interests of water resource management authorities of different levels and other actors with decision-making power, for example, FAO management and the GEF Coordination Unit (GCU);
 - provide recommendations to improve the project management by providing valuable information evaluation findings, lessons learned and good practices to managers and others responsible for regular project operations, such as the project management office (PMO), the project steering committee (PSC), the Project Task Force (PTF), FAO-China (FAO-CN) and GCU; and
 - contribute to learning – in-depth understanding and contextualization of the project and its practices, of particular benefit to the government authorities for water resources management and biodiversity conservation, NGOs, FAO-GEF CU, FAO staff and future developers and implementers.
2. The **scope of the MTR** covers the implementation of the project’s three main components between the start of operations on 29 September 2016 to 31 March 2020. The geographical scope of the evaluation covers all main activities and stakeholders who have participated in project activities at the national level, in the two provinces selected for on-the-ground actions (Yunnan and Chongqing) and at the local level (four pilot sites). Specific attention has been given to include in the evaluation the participation of specific target groups, such as female-headed households and ethnic minorities to determine how far the project is meeting their specific needs and priorities.

1.2 *Objective of the MTR*

3. The **objective of the MTR** is to provide valuable recommendations based on as much triangulated evidence as possible, taking into account the current restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic globally and in particular in China. To reach this objective the MTR addresses a set of key questions relating to following the evaluation criteria set by GEF for MTRs: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, factors affecting project performance and sustainability of results. The main questions are summarised in Box 1.

Box 1: Main questions for the MTR

1. Relevance	Are the project outcomes congruent with current country priorities, GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework and the needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries?
2. Effectiveness	To what extent has the project delivered on its outputs, outcomes and objectives?
3. Efficiency	To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently and cost effectively?
4. Sustainability	What is the likelihood that the project results can be sustained after the end of the project?
5. Factors affecting progress (questions relate mainly to one of the above criteria)	<p>Is the project design suited to delivering the expected outcomes?</p> <p>Is the project’s causal logic coherent and clear, practical and feasible within the timeframe allowed?</p> <p>How do the various stakeholder groups see their own engagement with the project and what are the strengths and challenges of the project’s partnerships?</p> <p>Were local actors – civil society or private sector – involved in project design or implementation and what was the effect on project results?</p> <p>Is the project on track as it was originally designed or have there been delays in the project approval, implementation and reporting process? What are the major reasons of the delay?</p> <p>To what extent did the executing agency effectively discharge its role and responsibilities in managing and administering the project?</p> <p>How well is the PMO functioning?</p> <p>Are there sufficient human resources, financial resources, etc. for the PMO operation and does it have the capacity to support project implementation.</p> <p>What have been the main challenges in terms of project management and administration?</p> <p>How well have risks been identified and managed?</p> <p>What have been the financial-management challenges of the project? To what extent has pledged co-financing been delivered? Has any additional leveraged co-financing been provided since implementation?</p> <p>To what extent has FAO delivered oversight and supervision and backstopping (technical, administrative and operational) during project identification, formulation, approval, start-up and execution? What kind of support or changes is expected from FAO by the execution partners?</p> <p>How effective has the project’s internal M&E system been in supporting project planning and the development of a communication strategy to inform and promoting its key messages and results to partners, stakeholders and a general audience?</p>
6. Cross-cutting priorities	To what extent were gender considerations (including a gender analysis) taken into account in designing and implementing the project? How has stakeholder engagement and gender assessment (gender-disaggregated targets and

	indicators) been integrated into the M&E system? Has the project been implemented in a manner that ensures gender-equitable participation and benefits?
	To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project?
Lessons learned	What lessons and good practices are likely to be replicated or scaled up in the near future?

4. To support the MTR, address these questions and report on GEF’s MTR scoring⁷, an **evaluation matrix** was elaborated and approved by the FAO-CN and GCU (see Appendix 4). The evaluation matrix provides a set of sub-questions to help answer the main questions on relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability and provides a summary of the indicators and judgement criteria to be considered in answering these sub questions. In addition, the matrix also identifies the main sources of information to be consulted and methods to be applied to obtain as much evidence as possible to ensure main findings have been subject to triangulation.

1.3 Intended users

5. The evaluation team reviewed the **stakeholder analysis** provided in its TOR and provided an updated version in the inception report to support the selection of interviewees to be interviewed through videoconferencing to help produce this draft report of the MTR. The stakeholder analysis confirms that the main users of this MTR report are:
 - The Chinese counterpart institutions participating in the project, in particular the Ministry of Water Resources (MWR), the Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE), and the Ministry of Finance (MoF);
 - The Project management unit operated under GEF’s Operational Partners Implementation Modality (OPIM);
 - The Nature Conservancy (TNC), which is supporting project implementation under an Association Agreement; and
 - FAO-CN and GCU.

1.4 Methodology

6. The MTR has been conducted by two consultant (one international and one national), in line with United National Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards (2016) and the most recent FAO-GEF guidelines and procedures for conducting a MTR and reporting (2019). In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was agreed with GCU and FAO-CN that the **overall methodological approach** of the MTR would be to conduct a **desk evaluation** involving an assessment of project documents (see Appendix 5) supported by remote semi-structured interviews of as wide a sample of stakeholders as possible using online video telephony such as Zoom, VooV, or Skype. In this way it was possible to

⁷ Each evaluation criterion is scored in terms of: highly satisfactory, satisfactory, moderately satisfactory, moderately unsatisfactory, unsatisfactory.

triangulate a large number of findings in the present draft report as well as identify gaps or areas requiring more in-depth analysis that could be the subject of a field analysis in the event travel restrictions are lifted by the Chinese authorities, FAO and GEF.

7. The stakeholder analysis conducted in the inception phase focused on identifying **priority stakeholders at the national, provincial and local levels**. The MTR successfully identified and fixed online interviews with a wide array of stakeholders ranging from FAO-RAP (Natural Resources Officer responsible for project 057 in China), FAO-CN (the Budget Holder, the LTO and the GEF Funding Liaison Officer (FLO) responsible for overseeing implementation of project 057, representatives working in the PMO, personnel from the MWR at the national, provincial and local levels in Yunnan Province and Chongqing Municipality, TNC representatives, national advisers and consultants supporting project implementation and a selection of end beneficiaries and MWR county/district bureau staff based in the pilot sites. The latter were identified and interviewed by the national consultant using WeeChat and responses relayed to the MTR team leader after translation into English. The full list of stakeholders interviewed, the reason for their selection and dates and times of the interviews can be found in Appendix 3.
8. Work methods and tools centred on, first, constructing a theory of change in the IR to analyse the structure and causal logic of the project’s actions, expected results (in terms of outputs, immediate and wider ranging outcomes) and their potential impact in China. During the Desk Phase this was shared with FAO-CN and the PMO to gather their views and produce a revised version (see Appendix 10). The ToC was also used to identify the scope of the MTR’s questions and sub questions established in the above-mentioned EM that was also included in the IR. In order to establish effective **data-collection** the EM’s judgement criteria were used to guide the identification of the most pertinent questions for each group of stakeholders to be interviewed. This ensured questions could be tailored to the specific expertise, work experience and interests of the stakeholders according to their roles in the project at the national, provincial and local levels. To enhance the quality of the semi-structured interviews, the MTR team forwarded the MTR questions in advance to the focal persons for each group of stakeholders. The MTR interviews centred on an average of 15 questions covering all the evaluation criteria listed in Box 1 above.
9. Taking into account the level of engagement of local government and CSO stakeholders in the four pilot sites has been limited to mobile phone interviews and their participation in the provincial interviews where internet connections were not always reliable, the MTR team have flagged areas where the evaluation would like to conduct further interviews in the event the field phase is possible. In particular interviews in the pilot sites and with senior members of the PSC are considered important. However, other potential stakeholders have been identified for interview as (indirect beneficiaries) on the grounds their expertise is considered to be of high interest to the project, such as the Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE), which has in-depth experience in biodiversity monitoring and the Ministry of Finance, which is the main government partner of GEF in China (more on this is provided in section 4 below). In these cases, the interviews could take place with the aid of a professional interpreter to support the MTR team leader triangulate findings and identify lessons learnt and good practices at the ground level more easily. Also, important would be a wrap-up meeting in Beijing with key national stakeholders and FAO-

CN/GEF representatives in order to discuss updated findings and conclusions in order to fine tune the recommendations in the final report.

10. Finally, to ensure the MTR is conducted in a transparent and independent manner, **the composition of the MTR team** includes an international expert, Warren Olding, who has over 20 years work experience conducting project evaluations relating to natural resources management, biodiversity conservation and sustainable rural development (includes FAO/GEF-funded projects) and a national expert, Dr Yu Xiubo, a professor at the Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, Chinese Academy of Sciences, who has in-depth work experience in ecosystem management and monitoring.

1.5 Limitations

11. In the light of the continued restrictions posed by the current COVID-19 worldwide pandemic, it has been agreed with FAO-CN/GCU that the MTR team would have to limit their analysis and interviews to homebased solutions and remote interviews (via Zoom and TenCent applications) in order to prepare the draft report. In addition, given the pandemic is evolving and unforeseen developments are likely, it was agreed the MTR should be carried out in a flexible manner and all deadlines for the submission of deliverables will remain indicative to ensure the health and safety of the MTR team, their families and interviewees, together with the new obligations they must follow, come first.
12. In the light of the inability to conduct the field mission in 2020, it was agreed to spend the field mission days on more in-depth analysis and produce the present third and final draft report incorporating comments and observations in a joint-debriefing exercise on 24 September involving key stakeholders from all three MTRs conducted by the international lead consultant; namely projects GCP/CPR/056/GFF (on sustainable forestry management) and GCP/CPR/052/GFF (on wetland protected area management in Jiangxi Province). The lead consultant proposed this joint exercise, because all three projects have experienced similar operational challenges and found there are areas of mutual interest, especially between projects GCP/CPR/052/GFF and GCP/CPR/057/GFF, where both projects are engaged in, among others, wetland restoration, aquatic biodiversity monitoring and hydrological studies. The production of this third draft report, thus ends the MTR process. However, the MTR team suggests a field mission is conducted in 2021 to assess progress in the implementation of the recommendations and to provide support and guidance on the exit strategy, the systematisation of results (i.e. clarifying immediate and wider outcomes) and providing recommendation on how the up-scaling of good practices could be promoted to facilitate replication and the catalyst effect after project closure, in line with the ToC included in Appendix 9.

2 Project background and context

2.1 Threats and barriers being addressed by the project

13. China has rich surface water resources that include over 20,000 rivers with draining catchments of 100 km² or more. Of these, 228 have drainage basins exceeding 1000 km². The Yangtze River and rivers to the south of it carry 82% of the total runoff of Chinese rivers (Min of Water Resources and Power, 2012). However, in terms of fresh water resources available per capita, China has 20 per cent of the world’s population but only around 7 per cent of the world’s freshwater resources. This, combined with the dramatic increase in water intensive industries, river infrastructures that block, or environmental flow (in particular relating to hydro-electric dams and flood defences), the expansion of intensified agriculture and excessive water pollution due to unregulated discharge of waste water, has caused medium to high water stress. Statistics from the World Resources Institute indicate between 20- 40 per cent of freshwater available in China is being withdrawn for industrial, agricultural and domestic use per annum, which is categorised as “medium to high” water stress level.
14. The project GCP/CPR/057/GFF, “A new green line: mainstreaming biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China’s water resources management policy and planning”, hereafter referred to as project 057, was designed to respond to this growing problem of water stress in China. Indeed, fresh water scarcity and pollution threaten the long-term sustainability of key sectors such agricultural production and productivity and, therefore, food security and nutrition. Furthermore, it responds to the State Council’s, *Decisions on Strict Water Resources Management* (2012), which established “**Three Red Lines**” on water resource management as follows:
 - Red line 1:** Limit total water use by strict demand management;
 - Red line 2:** Achieve higher water use efficiency in industry and agriculture; and
 - Red line 3:** Improve water quality by capping pollution loading within water functional zones.
15. Project 057 responds to the current gap in these three red lines; namely the need for a fourth “**Green Line**”, that secures the conservation of river biodiversity and environmental flow (e-flow), both of which are vital to sustaining China’s freshwater ecosystems and the human livelihoods that depend on them. Furthermore, in accordance with GEF priorities, the project has identified specific river systems where biodiversity is of global importance. China is one of the world’s top 10 countries in terms of numbers of freshwater fish species, with approximately 1,000 species recorded. South-eastern China encompasses some of the world’s most important biodiversity hotspots and globally significant ecoregions and habitats. A study on China’s freshwater fishes (Kang et al. 2012) identified a total of 613 species as endemic within China of which, 216 are only found in Yunnan Province (equivalent to 58 per cent of all fish species in Yunnan Province). Meanwhile, the Upper Yangtze Region in Chongqing Municipality home to 303 endemic species.
16. The project responds to these gaps by adopting three components designed to mainstream biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China’s water resources management (WRM) policy and planning. Components 1 and 2 focus on integrating biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection into policies, laws, regulations and guidelines on WRM and carrying out on-the-ground activities to demonstrate the environmental, social and economic benefits of conserving globally important biodiversity and protecting e-flow at four pilot sites (PS): Yunnan Province: PS1 - Buma & Enle River (Zhenyuan County) and PS2 - Chuan River i(Jingdong County); Chongqing Municipality: PS3 - Wubu River (Banan District) and PS4 - Tang River (Jiangjin District). Component 3, supports

the development of improved information systems and monitoring to consolidate, up-scale/expand improved WRM to increase the conservation of China's river biodiversity.

2.2 Project description (presented in Box 2)

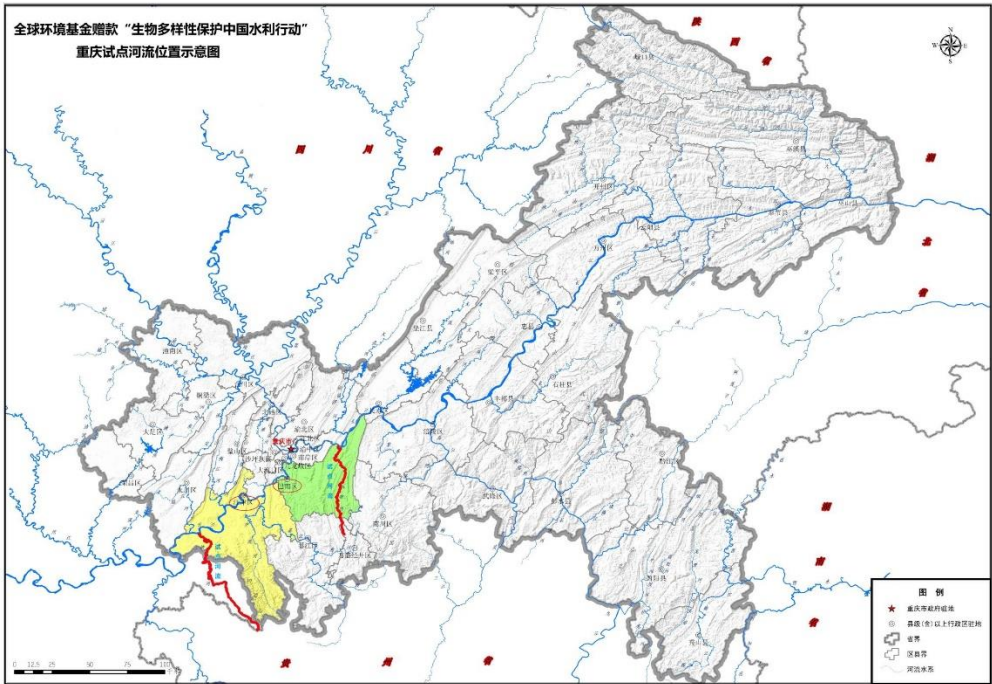
Box 2. Project summary

GEF Project ID: 5665;
FAO Project ID: 622963/GCP/CPR/057/GFF;
GEF 5 focal area(s): BD-2 (mainstream biodiversity conservation and sustainable use)
FAO Strategic Objective: 2 (enhancing equitable, productive and sustainable natural resource management and utilization);
CPF 2016-2020: 1 and 4 (facilitating China's regional and international agriculture cooperation)
GEF allocation / disbursed to Dec. 2019: USD 2 639 726 / USD 773 543 (29.3%);
Total co-funding allocation: USD 25 975 000 (MWR: USD 19 300 000; MWR Yunnan Province: USD 3 100 000; MWR Chongqing Municipality: USD 3 000 000; TNC: USD 500 000; and FAO: 75 000);
Total budget: USD 28 614 726 (for more information see Section 4.3)
Date of implementation: 29 September 2016 to 31 May 2020.
Name of executing agency/operational partner: Ministry of Water Resources (International Economic and Technical Cooperation and Exchange Centre – IETCEC)
Execution modality: national execution by the MWR/IETCEC (through project management offices in MWR in Beijing and offices in Yunnan Province and Chongqing Municipality) and supervised/supported by FAO-CN in accordance with implementation conditions set in the Operational Partner's Agreement (include *ad hoc* conditions set by FAO's Senior Management).
Country and geographic locations: China - national project with two pilot provinces: Yunnan Province and Chongqing Municipality;
Target/pilot sites: two pilot river sites in Yunnan Province (Inle/Buma River in Zhenyuan County and Chuan River in Jingdong County) and two pilot river sites in Chongqing Municipality (Tang River in Jiangjin District and Wuhu River in Banan District). Their geographical location is provided in Figures 1 and 2;
Project objective: mainstream biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China's water resources management policy and planning
Project expected results (components): 1) incorporation of biodiversity conservation into the policy, legal and regulatory frameworks governing WRM in China; 2) demonstration of effective on-the-ground WRM measures in the four project sites that increase biodiversity protection weighed against development objectives; 3) demonstration of effective generation and processing of advanced information system relevant to river biodiversity conservation in the four pilot sites, serving as the basis for the pilot activities under component 2.
Main beneficiaries: MWR at national and provincial levels (Yunnan and Chongqing) and, at the local level, the MWR Bureaus and local inhabitants located in Zhenyuan and Jingdong counties (Yunnan Province) and Jiangjin and Banan Districts (Chongqing Municipality);
Key technical partners: TNC and Yunnan University and South West University (supporting training and biodiversity sampling and monitoring)
Any significant changes since project implementation began: the TNC contract had to be signed and managed by FAO-CN via a Letter of Agreement, which contributed to delays in the project's implementation to 2019. The COVID-19 pandemic since early 2020 to date has also restricted project implementation, especially group activities and trainings.
Any changes made to the project's design, timeline or budget: none.
Project status: implementation is behind schedule. An extension is needed following the MTR.

Figure 1: Map of pilot sites in Yunnan Province



Figure 2: Map of pilot sites in Chongqing Municipality



Source: PMO

3 Theory of change

17. As stated above the MTR team constructed its interpretation of the ToC, which was submitted in the IR, based on an analysis of the Prodoc. The first step concentrated on determining the project's intended impact (main goal, or global objective) in the years immediately after its closure. This was identified as, *"catalyzing a profound change in China's approach to river biodiversity conservation"* (p.71). The term "profound change" was interpreted by the MTR team to amount to three main developments:
 - (i) An increase in the conservation and sustainable use of globally and nationally important biodiversity throughout China's waterways (measured in kilometres/annum to 2030);
 - (ii) Growth in public investment in the landscape approach to conserve river biodiversity and protect e-flow in other provinces in China (measured in Yuan/annum to 2030); and
 - (iii) Growth in the number of Green-Line Scorecard Certificates awarded in China (measured in number/annum and kilometres/annum to support monitoring of (i)).
18. The second step, linked the expected wider outcomes (end results) to these impacts and a similar exercise linked expected outcomes (initial results) to project outputs to ensure they were coherent with meeting the expected wider outcomes. The MTR team found the project's outputs, outcomes and impacts were generally clear and coherent and this supported the construction of the ToC in the form of a flow diagram. Cross-cutting priorities identified in the Prodoc, together with a summary of key assumptions were also included in the ToC. These included additions believed important by the MTR team, but which were not evident in the Prodoc, such as the need for good water governance and the inclusion of risk management (in particular relating to the effects of climate change) as an integral part of biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection. The MTR team also refocused key assumptions on smooth project implementation to external factors not included in the Prodoc and which the MTR team considered important to reach the expected outcomes and intended impact. This included no major natural disasters (caused by abnormal climatic events linked to climate variability and change) take place at the pilot sites, which could lead to major disruptions to the on-the-ground actions foreseen to conserve biodiversity and protect e-flow.
19. The MTR team shared the ToC with FAO-CN and the project's main stakeholders in the PMO and invited them to analyse the ToC and provide feedback. The results of the feedback were generally positive with some minor additions suggested. These included re-terming the GLS concept to a River/Lake Health Assessment Scorecard (R/LHAS) given the MWR found the GLS concept was fully applicable through the reform of the country's existing RHA methodology in which modules for biodiversity conservation and its sustainable use together with e-flow protection could be added. Furthermore, it was stated by MWR interviewees that the term "Green Line" was already in use by the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) and that the GLS could, therefore, generate confusion. The updated ToC can be found in Appendix 9. It has been used to guide the MTR team's assessment of the evaluation criteria applied, in particular relating to its relevance, effectiveness and sustainability.

4 Key findings and MTR questions

20. The MTR report should be internally consistent. The evidence presented needs to be complete and convincing. The main MTR questions should address issues related to the following six key MTR criteria and their sub-categories.

4.1 Relevance

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

Finding 1. The project’s three main components continue to be highly relevant to the MWR’s on-going commitment to increase awareness and capacity in the conservation of aquatic biodiversity and protection of e-flow at all levels of government. This has been substantiated by the latest Five-Year Plan 2016-2020 calling for the scaling up of efforts to address climate change and biodiversity loss and President Xi Jinping’s promotion of the beautiful rivers and lakes initiative and call to step up ecological civilisation in 2019.

Finding 2: The project’s design is strong in terms of complying with GEF5 and FAO objectives and successfully communicates how the conservation of aquatic biodiversity is inextricably linked to the protection of e-flow. However, it largely by-passes the importance of developing inter-institutional collaboration and synergies in areas of mutual interest to ensure these linkages are fully optimised and ensure new approaches to WRM are both effective and efficiently applied and monitored.

4.1.1 Strategic relevance of the project’s three main expected outcomes (components 1-3)

21. The MTR found the project’s first expected outcome remains highly relevant in that it **fills an important gap in the government’s quest to attain effective and sustainable WRM**. Analysis of the current policy, legal and regulatory framework under the overarching “Water Law of the People’s Republic of China” (2002), reveals there has been an important shift of focus away from the damming and exploitation of water resources to stimulate economic development, to the need to manage and conserve water resources in order to address the growing problems of water stress in the country and promote more sustainable development. This is supported by, among others:

- The “*Measures for Management of Water Functional Zones*” (2003), which divides China’s rivers and lakes into around 4,500 functional areas in which standards and targets relating to natural features, social services and ecological functions have to be met;
- The “*Water Pollution Prevention and Control Law of the People’s Republic of China*” (2008), which introduced new provisions on water quality and pollutant discharge standards and on how to supervise and manage water pollution prevention and control; and
- The “*Decision on Advancing the Water Conservancy Reform*” (2011), which commits the national and provincial governments to increase its commitments and investments in

water resources management and protection through the application of “Three Red Lines” (described in section 2.1).

- The revision of the, “*Environmental Protection Law of the People’s Republic of China*” (1989), which came into effect on 1 January 2015 and requires polluting enterprises to obey stricter obligations on pollution prevention and control, supported by the application of more severe penalties on polluters.
- The *Beautiful Rivers and Lakes Initiative* launched in 2015 by President Xi Jinping, which includes full implementation of the River Chief System to establish river and lake management and protection throughout China;
- The *13th Five-Year Plan* (2016-2020) of the National Government, which is committed to catalysing a transition to advanced environmental protection and initiating its scaling up to address major challenges including climate change and biodiversity loss.
- President Xi’s call to step up ecological civilisation in 2019 following its inclusion in the Chinese constitution in 2018.

22. The MTR found the introduction of the Three Red Lines has brought about some positive developments in China. For example, it has enabled the country’s adopt international good practices such as “the polluter pays principle”. This not only supports water resources management, but also ensures the rights of taxpayers are less exposed to meeting the costs associated with river pollution by enterprises who flout the Law. Nevertheless, interviews with MWR at the national, provincial and local level confirm there remains inadequate capacity to apply the Three Red Lines effectively (in particular Red Lines 1 and 2) without determining the biodiversity levels and e-flow requirements of the country’s main rivers and tributaries first. As a result, the project’s first outcome is highly relevant not only to establishing and maintaining the functional zones assigned to them and in applying the Three Red Lines, but in **successfully communicating the fact it is not possible to conserve the country’s aquatic biodiversity without protecting e-flow at the same time.**
23. More specifically the selection of the pilot sites was found to be highly relevant to current policies, strategies and action plans of stakeholders interviewed in the project management offices of MWR/IETCEC located in Yunnan Province and Chongqing Municipality. For example, stakeholders in Yunnan Province confirmed the province aims to be the centre of biodiversity conservation in China by 2030 and in 2019 adopted an Action Plan to implement the Beautiful Rivers and Lakes Initiative. Likewise, interviews with stakeholders in Chongqing Municipality confirmed the pilot sites are considered of strategic importance to central government, because they form part of the upper Yangtze River Basin, which is a priority for protection to safeguard hydroelectricity generation at the 3 Gorges Dam (approximately 450 km downstream). Chongqing Municipality is also recognised as a biodiversity hotspot for endemic species of fish and other aquatic organisms in the NBSCAP and interviewees in the PMO confirmed their goal is to establish the Municipality as the most “beautiful homeland” under the Beautiful Rivers and Lakes Initiative.
24. However, despite mentioning the project’s alignment with the NBSCAP both in the interviews and in the Prodoc (p.68), the second and third components of the project focus on outcomes relating to MWR/IETCEC’s capacity to manage biodiversity conservation and protect e-flow through the implementation of on-the-ground activities and the development of information systems to monitor biodiversity and e-flow data at four pilot sites. In both cases the aim is to relay data and learning back to MWR/IETCEC in Beijing to support informed decision-making on the mainstreaming process under outcome 1. This focus belies the fact that conservation and monitoring of the country’s biodiversity is primarily the responsibility of the Ministry of Ecology

and Environment (MEE) and, therefore, also directly supports implementation of the NBCSAP.⁸ Under these circumstances the MTR believes the **strategic value of GEF funding through the project has not been fully optimised in the project design through, for example, the establishment of a partnership with MEE in areas of mutual interest.** In particular, the MTR considers MEE has an important role to play in areas such as monitoring of aquatic biodiversity, information management and education to support learning and information exchange relating to biodiversity conservation and ecosystems management. This view was discussed with all stakeholders interviewed who in the vast majority of cases agreed that this was a valid observation, founded primarily on the Ministry’s lack of knowledge and information on water ecology and its role in ecosystems management.

25. Furthermore, the government created the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) following major government reforms in 2018. MNR has responsibilities that potentially could overlap and/or conflict with the project’s activities. These include, among others, water resources surveys and registration, wetland surveys and registration and spatial land-use planning and governance. In the light of this situation, there is also potential for the project to add value by facilitating closer coordination and even synergies with MNR in the interests of meeting its expected outcomes. However, the MTR did not identify evidence to indicate a partnership has been established so far. This appears to be due, on the one hand, to the delays in the project’s implementation (due to the government’s institutional reforms) and, on the other, due to inadequate levels of intra-institutional coordination.

4.1.2. Alignment with GEF strategic priorities

26. The MTR found the project is fully aligned with GEF 5’s Biodiversity (BD) Focal Area Strategies, in particular Objective 2 (BD-2): “*Mainstream Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use into Production Landscapes, Seascapes and Sectors*”.⁹ This is substantiated in the Prodoc (p.68), where:

Outcome 1 (component 1) of the project is compliant with achieving Outcome 2.2 of BD-2 - *measures to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity incorporated into policy and regulatory frameworks*; and

Outcome 2 (component 2) of the project supports the achievement of BD-2 Outcome 2.1 - *Increase in sustainably managed landscapes and seascapes that integrate biodiversity conservation*.

27. Furthermore, the Prodoc mentions the overriding output of component 1 is the mainstreaming of a landscape approach to river biodiversity conservation into policies, development plans, laws and regulations as well as WRM at the national, provincial and local levels. This complies with both Output 1 of Outcome 2.1 (*Policies and regulatory frameworks for production sectors*) and Output 2 (*integration of biodiversity conservation in the national provincial and local water resources management plans*). Likewise, outputs under components 2 and 3 of the project conform with the objectives of project support of GEF 5; namely the removal of critical knowledge barriers and developing institutional capacity on biodiversity conservation at the sub-national and local levels.

⁸ This includes within its 10 Priority Areas: Priority 1. To improve the policy and legal system of biodiversity conservation and sustainable use; 2. To incorporate biodiversity conservation into sectoral and regional planning and promote sustainable use; 3. To carry out identification, evaluation and monitoring of biodiversity. FAO, 2011.

⁹ GEF 5 Focal Area Strategies, p. 5.

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28. However, the MTR observes that the wider integration of WRM into *"spatial land-use planning that incorporates biodiversity and ecosystem service valuation"* foreseen under BD-2 is not fully addressed in the Prodoc. As indicated in the preceding sub section, this is mainly due to the project's focus on developing capacity within MWR/IETCEC, as opposed to an interinstitutional approach to conserving biodiversity within a unit of analysis such as the water catchment area of the pilot rivers.

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

29. The MTR found the project responds directly to Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG-6 - access for all to clean water and sanitation) and supports most specifically the meeting of Target 6.6: *By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes*. In addition, the project contributes to meeting Targets 6.3 (improvements in water quality), 6.4 (increased water-use efficiency), 6.5 (establishing integrated water resources management) and 6B (engaging the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management). The project also contributes to meeting SDG 15, in particular Targets 15.1 (conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services), 15.5 (reduce the degradation of natural habitats and halt biodiversity loss). In addition, the project supports the achievement of relevant Aichi Targets in the NBCSAP, in particular Aichi Targets 8 and 11.¹⁰
30. In terms of the project's alignment with FAO's five Strategic Objectives (SO) supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Prodoc confirms alignment with SO2: *Increase and improve provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner* and achievement of all four outcomes identified to meet this objective; namely strengthening governance at all levels (of the water sector) to support the transition towards sustainable agriculture and fisheries, mainstreaming of good practices (associated with WRM) and application of internationally recognised standards (on water quality and biodiversity) and creation of monitoring systems to support informed decision-making (on WRM).
31. However, direct alignment with the four main priority areas set out in the CPF 2016-2020 is less evident given they are focused on promoting sustainable agriculture (Priority Area 1), reducing food insecurity and malnutrition (Priority Area 2), promoting a one-health approach for sustainable agriculture trade (Priority Area 3) and facilitating international agricultural cooperation in China (Priority Area 4). However, Output 1.2. under Priority Area 1 does mention biodiversity conservation to revitalise water and wetland agro-ecosystems and indirectly protection of e-flow and biodiversity conservation are directly linked to safeguarding food security and nutrition in the pilot sites where agricultural communities are present. This view was endorsed by FAO interviewees, even though there is an absence of direct participation of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA) in the project. This is despite being a major water user (and polluter) of water resources and is home to the Bureau of Fisheries, which has as one of its main functions, *"To study on and draw up policies, measures and programs for the protection and rational exploitation and utilization of fishery resources and ecology and environment of fishery waters, and organize their implementation; to administer the aquatic wild animals and plants"*.¹¹

¹⁰ Target 8: By 2020, pollution, including from excess nutrients, has been brought to levels that are not detrimental to ecosystem function and biodiversity; Target 11: to improve the performance of protected areas and conserve freshwater biodiversity

¹¹ MARA website, 2009.

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

32. No complementarity with other on-going interventions was identified. This includes with other GEF-funded projects: GCP/CPR/056/GFF Sustainable forest management to enhance the resilience of forests to climate change and GCP/CPR/052/GFF Piloting Provincial-level Wetland PA System in Jiangxi Province. Also, no complementarity was identified with two other initiatives associated with watershed management and e-flow management that are being implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). These are summarised as follows:

- UNDP and MEE jointly implemented the GEF-funded project: *Payment for Watershed Services in the Chishui River Basin for the Conservation of Global Significant Biodiversity* (2014-2019). The goal of the project was to launch a replicable payment for watershed services (PWS) scheme in the Chishui River Basin (Guizhou), to stimulate land and natural resource use systems that conserve biodiversity and sustain ecosystem processes;
- WWF support to e-flows and Sustainable Hydropower Development. Since 2009 WWF has worked with the Yangtze Water Resources Commission and the Yellow River Conservancy Commission (YRCC) to conduct e-flow research. This includes research on the: *"Impacts on Water Birds and their Habitats along the Central and Lower Yangtze at the Three Gorges Dam"*, which provided advice on ways to mitigate the negative impact the dam on water birds and *Managing the Three Gorges Dam to Implement Environmental Flows in the Yangtze River*. This included, the identification of protocols on sustainable hydropower and e-flow in an effort to reduce the environmental impact and ecological risk of hydropower development, ensure the health and stability of river system, including its ecological function and promote the protection and sustainable use of aquatic biological resources in the Yangtze River Basin.

4.2 Effectiveness

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

Finding 3: Since 2019 MWR/IETCEC has, and continues, to demonstrate a strong commitment to implement its planned outputs and meet expected outcomes, following extensive delays in implementation between 2016-2019 that were largely outside its control. The MTR has identified two significant outcomes that have been achieved so far: a) the adoption of a new tiered approach to the River and Lake Chief System in partnership with civil society, which is already being applied at small and medium-sized rivers in the pilot provinces. MWR is also in the process of rolling out this approach throughout the country; b) the integration of the “Green-Line Scorecard” concept in a revised version of River and Lake Health Assessments, based on five protocols that include biological integrity. Meanwhile, achieving positive outcomes in biodiversity monitoring and information systems management are well behind schedule and it is unrealistic to fully achieve these, even in an extension period of two years.

Finding 4: The current M&E system, communication strategy and reporting is heavily focused on operational progress and outputs. As a result, the MTR identified areas where learning is not feeding back into planning in key areas. These include: a) applying more training and technical supervision in the pilot provinces according to their specific gaps and priorities; b) establishing synergies with government institutions that are direct stakeholders in biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection and who have a mutual interest in biodiversity monitoring and data management, biodiversity conservation techniques, soil and land use management and water accounting, etc.; c) focusing on aquatic biodiversity conservation largely within the confines of the river channel as opposed to a wider river ecosystem conservation strategy that uses a common unit of analysis (such as the immediate watershed).

33. The MTR found sufficient evidence to indicate the project is making progress in mainstreaming biodiversity conservation into China’s water resources management policies and plans at both the national level and in the pilot province of Yunnan and Chongqing Municipality. However, progress has been far slower than planned. Indeed, the implementation of activities under components 1-3 are, in most cases, more than a year behind schedule. This has delayed the delivery of the majority of outputs planned and, as a result, most of the expected outcomes have not materialised to date. Under these circumstances the MTR has assessed progress of outputs to date to determine how far the expected outcomes in the Prodoc are likely to be reached. This assumes a no-cost extension of at least two years is granted by GEF.
34. Overall, the MTR is satisfied from the triangulation of its findings, (summarised in Appendix 6), that since 2019 the project is on a progressive curve capable of achieving the majority of its planned outputs and expected outcomes under components 1-3 over the next two years. This is justified by three findings. First, the delays in starting project implementation have been largely resolved and external factors relating to the government’s institutional reforms have been finalised in 2018. Furthermore, the difficulties in contracting TNC as foreseen in the Prodoc have been resolved through a LoA between TNC and FAO-CN, which was signed in March 2019 and the contracting of

the Chief Technical Adviser (CTA) soon after. However, the prolongation of restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic throughout 2020 will need to be monitored carefully as the virus has restricted travel, group activities and trainings to date (September 2020). More importantly, the MTR found no evidence to indicate the delays are related to a lack of political commitment, capacity and/or resources of the partner. To the contrary, interviews conducted with MWR at all levels of government (see Appendix 3) confirm there is a determined and ongoing commitment to implement project outputs and objectives.

35. Second, due to the high strategic relevance of the project identified in the previous section, MWR/IETCEC provided significant evidence in the interviews at all levels confirming it has a strong sense of ownership of the project’s execution and its results. This has been aided by the strong vertical nature of Chinese government, which has ensured the internal management structure has a clear chain of command, based on focal points at the central, provincial and local levels in the four pilot sites.

Third, the project has already raised considerable awareness within the MWR at the central and provincial levels that sustainable economic development depends heavily on the effective management of all aspects of water demand, including ecological demands. As a result, MWR has a professional interest to develop capacity in e-flow restoration that fully factors in the needs of aquatic biodiversity and its conservation at the same time. However, to achieve the project’s objectives, the MTR identified a number of observations and specific findings that are detailed in the following three sub sections (4.2.1 – 4.2.3).

4.2.1 Achievement of project outputs and progress towards project outcomes under component 1 - Mainstreaming biodiversity into water resources management

36. The MTR found the project is making progress in reforming the policy, legal and regulatory framework to mainstream biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection to support improved management of China’s water resources at the central, provincial and local levels of government. According to the PMO’s self-evaluation (April 2020), progress in achieving planned outputs under outcome 1.1. is at around 60 per cent. The gap analysis (output 1.1.1) has largely been completed at the national level and in the two pilot provinces (provincial and municipal levels). Entry points for mainstreaming biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection have been identified in the gap analysis and the project has been instrumental in mainstreaming the protection of ecological demand and e-flow in one important plan at the national level *Ecological Flow (Water Volume) Research and Guarantee Work Plan for Key Rivers and Lakes* (2019). When compared to the target in the Prodoc¹² the project has a 33 per cent progress rate.
37. In addition, interviews confirm the MWR and MEE are conducting a joint review to reform the Water Law, to ensure small hydro-electric dams (up to 50 MW) are required to respect ecological water demand and e-flow standards in line with international best practices. On August 21, 2019 MWR and MEE jointly released the *Announcement of Ecological Environment on Strengthening*

¹² Target 1.1.2 in the Result Matrix of the Prodoc is: *Biodiversity mainstreamed into at least 3 important national level WRM policies, plans, or laws (p. 158).*

the Supervision of e-flow of Small Hydropower Stations in the Yangtze River Economic Belt. The Announcement requests to organize and carry out the determination of e-flow of small hydropower stations, reconstruction of discharge facilities, ecological operation, and monitoring, practically strengthen the supervision and management of e-flow of hydropower stations (up to 50 MW) in the Yangtze River Economic Belt, and to improve the long-term mechanism for ensuring e-flow starting with implementation of e-flow of small hydropower stations by 2021¹³.

38. At the provincial level the project has contributed to achieving the revision, endorsement and dissemination of three plans in Yunnan Province and one in Chongqing Municipality, which represents a 100 and 33 per cent progress rate respectively against targets in the Prodoc.¹⁴ They are:

- *Yunnan Province Total Water Use Control Plan and Yunnan Province Implementation Plan for the Protection and Restoration of the Six Major Water Systems of the Yangtze River* (2019), designed to guarantee e-flow and support the restoration and conservation of water ecology;
- *Yunnan Province Water Resources Protection Plan* (2018), which identifies 75 ecological zones, the ecological water demand in 7 eco-sensitive lake areas, and the ecological flow needs of 14 important and highly vulnerable habitats;
- *Action Plan for the Construction of Beautiful Rivers and Lakes in Yunnan Province* (2019), designed to protect e-flow and aquatic habitats;
- *Implementation Plan for Small Hydropower Cleanup and Rectification in the Yangtze River Economic Belt in Chongqing Municipality* (2019), designed to reduce the impact of hydropower stations on ecological demands and e-flow by clarifying which hydropower dams under 50 MW should be retained, removed, or modified.

39. At the local level (municipal and district/county), mainstreaming of e-flow in WRM plans has advanced in the pilot sites of both pilot sites as follows:

- *Ecological Flow Control Plan for Hydropower Stations in the Wubu River* in Banan District (Chongqing municipality);
- *Plan of Action for Wetland Protection and the Creation of One Reservoir-One River* in Jingdong County, Yunnan Province.

40. In addition, the project has recorded three important advances in mainstreaming e-flow protection into technical guidelines concerning WRM at the national level and produced new guidelines for river health assessments, which signify the project is likely to meet targets under outcome 1.2.¹⁵ These are:

- *Guidelines on Rivers and Lakes Ecological Flow Identification and Guarantee* (ongoing);
- *Technical Guidance on Ecological Flow Supervision for Small Hydropower enterprises* (2019);
- *Guidelines on Strengthening the Performance and Responsibilities of River and Lake Chiefs* (2019), which aims at strengthening the capacity of River/Lake Chiefs throughout the

¹³ More on this can be found at: http://www.mwr.gov.cn/zwgk/zfxgkml/201909/t20190902_1362055.html

¹⁴ Target 1.1.3 in the Results Matrix of the Prodoc is: *Biodiversity mainstreamed into at least 3 provincial level WRM policies, plans or law for each of the two provinces (min. 6 provincial level improvements in total)*, p. 158.

¹⁵ Target 1.2.2 in the Result Matrix of the Prodoc specifies: *Technical guidelines drafted for the national, provincial, prefecture, and county/district level policies (outcome 1.1) and regulations (outcome 1.2); other suitable policies and regulations will be included as far as possible* (p.159).

country to promote the conservation of aquatic biodiversity and protection of e-flow by engaging in partnerships with civil society.

- *Technical Guidelines for River and Lake Health Assessment*, incorporating five protocols relating to: hydrological integrity, physical structure integrity, chemical integrity, biological integrity, and social service function integrity. The R/LHA guidelines are currently being piloted in other rivers and lakes across the country before being finalized and rolled out nationally to support more effective management and planning of the country's rivers and lakes.

41. Meanwhile, the integration of e-flow protection in the regulatory framework at the national level has not yet started (against a target of 3 regulations). However, at the provincial level MWR has mainstreamed e-flow protection into one set of regulations in Yunnan Province and in two regulations Chongqing Municipality (equivalent to 33 and 66 per cent of targets in the Prodoc). The regulations are:

- *Pu'er City Regulations on Sand Mining in River Channels*, (2019), which forbids sand mining activities where is threatens e-flow;
- *Water Resources Management Regulations of Chongqing Municipality and River Management Regulations of Chongqing Municipality* (2018), which places particular attention on addressing the artificial adjustments of river flow to restore the natural e-flow cycle as far as possible.

42. Progress in establishing new institutional partnerships with civil society appears to have made good progress against targets in the Prodoc.¹⁶ In particular, the River and Lake Chiefs System in the pilot provinces have been supported by TNC to establish partnerships with civil society. This has proved to be an effective way of, first, communicating the importance of conservation of aquatic biodiversity and e-flow protection and, second, engaging civil society directly in conservation and protection measures. In Yunnan Province, the project's support in establishing Civil River Chiefs at the township and village levels in the Inle/Buma and Chuan Rivers has directly influenced the establishment of a five-tier River and Lake Chiefs System where MWR staff assume the position of River Chiefs at the provincial, municipal/prefecture and county levels, and civil society nominees assume the position of Civil River Chiefs at the township and village levels. In Chongqing Municipality, MWR has adopted a three-tiered River/Lakes Chief System where there is a River Chief from MWR at the municipal and county/district levels and a Civil River Chief at the township level. A similar four-tiered River Chief System is in place where there are also villages/rural communities, who are responsible for nominating a Civil River/Lake Chief.

43. Interviews with representatives from CSOs and MWR Bureau staff in the pilot sites confirmed the strengthening of the River/Lake Chief System in the pilot provinces has been an effective way to widen the capacity of MWR beyond its traditional role of controlling pollution-related issues (in accordance with the Three Red Lines) into biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection. This has been aided significantly by working in partnership with civil society to deliver change at the local level. Furthermore, this approach has also facilitated the implementation of biodiversity monitoring with other actors from civil society, in particular Yunnan University and SW University in Chongqing.

¹⁶ Target 1.3.1 in the Results Matrix of the Prodoc is: *New collaborative partnerships operational at national level, provincial level for 2 pilot provinces; Working group/Stakeholder network established and operational at prefecture/municipal level as well as county/district level for 4 pilot areas* (p. 160).

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44. The MTR observes, an important outcome from the adoption of the new approaches to the River/Lake Chief System in the two pilot provinces has been MWR's decision in 2019 to issue new national guidelines for River/Lake Chiefs. These guidelines (see paragraph 41), include the establishment of new partnerships with civil society to strengthen capacity on conserving aquatic biodiversity and protecting e-flow, which the MTR considers to be particularly important to support WRM in the upper watersheds of China's main rivers.
45. The project has also made significant progress in clarifying the application of the Green Line Scorecard, which was not specified in the Prodoc. Interviews with MWR/IETCEC confirm the most feasible way of applying the principles of GLS through the new River and Lake Health Assessments (R/LHA) that are currently being piloted using the new above-mentioned Technical Guidelines for R/LHA (see paragraph 41). The MWR/IETCEC justified this approach on the grounds it already has experience and capacity in conducting conventional R/LHA (i.e. based on hydrological, chemical and user criteria) and that by adopting the new protocols it can move to adopting international standards not only on implementing the Three Red Lines, but also the GLS concept. Also, because the MNR already applies the "Green Line" terminology (to prevent urban sprawl into rural/agricultural areas), MNR confirmed the application of GLS within the confines of R/LHA would be less confusing to both stakeholders and non-stakeholders.
46. According to interviews with Technical and National Advisers, the Current thinking on the application of GLS in RHLA is to rename it as a "River/Lake Health Report" in which there is a new focus in critical areas such as the state of natural habitats and their level of connectivity. The MTR considers this approach represents an effective way to help refocus MWR and other key stakeholders on the importance of adopting a more "integrated landscape and ecosystem approach" as prescribed in the Prodoc. Nonetheless, the MTR believes, it would be more appropriate to rename GLS in the form of a **"River/Lake Health Report Scorecard"** (RLHRS) in the interests of enticing a wider audience to find out the score and discuss it. In addition, the wider issues of urban and land use management within the river and lake catchments (responsibility of MNR), has not been factored in the R/LHA, despite the fact soil erosion, increased use of chemical inputs in agriculture and urbanisation are all growing challenges in China.
47. Finally, concerning the fifth expected outcome under component 1¹⁷, progress in attracting government investment on biodiversity conservation is behind schedule, mainly because the results of biodiversity monitoring within the R/LHA in the pilot sites (and elsewhere across the country) are still ongoing and, therefore, unable to support informed decision-making concerning the prioritisation of government investment. Nevertheless, the MWR is aware of the benefits the application of the R/LHA will have on biodiversity conservation and this is demonstrated by the fact it has secured an increase in central government investment to RMB 10.022 billion (USD 1.42 billion) per annum since the project's implementation (2017-2019) to support improvements in river and lake governance, including water ecology management and protection across the country. More specifically, the pilot provinces have also increased investment in water conservancy and improving the management of water resources. According to PMO's self-assessment report (April 2020) Yunnan Province has invested a total of RMB 3.7 billion (USD 521 million) in small and medium-sized river management between 2017 and 2019, although this has not been triangulated in the field by the MTR, nor is it clear how much has

¹⁷ Outcome 1.5 in the Results Matrix of the Prodoc is: *Increase levels of government investments into biodiversity conservation for river ecosystems (p. 161)*

been invested in the Inle/Buma and Chuan pilot rivers. Likewise, Chongqing has allegedly invested RMB 4.61 billion (USD 649 million) in similar activities.

48. Furthermore, once the e-flow studies have been completed at the pilot rivers (projected by 2021), MWR confirms it will be able to identify and prioritise government investment to improve the application of the polluter pays principle (under the Three Red Lines), which will have a direct and positive effect on aquatic biodiversity through improvements to water quality and by guaranteeing water ecological demands. Additionally, the R/LHAs, by applying the RLHRS would offer opportunities (in the next three to five years) to identify and prioritise government investment more effectively to support restoration of habitats, enhance their connectivity and improve public access to the river/lake ecosystem for recreation, eco-tourism and other purposes.

4.2.2 Achievement of project outputs and progress towards project outcomes under component 2 - Demonstrate on-the-ground activities for mainstreaming biodiversity in pilot rivers

49. The MTR found the project’s progress in meeting the main objective of component 2 - *design and implement a set of concrete biodiversity conservation measures in four pilot sites, providing a successful example for replication and scaling-up as well as a direct input for policy and regulatory improvements* is moderately satisfactory.
50. The MTR has identified sufficient evidence from the triangulation of its interviews and desk analysis to confirm the project is on track to meeting Targets 2.1.1 and 2.1.2.¹⁸ As mentioned in the previous subsection, the strengthening of the River Chiefs System, supported by new alliances between MWR, civil society and universities from the pilot provinces is demonstrating positive outcomes. For example, the direct engagement of civil society is proving to be an effective way to raise awareness and ensure civil society increasingly shares in the benefits from protecting biodiversity and e-flow. The perception of these benefits requires further analysis in the field, but stakeholders interviewed have mentioned the health and recreational benefits associated with conserving biodiversity and improving water quality. Likewise, the alliance established with Yunnan University and SW University in Chongqing has facilitated access to scientific knowledge and information concerning the biodiversity monitoring conducted in the pilot rivers. This appears to not only support awareness raising on biodiversity in general, but also on the special status of the pilot rivers in terms of the endemic species they support and which ones are of global and/or national importance to science. Again, more analysis in the field is required, but the MTR sees this information offers new opportunities to develop, among others, education and research at all levels (locally, nationally and internationally), promote local identity, heritage and customs, encourage recreation and ecotourism, and stimulate private and public investment.
51. Nonetheless, progress in developing a fully integrated landscape and ecosystem approach to biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection is being hampered by slow progress in

¹⁸ Target 2.1.1 in the Results matrix of the Prodoc is: *New collaborative partnership operational at provincial level for 2 pilot provinces (supporting mainstreaming under 1.1.3 as well as strengthening implementation capacity for pilot activities; Working group/Stakeholder network established and operational at prefecture/municipality level as well as county/district level for the 4 pilot areas. Target 2.1.2 is: Clarify responsibilities and tasks for all stakeholders involved in river biodiversity conservation (e.g. appointment of dedicated river managers) at provincial, prefecture and county/district level* (p. 162-163).

establishing collaborative partnerships with other government sectors. The MTR understands cooperation mechanisms have been identified to facilitate dialogue with other government institutions at the national level but, as mentioned in the previous section, gaps remain in converting the mechanism into effective inter-institutional working groups that operate at the national, provincial and municipal levels to ensure all relevant government sectors agree to and comply with e-flow protection and biodiversity conservation and, thus, facilitate more effective WRM to be applied and sustained. In particular, the MTR found communication needs to be improved between the national and provincial level with sectors such as agriculture (relating to water use for irrigation, control of chemical inputs, soil erosion, etc.), natural resources management (relating to forestry, urban and rural land use planning, domestic water use, sewage treatment, drainage, etc.), industrial and commercial development (relating to its location, pollution risks, water and mineral abstraction needs, etc.) and MEE (relating to its capacity in biodiversity monitoring, database management, mapping, conservation techniques and best practices, etc.).

52. This situation may also be a contributory factor in some caveats identified in the training conducted to date. In particular, stakeholders interviewed believe the application of the eco-regionalisation approach¹⁹ has limited value in supporting the application of a sustainable river and lake management approach in the pilot sites. Although applicable at the national and international levels, the approach is not applicable in the pilot provinces in general, and the pilot rivers in particular, because they fall under one eco-region. In addition, due to the high number of dams and other infrastructures constructed in its rivers and lakes the provinces find it hard to demarcate where their eco-region ends and a new one starts. On this, the MTR found the training has not placed sufficient emphasis on using the watershed of each pilot river (i.e. sub watersheds of the Yangtze River) as the most suitable unit of analysis to guide the demonstration of e-flow protection and biodiversity conservation. This is despite the fact the MTR found the MWR invests considerable funds in areas such as soil erosion reduction in Yunnan Province and Chongqing Municipality.²⁰
53. Furthermore, such an approach would have facilitated stronger alliances with other government institutions that are interested parties in e-flow protection and biodiversity conservation. This was discussed with TNC and the national/technical advisers who agreed such an approach should also categorise the watershed according to the river/lake type in order guidelines on WRM and R/LHAs are tailored to the specific needs of the river/lake type, rather than the application of uniform standards and best practices. Furthermore, to support this approach, municipal and bureau levels of MWR will require training to ensure the approach enhances ownership of the river's specific qualities and challenges, as well as reduces dependency on education and research establishments.
54. Concerning progress on the implementation of specific projects to demonstrate the importance of mainstreaming e-flow protection and biodiversity conservation in the four pilot sites, the MTR identified some positive results, which indicate the majority of targets 2.2.1 to 2.3.5 in the RM are likely to be met over the next two years. However, concerning targets on biodiversity monitoring (targets 2.2.7 and 2.3.5), the MTR observes a period of more than two years is very likely to be needed due to the complexity in developing data and capacity in this discipline. Results identified and triangulated by the MTR as far as possible, are summarised as follows:

¹⁹ TNC defines ecoregional assessments as: "a method for setting geographic priorities based on the status of biodiversity, habitat condition, threats and socio-political conditions in an ecoregion... For an ecoregion or collection of ecoregions we develop and disseminate finer-scale data on the distribution and status of biodiversity, habitat condition, current and future threats and the socio-political conditions that influence conservation success within those ecoregions."

²⁰ PMO self-evaluation assessment, April 2020 (p. 44).

Targets 2.2.1/2.3.1: Interviewees from MWR in both pilot provinces confirmed they are in the process of formulating the Water Resources Management Policy Framework for Biodiversity Conservation with TA support from TNC. In addition, the project has contributed to mainstreaming biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection into the River/Lake Chief System in both pilot provinces through the application of a tiered approach that ensures all levels of MWR apply these disciplines in partnership with civil society. Among the achievements in the pilot sites has been the training of Civil River Chiefs and the establishment of a River Chief office at all four pilot sites. Communication has also improved at all levels of MWR in the pilot provinces thanks to the use of the WeeChat phone application and, in Chongqing Municipality, Civil River Chiefs have password access to MWR’s specific phone application in order to participate in reporting on 16 criteria relating to mainly to controlling water quality and pollution issues. The MTR considers there is significant potential to expand this application to include biodiversity conservation in the future (once all baseline data and the e-flow strategies have been validated/approved);

Targets 2.2.2-2.2.6 (Yunnan Province): e-flow analysis, a river health assessment and water use accounting have been completed on the Enle/Buma Rivers (Zhenyuan County) with training and support provided by TNC. However, the e-flow strategy for this pilot site cannot be finalised until a second e-flow analysis has been conducted in the second half of 2020 to determine the effects of the dams and other infrastructures on water ecological demand in the dry season. However, the MTR understands the e-flow strategy for both rivers will be finalised by the end of 2020, although MWR stakeholders stated it will be challenging for the strategy to cover the 14 400 ha target stated in the EM without more resources. In the meantime, urgent restoration activities have taken place at the pilot site, including clean-up campaigns, the release of 400 000 endemic fish fingerlings (the MTR received confirmation these were understood to include endangered endemic species of global importance) and wetland restoration work. The latter is reported to cover 14.6 ha of wetlands in the Enle River and 4.65 ha in the Buma River, which is more than double the target of 9.3 ha stated in the RM for the pilot site. Similar activities have been conducted on the Chuan River (Jingdong County), where wetland restoration is being implemented under the abovementioned Plan of Action for Wetland Protection and the Creation of One Reservoir-One River”. The plan has targeted almost 666 ha of wetlands to be restored in the upper Chuan River valley of which 13.1 ha have been restored to March 2020, against the target of 25 ha in the EM. In addition, a total of 426 000 endemic fingerlings were released into the river in 2019 together with new controls on fishing²¹ and two dams have been modified to allow fish migration. To help verify the restoration work at both pilot sites, the MTR requested the images shown in Figures 1 and 2.²² The MTR also observed two innovative activities taking place to support the application of e-flow strategies in Yunnan Province. First, interviewees at MWR confirmed they are investigating the application of an ecological compensation system, to ensure the private sector offset any trade-off on e-flow and biodiversity with compensatory actions in the same watershed. Second, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and MEE have identified the value of the Chuan River’s ecological services, which will offer new opportunities to promote initiatives such as payments for environmental services (PES) and support decision-makers strike a better balance between biodiversity conservation and

²¹ PPR No. 4, p. 4.

²² An assessment of the quality of the restoration work will depend on a field visit (if authorised).

development objectives in Jingdong County, which can be replicated in other small rivers in the province (including Enle/Buma Rivers);

Figures 1 & 2: Photographic evidence of habitat restoration in Enle/Buma Rivers



Source: PMO Yunnan (2020)

Targets 2.3.2-2.3.4 (Chongqing Municipality): Interviewees confirmed e-flow assessments on the Wubu and Tang Rivers have been completed (as there is no marked dry and wet season) and a draft report was submitted to the MWR's provincial office in early 2020. In addition, surveys on aquatic biodiversity in the Wubu and Tang Rivers have been completed and draft reports submitted in 2020. The reports, once finalised, will be used to support the identification of the e-flow strategy for both pilot rivers. In the meantime, the abovementioned, *Ecological Flow Control Plan for Hydropower Stations in the Wubu River* is being implemented. So far, rubbish has been cleared from the river channel and its riparian strip, embankments susceptible to erosion and flooding reinforced and hydropower stations located on the Wubu River are now under strict controls to guarantee e-flow through the construction of outlet facilities. MWR has installed e-flow equipment at the outlets that have been completed to support continuous monitoring and surveillance of e-flow rates. The PMO also reports a total of 21 ha of habitats have been restored to protect the river's biodiversity, against a target of 32 ha.

Figures 3 and 4: Photographic evidence of habitat restoration, Wubu and Tang Rivers



Source: PMO-Chongqing (2020)

Figure 3 provides an example of a habitat that has been restored on the Wuhu River. At the Tang River pilot site, a major clean-up campaign has successfully removed a reported 900

000 MT of rubbish covering an area of 4.5 km² in 2019.²³ In addition, 600 000 fingerlings of endemic varieties of fish were released into the river in the first half of 2019²⁴ and 58 ha of habitats along the Tang River have been restored so far, against a target of 120 ha (see Figure 4). Furthermore, the restoration of habitats on the Tang River is reported to be producing positive outcomes in terms of protecting important staging points for endangered migratory birds and being nominated as one of the ten most beautiful rivers in Chongqing Municipality.²⁵

Targets 2.2.7 and 2.3.5: progress in the establishment of a biodiversity monitoring system for each pilot river was found to be moderately unsatisfactory. Furthermore, the length of river being targeted for “green line” certification in the RM (80 km and 95 km of river applying improved WRM practices in the pilot rivers in Yunnan and Chongqing pilot sites respectively and covering a land area equivalent to 21 900 ha and 31 043 ha) was also found to be unrealistic according to stakeholders interviewed in the pilot provinces. The MTR agrees with this view on the grounds biodiversity monitoring is a complex area of science that requires significant scientific expertise to both conduct the sampling correctly, identify the species (which in the case of fish larvae is a highly specialised discipline) and requires many years to first establish reliable baseline data, second process and validate the data and, third, compare the baseline data with new rounds of monitoring data in order to identify trends, needs, priorities, etc. More information on the activities conducted to date on biodiversity sampling and the development of information management systems is discussed under 4.2.3.

55. Finally, concerning progress under outcome 2.4²⁶ the MTR found the level of documentation, communication and dissemination of information relating to the project’s activities, results and experiences to be satisfactory. For example, the MTR found progress reporting is complying with the reporting requirements of GEF and FAO and the PMO provides a wide array of information about the project’s activities, progress, lessons, visits by FAO staff, etc. through regular newsletters (7 in total to date), newspaper articles, the MWR website, the River Chief System, conferences, etc. However, targeted provision of best practices and lessons learned to the specific needs of different audiences was found to be inadequate, partly due to the lack of communication strategy designed to target information according to the needs of different audiences, such as other government institutions who are direct, or indirect stakeholders in WRM, schools, the private sector and the international community. Indeed, on the latter, the MTR observed a need for more information to be translated into the English language using professional translation services where the documentation is of global importance (such as on endemic biodiversity and endangered species).

4.2.3 Achievement of project outputs and progress towards project outcomes under component 3 - Creation and use of information systems to support biodiversity conservation

56. The MTR found overall progress in meeting outcome 3 is slow and will need to overcome some major challenges before MWR is in a position to take informed decision-making on the long-term conservation of biodiversity at the pilot sites. Progress has mainly centred on river

²³ PIR No. 2, p.13.

²⁴ PPR

²⁵ National contest “In search of the most beautiful hometown river”, PMO Self-Evaluation Report (2020), p.47.

²⁶ The RM states outcome 2.4 as: *Compilation and internal as well as external dissemination of information and best practices gained from the project* (p. 168)

biodiversity analysis in the form of an ecological baseline survey on river ecotopes and environmental flow analysis, together with the initiation of river water resource accounting at the pilot rivers conducted by the Institute of Water Resources and Hydropower Research (IWHR) in 2019. Training courses by TNC to support the mainstreaming process have also benefitted around 200 MWR staff, which includes support in developing the GIS-based river biodiversity information system (focusing on 12 datasets). In addition, more than 28 500 members of civil society are reported to have had access to training relating to on-the-ground activities in the pilot sites. However, as previously stated in this report, the implementation of a comprehensive biodiversity monitoring and information system in the pilot areas (outcomes 3.1 and 3.2²⁷) are not realistic in a four-year time period. The MTR identified four main factors justifying this assertion. First, the project is focusing on pilot sites where there is little or no previous work experience, or technical capacity, to conduct reliable and effective biodiversity monitoring and manage data to support informed decision-making on the long-term conservation of the biological diversity identified at the sites. As stated by some interviewees, this situation means the project places high dependency on external expertise and resources to do the monitoring and develop the information systems.

57. Second, Yunnan Province has both a dry and a wet season, which means more time is needed for data collection, processing and validation before a reliable picture on the state of biodiversity can be established. This is particularly challenging, because interviewees in Yunnan Province confirmed the effects of climate variability and change have changed the dry and wet season patterns in recent years. In addition, the Prodoc has not integrated risk management and adaptation to climate change into the activities under component 3 to ensure decision-making includes adaptation to climate variability and change.
58. Third, the introduction of advanced technologies to support biodiversity monitoring and e-flow analysis is a positive development, but there is a major lag time of several years before staff are fully trained and able to provide a comprehensive picture on the status of biodiversity at each pilot site. For example, the PMO's self-assessment mentions the adoption of "big-data technologies" (such as satellite remote sensing, real-time data collection technologies, GIS, etc.).²⁸ However, interviewees at the provincial level stated there is a need for a long-term training road map to be established to ensure they are in a position to fully apply these technologies and able to determine the state of biodiversity at the provincial level and support informed decision-making on where to prioritise government resources.
59. Fourth, the successful operation of biodiversity monitoring requires a critical mass of monitoring stations in order the sampling meets international standards. However, as stated above, the MTR found from its interviews that the biodiversity sampling conducted so far at the pilot rivers has been conducted at a small number of stations using university specialists. As a result, the data collected so far represents the initial step in terms of applying the R/LHAs and establishing a comprehensive information system to support learning and capacity development within the River-Chief System in the pilot provinces.
60. However, the MTR observes the second step of up-scaling the biodiversity monitoring and information system to meet international standards and support informed decision-making will take several years and require additional resources. This is due to the added cost implications of more monitoring and data management, together with more training to identify new

²⁷ The RM states outcome 3.1 is: *Design and implement additional information systems to provide comprehensive river biodiversity analysis* and outcome 3.2: *Establish a comprehensive biodiversity monitoring system for aquatic biodiversity and piloting of the system in the project areas* (p169-172)

²⁸ PMO Self-Assessment Report, April 2020, (p.49-50).

approaches to biodiversity monitoring and managing data (to reduce dependency on university specialists). The MTR identified a lot of consensus on this from interviewees, in particular the need for a training road map that places more emphasis on developing participatory techniques with civil society. The MTR believes such a road map should also be seen as an opportunity to forge synergies with key government institutions that have an important stake in improved WRM, but which are not actively participating in areas such as the monitoring and management of biodiversity data, the GIS mapping exercises, the development of water accounting, or in activities linked to these disciplines (in particular relating to watershed/land use mapping and planning).

61. Nonetheless, the MTR did identify a high level of consensus within MWR/IETCEC at the central level on its **interest and commitment to establishing reliable biodiversity monitoring and information management**. This is evident from the investment in new technologies and the training completed to date. According to data from the PMO and verified in the interviews, over 400 officials and technicians from MWR at all levels of government have participated in training workshops and seminars on biodiversity mainstreaming-related activities.²⁹ This complies fully with the target in the EM and has been a contributory factor in bringing about positive outcomes, such as the establishment of the River-Chief System adopted in both pilot provinces.
62. Nonetheless, the MTR found the training programme remains too “project focused”, and lacks a more forward-thinking road map that not only concentrates on the remaining years of the project’s implementation but, more importantly, on supporting relevant parts of the 14th Five-Year Plan (from 2021) and in meeting the 2030 Agenda targets. In this way the project would respond to the needs of technicians in clarifying their medium-term career path (to help reduce staff rotation) and provide greater clarity on the vision and mission behind the biodiversity mainstreaming process.
63. Likewise, the project’s internal M&E focuses heavily on supporting project reporting on the advance of operations and outputs. Although this supports the fulfilment of targets under outcome 2.4 mentioned above, the MTR found under reporting on the project’s contribution to capacity development within MWR and how far this is stimulating new activities and initiatives with the Ministry, such as the cooperation mechanisms established with other government sectors, the application of the new River-Chief System in partnership with civil society (which is being applied throughout the country), or the number of habitats it is conserving each year that are of global or national importance. Furthermore, the project’s newsletters provide highly satisfactory narratives on project activities and events, but are not geared to qualitative monitoring and learning. For example, the 7th Newsletter provides a list of five highly relevant recommendations to support the biodiversity mainstreaming process, which could and should be monitored by the project through its training activities.³⁰

²⁹ PMO Self-Assessment Report, April 2020 (p. 51-52)

³⁰ 7th Newsletter, December 2019 (p. 1-2), The five recommendations are summarised as follows: 1) water ecology conservation should be considered in the formulation/revision of China’s relevant regulations and *Yangtze River Protection Law*; 2) clarify the technical standards for the restoration of river habitats, fishway construction, and the ecological transformation of embankments and revetments; 3) monitoring of river and lake biodiversity should be strengthened by installing monitoring facilities at key points such as fishways, reservoirs and floodgates; 4) strengthen the supervision over, and investigation and penalty, on any act of water ecological vandalism; 5) strengthen the popularization of water resources science and the publicity and education of water conservation and protection.

4.3 Efficiency

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

Finding 5: The project has experienced difficulties in optimising its efficiency, due to delays and high transaction costs associated with project start-up, contracting TNC and recruiting key consultants, which were not resolved until 2019. Major institutional reforms and staff rotation between 2017 and 2018 together with the COVID-19 pandemic restricting travel and group activities also have affected operations. By the start of 2020 the project had achieved a physical advance of around 40 per cent and spent 21.7 per cent of the GEF grant. The implementation of the project has intensified since 2019 thanks to the executing partner's full support and commitment to meet objectives. This has been demonstrated by the establishment of PMO offices in Beijing, in Yunnan Province and Chongqing Municipality and in the counties/districts covering the four pilot rivers and a high level of co-finance spent to date (66% in cash and in-kind) end December 2019. However, it is evident the project will not meet its planned targets by project closure on 31 May 2020.

Finding 6: The project struggled to achieve satisfactory levels of cost-effectiveness until 2019 due to the reasons mentioned in Finding 5. However, cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness has been highly satisfactory since 2019. This has been aided three developments in 2019. First, the signing of the service agreement between TNC and FAO-CN in early 2019, which resolved the impasse concerning the recruitment of TNC by the executing partner, which it was legally unable to do following the institutional reforms in 2017-2018. Second, the embedding of the PMO at the national, provincial/municipal and local levels has enabled the PMO (under the guidance of the PSC) to take full ownership of day-to-day activities and results, target co-finance where it is needed, etc. Third, the recruitment of the CTA and nomination of full-time staff in the PMO in Beijing has facilitated timely technical and administrative guidance and decision-making. Nonetheless, there is room to improve efficiency. For example, strategic planning does not include adequate levels of cross-sector coordination with other government stakeholders who are directly, or indirectly, engaged in WRM and which produce negative impact on water resources. Meanwhile, at the administrative level, the Budget Holder has insufficient human and financial resources to apply the *ad hoc* conditions established by FAO's Senior Management in the OPA to mitigate the risks of indirect execution of the project by the MWR/IETCEC. This includes conducting regular site visits to supervise operations in the field.

4.3.1 Timeliness of activities

64. The significant delays reported earlier in this report have affected the delivery of planned outputs. An assessment of the latest report on progress indicates that on average components 1, 2 and 3 have a physical advance of 37, 40 and 38 per cent, respectively.³¹ Interviews with stakeholders confirm that the project will be no more than half way through its planned implementation at the current planned closure at the end of May 2020. However, the majority of this physical progress has happened since the conclusion of the amendment to the Operational Partner's Agreement (OPA) with FAO and the subsequent signing of the LoA with TNC in 2019. Indeed, the MTR found the project has intensified operations over the last year. Most significant are the advances in trainings for MWR staff and representatives from CSOs on

³¹ PMO Self-Assessment Report, April 2020. All advance estimates provided in the RM were added up and averages calculated for each project component.

biodiversity mainstreaming (95% completed). This has contributed to the advances in the reforms of plans, regulations, guidelines, etc. reported in the previous section. Furthermore, given most of the group trainings on this theme have been completed, the impact of the current COVID-19 virus pandemic is likely to be less significant.

65. However, key activities under component 3 relating to training and piloting aquatic biodiversity monitoring, applying the revised R/LHAs and developing advanced information systems are well behind schedule (averaging less than 20% physical advance). In these areas the MTR believes the project will experience difficulties in advancing group training activities planned in 2020. This is partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also due to low levels of inter-institutional coordination actively in place that was identified in the previous sub-section. Under these circumstances and taking into account the government’s strong commitment to meet project objectives, the MTR has found sufficient evidence to justify the proposed extension of the project by MWR by two years. However, taking into account the current challenges facing the project’s implementation due to the COVID-19 virus pandemic, in particular concerning group training activities in areas such as biodiversity monitoring and data management, it is highly likely the project will be unable to achieve some of its expected outcomes. Under these circumstances, it is crucial a clear and coherent exit strategy is built into the extension period (more on this can be found in section (4.4.1). to clarify the training technical supervision and funding needed to support on-going activities such as biodiversity monitoring and data management.

4.3.2 *Cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the project*

66. An additional set of interviews realised in September 2020 confirm FAO spent considerable resources in the period 2016-2018 on supporting the executing partner of several GEF5-funded projects in China implement their Operational Partner’s Agreements (OPA) through indirect execution; namely the executing agency/operating partner (MWR/IETCEC) assumes responsibility for project implementation, while FAO provides support and supervision of implementation, as opposed to direct execution (DEX) by FAO itself. Indeed, DEX was ruled out by the Chinese authorities on the grounds of project ownership and sovereignty. This included project 057, as well as projects 052 and 056, which were also reviewed by the international lead consultant in the period April to September 2020. The problem at the time, was that the project documents were formulated well before FAO’s release of the Operational Partner’s Implementation Modality/Manual Section 701 (OPIM/MS-710) at the end of 2015, which sets out the regulatory framework for projects applying direct execution through operating partner institutions such as MWR/IETCEC. Furthermore, the OPAs were prepared and concluded in September 2016 before training on the application of OPIM/MS-701 began in FAO-CN and other country offices. In response to this situation, FAO hired a consultant to assess fiduciary standards and capacity of the partners with the aim of establishing an appropriate set of risk mitigation measures to guide implementation, based on MS-701. However, the assessment failed to comply with FAO’s risk evaluation criteria.³²
67. Under these circumstances, Senior Management agreed under exceptional circumstances to allow an *ad hoc* process of implementation to take place for all three projects, based on a set of conditions and risk assurances in the absence of DEX (many of which complied with OPIM/MS-701. Among the conditions was the provision of additional human resources (funded

³² The MTR understands an agronomist was hired to conduct the assessment.

by GCU funds) in FAO-CN, together with recruitment of GEF portfolio managers to support/supervise the implementing partners (namely the PMOs assigned by the executing agencies to implement the projects), especially with regards to reporting, elaborating and applying the project implementation management manual (PIMM), participating in key meetings and events, etc. However, the MTR understands, the implementation of project 057 under Senior Management conditions does not constitute the application of the project in full conformity with OPIM/MS-701 rules and regulations.³³

68. Furthermore, the MTR found that the BH does not have the financial resources to neither recruit the staff he needs to oversee the implementation of these *ad hoc* conditions, nor conduct regular missions in the field to supervise project implementation and compliance with the OPA. Indeed, there was general consensus among interviewees from the PMOs in Yunnan Province and Chongqing Municipality, that visits from national consultants, national PMO staff and FAO-CN staff were too infrequent and that it took time to resolve technical and administrative issues, such as payment of reimbursable costs incurred in the field to facilitate project activities. On this latter point, an interview with GCU³⁴ confirmed an international and national consultant had been employed by GCU to support the BH/FAO-CN resolve the funding of spot checks and audits in the field, field missions, staffing needs, etc. However, a permanent solution was not found and, instead, GCU agreed to provide funds to cover assurance activities in the field.
69. An interview with the acting BH³⁵ (due to the departure of the BH in early 2020), pointed out to the MTR that this situation is mainly due to shortcomings in FAO's Fee Guidelines concerning the management of GEF5-funded projects, (includes project 057). As a result, the BH/FAO-CN confirmed they are unable to provide the level of administrative support required to support the implementation of all seven GEF5 projects that are operating in China. The MTR was informed this is primarily because these Guidelines specify that only 30 per cent (USD 771 000) of the 9.5 per cent fee rate applied to manage the GEF5 project portfolio in China (USD 2.57 m.) is paid to the BH to cover administration and project management costs. According to the acting BH these conditions mean FAO-CN receives insufficient funds to cover the employment of the three GEF Portfolio coordinators required and is obliged to fund one of them from the budget for the country office (in the case of project 057, the GEF portfolio manager is funded from the GEF fee rate applied).³⁶ Under these circumstances, the MTR found this also applies to the employment of support staff, such as financial assistants.
70. In the light of these gaps, together with the fact FAO's Inter-Departmental Working Group (IDWG) on new operational modalities does not appear to have been consulted sufficiently to find a solution to these shortcomings, the MTR found there is not a suitable communication mechanism in place to facilitate dialogue between the LTO, FLO, IDWG, PSS, GCU and FAO-CN/BH on improving the implementation of GEF5-funded projects in China.³⁷ Moreover, the establishment of such a mechanism could have been discussed and established in response to recommendations made in the Fiduciary Report conducted in March 2016, which highlighted the need for additional training requirements to be provided by FAO-CN to the PMO.³⁸

³³ This was also confirmed in an interview conducted in September 2020 with FAO's Project Support Services (PSS) in conjunction with the MTRs for projects GCP/CPR/056 and GCP/CPR/052, which were also assessed by the international lead consultant after the present MTR (in June-August 2020 and July-September 2020 respectively).

³⁴ Idem

³⁵ Idem.

³⁶ The MTR points out that these coordinators are also responsible for GEF-6 and GEF-7 projects.

³⁷ The MTR understands there are also GEF-6 projects that are also not applying the OPIM approach and relying instead on *ad hoc* approaches

³⁸ Report on the Fiduciary Assessment of IETCEC/MWR as Executing Partner of FAO/GEF Project, by Liu Yonggong, Centre for Integrated Agricultural Development (CIAD), Beijing, (March 2016), Section 5 - Recommendation 5.1 (2), p.26.

71. The setting up of the PMO also resulted in a significant increase in workload for the government staff assigned to it. Not only were they required to continue their day-to-day work duties at the same time as take on project activities (on a part-time basis), but they also experienced staff rotations both within the MWR/IETCEC and in FAO-CN. This situation, together with the above-mentioned institutional reforms, which ruled out direct contracting of iNGOs such as TNC by the executing partner, were also contributory factors in slowing down project implementation between 2017-2018. For example, to resolve the contracting of TNC services as foreseen in the Prodoc, a LoA had to be concluded between TNC and FAO-CN³⁹. However, this was not signed until March 2019, due to the above-mentioned amendment of OPA, which took many months to finalise.
72. However, the embedding of the PMO within the MWR/IETCEC, has demonstrated it has been an efficient mechanism for the executing partner to execute the project since 2019. This turnaround is mainly due to the PSC taking some important measures, which have been successfully implemented. First, the PMO staff have been assigned full-time to the project in late 2019. Second, the PMO has established a good balance of expertise to cover all main aspects of the project, supported by a highly qualified CTA recruited in August 2019, which has been demonstrated through the project's above-mentioned achievements, which were cross-checked during the project's online presentation to the MTR in April 2020 and substantiated further through the submission of images of project activities requested by the MTR (submitted in May 2020). Third, PMO staff have complied with the OPA and the above-mentioned conditions regarding project operations in areas such as the application of open tenders to recruit consultants and technical subcontractors, on convoking meetings and coordinating with PMO staff and other stakeholders at the national, provincial and local levels, etc. This has been aided by modifications in the Project Implementation Management Manual (PIMM) and the fact the PMO operates at the central, provincial and local levels of MWR/IETCEC.⁴⁰ In addition, by operating within the MWR, the PMO and FAO-CN confirmed the project is able to channel GEF funding directly as well as support the PSC take informed decisions on co-finance and call on government and the private sector to invest in biodiversity conservation, among others.
73. Taking into account these new developments the MTR asked the question to FAO-CN and the PMO if the application of DEX would have been a more cost-efficient way to execute the project. Both considered national execution through the MWR/IETCEC to be more efficient in spite of the above-mentioned problems and delays experienced in setting it up, for two main reasons. First, FAO-CN has highly limited staffing capacity and would be required to apply heavy bureaucratic procedures on procurement, which interviewees stated would have caused similar delays and high transaction costs, especially in areas such as the signing of Letters of Agreement. Second, FAO-CN has less authority in convoking meetings and seminars than the PMO, which is part of the government apparatus and, thus, enjoys direct access to technical staff and, through the PSC, to decision-makers. Nonetheless, the MTR identified some caveats where the PMO's efficiency has not been optimised. These are summarised as follows:

³⁹ The original intention in the Prodoc was to assign TNC as "one of the executing partners" and to "to provide in-depth analysis assisting activities in all three project components" (p. 139). However, given the executing partner cannot make payments in US Dollars, nor TNC make payments in Chinese Yuan, it was agreed the only way to apply the TNC contract was through a LoA with FAO.

⁴⁰ In particular the participation of FAO in the recruitment of consultants paid over USD 20 000 and in procurement of technical services was changed to one of approving the selection of consultants and technical services proposed by the PMO (PIMM, 2019 - Revised version, p. 2019),

- GEF funding cannot be managed by the PMO team at the provincial level. This means contracting of experts and technical services to support the implementation of activities in the pilot provinces is controlled by PMO in Beijing, which results in more transaction costs and fewer opportunities to develop capacity and accountability at the provincial level, (which would also enhance the added value of GEF funding).
- Communication between the PMO in Beijing, TNC and the PMO in each of the pilot provinces, is insufficient to stimulate adequate levels of participatory planning concerning the training activities. This is not aided by the absence of TNC focal points in both pilot provinces and the fact there is not an “on-demand facility” whereby the provincial PMO can directly request specific technical support services relating to project activities (especially relating to biodiversity monitoring. However, interviewees did say this has improved due to the increased use of tele conferencing in response to the current pandemic;
- The OPA includes under the responsibilities of FAO the provision of technical assistance.⁴¹ Although GCU did send the above-mentioned consultant to resolve administrative-related matters to facilitate implementation, technical support has relied heavily on the Lead Technical Officer (LTO) who is based in FAO’s Regional Office for Asia and Pacific (FAO-RAP) in Bangkok, Thailand. The MTR found that despite the LTO’s efforts to support and visit the project, this situation represents a significant division of labour that limits FAO-CN’s capacity to provide seamless communications with the PMO, especially taking into account the above-mentioned budget limitations the BH is experiencing.⁴² Indeed, the MTR found the LTO has only been able to conduct two field visits to date and technical coordination was hampered by the lack of a CTA until August 2019 to oversee the project’s training activities and coordinate the decisions of the Project Advisory Committee (PAC). Taking into account the LTO has a large portfolio of projects to manage which, thus, reduces capacity for close follow-up, the MTR did not find evidence to indicate this problem is being mitigated by alternative solutions, such as the contracting of a technical coordinator in China.⁴³ However, the decision by the PSC authorising the recruitment of the CTA from the China Institute of Water Resources and Hydropower Research is reported by the PMO to have helped palliate this gap.

74. Turning to the consulting service contract with TNC, which cost a total of USD 99 359 over a period of one year to end of February 2020, the MTR found this to be a **highly cost-efficient way to gain access to information on international best practices and specialised technical services** that would have cost considerably more using the private sector, or direct execution by FAO.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the MTR found that the outsourcing of technical services using international NGOs (iNGOs) like TNC has also been highly cost-effective. In general terms, there appears to be a high correlation between the signing of the TNC contract in March 2019 and the intensification of the project’s implementation over the same period. More specifically, the project attained some important outputs and outcomes in this period in exchange for services that cost less than 4 per cent of the GEF grant. These include, facilitating the mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection into the plans, regulations and guidelines mentioned in the previous sub section on effectiveness, providing research and guidance on how GLS could be incorporated into the new revised R/LHAs, which is being piloted across the country and guiding the development of the 12 GIS datasets on aquatic biodiversity.

⁴¹ OPA (2019), Article VI – Responsibilities of FAO, Point 1 (e).

⁴² Interviews confirm this situation has been offset to some extent by the fact the LTO in this particular case is Chinese, which has reduced the language barrier.

⁴³

⁴⁴ FAO-CN informed the MTR that the final payment of USD 69 552 is in the process of approval.

75. The cost-effectiveness of the national experts and advisers employed in the project was also found to be highly satisfactory. The MTR found from the interviews that they have a good mix of academic capacity, international experience and analytical skills, which enabled them to provide the MTR with a thorough insight into the project's strengths and challenges relating to all three components of the project. Furthermore, they were able to provide information on where they are adding value to the project. The MTR identified several areas where their advice and support has been particularly valuable. These include, support in the development of the guidelines and indicators for the new R/LHA, ensuring e-flow guidelines strike a balance between the incorporation of international best practices and the specific needs facing China's small and medium-sized rivers and lakes, and identifying gaps in the biodiversity monitoring that has taken place so far.
76. It is too early to assess the cost-effectiveness of the on-the-ground activities being conducted in the four pilot sites. Furthermore, field analysis is required to substantiate findings. Nevertheless, first impressions from the desk analysis and interviews indicate a high level of cost-effectiveness has been achieved in the pilot sites to date. This is based on the fact the establishment of the new tiered River and Lake Chief System in partnership with civil society is relatively low cost in relation to the high level of leverage it has on awareness raising and protecting biodiversity of global significance. Furthermore, by promoting habitat conservation and e-flow protection the opportunities to promote eco-tourism, heritage conservation, recreational activities, education and scientific research, among others, appear to have increased.
77. However, two important areas were identified where the project is not optimising its cost-effectiveness in the pilot sites. The first, concerns the lack of working groups and formal synergies at the intra-institutional level (i.e. neighbouring MWR provincial offices that are managing part of the pilot rivers) and inter-institutional level. In both cases, the MTR found the new River Chief System applied in the pilot sites are not benefiting from the technical support other government institutions are able to provide to support their work concerning biodiversity and e-flow protection and restoration. As a result, the MTR is unable to report on whether there are overlaps, or duplication of activities taking place. Likewise, there appears to be a lack of coordination in applying multi-disciplinary activities of mutual interest, (such as land-use planning and watershed management, which would also support improvements to risk mapping and management, or specialised activities where some institutions have an added advantage (such as on biodiversity monitoring, information systems on the state of the environment, endangered species, species identification, etc.). The absence of these synergies was also confirmed when the MTR requested interviews with representatives from MEE and MNR, but was informed the project does not have contact persons, or focal points in these ministries, nor others such as MARA, which is FAO's main partner in China.
78. Second, the MTR found the project has not done enough to integrate risk management into its planning and activities. This situation has not been aided by the inadequate assessment of risks associated with WRM in the Prodoc (including the Risk Classification Certification Form⁴⁵), which is in spite of the growing problems of water stress mentioned in section 2 of this report.⁴⁶ This situation is repeated in the PIR where the section on Risks is largely treated as an administrative exercise, as opposed to an opportunity to assess the risk ratings in relation to project planning,

⁴⁵ Annex 7 of the Prodoc, completed by the LTO on 06 June 2016.

⁴⁶ Based on information provided in the Prodoc, Section 1 – Relevance (p. 15).

implementation and monitoring. This was cross-checked in the interviews with all stakeholders, where the MTR found there is a general agreement on the need for training on this cross-cutting theme. Areas identified by the MTR to be of particular interest to the government include, among others:

- The use of e-flow data to support informed decision-making on adaptation to climate variability and change in key rural sectors, such as the agriculture sector (in line with FAO's SO-2 and SO-5);⁴⁷
- The restoration of wetlands and other habitats as part of a wider flood prevention water storage strategy to reduce the effects of droughts; and
- Promoting education on the linkages between soil erosion and its effects on e-flow, biodiversity conservation and increased risks of floods.

4.3.3 GEF funding and co-finance

79. Total expenditure of GEF funding managed by the executing partner to 31 December 2019 stood at USD 572 861 which is equivalent to **21.7 per cent of the total GEF grant** (USD 2 639 726)⁴⁸. A breakdown of expenditure by component is provided in Table 2, together with a summary of expenditure of funds (in-kind/cash) managed by FAO, which amounted to USD 55 807 (10.2 per cent) over the same period. It confirms expenditure in all areas of the project is well behind planned expenditure as the project enters its final months of execution. A comparison of the current rate of GEF expenditure against the overall implementation rate of the project at the same time (around 38 per cent) indicates that for every one per cent of expenditure the project is returning 1.7 per cent in physical advance. This situation is partly attributed to the high level of co-finance already spent in the project. Financial data provided by MWR (see Table 3) confirms total expenditure of USD 16 683 105, which is **equivalent to 65.7 per cent of MWR's agreed co-finance** of USD 25 400 000 (in cash and in-kind) approved by the PSC in 2018. On the request of the MTR the PMO provided a breakdown by component of this expenditure. As a result, the MTR is able to confirm both Yunnan Province and Chongqing Municipality are providing co-finance through their respective budgets, although this is generally less than planned. The MTR also found no evidence to indicate the appreciation of the Chinese Yuan in 2018 had no major effect on co-finance given the US Dollar regained value in 2019 to date
80. Despite the intensification of expenditure over the last year it is estimated more than half of the GEF grant will still be available at closure at the end of May 2020. The main reasons for the low expenditure relate to the delays in amending the OPA and the signing of the Letter of Agreement with TNC, which as mentioned earlier in this report severely affected project implementation until March 2019. The on-going impact of the COVID-19 pandemic since November 2019 also confirms difficulties in implementation will persist for several more month, especially in areas such as group trainings and travel between Beijing and the pilot provinces and pilot rivers due to the quarantine measures in place.
81. In terms of the availability of GEF funding and co-finance the interviews confirmed the project had not experienced delays in receiving funds, or support in-kind. However, interviews did confirm that applying GEF procedures in the OPA do contribute to increased transaction costs. For example, the first disbursement of funds did not arrive until April 2017, because the PMO

⁴⁷ Our Priorities – The Strategic Objectives of FAO, SO-2 specifically mentions, "Providing knowledge and information for evidence-based decision-making" (p. 11) and SO-5 places importance on, "Monitoring threats to agriculture" (p.23).

⁴⁸ The executing partner is directly responsible for managing USD 2,092,176 and FAO the balance of USD 547,550.

experienced delays in opening the bank account and submitting the inception report (in March 2017), before it could make the transfer request. Also application of the OPA concerning a minimum of 75 percent of the previous payment has to be expended before a new request for funds can take place was found to increase transaction costs.⁴⁹ For example, interviews confirm that the time between the submission of a new request when 75 per cent of funds have been spent and receipt of the next tranche of GEF funds risked a funding shortfall and, as a result, the PMO has had to issue an urgent request to FAO-CN for funds and preparations to reschedule some activities. Meanwhile, the MTR found no major issues relating to the availability of co-finance (almost exclusively provided in-kind). Indeed, an assessment of images of the trainings, seminars, conferences and site visits that have been included in project communications indicate MWR has been able to provide support to the training activities and on-the-ground activities through the provision of staff, mobility high quality venues (observed through analysis of images in reports) providing an array of work materials, banners and other inputs and services to facilitate the realisation of project activities.

Table 2. Summary of current status of GEF expenditure managed by the executing partner/FAO in USD (to 31 December 2019)

Component	2016-2020 Plan	2017* Actual	2018 Actual	2019 Actual	Total Actual	Total Balance
Component 1	373,000	-	-	124,351	124,351	248,649
Component 2	1,100,000	-	-	240,916	240,916	859,084
Component 3	450,301	62,729	3,739	120,905	187,373	262,928
MWR/PMO	168,875	-	1,934	18,287	20,221	148,654
Total MWR	2,092,176	62,729	5,673	504,459	572,861	1,519,315
FAO	547,550	-	-	55,807	55,807	491,743

Source: PMO * Expenditure from 01 October 2016 to 31 December 2017 & FAO from 2019 (after review)

Table 3. Summary of current status of MWR expenditure in USD (to 31 December 2019)

Component	MWR (Central)		MWR (Yunnan)		MWR (Chongqing)		Total Co-finance	
	Plan	Actual	Plan	Actual	Plan	Actual	Plan	Actual
Component 1	3,088,000	2,068,557	496,000	301,374	496,000	299,366	4,080,000	2,669,297
Component 2	9,650,000	6,464,242	1,750,000	941,794	2,270,000	935,517	13,670,000	8,341,553
Component 3	5,597,000	3,749,261	699,000	546,241	154,000	542,598	6,450,000	4,838,100
PMO	965,000	646,424	155,000	94,179	80,000	93,552	1,200,000	834,155
TOTAL	19,300,000	12,928,484	3,100,000	1,883,588	3,000,000	1,871,033	25,400,000	16,683,105

Source: PMO

⁴⁹ OPA (2019), Article VIII – Fund Transfers, Point 4 (e).

4.4 Sustainability

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

Finding 7: The project will first need an extension of at least two years to achieve its planned results (outcomes). The likelihood these results will be sustained is high when taking into account the socio-political, institutional, financial and fiduciary risks are deemed to be low, or low-medium. This is aided by fact the project has largely been institutionalised within MWR and demonstrates a strong commitment to applying biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection nationwide. However, it is low unless the extension of the project addresses some major challenges relating to inadequate levels of intra and inter-institutional coordination/synergies, the lack of integration of risk management and adaptation to climate change and the absence of an exit strategy

Finding 8: The project has already started to show positive signs it is willing and able to replicate at the national level, successfully tried and tested initiatives such as the River Chief System platform established in the pilot provinces and is acting as a catalyst for change in areas such as the application of the GLS concept within a revised R/LHA incorporating new protocols designed to support biodiversity conservation.

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

82. MTR found the current socio-political, financial and institutional situation in the country is highly favourable to extend the project in order to first and foremost produce results (outcomes) as planned. Moreover, the likelihood of the government sustaining these results is considered to be high. The MTR justifies this on the basis of the following findings:

- a) **Socio-political risks are low.** Most important, there is a favourable climate to sustain, consolidate and expand the mainstreaming of biodiversity and e-flow into WRM country-wide. This is aided by, on the one hand, by the fact the government is increasingly aware of the growing risks associated with water stress and, on the other, a strong political commitment to reform the policy, planning, legal and regulatory framework governing the water sector at all levels of government. This is further aided by the promotion of the “Beautiful Rivers and Lakes Initiative” at the highest political level.
- b) **Institutional risks within MWR are low.** Indeed, the current institutional situation within MWR is satisfactory. The government’s institutional reforms have been completed and MWR’s mandate clarified. The OPIM/PMO modality has been embedded in MWR and is demonstrating capacity to up-scale the new River Chief System approach developed in the pilot provinces to the national level. Furthermore, the new River Chief System indicates MWR will have greater institutional capacity to implement reforms in WRM right down to the local level in partnership with civil society.
- c) **Financial risks within MWR are low to medium.** MWR at the national and provincial levels has demonstrated it has the financial capacity (in cash and in-kind) to both fully implement the project and a budget to continue funding key activities such as policy and legal reforms (which will take many years to finalise), apply e-flow protection and fund the roll-out of the new R/LHAs country-wide. In addition, the Prodoc has

emphasised the importance of identifying new government investment in biodiversity conservation. The R/LHAs provide an excellent opportunity to identify and prioritise this investment. In addition, the improvement of ecoservices also offers new opportunities to develop PES in collaboration with strategically important economic zones, such as the Yangtze River Economic Belt (YREB).

- d) **Fiduciary risks are low.** The MTR found no evidence to indicate staff within MWR are acting contrary to GEF's interests, and audits have not reported problems concerning a lack of transparency in accounting of GEF funding. In fact, the MTR found a high level of qualified expertise within the PMO and in its PSC and PAC to indicate the Ministry is fully capable of sustaining core activities developed with the support of the project.

83. Nevertheless, the MTR has also identified a number of risks that will need to be mitigated to secure the long-term sustainability of biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection. These are summarised as follows:

- a) **Environmental-related risks at the watershed levels are medium to high.** There are inadequate levels of inter-institutional coordination at all levels to manage the growing environmental risks that are associated with powerful sectors that have to meet the growing demands of feeding, employing and housing the country's population. This situation also echoes the vertical nature of Chinese government which is reflected in the new River Chief System. Although this situation supports the application of the Three Red Lines water governance in small and medium-sized rivers the main focus remains the sectors who are physically present in, or next to these rivers such as dams and treatment plants. However, this does not equate to a landscape approach to manage the river ecosystem in which many other sectors are present at the watershed level and which cause considerable environmental impact (housing, roads, agriculture, industry, etc.). As a result, it is not clear how WRM will be able to protect and enforce e-flow and conservation of aquatic biodiversity without closer coordination and using an appropriate unit of analysis, such as the watershed, in order to address the challenges of establishing integrated ecosystem management (IEM)⁵⁰;
- b) **Climatic-related risks are medium to high.** Generally, the MTR found stakeholders are not fully aware of the growing effects of climate change and generally felt this is not a problem in the pilot provinces. This is also reflected in the section on risk in the PIRs. However, stakeholders in Yunnan Province confirmed they are facing major challenges due to a marked change in the dry and wet seasons, which includes a notable intensification of rainfall patterns over a shorter period of time. The growing risks associated with climate change are also confirmed through extensive research on climatic trends in China by the World Bank.⁵¹ However, the project currently does not have a strategy to address the effects of climate change in its planning, (even though the protection of e-flow provides an excellent gateway to do so);

⁵⁰ The MTR understands that IEM has been applied in parts of the Upper Yangtze River since 2011 and supported by TNC since 2016.

⁵¹ World Bank, Climatic Trends and Impacts in China, September 2013. The report concluded: *"The growing body of scientific evidence shows that China's climate is indeed changing, especially when climate is viewed at the regional level. Temperatures are rising, precipitation regimes are changing, and shifts have occurred in the distribution of extreme weather events. Changes vary remarkably from one region to the next, but the effects of more frequent extreme weather events and other long-term changes cut across the whole of China's economy. One of the biggest knowledge gaps facing both scientists and policy makers is how the impacts of climate change will be amplified or moderated by China's future development.... Effective policies and investments to manage risks are imperative for reducing the sensitivity and increasing the resilience of the country to climate change."*

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- c) **Health-related risks are high.** The full impact of the COVID-19 coronavirus in China and globally is still unknown, but the indications are it will be severe, especially if there is a second wave of the virus later in 2020. Currently, the project is not applying a risk management strategy to address and mitigate this impact. As a result, issues such as the reduction in the allocation of resources, the limitations on travel to the field and for training, etc. are likely to affect sustainability.

84. It has also been pointed out in the section of effectiveness, that the MTR identified some significant capacity-related challenges that need to be addressed to sustain key activities over the long-term. First, the project has no clear exit strategy concerning the continuation of the training programmes in key areas such as biodiversity monitoring and data management, which will require many years to develop before it can support evidence-based decision-making.
85. Second, the above-mentioned risks have not been adequately addressed. The MTR identified inadequate levels of active intra and inter-institutional coordination is in place to guide decisions on where to optimise public investment to sustain biodiversity conservation and e-flow. For example, the communication between MWR at both the central-provincial and inter-provincial levels lacks a chief technical coordinator and focal points to ensure internal information exchange and knowledge sharing is fully fed into planning and implementation of biodiversity monitoring, R/LHAs, the River Chief System, etc. At the inter-institutional level, there is a general absence of coordination and synergies with MEE in areas of mutual interest relating to biodiversity monitoring and systematisation of results (such as on habitat conservation, protecting endemic and endangered aquatic species, etc.). This situation also exists with MNR on land use planning and risk management strategies to protect watersheds and remove/reduce the risk of natural disasters. In addition, there is no specific strategy in place to mitigate the medium to long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on project activities (such as new approaches to using a combination of internet technologies, new field techniques and a wider array of partnerships with small multidisciplinary groups).
86. Third, the project has focused little attention on developing new services. In particular e-flow data offers new opportunities to guide sectors such as MARA or the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology not only improve water efficiency, but also adapt to climate variability and change. Indeed, the provision of these services would also give the MWR considerable leverage to develop dialogue and cooperation on establishing and sustaining the landscape approach to river ecosystem management proposed in the Prodoc.

4.4.2 Evidence of replication or catalysis of project results

87. Despite the considerable delays in implementation, the MTR identified two areas where the project has inspired MWR to replicate an initiative piloted by the project and acted as a catalyst for change. The first concerns the replication of the New River/Lake Chief System. This is currently being piloted nationwide to test whether the platform for river chiefs and civil society is the best way forward to enhance biodiversity conservation and e-flow management of small and medium-sized rivers at all levels within the country's provinces and autonomous regions. Furthermore, in a presentation to the MTR in April 2020, the MWR confirmed that the new system is encouraging other stakeholders to participate in the platform, which suggests there is scope for the system to develop into a more multi-sectoral approach to WRM.
88. The second, concerns the research into application of GLS, which the project has helped determine can be applied within a broader version of R/LHA in which there are five protocols;

one of which is dedicated specifically to the assessment of biological water demand. This has led to the elaboration of new guidelines to pilot the new R/LHA nationwide. An important goal of this piloting exercise is to identify the biological indicators to be adopted nationally in the R/LHA to produce a full picture of the river’s level of aquatic biodiversity. This will not only facilitate the formulation of the river/lake health report, but also enable the MWR to cross-check information in the advanced information system and produce a national picture on the state of aquatic biodiversity throughout the country’s small and medium-sized rivers and lakes. In addition, the R/LHA will be able to provide guidance on the measures to be implemented to protect e-flow, which will include restoration and improved connectivity of natural habitats along the river channel.

4.5 Factors affecting performance

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

Finding 9: The project has confronted several barriers that are having and/or are likely to have an effect on project performance. First, the project design has some gaps relating to the application of biodiversity monitoring and some targets are unrealistic or difficult to measure and report. Second the M&E system is centred on reporting progress rather than on results and learning. Third, the project lacks a communication strategy that engages different sectors of society to engage in and/or support the multiplier effect relating to biodiversity conservation. Fourth, FAO does not have an efficient internal coordination mechanism to ensure GEF-funded projects in China (including project 057) allocate sufficient resources to the BH/FAO-CN to support and supervise the operating partners execute the projects in accordance with the conditions applied in the OPA/Executing Agreement.

Finding 10: Integration of risk management in planning supported by effective inter-institutional communication remains largely absent and this restricts the opportunities to establish an integrated landscape approach to river ecosystem management.

4.5.1 Project design and readiness

89. The MTR found little evidence to indicate the project’s performance has been affected by design defects in the Prodoc. Generally, stakeholders interviewed confirmed its intervention logic is clear and coherent and this has facilitated planning and implementation. However, three areas where the design has contributed to slowing down implementation concerns the lack of clarity on how to apply the GLS concept and biodiversity monitoring and the absence of a CTA to guide and coordinate these and other technical aspects in the project. In the case of GLS, the project relied on TNC to research the application of this concept. Due to the delay in signing the TNC service contract, the research and then testing of GLS within a revised version of the R/LHA approach was not concluded in the pilot provinces until the end of 2019.
90. In the case of biodiversity monitoring, the Prodoc and OPA provides inadequate information on who will be ultimately responsible for coordinating the development of the monitoring system at the cross-sector level, and the project has not established guidelines to ensure it is conducted to international standards that require, among others, a certain number of sample

sites (to establish data accuracy to support decision-making). Indeed, the CTA expressed concerns that the number of sampling sites needs to be increased on each pilot river.⁵² As a result, the development of the biodiversity monitoring has not only taken time to implement, but also its application (including the identification of indicators) and has become highly dependent on university expertise to apply it. The MTR understands that the CTA is addressing these problems and providing guidance and advice in areas such as the selection of initial indicators to test the biodiversity monitoring.

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

91. The MTR was unable to interview the PSC Chairman, or Vice Chairman to assess the quality of the project's execution under their watch. This was due to excessive workload associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the MTR found the quality of project execution exercised by the PSC in the first year was impeded by the general lack of understanding on how the OPIM/PMO modality should operate, given it was a new concept. However, the MTR observes the quality of the execution of the project has improved considerably since 2019 following the completion of institutional reforms, which forced amendments to the OPA. This is demonstrated by the PSC's support in nominating qualified staff to work full time in the PMO, which included the recruitment of a project manager (who also became an observer in the PSC) in April 2019 and the CTA in August 2019.
92. The MTR found the quality of project management was limited at the time of the project's start up due to the lack of experience in applying the OPIM/PMO modality. This contributed to the delay in the preparation and submission of the inception report in April 2017. However, this has improved considerably since the establishment of a permanent project team and recruitment of the project manager. The MTR found no evidence to indicate the PMO lacks adequate expertise that has, or could, result in a slow-down of project activities. Furthermore, the majority of the PMO members demonstrate they do not have major problems in communicating in English.
93. However, the PMO has not fully integrated risk management into its planning and there is a risk that without adequate identification of risks and corresponding mitigation measures in place the project could be affected at any moment by a climatic event, natural disaster, a second wave of the COVID-19 virus, etc.

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

94. The MTR found evidence to indicate that FAO did not fully prepare in advance of the start-up of the project to ensure the recommendations in the Report on the Fiduciary Assessment of IETCEC/MWR (March 2016), were fully applied at start-up. As a result, FAO's GCU had to send the fund liaison officer (FLO) to FAO-CN to provide guidance on project implementation issues in 2016. In addition, GCU funded an international and national consultant to support the BH/FAO-CN resolve difficulties associated with the start-up of all GEF5-funded projects applying OPA/Executing Agreements in China from 2016. These difficulties included the need for a risk assessment of the operating partner, complying with new government rules and regulations set by government in the aftermath of major institutional reforms in 2017-2018 concerning the implementation of donor-funded projects and the lack of guidance material and funding to implement the *ad hoc* conditions set by FAO's Senior Management to mitigate the risks of executing projects indirectly through operational partners. However, the risk assessment proved

⁵² The MTR understands there are on average three sampling sites per pilot river, which means strategic places such as fishways are not adequately tracked.

inconclusive and, as mentioned in section 4.3.2, funding gaps in the projects’ design were not resolved, leaving the BH/FAO-CN unable to recruit the staff he needed to manage and supervise the GEF5 project portfolio in China as foreseen in the OPAs/Executing Agreements. This resulted in the adoption of stop-gap solutions, such as the GCU agreeing to fund the assurance activities established in the OPA by Senior Management. In addition, FAO-CN adopted the position of applying the OPAs/Executing Agreements in line with MS-701/OPIM, when in fact none of the GEF5-funded projects in China complied with this regulation (due to the *ad hoc* nature of the conditions applied in the OPAs/EAs). Indeed, the MTR concludes that the FAO lacks a suitable and permanent internal coordination mechanism to ensure different services (LTO, FLO, GCU, PSS, BH, FAO-CN, etc.) are providing coordinated guidance both at the design and start-up phases concerning the funding needs of GEF-funded projects applying MS-701/OPIM rules and procedures.

4.5.4 *Financial management and co-financing*

95. The MTR did not identify any major problems associated with the accounting and management of GEF funds, or in the slow disbursement of co-finance that have affected implementation rates, or the need to reschedule activities.

4.5.5 *Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement*

96. The MTR found that the partnerships established between the MWR and civil society have not affected performance. Indeed, the establishment of the new River Chief System platform in which a new partnership has been established with civil society (as civil river chiefs) in the two pilot provinces has contributed to improving performance. However, the general lack of official engagement with other government stakeholders (such as MEE, MNR, MARA, etc.), based on mechanisms that not only support interinstitutional dialogue, but also the ability to implement decisions was found to be absent as highlighted earlier in this report (see sections 4.1 and 4.2).

4.5.6 *Communication, visibility, knowledge management and knowledge products*

97. A high level of communication has not been maintained between the PMO’s central office in Beijing and the PMO offices in the pilot provinces. There are indications from the interviews that this has contributed to some delays in preparing for the launch of training and activities relating to biodiversity monitoring and also in receiving adequate feedback on the developments under component 1 that are being managed from Beijing. Furthermore, there is a lack of a inter-institutional communication with key development sectors to ensure that there is a regular flow of knowledge exchange and dialogue to support learning and reflexion on biodiversity conservation within the context of a landscape (relating to the river ecosystem). However, communication at the intra-provincial level has been good and there is no evidence the PMOs established at the local level (integrated into the River Chief Systems) have caused any significant delays in launching or implementing the majority of the on-the-ground actions.
98. In terms of communications on the project’s progress and performance, the MTR found the project provides an array of newsletters, publications, newspaper articles, television spots, etc. However, it is not capitalising on the identifying lessons and good practices from its M&E system (see 4.5.7) and this has contributed to the fact that there is no clear communication strategy in place to target different audiences, such as school children, the tourist sector, or the private sector. This situation, coupled with the lack of systematisation of results of national and

international interest relating to conservation of habitats, protection of endangered species, lessons learned from e-flow calculations and protection, etc., indicates the project is not optimising the management of its information. In particular, the MTR believes the information management is not being used effectively to stimulate the multiplier effect to encourage civil society, government and the private sector to engage in supporting biodiversity conservation, or invest in it.

99. Finally, concerning communication in English, the MTR found there is a need for professional support in translating key documents, given the translation of some elements, such as the title of plans, policies, regulations, guidelines, etc. were found to be unclear. In addition, the project's website does not have any information in English.⁵³

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

100. The design and application of the project's M&E system was found to be moderately unsatisfactory and in its current format appears to be heavily focused on tracking operations and outputs. This situation is partly due to the Prodoc's long list of immediate outcomes, outputs and targets (over 50) that have encouraged the PMO to apply exceptionally long tables attempting to track the progress of one of them. Furthermore, the consultant sent by GCU to provide support to FAO-CN and the partners appears to have not addressed this situation, as reporting has not changed since the project started operations in 2017. Under these circumstances the M&E system managed by the PMO represents a costly exercise that primarily fulfils GEF/FAO reporting requirements (PIR and PPR respectively), rather than a system to stimulate learning and internal reflection on immediate results/outcomes (for example, on the official approval and application of WRM guidelines) and their wider results/outcomes (for example, what happens following application of the guidelines in terms of change on the physical environment in the pilot sites), which would facilitate analysis on why results are, or are not, being achieved and how to capitalise on strengths and reduce weaknesses in order to promote desired impact (i.e. what happens after the project in other parts of the pilot provinces and in China as a whole).

4.6 Cross-cutting priorities

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

Finding 11: The project design provides limited information and guidance on the gender focus and on the approach to working with ethnic minorities who are present in the two pilot sites in Yunnan Province. This situation has not been addressed during the project's implementation and monitoring. As result, reporting provides very limited information on sex-disaggregated participation, reaching the most vulnerable, or the mechanisms in place to track GEF's policy related to ethnic minorities.

Finding 12: The MTR is satisfied from the evidence gathered that the project continues to conform with the environmental and social standards established prior to start-up in September 2016 in the ESS, but that additional information would be desirable to identify its potential wider

⁵³ The website can be found at: <http://intce.mwr.cn/swdyxbhgzslxd>

impact on conservation of the country's biodiversity and the opportunities derived from its eco-services.

4.6.1 Gender and social inclusion focus

101. The project design does not include a gender analysis supported by a gender responsive approach that conforms with GEF's policy of shifting from a "do no harm" to a "do good" strategy.⁵⁴ It also provides no specific guidance in the form of sex disaggregated indicators and targets. The main reference to gender in the Prodoc states, *"Participatory practices will place strong emphasis on the realization of gender equality throughout the project implementation process... The conscious inclusion of women in... knowledge exchange mechanisms will further strengthen the gender equality aspect of the project."*⁵⁵ Similarly, the MTR found no specific reference to the implementation of FAO's Policy on Gender Equality (2013).
102. The MTR found from its analysis that gender has a low profile in project reporting. Analysis of the PIR (December 2019), indicates that 49 per cent of the local population in the pilot sites are officially women, although due to the migration of men to the cities for work, the actual figure is estimated to be closer to 70 per cent. Also significant is that the vast majority of these women are engaged in farming. The project's main focus, *"encourages women's involvement in project activities, such as attending mobilization and advocacy on biodiversity protection practices, participating in river cleaning actions, etc."*⁵⁶ This is substantiated by the view, *"As women and children are more vulnerable to ecological environment, they could benefit from all the project results"*.⁵⁷ However, the MTR was unable to substantiate how far women are actually participating in project activities or, more importantly, if it is targeting the most vulnerable and marginalized groups of women and youths, as the M&E system does not include sex-disaggregated data, or track socially-inclusive data.
103. In response, the MTR asked stakeholders in its interviews about the project's gender focus in relation to supporting women's empowerment in line with GEF's current gender policy and on participation rates. All respondents reported that in China women have equal rights concerning decision-making and access to resources and that for these reasons a specific gender strategy focusing on these issues was justified. This was also substantiated by the fact that over 40 per cent of the PMO staff at the central, provincial and local levels are women. On the question of participation, the MTR found that approximately 40 per cent of the 28 500 villagers who have participated in the project's on-the-ground activities to December 2019 are women. However, reporting provides no information or findings relating to how far women participants are improving their understanding of the value of biodiversity conservation, or on how many are actually practicing environmentally-friendly practices to protect their local river biodiversity. Likewise, the MTR was unable to obtain information on how many civil river chiefs are women, although interviews indicate one of the four civil river chiefs nominated in the four pilot sites is a woman. On the question of other gender groups, in particular the participation of youths aged 15 to 25 years old, the MTR was unable to find adequate data and that field analysis is required to assess this more accurately.

⁵⁴ Policy on Gender, adopted at the 53rd GEF Council Meeting, Washington D.C., 30 November 2017 (p. 4).

⁵⁵ Prodoc, Section 5.1 "Social sustainability", p. 154.

⁵⁶ PIR, December 2019, p. 38.

⁵⁷ Idem.

104. Likewise, the project provides very little information on how far it is applying GEF and FAO's policies and guidelines concerning ethnic minorities.⁵⁸ Interviews confirm ethnic minorities are present in both pilot sites in Yunnan Province. This is particularly the case in Jingdong County (Chuan River) where there are several ethnic minorities (in particular Dai, Hani, Yao and Yi ethnic groups) and who together account for the majority of the county's total population. However, the MTR was unable to gain an adequate insight into how ethnic groups were consulted during the selection of the Chuan River as a pilot site, or how far they feel their specific needs and interests (women and men) have been incorporated into project activities in the pilot sites. For example, in the PIR (December 2019), the only information provided on the project's approach in Jingdong County was the distribution of leaflets to each household to raise awareness of water saving, biodiversity conservation and environmental protection. There are also low levels of data on the participation levels of ethnic minorities although it is reported to be around 40 per cent held in Jingdong County.⁵⁹ Interviews with stakeholders provided no further information on the participation of ethnic minorities. This was not aided by the loss of internet connection with representatives from Jingdong County. However, the vast majority of stakeholders did not feel the project needed a specific focus for ethnic minorities on the grounds all ethnic minorities are treated equally and there is not, therefore, a significant ethnic divide in the country. As a result, the MTR concludes more analysis in the field is required in order to provide more information on this horizontal issue.

4.6.2 *Environmental and social standards*

105. The PMO did not include an update on the ESS Checklist (2016) in its self-evaluation report (April 2020) to support an analysis of any potential changes. Nonetheless, the MTR found sufficient evidence from its desk analysis and interviews to confirm the project continues to meet the following relevant points in the ESS Checklist that was prepared in 2016:

- Continues to meet FAO principles relating to the conservation of natural resources and ecosystems (ESS II);
- Continues to support improvements in water resources management and is actively addressing the negative impact of dams up to 5 m. in height (up to 50 MW) on e-flow, which is critical to sustaining aquatic biodiversity (ESS 1);
- Avoids practices that could have a negative impact on aquatic biodiversity, although the more information on the conservation of riparian biodiversity would be desirable (ESS 2a);
- Actively supports the conservation of wetlands and other aquatic-related habitats, as well as their connectivity, although greater detail on whether any have been integrated into the country's protected area network, how many are critical habitats and information on their ecosystem services would be desirable (ESS 2b);
- Adheres to the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (ESS 4).

106. The MTR points out that to substantiate these findings further, a field phase would need to be carried out. This would also help identify its potential wider impact on conservation of the country's biodiversity and the opportunities derived from its eco-services, which are not reported, or monitored, despite the Prodoc highlighting the contribution of the project to developing "global environmental benefits" (GEB).⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Principles and Guidelines for engagement with Indigenous Peoples, October 2012 (p. 18-21)

⁵⁹ Exactly the same information is provided in both PIR-1 (December 2018) and PIR-2 (December 2019), p. 39.

⁶⁰ Prodoc, Subsection 2.5: Global Environmental Benefits, p. 108-109. In particular it states the project will demonstrate GEBs in the four pilot sites.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

107. The project is around two years behind its planned progress and the achievement of outcomes identified. However, since 2019 the MTR found a marked improvement in project implementation and a strong commitment within MWR to meet the project’s objective of fully mainstreaming biodiversity conservation into China’s water resources management policies, strategies and plans corresponding legal and regulatory framework. This has been demonstrated through a number of positive developments. This has been aided by a highly supportive PSC, which has facilitated, among others, the establishment of a dedicated team of MWR staff in the PMO who are working full-time on the project at the central and provincial levels and the employment of a Chief Technical Adviser (CTA) to provide leadership on the implementation of the project’s main activities under components 1-3.
108. Two areas where the MTR found the project has made satisfactory progress concerns the establishment of a tiered approach to the River-Chief System in both pilot provinces and the mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection into R/LHAs. The first involves the nomination of river chiefs by MWR at the provincial, municipal and county/district levels and civil river chiefs nominated at either/both township and village levels. The MTR found this new partnership between MWR and civil society has facilitated the mobilisation of on-the-ground activities funded by the project and, thus, raise awareness on the importance and benefits of biodiversity conservation within civil society and offers a new space for other government stakeholders to participate. Indeed, there are indications this has already taken place on an *ad hoc* basis, although more analysis in the field is required to substantiate this. The second, concerns the establishment of five protocols in the R/LHAs; one of which ensures biological water integrity forms an integral part of the river/lake health assessment. Furthermore, two positive outcomes from these developments has been MWR’s decision to pilot both at the national level, supported by the introduction of new guidelines.
109. Progress in other activities, such as policy and legal reforms, or the establishment of effective biodiversity monitoring and data management has been slow and there is general agreement among all stakeholders that some of the targets under component 2 are not realistic. In these cases, the project design was found to be over ambitious and had not taken into full account that the legal reform process is slow in China and biodiversity monitoring and its management is a very complex discipline to apply effectively and in line with international standards.
110. The overall risk rating for the project is medium. On the one hand risks are low, because the project enjoys political support and demonstrates it has the financial resources and technical capacity to achieve the majority of planned outcomes. On the other, it has not integrated risk management into its planning, implementation and monitoring and attention given to establishing effective inter-institutional coordination in areas of mutual interest has been low. As a result, the risks associated with the effects of climate variability and change, natural and health-related disasters, etc. are not being adequately integrated into WRM and resource efficiency is not being optimised.

111. In conclusion, the MTR found the project continues to be highly relevant to the Chinese government and this is matched by a strong commitment in both human resources and co-finance to reach objectives. However, to optimise the sustainability of its results, the PMO will need to address some barriers that are affecting efficiency and the level of effectiveness of its WRM going forward. In some cases, the MTR sees some of these barriers as also opportunities to bring about positive change in other sectors, such as agriculture and industry.

112. Conclusion 1 on question 1 (Relevance): Overall, the MTR found the project's three main (final) outcomes are satisfactory in that they are congruent with priorities of GEF, FAO and MWR and are mutually reinforcing, which has strengthened its intervention logic and enhanced the opportunities to raise awareness on biodiversity conservation and e-flow at all levels of government. However, the project's relevance is let down by a long list of immediate outcomes to achieve final outcomes that are, in many cases, confusing as they relate to activities or outputs. Moreover, the project plays down the importance of synergies with other ministries, such as MEE on biodiversity monitoring, or MNR on land-use planning in the river catchments where key sector ministries such as MARA have a direct impact on water resources and biodiversity. There is also a gap in coordination with neighbouring provinces that share the upper reaches of some of the selected pilot rivers (especially in Chongqing municipality with Sichuan Province). As a result, the MTR found the project retain a strong sector approach to biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection, rather than one that stimulates cross-sector coordination and collaboration to support the river's ecosystem (or landscape).

113. Conclusion 2 on question 2 (Effectiveness): Delays amounting to as much as two years in implementation (including current COVID-19 restrictions) has had an effect on the delivery of planned outputs and outcomes, although positive outcomes are evident since 2019, which demonstrate the MWR/IETCEC is in a position to deliver most of its outcomes and objectives relating to the mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation in WRM. However, this will require a project extension period of two years to achieve. The most significant outcome so far is that over 28 500 members of civil society and over 300 MWR staff and local leaders have increased their capacity to apply biodiversity conservation and protect e-flow and that this is now being applied throughout both pilot provinces through the River/Lake Chief System. The mainstreaming of biological integrity into R/LHAs also provides clarity on how the GLS concept can be successfully applied to safeguard aquatic biodiversity and e-flow requirements, as well as guide decisions on where public investment can add most value. Furthermore, the MTR found these outcomes also help to motivate MWR advance reforms on the mainstreaming of biodiversity into water resources management policy and its legal framework, which can already be seen through important revisions to guidelines designed to pilot the new River/Lake Chief System and R/LHAs country-wide. Nevertheless, to support informed decision-making, the MWR, civil society and other government stakeholders will need effective biodiversity monitoring and data management. However, the MTR found slow progress in this area, which is not aided by the lack of inter-institutional coordination, or by an M&E system and communication strategy that focus too much attention on reporting operational progress rather than establishing a learning mechanism that feeds into planning and communications.

114. Conclusion 3 on question 3 (Efficiency): The MTR found the projects capacity to convert its resources into results (outcomes) since 2019 is moderately satisfactory, with

a physical advance averaging almost 40 per cent against expenditure of 21.7 per cent of GEF funds to the end of 2019 (USD 2.64 m.), whereas before 2019 it was unsatisfactory with a financial advance standing at just 6.5 per cent due largely to problems associated with the start-up of operations, (national policy changes, institutional reforms, absence of the CTA, lack of full-time staff, staff rotation within the PMO and FAO-CN, etc.). Meanwhile, expenditure of co-finance from MWR confirms over 65 per cent of planned funds have been disbursed (USD 16.9 m.) over the same period. The MTR concludes the project's efficiency has improved significantly due to a combination of cost-efficient and cost-effective measures. These measures include the Project Steering Committee (PSC) taking important decisions in 2019 to increase the project's internal technical capacity at relatively low cost and at the same time ensuring co-finance was targeted where it was needed most at both the national level and in the pilot provinces. Furthermore, the LoA signed between FAO-CN and TNC has facilitated access to international best practices on WRM and technical expertise at relatively low cost (USD 99 000 over one year). Furthermore, its support on the development of the tiered River Chief System in both pilot provinces has demonstrated a cost-effective way for MWR to engage civil society proactively in biodiversity conservation at all levels of the Department for Water Resources in the pilot provinces, in particular at the village and township levels, which previously had no River Chief system in place. Nonetheless, the MTR found the project still faces shortcomings that are likely to prevent it from optimising its efficiency. On the one hand, the national execution of the project is based on an OPA that includes conditions that do not have the funding needed to fully implement them. In particular, the BH faces significant budgeting challenges to fund the administrative team he needs to supervise the project's implementation, conduct frequent field visits, etc. On the other, there is no mechanism in place to facilitate intra and inter-institutional dialogue and decision-making, supported by a secretariat or similar institution that has the authority to ensure decisions are implemented. In addition, the high level of dependency on participating universities to conduct biodiversity monitoring is likely to become costly (especially if the biodiversity sampling sites are increased to meet international standards), become increasingly susceptible to staff and student rotation and reduce civil society's sense of ownership in the project.

115. **Conclusion 4 on question 4 (Sustainability):** The MTR found that the institutionalisation of the PMO is an important indicator that key activities concerning the mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection are likely to be consolidated and sustained over the medium to long-term. Furthermore, political, social, financial and institutional risks are currently ranked low. However, current capacity levels within the MWR, especially at the provincial level, still need further consolidation through an extension of training and other support services provided by the project. However, an extension of the project should also be seen as an opportunity to address the factors affecting the project's performance, as these are currently preventing the project from optimising its efficiency and effectiveness. These factors are listed in the next conclusion.
116. **Conclusion 5 on question 5 (Factors affecting performance):** The Prodoc has some shortcomings in its design, some of which have been addressed by the PSC, such as the agreement to replace the GLS concept by applying biodiversity conservation in an ecological module within R/LHAs. However, some shortcomings remain which the MTR team found still need to be addressed by the project to enhance the sustainability of some key activities/outputs. The first concerns the lack of clarity in the Prodoc on how

the biodiversity monitoring should be implemented. In particular, it is not clear which stakeholders should be involved, how it should be applied (ensuring an adequate number of sampling sites) and how it should be financed. Currently the MTR found the current approach places heavy dependency on expertise from universities, which is considered unlikely to lead to the establishment of a robust and effective information system that supports decision-making. Second, specific aspects of project such as its M&E system, communications, and gender and ethnic minority strategies focus primarily on fulfilling reporting requirements as opposed to opportunities to develop learning. Most significant is the view of the majority of stakeholders interviewed that gender or ethnic issues are not major issues on the grounds women and men enjoy equal pay and have equal access to training, information and resources. However, inadequate attention is given to assessing the access to these services among the most vulnerable, who according to some interviews are a major cause of biodiversity loss (through illegal fishing and other forms of extraction, habitat encroachment, etc.). Third, the project design provides little or no guidance on the importance of integrating risk management as a cross-cutting issue that not only ensures WRM is able to reduce the effects of climate change, but actually defend it by using e-flow data to support adaptation to climate change in key sectors such as agriculture, housing and industry as well as support them and civil society develop early warning systems and other actions that save lives and the local economy.

117. **Conclusion 6 on question 6 (Cross-cutting priorities):** Due to project design defects and general beliefs mentioned in the previous conclusion on gender and ethnic minorities, the MTR found the project does not include specific strategies on gender and working with ethnic minorities that cross-cut its planning and operations in the pilot sites. This is also justified by the belief that women make up the majority of inhabitants in the pilot sites due to the migration of men to the cities and the fact that ethnic groups are only present in the two sites in Yunnan Province where they are reported to be fully included as recipients of project support.

5.2. Recommendations

118. **Recommendation 1** - Strategic relevance and efficiency – for FAO-GEF Coordination Unit (GCU), LTO and FLO in FAO-Rome, FAO-CN, LTO/FAO-Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (FAO-RAP), MWR/IETCEC/PMO: The MTR considers it is fully justified to recommend:

- a) An extension of the project for a period of two years from 31 May 2020;
- b) That the extension is granted with the following conditions to strengthen its strategic relevance:
 - Adopt the theory of change proposed in Appendix 9 following analysis and final modifications by the PSC and use this to clarify the vision and mission of the project to support the identification of the project's exit strategy at the start of the extension period. Particular attention should be given in the exit strategy to clarifying how training on biodiversity monitoring and data management will be continued after the project and how data will be used (in the GIS information system identified with the support of TNC) will be used and sustained beyond the project to guide and support

informed decision-making. In particular, this decision-making should focus on key issues, such as where to prioritise biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection in the pilot provinces;

- The LTO, FLO, FAO-CN and the PMO review and revise the Results Matrix with the aim of removing repetitive outcomes, adjusting indicators so they are either specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound (SMART), or focus on qualitative issues measured through surveys, questionnaires, etc.) and applying realistic targets where they have over-estimated (in accordance with capacity and resources available). The MTR proposes all references in the RM to the Green Line Scorecard (GLS) should be replaced with “River/Lake Health Assessment” (R/LHA). On this it is also recommended the R/LHA Report is renamed to, for example, “R/LHA Scorecard” to attract public interest, guide public investment and facilitate a national ranking system designed to support, among others, ecological civilisation and participation in the Beautiful Rivers and Lakes initiative of President Xi Jinping. The MTR suggests Other more specific revisions to be considered and proposed to the Project Steering Committee for official approval are:
 - (iii) Outcome 1: the renewal of results under the gap analysis at all levels of MWR (outcome 1.1) should be conducted on a yearly basis. Main findings should be incorporated into annual progress reporting (both PIR and the Ministry’s own annual review) and used to guide the next annual plan. In addition, the mainstreaming of biodiversity into at least 3 important national level and 3 provincial level regulations (outcome 1.2.1) should be subject to an internal review to determine which regulations are required, so that the target is realigned to MWR needs and capacity, as opposed to an estimate in the Prodoc;
 - (iv) Outcomes under component 2 (2.2.1 to 2.3.5) should be reviewed in accordance with the biodiversity and river habitat analysis already conducted, so that targets are adjusted to what is both possible and feasible in terms of capacity and resources available in the project’s extension period. For example, the length of biodiversity conservation measures to be applied (in km), and the area of river habitats to be conserved at each pilot river, should be reviewed according to resources and capacity available and that these resources should their declaration as “protected natural areas” coupled with appropriate enforcement measures coordinated with the River Chief System;
- Develops a more results-oriented M&E system designed to promote learning on not only the results being achieved, but why they were achieved, or not. It is recommended the Theory of Change agreed by the PSC is used to guide reflection and planning on what is the “vision and mission” of the project to 2030 (i.e. its impact over the next decade). To assist this, it is suggested to enhance the project’s visibility by including an assessment of the project’s contribution to meeting national targets in the NBCSAP and, as far as possible, contributions to meeting relevant relevant Aichi Targets in China (such as Targets 8 and 11).

119. Recommendation 2 - Effectiveness – MWR/IETCEC/PMO supported with oversight/supervision from GCU, FAO-CN, LTO and FLO/FAO-RAP: The MTR recommends:

- a) Establishing a mechanism designed to facilitate greater intra and inter-institutional coordination and decision-making in areas of mutual interest at all levels, but particularly at the provincial level (preferably using the River Chief System as the main vehicle to engage such collaboration). Moreover, the mechanism should ensure it has the capacity to implement

decisions from this collaboration and monitor progress (for example, by establishing a secretariat and focal points). For example, it is recommended to forge an alliance with MEE on applying biodiversity monitoring that complies with international standards (in order to support monitoring of project contributions to relevant Aichi Targets, SDGs, etc.) and with MNR on spatial/land-use planning to facilitate dialogue with key sectors, such as MARA, on applying good practices to reduce the risks of soil erosion, pollution of water resources and expansion of agriculture and other sectors in the wetlands and other aquatic habitats that sustain biodiversity of national and global importance;

- b) Piloting the creation of a biodiversity network and committee at the provincial level that brings together different stakeholders both from within the River Chief System and outside who have a mandate, or who are dedicated to nature conservation (including international and grassroot NGOs). The main aim of the network should be to build on the lessons learned from the Biodiversity Protection Committee established in Yunnan Province in 2017 to promote awareness and step up dialogue on how to apply best practices and lesson learnt on WRM in a suitable unit of analysis. This implies refocusing project activities away from aquatic biodiversity conservation per se and more to a wider river ecosystem conservation strategy that uses the watershed as the unit of analysis of choice to support IEM;
- c) Establish a long-term training programme with a dedicated road map to develop aquatic biodiversity monitoring and data management to international standards and with the aim of supporting the government report on progress in meeting relevant goals of the next Five-year Plan and Agenda 2030. To achieve this the training programme will need a training road map that incorporates innovative strategies and practices to ensure it can be carried out, such as through a combination of internet technologies (web-based online learning), new field techniques and a wider array of different partnerships that include synergies with government institutions that have in-depth experience in areas of mutual interest.
- d) Enhance on-the-ground river conservation through better communication and nature education in the pilot rivers through the River Chief System, especially at the county/district, village and/or township levels that includes the active engagement of key stakeholders such as MEE, MNR, MARA, etc.
- e) Provide training and cases studies on how to integrate risk management and adaptation to climate change into the project's planning, implementation and monitoring (especially through the River Chief System). To support this, e-flow data should be used to pilot synergies with MARA on supporting its adaptation to climate variability and change and support moves to establish local coordination mechanisms that establish the watershed as the unit of analysis to initiate a pilot phase of coordinated planning and action in which to identify strengths and weaknesses (gaps), opportunities (synergies) and threats (risk mitigation measures).

120. **Recommendation 3** - Sustainability – for GCU, FAO-CN, LTO/FAO-RAP, MWR/IETCEC/PMO and PSC: The MTR recommends the project's communication strategy is reviewed with the support of an expert in communications and takes on board the following:

- a) Involve the full participation of MWR officials from neighbouring provinces that are responsible for WRM in shared rivers, such as the Tang River in Jiangjin District (Chongqing);
- b) Tailor communications to the needs of different stakeholders (including women, youths and ethnic minorities) in each province on how they can use biodiversity and e-flow data to support adaptation to climate variability and change, disaster risk reduction, ecotourism, PES, etc.
- c) Ensure results (outcomes) are systematised annually (using the M&E system proposed at the end of recommendation 1) to inform sub-national, national and international audiences on progress in conserving aquatic habitats for endemic and endangered species of national and

global importance and other achievements that stimulate learning dialogue and decisions designed to stimulate the multiplier effect (especially in relation to the NBSCAP). It is suggested this is measured in terms of how far civil society, government and the private sector are engaging in practices that support biodiversity conservation, and/or investment in it.

- d) Provide information on results, lessons learned and good practices on the project web page (in the MWR website) and ensure at least a summary is provided in English.

121. **Recommendation 4** – Efficiency and effectiveness – for FLO, GCU, PPS, FAO-CN, LTO/FAO-RAP, IDWG, Senior Management: The MTR recommends a communication mechanism is established (such as an online meeting group using Zoom) to improve dialogue and find solutions to outstanding problems associated with:

- a) The application of *ad hoc* arrangements governing the indirect implementation of GEF5-funded projects such as project 057 in China. It is recommended a specific solution is found to ensure the BH can perform a satisfactory level of supervision/support to implementing partners such as MWR/IETCEC (including assurance activities) in the interest of enhancing FAO's capacity to support project implementation in the proposed extension period;
- b) The current application of FAO's FEE Guidelines in China. The MTR found the BH does not have enough funds to coordinate the GEF project portfolio in China. It is, therefore, suggested dialogue centres on establishing guarantees (as opposed to the application of percentages) to ensure the BH in FAO-CN does not experience major budget shortfalls in implementing the GEF portfolio of projects and that this is used as a model for other countries facing similar challenges;
- c) The application of OPIM/MS-701 in China. The MTR suggests the PPS is fully integrated into the project identification and design process to ensure the necessary risk and capacity assessments are supervised and integrated correctly in the Prodoc and OPA. It is also strongly recommended that the mainstreaming of OPIM pays particular attention to ensuring it does not cause a major delay between the design and implementation phases, given project 057 (and other GEF5 projects) experienced significant delays between the identification/design phase and the start of the implementation phase.

Following this dialogue, it is suggested the agreed solutions are communicated to the Executing Partner to determine how much funding is required to remove the budget restrictions linked to the implementation of the OPA in the project extension proposed in recommendation 1.

122. **Recommendation 5** – cross-cutting priorities – for MWR/IETCEC/PMO in coordination with the LTO: The MTR recommends the project monitors the participation of ethnic minorities and female participants through the application of ethnic/sex-disaggregated data to strengthen reporting on their participation, in particular, the number of women (including women from ethnic minorities)_who are engaged in decision-making roles, such as village/township river chiefs. Particular attention should be given to targeting vulnerable groups (single mothers, women/ethnic minority households, etc. who are classified as below minimum poverty standards, subject to domestic violence, have limited/no access to resources, etc.).

6. Lessons learned

123. **Lesson 1 – on conducting a homebased MTR:** The application of teleconferencing is not only an efficient method to increase communication within the PMO at all levels and avoid the current problem of a mandatory quarantine period of 14 days for anyone who travels between provinces in China, but also good practice to facilitate more regular information exchange and learning.
124. **Lesson 2 – on the catalytic effect of the project:** The creation of a tiered approach to the River Chief System platform demonstrates not only a highly effective and efficient way to raise awareness and engage civil society to participate actively in biodiversity conservation, but also a platform through which other key government institutions can be brought in to widen the debate on how to sustain river and lake habitats as well as act in a more coordinated and collaborative manner on areas of mutual interest (land use, agriculture, housing, etc.)
125. **Lesson 3 – on applying e-flow data analysis:** Data on e-flow offers the project a viable entry point to develop dialogue with institutions such as MARA and small farmers alike that need such data to plan more effectively against the effects of climate variability and change as well as manage farm inputs and soils more sustainably.
126. **Lesson 4 – on biodiversity conservation:** The restoration of habitats such as wetlands and riparian strips offers the project a viable entry point to demonstrate its direct linkages with flood and drought controls that are a growing problem and which cause significant damage and loss of both biodiversity, reduce economic growth and cause social upheaval.
127. **Lesson 5 – on biodiversity monitoring:** The practice of biodiversity monitoring in the Prodoc presupposes that the data collected can, with training, be processed, validated and then used to identify trends is only half the practice. The other half concerns the complex and lengthy identification process of aquatic species, which in the case of fish larvae, phytoplankton and benthic organisms living in sediment can take considerable time and usually requires specialists who may not be easily available.
128. **Lesson 6 - on gender and ethnic minorities:** The issues of gender and the rights of ethnic minorities are generally considered to be well attended through rights to equal pay for men and women who do the same job, , which has reduced the scope to focus on issues relating to their level of vulnerability and their specific needs to ensure they do not use biodiversity unsustainably , or remain excluded from decision-making.
129. **Lesson 7 – on the GEF5 project portfolio in China:** the identification and design of GEF5/GEF6 projects in isolation of each other in China has resulted in missed opportunities to develop synergies in areas of mutual interest that could enhance cost-effectiveness through information and knowledge exchange, joint-trainings, etc.
130. **Lesson 8 – on monitoring evaluation and reporting:** the absence of effective monitoring of results to support learning and reporting on national and international goals and targets (such as the SDGs and Aichi Targets) reduces the scope to optimise GEF's visibility in general and its contribution to conserving nationally and globally important biodiversity in particular.
131. **Lesson 9 – on indirect implementation of projects in China:** the absence of an appropriate communication/funding mechanism within FAO to ensure GEF-funded projects (and FAO

projects) such as project 057 are subject to coordinated dialogue on their identification, design, implementation, monitoring and exit strategy continues to restrict the opportunities for executing partners to achieve high levels of efficiency and effectiveness in a timely manner.

7. Appendices

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Appendix 1. Terms of reference for the MTR

Introduction

1. This document provides the terms of reference for the mid-term review (MTR) of the FAO-GEF project “A new green line: mainstreaming biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China’s water resources management policy and planning”.

Project/programme background and context

2. The FAO-GEF project “A new green line: mainstreaming biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China’s water resources management policy and planning” was endorsed by the GEF CEO on 1 December 2015. The GCP Agreement Letter and Operational Partners Agreement were signed on 6 September 2016 and 29 September 2016, respectively. Its official starting date is 29 September 2016 and its closing date is 31 May 2020. The operational partner is the International Economic and Technical Cooperation and Exchange Center (IETCEC) of MWR. The project has a GEF budget of 2,639,726 USD and 25,975,000USD co-financing.
3. The project objective is to mainstream biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China’s water resources management policy and planning. The project promotes systematic consideration of the balance between biodiversity conservation and development objectives to become part of all WMR relevant policies, planning and legislation as well as corresponding regulations. WRM practices, existing as well as planned, should be assessed from a biodiversity perspective and the identification of WRM practices that minimize negative impacts on river biodiversity should be prioritized as much as possible. The required analytical capacity and examples for practical implementation will be demonstrated by the NGL project in Yunnan and Chongqing.

Description of the project, project objectives and components

Box 1: Basic information

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">A. GEF Project ID Number: 5665B. Recipient country: ChinaC. Implementing Agency: FAOD. Executing partner: The International Economic and Technical Cooperation and Exchange Centre, Ministry of Water Resources (IETCEC, MWR), The Nature Conservancy (TNC)E. GEF Focal Area: BiodiversityF. GEF Objectives: BD-2 (Mainstream Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use into Production Landscapes, Seascapes and Sectors)G. FAO Strategy/operational program: SO2 (Increase and improve provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner)H. Date of CEO endorsement: 1 December 2015I. Date of project start (EOD): 29 September 2016J. Operational Partners Agreement signed: 29 September 2016K. Operational Partners Agreement amended: 19 July 2018L. Initial date of project completion (original NTE): 31 May 2020 |
|--|

Context

4. For decades, China's water systems have been paying a particularly high price for China's rapid industrialization. Dramatic increase in water demand from the expanding industrial sector, especially water intensive heavy industries, as well as intensified agriculture were combined with excessive water pollution due to unregulated discharge of waste water. Scarcity and pollution created a double water crisis that China is confronted with today, especially threatening agricultural productivity and food security. In response, China has enacted a series of legal and regulatory provisions to improve water availability and quality by increasing water savings and water productivity for example through large investments in irrigation modernization. These efforts culminated in the 2012 State Council's *Decisions on Strict Water Resources Management* which established the concept of the "Three Red Lines". **The "Three Red Lines" represent the central water resource management priorities all water management in China needs to be oriented at.** They stipulate to:
 - 1) limit total water use by strict demand management,
 - 2) achieve higher water use efficiency in industry and agriculture, and
 - 3) improve water quality by a cap on pollution loading within water functional zones.
5. The current regulatory system however does not systematically include the protection of biodiversity in river ecosystems. It also does not focus on river flow regimes and the environmental impacts of flow alterations by infrastructure like dams and reservoirs, embankments etc. The NGL Project proposes to add an additional fourth line, the "Green Line", which focusses the conservation of river biodiversity and links it to the existing environmental protection measures.
6. China has rich surface water resources that include over 20,000 rivers with draining catchments of 100 km² or more. Of these, 228 have drainage basins exceeding 1000 km². The Yangtze River and rivers to the south of it carry 82% of the total runoff of Chinese rivers (Min of Water Resources and Power, 2012). However, in terms of fresh water resources available per capita, China has 20% of the world's population but only around 7% of the world's freshwater resources. This results in high water stress, creating a particular necessity for efficient water use and sustainable management of existing water resources.
7. China is one of the world's top 10 countries in terms of numbers of freshwater fish species, with ~1,000 species recorded. South-eastern China (including the pilot provinces of Chongqing and Yunnan) encompasses some of the world's most important biodiversity hotspots and globally significant ecoregions and habitats. A study on China's freshwater fishes (Kang et al. 2012) identified a total of 613 species as endemic within China. Among them, 216 endemic species are found in Yunnan Province. Approximately 58% of the species in Yunnan Province are endemic to China. The Upper Yangtze Region, including Chongqing Municipality, is home to 303 species. Therefore, they are especially suitable to demonstrate the powerful environmental benefits, significant at a global scale that can be achieved through sustainable river WRM in China. The project areas have been selected as follows:
 - i. Project Site #1: Buma & Enle River, Zhenyuan County, Pu'er Prefecture, Yunnan Province
 - ii. Project Site #2: Chuan River, Jingdong County, Pu'er Prefecture, Yunnan Province
 - iii. Project Site #3: Wubu River, Banan District, Chongqing Municipality
 - iv. Project Site #4: Tanghe River, Jiangjin District, Chongqing Municipality

Threats to biodiversity conservation

8. **Flow modification through river regulation and control.** Artificial river flow alterations, including infrastructure like dams and embankments as well as water abstraction pattern, change the natural cycle of the river ecosystem, threatening biodiversity.
9. **Water stress.** China currently faces medium to high levels of water stress. 20-40 percent of the water available is withdrawn for agricultural, domestic, and industrial use annually—leaving environment vulnerable to scarcity. In addition, water abstraction is also a cause for flow alteration (see above), threatening river ecosystems.
10. **Climate Change.** In addition, the effects of climate variability and change will exacerbate the situation and imperil both freshwater species and human uses of fresh water, driving engineering responses that will further threaten the freshwater biota. Climate change promises to complicate and aggravate the problems of water stress already faced by China.
11. **Pollution.** Water quality is not in the centre of the NGL project, but needs to be mentioned as a major environmental pressure for China’s water bodies across the country.

Project components and beneficiaries

12. The Project’s specific objective is to “mainstream biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China’s water resources management policy and planning”. It is highly consistent with China’s biodiversity conservation strategy and policy priorities. The project aims to promote the close combination of river biodiversity protection and water conservancy, and contribute to biodiversity conservation and water ecological civilization construction in China. This is in line with the national priority of the construction of ecological civilization, as well as :
 - China’s biodiversity conservation strategy and action plan (2011-2030)
 - the protection of the Yangtze River
 - strategies and policies to promote ecological protection and high-quality development in the Yellow River Basin
13. Moreover, the project concept of green line and the national “three red lines” are highly integrated. The project content is consistent with the water ecological protection of rivers and lakes in China. The project outputs are in line with the priority of the Ministry of Water Resources to strengthen river and lake governance, as well as the priority in Yunnan and Chongqing.
14. The expected outcomes of the Project are:
 - (i) *strengthening of China’s governance system at the national, provincial and local level facilitating the transition towards sustainable agricultural sector (including fisheries) production systems;*
 - (ii) *implementation of internationally recognized mechanisms, e.g. through the mainstreaming of best WRM practices and the application of the internationally acknowledged standard;*
 - (iii) *design and implementation of evidence-based decision-making in China’s WRM sector, e.g. through the establishment of reliable monitoring systems.*
15. To achieve the project objectives and expected outcomes the Project has been structured in 3 components and various sub-components as presented in the box below.

Box 2: Components and sub-components of the project

Component 1: Changing the framework

- 1.1 Mainstream biodiversity objectives and practices into key water resource management policies, planning, and legal stipulations at the national, provincial, prefecture and county/district level
- 1.2 Develop administrative regulations as well as technical guidelines for translating biodiversity objectives into concrete WRM practices

- 1.3 Establish new institutional partnerships for WRM between government and CSOs Develop system of principles and corresponding standards to systematically measure and certify biodiversity conservation in China's water bodies
- 1.4 Increase levels of government investments into biodiversity conservation for river eco-systems

Component 2: Enhancing implementation

- 2.1 Broaden the alliance of stakeholders and clarify distribution of responsibilities to strengthen the networks of partners involved in the implementation of biodiversity conservation measures
- 2.2 Pilot counties in Yunnan Province demonstrate successful implementation of local-level biodiversity conservation activities, implementing e-flows
- 2.3 Pilot districts in Chongqing demonstrate successful implementation of local-level biodiversity conservation activities, implementing e-flows
- 2.4 Compilation and internal as well as external dissemination of information and best practices gained from the project

Component 3: Improving information

- 3.1 Design and implement additional information systems to provide comprehensive river biodiversity analysis (including mappings, environmental flow analysis, river health assessments, and water accounting)
- 3.2 Establish a comprehensive biodiversity monitoring system for aquatic biodiversity and piloting of the system in the project areas
- 3.3 Develop and implement system of multi-level and multifaceted biodiversity mainstreaming training program targeting government officials and water management partners from local communities and civil society organizations
- 3.4 Project Monitoring and Evaluation

16. The main beneficiaries of the Project are:

- The **MWR and local water management authorities** in the project sites will benefit from capacity building, access to international experience and cross-sector cooperation with other government partners.
- The **local communities** will have increased employment and income-generating opportunities, will have higher awareness and understanding of sustainable water management and utilization, and will enjoy a better natural environment.
- **Broader river management practitioners and agencies** will benefit from the lessons, experience and information built up at the project sites under through knowledge sharing and exchange.

The co-financing

17. The total co-financing of the project is 25,975,000 USD, including: (i) Ministry of Water Resources (USD 19 300 000); (ii) Yunnan Dep. of Water Resources (USD 3 100 000); (iii) Chongqing Dep. of Water Resources (USD 3 000 000); (iv) The Nature Conservancy (USD 500 000); (v) FAO (USD 75 000). FAO, as the GEF Agency, is only responsible for the execution of the GEF resources and the FAO co-financing. The co-financing allocated until December 2019 could be found in the 5th PPR.

<u>Financing Plan:</u> GEF/LDCF/SCCF allocation:	USD 2 639 726
<u>Co-financing:</u>	
Ministry of Water Resources (in-kind and cash)	USD 19 300 000
Yunnan Dep. of Water Resources (in-kind and cash)	USD 3 100 000
Chongqing Dep. of Water Resources (in-kind and cash)	USD 3 000 000

The Nature Conservancy (in-kind)	USD 500 000
FAO (in-kind and cash)	USD 75 000
Total Co-financing:	USD 25 975 000
Total Budget:	USD 28 614 726

1.1 Project stakeholders and their role

Table A4.1. Stakeholder analysis matrix template

Key stakeholders (disaggregated as appropriate) ⁶¹	What is their role in the project?	What is the reason for their inclusion in or exclusion from the MTR?	Priority for MTR (1-3) ⁶²	How and when should they be involved in the MTR?
1. Active stakeholders with direct responsibility for the project, e.g. FAO, executing partners				
FAO	GEF agency	Manage and disburse funds from GEF in accordance with the rules and procedures of FAO; Oversee project implementation in accordance with the project document; Provide technical guidance; Report to the GEF Secretariat and Evaluation Office through the annual Project Implementation Review on project progress and provide financial reports to the GEF Trustee.	1	Tele interviews Zoom, Skype, TenCent, etc. with: Vincent Martin, FAOR and BH; Zhao Wei, GEF Portfolio Officer; Li He, LTO based in RAP, Skype interview; Yurie Naito: FLO based in HQ.
Ministry of Water Resources (MWR)	MWR is the execution partner of the project. The MWR is the national level body responsible for water resource management in China. It provides financing and strategic direction and guidance to the nation's provincial	Directly responsible for technical implementation of project activities, day-to-day monitoring as well as financial management and purchase of goods, minor works, and services (procurement). It closely coordinates with other national partners on different levels.	1	Tele interviews with Zhu Jiang, Deputy Director General of IETCEC/MWR, Project Manager (tbc); Accompany the field mission: Hu Wenjun, Division Director of IETCEC/MWR, Project Coordinator (tbc); Liu Bo, Project Officer of IETCEC/MWR (tbc);

⁶¹ Include the names of relevant individuals, if known, and be as specific as possible

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

Key stakeholders (disaggregated as appropriate) ⁶¹	What is their role in the project?	What is the reason for their inclusion in or exclusion from the MTR?	Priority for MTR (1-3) ⁶²	How and when should they be involved in the MTR?
	Departments of Water Resources.			Wu Zheru, Project Officer of IETCEC/MWR (tbc).
The Nature Conservancy (TNC) China	TNC is an international environmental civil society organization (CSO). It commenced its work in China in 1998, focusing on biodiversity conservation, often in partnership with the government.	TNC is an important civil society partner in the conceptualization of this project and plays an important role in implementation, e.g. providing technical support and international experiences.	1	Liu Hao, Project Officer, TNC
National consultants and service providers	Provide technical support to the PMO	Responsible for certain project activities and contribute to project outcomes	1	Tele interviews (tbc)
2. Active stakeholders with authority to make decisions on the project, e.g. members of the PSC				
Ministry of Finance	GEF Focal Point in China	Overall planning and supervision of all GEF projects.	2	TBC (a combined interview for all 3 MTRs)
Department of Water Resources in Yunnan and Chongqing	Local partners	In its role to manage, allocate, conserve and protect water resources, the DoWR is the key to mainstreaming biodiversity into water resources planning and management through its work to oversee implementation functional zoning of water bodies and the use of EIA in water resources planning and water project construction. They are the lead actors in demonstrating mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into water management, through the local water resources protection	1	Skype interviews; Additional meetings will be organized during the field visit if authorised by FAO/UNDSS

Key stakeholders (disaggregated as appropriate) ⁶¹	What is their role in the project?	What is the reason for their inclusion in or exclusion from the MTR?	Priority for MTR (1-3) ⁶²	How and when should they be involved in the MTR?
		planning process and the demonstration or piloting of other key mainstreaming activities.		
Prefecture/Municipality level government and civil society (= Pu'er prefecture & Chongqing municipality)	Local partners	Prefecture level stakeholders play a key role in piloting mainstreaming activities at the local level.	2	Tele interviews with key stakeholders Group meetings will be organized if the field visit is authorised by FAO/UNDSS
County/District level government	Local partners	County level (in Yunnan) and District level (in Chongqing) governments play a crucial role in implementing the on-the-ground pilot activities along the four pilot rivers.	2	Tele interviews with key local government staff; Meetings will be organized during the field visit if authorised
3. Secondary stakeholders (only indirectly or temporarily affected)				
Department of Planning and Programming	Local partners	The key actor in mainstreaming biodiversity into the overall planning process. Develops national strategies for water resources development; Formulates national comprehensive plans; Assesses flood impacts of & approves proposals and feasibility studies for key national water projects; Proposes water investment for Central Government.	3	Meetings might be organized during the field visit if authorised
Department of Construction and Management	Local partners	The key stakeholder in applying biodiversity mainstreaming practices to reservoir planning and operations management and standards setting. Provides guidance on management of water infrastructures, sand mining and river channel planning; culverts and gates; Oversees construction of water projects and quality control.	3	Meetings might be organized during the field visit

Key stakeholders (disaggregated as appropriate)⁶¹	What is their role in the project?	What is the reason for their inclusion in or exclusion from the MTR?	Priority for MTR (1-3)⁶²	How and when should they be involved in the MTR?
Bureau of Rural Hydropower and Electrification Development	Local partners	Provides guidance and planning to rural hydropower (RH) development. Formulates and implements strategies, policies, regulations, technical norms on RH. Surveys hydropower potential of rivers and manages information system. Directs formulation and implementation of RH plan, manages permits and approves RH projects subsidized by the Central Government. Provides guidance on construction/ rehabilitation of RH network.	2	Meetings might be organized during the field visit
River Basin Management Commissions (RBMC)	Local partners	RBMCs are responsible for basin planning, unified water resources management, conservation, allocation, drought control and relief, river course management, infrastructure construction, sand mining management, soil conservation, collection of hydrological information. Changjiang (Yangtze) Water Resources Commission is one of 7 RBMCs.	2	Meetings might be organized during the field visit
Bureau of Fisheries Administration, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs	National partners	The Aquatic Wild Animal Protection Agency of the Fishery Bureau is an important stakeholder when it comes to monitoring aquatic biodiversity, gathering information about aquatic diversity and enabling that information to be used for mainstreaming purposes.	3	Meetings might be organized during the field visit
Ministry of Ecology and Environment	National partners	Guides, coordinates and supervises ecological and biodiversity conservation. Develops ecological conservation plan,	3	

Key stakeholders (disaggregated as appropriate) ⁶¹	What is their role in the project?	What is the reason for their inclusion in or exclusion from the MTR?	Priority for MTR (1-3) ⁶²	How and when should they be involved in the MTR?
		organizes the assessment of water quality. Coordinates environment protection in rural areas; Manages the China Biodiversity Information System.		
National Forestry and Grassland Administration	National partners	Plays a role in aquatic biodiversity conservation through its management of wetland protected areas. Organizes and guides the protection and use of the wild land based animals and plants. Manages the China Biodiversity Information Management System.	3	
Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS)- China Species Information Service (CSIS)	National partners	The CSIS is managed jointly by Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and CAS. Currently working on Biodiversity Atlas of China aims at producing set of maps for the protection and management of the biodiversity.	3	
Yunnan University; Asian International Rivers Centre	Local partners	An important regional centre of knowledge and expertise on hydro-ecological processes and aquatic biodiversity and ecosystem health. Could play an important role in strengthening capacity for mainstreaming in Yunnan Province. Specific roles and responsibilities will be elaborated during the project preparatory process.	3	
County/District level government	Local partners	County level (in Yunnan) and District level (in Chongqing) governments will play a crucial role in implementing the on-the-ground pilot activities along the four pilot rivers.	1	Meetings will be organized during the field visit

Key stakeholders (disaggregated as appropriate) ⁶¹	What is their role in the project?	What is the reason for their inclusion in or exclusion from the MTR?	Priority for MTR (1-3) ⁶²	How and when should they be involved in the MTR?
4. Stakeholders at grassroots level who benefit directly or indirectly from the intervention (gender disaggregated where possible)				
Ethnic minorities	beneficiaries	Mainstreaming biodiversity into water management must include a social component since people will do this mainstreaming work and since knowledge and local knowledge will be critical to its success. For example, more than 33 different ethnic groups live in Pu'er Prefecture; six of these have officially designated ethnic administrative units in Pu'er, including the ethnic groups: Dai, Yi, Hani, Meglian, Mojiang and Wa. More than 50 ethnic groups inhabit Chongqing, including the two largest groups the Tujia and the Miao.	1	Meetings might be organized during the field visit
5. Stakeholders at grassroots level who do not benefit from the intervention (gender disaggregated where possible)				
Name Stakeholder group 1				
Name Stakeholder group 2				
Etc.				
6. Other interest groups that are not participating directly in the intervention, e.g. development agencies working in the area, civil-society organizations				
Name Stakeholder group 1				
Name Stakeholder group 2				
Etc.				

18. This list of key stakeholders identifies key stakeholders to be consulted and interviewed as part of the MTR process. The list is likely to be modified by MTR team members once they become engaged in the MTR and will be updated as part of the MTR inception report.

1.2 Theory of change

19. The project document did not propose any Theory of Change, but has a detailed results matrix. The Theory of Change will be constructed by the MTR team during the inception phase and used to guide key findings, conclusions and recommendations. The ToC will be included in an appendix in the MTE report.

1.3 Implementation progress and main challenges to date

20. The project was endorsed by the GEF CEO in December 2015. The Operational Partners Agreement between FAO and IETCEC was signed in September 2016 and amended in July 2018. The first instalment of GEF grant of USD 325,800 was transferred to IETCEC in March 2017. The second instalment of USD 447,743 was transferred in December 2019.
21. A National Project Management Office has been established. Ms Shi Qiuchi, Director of IETCEC is the National Project Director. Mr Zhu Jiang, Deputy Director of IETCEC, is the Project Manager. Mr Hu Wenjun, Division Director of IETCEC, is the Project Coordinator. Mr Liu Bo and Ms Wu Zheru are the M&E Officers, while Ms Wu Zheru also works as the information Officer. A National Technical Advisor, an Accountant and a Cashier are also supporting the project management. The Project Coordinator and M&E Officers communicate with FAO regularly. The PMO has developed the Project Implementation Manual to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of project implementation. The National Steering Committee (NSC) was established with 10 members, mostly from MWR.
22. In 2017 and 2018, the project was delayed because of OPA amendment. IETCEC could not sign contract with TNC, which is an important partner of the project, due to changed regulation of the government, and there were errors in the original project budget. Therefore, the OPA had to be amended. From 2019, the project implementation has accelerated, especially in the second half of 2019. The major progress of project implementation for each component until the end of 2019 is summarized as follows:
- Component 1: Completed best practice research on international water resources management policies, regulations and planning (especially ecological flow), ecological area assessment methods and case studies, analysis of water resources management policies in China under the mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation, biodiversity conservation policy framework under the background of river and lake chief system, etc. The project areas have strengthened the construction of legislation, rules and regulations related to water resources management. Water ecological protection measures have been integrated into laws, regulations and plans according to local conditions, thus to guarantee biodiversity conservation.
 - Component 2): Established the river and lake chief system to promote the ecological management of rivers and lakes and biodiversity conservation. Yunnan and Chongqing have incorporated the project activities into river and lake chief system, as well as the national programme of construction of beautiful rivers and lakes. The river and lake chiefs are responsible to carry out biodiversity survey, strengthen river management and cleanup, habitat protection and riverside wetland construction; Strictly reduce the e-flow of small hydropower stations; Coordinate and promote biodiversity conservation. About 55 ha of wetland has been restored or newly established.
 - Component 3): Carried out river health assessment, and propose GIS-based aquatic biodiversity database structure and data inventory. Developed project monitoring systems at different levels. Organized seminars and trainings on international experience and cases, e-flow and 'Green Line Scorecard'/ River Health Assessment. Organized international study tours to improve awareness and capacities on water ecology protection and to share experiences. More than 200 people from the national level, Yunnan and Chongqing

participated in the project trainings. Awareness raising and training activities on river biodiversity conservation have been organized targeting the general public.

- Communication and visibility: A project webpage (<http://intce.mwr.cn/swdyxbhgzslxd/>) has been developed. Seven issues of project newsletter were compiled by the national PMO, published online and distributed to partners.

23. As the project design was done in a few years back, some of the activities/outputs designed no longer fit the current situations nor have allocated sufficient resource, posing a challenge for project implementation and requiring for adaptive management. FAO and IETCEC are working together to propose revisions to the overall workplan. The project is likely to request a no-cost extension of 2 years based on the recommendations of the MTR.

1.4 MTR purpose and scope

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

25. The main purpose of the MTR is to:

- provide accountability – to respond to the information needs and interests of water resource management authorities of different levels and other actors with decision-making power, for example, FAO management and the GCU;
- provide recommendations to improve the project management by providing valuable information evaluation findings, lessons learned and good practices to managers and others responsible for regular project operations, such as the PMU, PTF, FAO-GEF CU and PSC; and
- contribute to learning – in-depth understanding and contextualization of the project and its practices, of particular benefit to the government authorities for water resources management and biodiversity conservation, NGOs, FAO-GEF CU, FAO staff and future developers and implementers.

26. The main audience and intended users of the MTR are:

- The Chinese counterparts, such as Ministry of Finance as the GEF focal point in China, government authorities on water resources management, environmental protection, planning, etc., will use the evaluation findings and conclusions for future practice
- The project team;
- The FAO Country Office, Project Management Team, members of Project Task Force in the FAO Headquarters and regional offices who will use the findings and lessons identified in the MTR to continue and improve the project activities and plan for sustainability of the results achieved;
- The GEF who will use the findings to inform strategic investment decisions in the future in China; and
- The Nature Conservancy, as one of the project partner and an international NGO, will further spread the findings of the MTR to the practice in other countries and regions.

MTR scope

27. The main audience and intended users of the MTR are:

The MTR will cover the project implementation period since its start in September 2016, until March 2020, and will analyze all the project components. It will cover all the geographical areas

where the project has been implemented (Yunnan and Chongqing), although not all the project locations might be visited by the ET.

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

1.4 MTR objectives and key questions

MTR objectives

29. The objective of the MTR is to provide valuable recommendations based on as much evidence that can be retrieved under the current restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic to support and justify findings under the topics of: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, factors affecting project performance including coherence of project design, project implementation and executing arrangements and operation (including financial management and co-financing), as well as potential sustainability and longer term impact. The MTR will address and rate in line with GEF procedures the following:

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

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

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

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

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

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

- application of an M&E system, including M&E design, implementation and budget.

Cross-cutting dimensions – considerations such as gender, indigenous-peoples and minority-group concerns and human rights; the environmental and social safeguards applied to a project require, among other things, a review of the Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS) risk classification and risk-mitigation provisions identified at the project's formulation stage.⁶³

1.5 MTR questions

Box A4.1. Proposed MTR questions

1. Relevance (rating required)	<p>Are the project outcomes congruent with current country priorities, GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework and the needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries (local communities, men and women, etc.)?</p> <p>Has there been any change in the relevance of the project since its formulation, in particular relating to risks and the way the project is monitored. If so, are there any changes that need to be made to the project to make it more relevant?</p>
2. Effectiveness of project results in reaching planned outcomes (rating required)	<p>To what extent has the project delivered on its outputs, outcomes and objectives? To answer this question the following sub questions should be addressed:</p> <p>How far has biodiversity conservation been incorporated into the policy, legal and regulatory frameworks governing WRM in China?</p> <p>How far have effective on-the-ground WRM measures in the four project sites increased biodiversity protection and its sustainable use to support sustainable development objectives and reduce environmental stress?</p> <p>How far has the project contributed to the effective generation and processing of advanced information on river biodiversity and its conservation in the four pilot sites?</p> <p>What are the initial outcomes (broader results) of the project's main actions at provincial and national levels to date, in particular relating to changes in sector policy, legal or regulatory frameworks?</p> <p>Are there any unintended consequences of the project's actions (positive and/or negative)?</p> <p>Are there any barriers or other risks that may prevent future progress towards and the achievement of the project's outcomes and objectives?</p>
3. Efficiency (rating required)	<p>To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently and cost effectively?</p> <p>To what extent has project's implementation mechanism contributed to efficient implementation of main outputs?</p> <p>Has project management been able to adapt to any changing conditions to improve the efficiency of project implementation?</p> <p>Is the co-financing being made available to the project as planned to contribute to meeting project outputs, outcomes and objectives?</p>

⁶³ FAO applies an online screening system during the project design phase. This is mandatory, even if the project was approved before FAO adopted the GEF Policy on Agency Minimum Standards on Environmental and Social Safeguards (GEF, 2011) in February 2015, as FAO had already applied the Environmental Impact Assessment Guidelines in 2011 (FAO, 2012a) to screen and rate the risks of every FAO project. Consequently, the MTR team should review and confirm the ESS assessments and risk status at mid-term and any changes suggested, if needed. The most recent GEF guidance can be found in GEF (2019b). A GEF project should not cause any harm to the environment or to any stakeholder and, where applicable, will take measures to prevent and/or mitigate any adverse effects.

	<p>How does the project’s cost efficiency (cost/time) compare to that of similar projects?</p> <p>To what extent has the project built on synergies and complementarities with other projects, partnerships, etc. and avoided duplication of similar activities by other groups and initiatives?</p> <p>Has the Operational Partners Agreement been applied efficiently?</p>
4. Sustainability (rating required)	<p>What is the likelihood that the project results can be sustained after the end of the project?</p> <p>What are the key risks that may affect the sustainability of the project results and its benefits (financial, socioeconomic, institutional and governance, and environmental aspects, as well as the risks identified in the project document)?</p> <p>What project results, lessons or experiences have been replicated (in different geographic areas) or scaled up (in the same geographic area, but on a much larger scale and funded by other sources)? What results, lessons or experiences are likely to be replicated or scaled up in the near future?</p> <p>Has the project established sustainable institutional arrangements or cross-sector partnerships?</p> <p><i>Did the OPIM contribute to ensure major ownership and sustainability of the project results? Did the OPIM contribute to increase national, regional and sub-regional ownership to support better sustainability of results? And to strengthen capacities of regional, sub-regional and/or national entities?</i></p>
5. Factors affecting progress (ratings required)	<p>Is the project design suited to delivering the expected outcomes?</p> <p>Is the project’s causal logic (objectives and expected outcomes) coherent and clear, practical and feasible within the timeframe allowed?</p> <p>How do the various stakeholder groups see their own engagement with the project and what are the strengths and challenges of the project’s partnerships?</p> <p>Were local actors – civil society or private sector – involved in project design or implementation and what was the effect on project results?</p> <p>Is the project on track as it was originally designed or have there been delays in the project approval, implementation and reporting process?</p> <p>What are the major reasons of the delay?</p> <p>To what extent did the executing agency effectively discharge its role and responsibilities in managing and administering the project?</p> <p>How well is the PMO functioning?</p> <p>Are there sufficient human resources, financial resources, etc. for the PMO operation and does it have the capacity to support project implementation?</p> <p>What have been the main challenges in terms of project management and administration?</p> <p>How well have risks been identified and managed?</p>

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

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

1.6 Methodology

31. The MTR will adhere to the UNEG Norms & Standards (UNEG, 2016) and align with the FAO–GEF MTR Guide and annexes detailing methodological guidelines and practices. The MTR will adopt a consultative and transparent approach, keeping internal and external stakeholders informed throughout the MTR process. The evidence and information gathered will be triangulated to underpin its validity and analysis and to support its conclusions and recommendations. The MTR must provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is accepted by all parties a flexible approach will be adopted throughout the evaluation process, in particular concerning the level of research and analysis that can be reasonably be done by the evaluation team from home and via remote interviews using Zoom, Skype, Voov, etc.
32. The main evaluation tools and methods will include the following:
- A **desk-review** of existing project documents and reports (e.g. the project document, the inception report, the Operational Partners Agreement, project implementation review, project progress reports, backstopping mission reports, audit reports, newsletters, etc.). Under the current restrictions on travel and movement posed by the COVID-19 pandemic the evaluation team will conduct a series of **semi-structured interviews remotely using Skype/Voov** with

key stakeholders. These will include representatives of FAO project taskforce members, PAC members, the operational partners, the local government authorities, national consultants and, if possible, with a selection of representatives from the end beneficiaries. Alternatively, where stakeholders cannot be interviewed under the current restrictions relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, an online questionnaire will be considered for collecting information on the project. To help substantiate findings, stakeholders will be asked to provide images, video clips, promotional materials, reports, etc. to the evaluation team where considered useful and appropriate.

- To support the evaluation process a **theory of change** will be constructed at the start of evaluation and incorporated into the **inception report**. The ToC will outline the multiple linkages between the project objectives, outputs and outcomes to the national goals, and will support the evaluation process. Following the submission of the first draft of the evaluation report at the end of the desk phase an on-line meeting will be held to present via Skype/Zoom initial findings and conclusions with the Project Coordination Unit and representatives of the PAC (including FAOR China). Feedback and comments will be incorporated into a revised second draft of the evaluation report.
- **Field visits** to the project sites in Yunnan and Chongqing will be carried out **ONLY in the event FAO/UNDSS authorises it can take place**. The main purpose of the field visits will be to triangulate findings from the MTR draft report submitted at the end of the desk phase. Particular attention will be given to verify the draft reports main findings on project implementation and results. The field visits will offer the opportunity to concentrate on interviewing local stakeholders and end beneficiaries in the field. collect feedback from local partners, as well as analyse the capacities of the local project teams. Face-to-face interviews and meetings (group and individual) will be carried out during the field visits and mainly aim to cover stakeholders and end beneficiaries that have not been interviewed remotely during the desk phase. A wrap-up meeting will be held at the end of the field mission in Beijing, China. The MTR report will be updated accordingly to support/adjust its main findings and finalise its conclusions and recommendations after the field visit and a final draft version presented to GEF PCU in Rome for final comments and feedback, prior to submitting the final report.

1.7 Roles and responsibilities

33. The **BH** is accountable for the MTR process and report and is responsible for the initiation, management and finalization of the MTR process. Depending on availability and commitments, the BH have designated Zhao Wei as the **RM**, to act on his behalf.
34. With the assistance of the project’s **LTO** and the **FAO GEF CU, FLO and MTR focal point**, and guidance from this document and the main MTR Guide, the BH/RM is responsible for the drafting and finalizing the terms of reference and providing input to the background and context section. The BH/RM is also responsible for identifying and recruiting the MTR team members, in consultation with the GCU and the LTO. In collaboration with the GCU, the BH/RM also briefs the MTR team on the MTR methodology and process and leads the organization of MTR missions. The BH/RM and the GCU’s MTR focal point review the draft and final MTR reports to assure their quality in terms of presentation, compliance with the terms of reference, timely delivery, quality, clarity and soundness of evidence and analysis supporting the conclusions and recommendations. The BH is also responsible for leading and coordinating the preparation of the FAO Management Response and the associated follow-up report, supported by the LTO and other members of the PTF.

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35. The **FAO GEF CU** will appoint a focal point to provide technical backstopping throughout the MTR process, including guidance and punctual support to the BH/RM and MTR team on technical issues related to the GEF and the MTR. This includes support in identifying potential MTR team members,⁶⁴ reviewing candidate qualifications and participating in the selection of consultants, as well as briefing the MTR team on the MTR process, relevant methodology and tools. The GCU also follows up with the BH to ensure the timely preparation of the Management Response.
 36. **PTF** members, including the BH, are required to participate in meetings with the MTR team, make all necessary information and documentation available and comment on the terms of reference and MTR report. However, their level of involvement will depend on team members' individual roles and level of participation in the project.
 37. The **National Project Director** (NPD) facilitates the participation of government partners in the MTR process and supports the PMU in ensuring good communication across government. The NPD should also ensure the translation and distribution of the MTR deliverables to related partners and stakeholders. The **Project Steering Committee** (PSC) facilitates government and other partner and stakeholder participation in the MTR process.
 38. The **MTR team** is responsible for developing and applying the MTR methodology, producing a brief MTR inception report, conducting the MTR and producing the MTR report. All team members will participate in briefing and debriefing meetings, discussions and field visits. They will contribute written inputs to the draft and final versions of the MTR report, which may not reflect the views of the government or of FAO. The MTR team leader will guide and coordinate the MTR team members in their specific tasks and lead the preparation of the draft and final reports. The team leader will consolidate team inputs with his/her own and will have overall responsibility for delivering the MTR report. The MTR team will agree with the GCU MTR focal point on the outline of the report early in the MTR process. The MTR team is free to expand the scope, criteria, questions and issues listed above, and develop its own MTR tools and framework, within the timeframe and resources available and based on discussions with the BH/RM and PTF. Although an MTR report is not subject to technical clearance by FAO, the BH/RM and GCU do provide quality assurance checks of all MTR reports.
 39. Ministry of Finance, as the **GEF Operational Focal Point** (OFP) in China, will be involved in the MTR, in accordance with the GEF Evaluation Policy (2019). The BH will inform the OFP of the MTR process and the MTR team is encouraged to consult with him/her during the review process. The team will also keep the OFP informed of progress and send him/her a copy of the draft and final MTR reports.

1.8 MTR team composition and profile

40. The MTR team will be formed by one international consultant, as the team leader and one national consultant, as the team member. Please refer to the TORs of the 2 consultants attached for more details.
41. The MTR consultants should be independent of any organizations that have been involved in designing, executing or advising on any aspect of the project being evaluated in the MTR and should not have been involved in any aspect of the project previously.

1.9 MTR products (deliverables)

42. This section describes the key deliverables the MTR team is expected to produce. At a minimum, these products should include the following (**all deliverables must be in English**):

⁶⁴ The BH/RM should be responsible for the administrative procedures associated with the recruitment of the MTR consultants.

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

MTR timeframe

43. This section lists the due date or timeframe of the MTR and describes all tasks and deliverables (such as briefings, the draft report and final report), as well as the associated roles and responsibilities of the key MTR individuals and groups. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic all parties agree to maintain flexibility in meeting the suggested deadlines and accept time extensions may be needed at any time until the pandemic has passed and under control.

Table A4.2 Suggested MTR timeline

Task	When/duration (indicative)	Responsibility
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Terms of reference preparation	February, 2020	BH/RM, LTO, FLO and GCU MTR focal point
Terms of reference finalization	March, 2020	BH/RM
Team identification	December, 2019	BH/RM, LTO, FLO and GCU MTR focal point
Team recruitment	March, 2020	BH with input from the GCU for international and national consultants
Briefing of MTR team	April 6 th , 2020	BH/RM, supported by PTF and GCU as necessary
Reading background documentation	April 2 nd to 9 th , 2020	MTR team in preparation for the MTR
MTR inception report	April 10 th , 2020	MTR team
Quality assurance and clearance of the MTR inception report	April 13 to 16 th , 2020	BH/RM and the GCU MTR focal point
Skype interviews	April 17 th , 2020	FAO PTF and national partners, consultants and service providers
Production of first draft report for circulation	April 30 th , 2020	MTR team
Circulation and review of first draft MTR report	May 11 th , 2020	BH/RM, PMU, GCU MTR focal point, LTO for comments and quality control (organized by BH/RM)
Production of second draft MTR report	May 18 th , 2020	MTR team
Circulation of second draft MTR report	May 25 th , 2020	BH/RM and key external stakeholders (organized by BH/RM)
Management Response	July 1 st , 2020	BH
Travel arrangements and organization of the agenda and travel itinerary in country for the field mission	TBD	BH/RM, project team and MTR team
MTR missions – confirmation of interviews, meetings and visits	8 days for the MTR field mission (if approved)	MTR team with the support of the PMU
Production of final MTR report	TBD	MTR team
Follow-up reporting in FAO PPR or GEF PIR	July 1 st , 2021	BH

44. Documents to be provided to the MTR team

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

1. GEF PIF with technical clearance
2. GEF-approved project document

3. Project inception report
4. Six-monthly FAO PPRs
5. Annual workplans and budgets (including budget revisions)
6. All annual GEF PIR reports
7. Operational Partners Agreement under OPIM and Amendment No. 1
8. List of stakeholders
9. List of interviewees
10. List of project sites and site location maps (for planning mission itineraries and fieldwork)
11. Relevant technical, backstopping and project-supervision mission reports
12. Minutes of the meetings of the PSC, FAO PTF and other relevant groups
13. Any ESS analysis and mitigation plans produced during the project design period and online records on FPMIS
14. Any awareness-raising and communications materials produced by the project, such as brochures, leaflets, presentations for meetings, project web address, etc.
15. FAO policy documents in relation to topics such as FAO Strategic Objectives and gender
16. Finalized GEF focal-area tracking tools at CEO endorsement, as well as updated tracking tools at mid-term.
17. Financial management information, including an up-to-date co-financing table, a summary report on the project’s financial management and expenditures to date, a summary of any financial revisions made to the project and their purpose, and copies of any completed audits for comment
18. The GEF Gender Policy (GEF, 2017), GEF Gender Implementation Strategy (GEF, 2018a), GEF Guidance on Gender Equality (GEF, 2018b) and the GEF Guide to Advance Gender Equality in GEF Projects and Programmes (GEF, 2018c)

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

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

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

No field mission was conducted due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Appendix 3. Table 4 - List of stakeholders interviewed (following stakeholder analysis)

Key stakeholders (disaggregated as appropriate)	Role in the project	Reason for their inclusion/ exclusion from the MTR	Priority for MTR 1 = essential 2 = desirable 3 = possible	How and when should they be involved in the MTR (Desk &/or Field Phase)
1. Active stakeholders with direct responsibility for the project, e.g. FAO, executing partners				
FAO-CN & GEF				
Zhang Zhongjun (M)	Acting Budget Holder (BH), FAO-Rep assistant	Acting BH is responsible for oversight and supervision on the use of funds by the executing partner and achievement of project results.	1	Desk phase (Tencent, Zoom meeting) 2020/8/5 (Wed) 3:00-5:00 pm (Beijing); 8:00-10:00 am (London)
Yurie Naito (F)	Fund Liaison Officer	FAO-Rome	1	Tele interview in late May for all 3 projects together
Li He (F)	Lead Technical Officer	FAO-RAP	1	Tele interview (Zoom) on 20 April 28 4:00-6:00 PM (Bangkok time)
ZHAO Wei (F)	GEF Portfolio Project Officer	FAO-CN	1	Tele interviews (Zoom) on 09 & 30 April 4:00-8:00 PM (Beijing time)
Jeffrey Griffin (M)	Senior Coordinator, GEF-FAO Coordination Unit	Responsible for coordinating GEF funding in China in line with Fee Guidelines of FAO.	1	Tele interview (Zoom) on 17 September 2020 (Fri) 10 am (Rome); 9 am (London).
Olga Abramova (F)	Official in FAO's Project Support Services, responsible for the application of the OPIM modality	To assess how far the project applied the OPIM modality in conformity with OPIM/MS-701	1	Tele interview (Zoom) on 29 September 2020. 11-12 pm (Rome); 10-11 am (London)
Ina Casas Sola	FAO Office of Evaluation (OED)	Invited by GCU to review the second draft report	2	Receive comments on the second draft report (submitted 18 September 2020)
PMO partners				
SHI Qiuchi (F)	Director General of Operation Party	Executing partner, Member of PSC	1	Tele conference (TenCent) on 22 April 4:00-7:30 PM (Beijing time)
ZHU Jiang (M)	Project Manager, Deputy Director General of Operation Party	Executing partner, Alternative Delegate of Member of PSC	1	
HU Wenjun (M)	Project Coordinator, Division Director of Operation Party	Executing partner	1	
LIU Bo (M)	M&E Officer, Deputy Division Director of Operation Party	Executing partner	1	

Key stakeholders (disaggregated as appropriate)	Role in the project	Reason for their inclusion/ exclusion from the MTR	Priority for MTR 1 = essential 2 = desirable 3 = possible	How and when should they be involved in the MTR (Desk &/or Field Phase)
WU Zheru (F)	Information Officer, Engineer of Operation Party	Executing partner	1	
ZHAO Chen (F)	Staff, Engineer of Operation Party	Executing partner	1	
TNC and national advisers and consultants				
TANG Kewang (M)	National Technical Advisor	National consultant expert in WRM	1	Tele interview (TenCent) on 23 April 4:00-7:30 PM (Beijing time)
QU Xiaodong (M)	Technical service provider (China Institute of Water Resources and Hydropower Research)	Chief Technical Advisor (CTA)	1	Tele interview (TenCent) on 24 April 4:00-7:30 PM (Beijing time)
ZHANG MIN (F)	Technical service provider (China Institute of Water Resources and Hydropower Research)	Assistant to CTA	2	
GUO Qiaoyu (F)	China Freshwater Program Advisor, TNC	Executing partner	1	Tele conference (TenCent) on 23 April 9:00-11:00 PM (Beijing time)
LIU Hao (F)	China Healthy River Project Manager, TNC China Programme Office	Executing partner	1	
Provincial, Prefecture/Municipal MWR staff and provincial consultants				
Yunnan Province				
LI Bogen (M, Naxi minority group)	Director-general, Yunnan Provincial Department of Water Resources	Member of the Project Steering Committee (PSC), Director of Yunnan PMU	1	Tele conference (TenCent) on 28 April 4:00-8:00 PM (Beijing time)
WANG Jing (F)	Chief of the Division of Science and Technology and Foreign Affairs	Yunnan Executing partner	1	
DING Jiao (F)	Chief River/Lake System Work Division	Focal point of Yunnan PMU	1	
WANG Zu'en (M)	Division chief, Yunnan Provincial Bureau of Hydrology and Water Resources	Yunnan executing partner	1	
SUN Yanli (F)	Yunnan Project Management Assistant / Senior Engineer	Provincial project management consultant	1	
HUANG Xiaoxia (F)	Deputy dean/associate professor of the School of Earth Science, Yunnan University	PI of the Project: "Research and pilot work on water ecology policies and legislation of Yunnan Province (2019)"	1	

Mid-term review of project "A new green line: mainstreaming biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China's water resources management policy and planning" - GCP/CPR/057/GFF

Key stakeholders (disaggregated as appropriate)	Role in the project	Reason for their inclusion/ exclusion from the MTR	Priority for MTR 1 = essential 2 = desirable 3 = possible	How and when should they be involved in the MTR (Desk &/or Field Phase)
CHEN Xin (M)	Director/Senior engineer of the Research Center on Water Strategy and Water Ecology at Yunnan Institute of Water& Hydropower Engineering Investigation, Design and Research	PI of the Project: "Survey, research and pilot work on water ecology of Yunnan Province (2019)" Supervising data collection at sample sites	1	
LIN Li (M)	Deputy director-general, executive deputy director in charge of River Chief System Office, Pu'er Municipal Water Affairs Bureau	Head of Pu'er Municipal PMU	1	
LI Zongxiang (M, Thai minority group)	Deputy section chief of Rivers and Lakes Management Section, Pu'er Municipal Water Affairs Bureau	Focal point of Pu'er Municipal PMU	1	
LI Fuwei (M, Yi minority group)	Zhenyuan Project Contact Person/ Deputy Director, Zhenyuan County Water Affairs Bureau	Head of Zhenyuan County Pilot Project (pilot sites: Enle/Buma Rivers)	1	
ZHANG Rusheng (M)	Deputy director-general, executive deputy director in charge of River Chief System Office Jingdong County Water Affairs Bureau	Head of Jingdong County Pilot Project (pilot site: Chuan River)	1	
Chongqing Municipality				
CHEN Min (M)	Chief of Science and Technology Division, Chongqing Municipal Bureau of Water Resources	Director of Chongqing PMU	1	Tele conference (TenCent) on 29 April 3:00-8:00 PM (Beijing time)
YANG Li (F)	Third-level Researcher at the Science and Technology Division, Chongqing Water Resources Bureau	Focal point of Chongqing PMU	1	
HU Zhidong (M)	Senior engineer, Chongqing Bayu Water Resources Planning Academy	Chongqing municipal project management consultant	2	
REN Jingjie (M)	Staff, River Chief System Office Chongqing Water Resources Bureau	Manager of APP of Chongqing River Chief System	2	
WANG Qiang (M)	Professor, Southwest University	Provincial technical representative for project 057 in Chongqing Municipality	2	

Key stakeholders (disaggregated as appropriate)	Role in the project	Reason for their inclusion/ exclusion from the MTR	Priority for MTR 1 = essential 2 = desirable 3 = possible	How and when should they be involved in the MTR (Desk &/or Field Phase)
CHEN Hu (M)	Chongqing Water Conservancy and Hydropower Survey, Design and Research Institute	Provincial Technical Representative for project 057 in Chongqing Municipality	2	
QI Xiaobo (F)	Deputy director-general, Water Resources Bureau Banan District (Wuhu River)	Head of Banan District Pilot Project	1	
GUO Chunling (F)	Staff of Water Resources Bureau Banan District	Focal point of Banan District Pilot Project	1	
GUO Xiaohong (M)	Deputy director-general, Water Resources Bureau of Jiangjin District	Head of Jiangjin District Pilot Project	1	
MU Guohong (M)	Member of Jiangjin Water Resources Bureau of Banan District	Focal point of Jiangjin Pilot Project	1	
YUAN Chuan(M)	Engineer, Guangzhou Firefox Translation Service Co.,Ltd.	Interpreter for MTR team leader	2	
2. Active stakeholders with authority to make decisions on the project, e.g. members of the PSC				
LIU Zhiguang (M)	Member of the Project Steering Committee	Chairman of the PSC	1	Unavailable due to workload during Pandemic (possible interview in May)
WANG Zhi (M)	Member of the Project Steering Committee	Responsible for NRM	2	Unavailable due to workload during Pandemic (possible interview in May)
SHI Qiuchi (F)	Director General of OP	Executing partner, Member of PSC	1	Tele conference (TenCent) on 22 April 4:00-7:30 PM (Beijing time)
ZHU Jiang (M)	Project Manager, Deputy Director General of OP	Executing partner, Alternative Delegate of Member of PSC	1	
LI Bogen (M)	Director-general, Yunnan Provincial Department of Water Resources	Member of PSC, Director of Yunnan PMU	1	Tele conference (TenCent) on 28 April 4:00-8:00 PM (Beijing time)
DING Jiao (F)	Chief River/Lake System Work Division	Focal point of Yunnan PMO, Alternative Delegate of Member of PSC	1	
YANG Li (F)	Third-level Researcher at the Science and Technology Division, Chongqing Water Resources Bureau	Focal point of Chongqing PMU, Alternative Delegate of Member of PSC	1	Tele conference (TenCent) on 29 April 3:00-8:00 PM (Beijing time)
3. Stakeholders at grassroots level who benefit directly or indirectly from the intervention (gender disaggregated where possible)				
Zhenyuan County, Yunann Province (pilot sites: Enle/Buma Rivers)				
LI Fuwei (M)	Zhenyuan Project Contact Person/ Deputy Director, Zhenyuan County Water Affairs Bureau	Zhenyuan County executing partner	1	Tele conference (TenCent) on 29 April 9:00-10:30 AM (Beijing time)

Mid-term review of project "A new green line: mainstreaming biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China's water resources management policy and planning" - GCP/CPR/057/GFF

Key stakeholders (disaggregated as appropriate)	Role in the project	Reason for their inclusion/ exclusion from the MTR	Priority for MTR 1 = essential 2 = desirable 3 = possible	How and when should they be involved in the MTR (Desk &/or Field Phase)
LUO Rong (M, Yi minority goup)	Ecological and Environmental Bureau of Pu'er City, Zhenyuan Sub-bureau	Member of Zhenyuan River Chief System Office, technician participated in training workshop	1	
HU Ling (F, Hani, minority group)	Water Affairs Bureau of Zhenyuan County	Focal point of Zhenyuan County Pilot River Project Site, technician participated in training workshop	1	
LI Zongxiang (M)	Deputy section chief of Rivers and Lakes Management Section, Pu'er Municipal Water Affairs Bureau	Project focal point in Pu'er Municipal PMU	2	
SHI Yiran (F)	Staff of Rivers and Lakes Management Section, Pu'er Municipal Water Affairs Bureau	Project focal point in Pu'er Municipal PMU	2	
Jingdong County,Yunan Province (pilot site: Chuan River)				
ZHANG Rusheng (M)	Deputy director-general, executive deputy director in charge of River Chief System Office Jingdong County Water Affairs Bureau	Head of Jingdong Pilot Project	1	Tele conference (TenCent) on 29 April 10:30-12:00 AM (Beijing time)
YANG Zhonghai (M)	Staff of Jingdong County River Chief Office	Focal point of Jingdong Pilot	1	
QIN Jiha (M)	Leader of General Office, Ecological and Environmental Bureau of Pu'er City, Jingdong Sub-bureau	Representative of the beneficiaries	2	
LI Zongxiang (M)	Deputy section chief of Rivers and Lakes Management Section, Pu'er Municipal Water Affairs Bureau	Project focal point in Pu'er Municipal PMU	2	
SHI Yiran (F)	Staff of Rivers and Lakes Management Section, Pu'er Municipal Water Affairs Bureau	Project focal point in Pu'er Municipal PMU	2	
Banan District, Chongqing Municipality (Pilot site: Wuhu River)				
QI Xiaobo (F)	Deputy director-general, Water Resources Bureau Banan District (Wuhu River)	Head of Banan District Pilot Project	1	Tele conference (TenCent) on 30 April 10:30-12:00 AM (Beijing time)

Key stakeholders (disaggregated as appropriate)	Role in the project	Reason for their inclusion/ exclusion from the MTR	Priority for MTR 1 = essential 2 = desirable 3 = possible	How and when should they be involved in the MTR (Desk &/or Field Phase)
HAN Xiansheng (M)	Water Resources Bureau of Banan District	Deputy director-general/Director of River Chief Office	1	
XU Changchun (M)	Senior engineer, Ecological and Environmental Bureau of Banan District	Representative of ecology and environment sector	2	
CHI Chenggui (M)	Chief, Agricultural and Rural Commission of Banan District	Representative of agriculture and fishery sector	2	
YANG Ke (M)	Senior engineer, Water Resources Bureau of Banan District	Supporting staff of Banan District Pilot Project	1	
ZHANG Jun (M)	Chief, Water Resources Management Station of Water Resources Bureau of Banan District	Supporting staff of Banan District Pilot Project	2	
GUO Chunling (F)	Senior engineer, Water Resources Section, Water Resources Bureau of Banan District	Head of Banan District Pilot Project	2	
HU Zhidong (M)	Senior engineer, Chongqing Bayu Water Resources Planning Academy	Chongqing municipal project management consultant	2	
WANG Qiang (M)	Professor, Southwest University	Provincial technical representative for project 057 in Chongqing Municipality	2	
CHEN Hu (M)	Chongqing Water Conservancy and Hydropower Survey, Design and Research Institute	Provincial Technical Representative for project 057 in Chongqing Municipality	2	
Jiangjin District, Chongqing Municipality (Pilot site: Wuhu River)				
ZHANNG Junhong (M)	Deputy director-general, Water Resources Bureau of Jiangjin District	Head of Jiangjin District Pilot Project	1	Tele conference (TenCent) on 30 April 2:00-3:30 PM (Beijing time)
MU Guohong (M)	Staff of Jiangjin Water Resources Bureau	Focal Point of Jiangjin District Pilot Project	1	
LI Xia (F)	Staff of Tanghe Township	Representative of local community	2	
SU Chenggang (M)	Agricultural and Rural Commission (Fishery Station) of Jiangjin District	Representative of agriculture and fishery sector	2	
FU Yu (M)	Water Environment Monitoring Center of Jiangjin District	Representative of ecology and environment sector	2	
4. Secondary stakeholders (only indirectly or temporarily affected)				

Mid-term review of project "A new green line: mainstreaming biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China's water resources management policy and planning" - GCP/CPR/057/GFF

Key stakeholders (disaggregated as appropriate)	Role in the project	Reason for their inclusion/ exclusion from the MTR	Priority for MTR 1 = essential 2 = desirable 3 = possible	How and when should they be involved in the MTR (Desk &/or Field Phase)
LIU Jingyiing (F)	MoF focal point for ongoing GEF projects	GEF Focal Point	1	Not available
5. Stakeholders at grassroots level who do not benefit from the intervention (gender disaggregated where possible)				
None identified for the Desk Phase				
6. Other interest groups that are not participating directly in the intervention, e.g. UN/other agencies working in the area, civil-society organizations				
None identified for the Desk Phase				
7. Debriefing with all main stakeholders				
7. Joint-debriefing with projects GCP/CPR/052/GFF and GCP/CPR/056/GFF	Selection of 30 participants from executing agencies, FAO-CN, LTOs, FLO, PPS, GCU,	Key stakeholders responsible for decision-making on project implementation.	1	Tele conference (Zoom) on 24 September 2020 3:30-6:30 PM (Beijing time); 9:30-12:30 (Rome); 8:30-11:30 (London).

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

UNEG/GEF Criteria	Questions and sub questions*	Indicators and judgement criteria	Sources of information/Brief summary of methods
1. Strategic relevance: are the project outcomes congruent with current country priorities, GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework and the needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries			
Alignment & ownership 1.1	<i>Political/policy relevance - does the project respond to current needs of the government at central and provincial levels on biodiversity conservation</i>	<p>1.1.1 Level of project alignment to relevant national, sector and provincial policies and plans</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>(a) The Prodoc conforms with government (central/provincial) priorities on conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity?</p> <p>(b) government (central/ provincial) shows willingness to support project by providing resources to support policy/strategy/plan reform to promote sustainable development (through conservation and management of environmental services) and address risk (especially the effects of climate change on biodiversity (gene pool) and WRM?</p>	<p>1) Prodoc</p> <p>2) Aichi Targets & NBSAP/ENBPA</p> <p>3) National Biodiversity Strategy</p> <p>4) National Development Plan 2015-2020</p> <p>5) National sector policies, strategies and plans (water resources, energy, agriculture, environment, etc.)</p> <p>6) National statistics</p> <p>7) Theory of change</p> <p>8) Interviews with central/provincial government stakeholders, education and research institutions, project staff, FAO/GEF-China</p>
Alignment and ownership 1.2	<i>Local relevance - does the project respond to local needs (municipal government and end beneficiaries - (men and women, specific needs of ethnic minorities, etc.)</i>	<p>1.2.1 Level of alignment with local needs and priorities</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>(a) Prodoc designed following stakeholder analysis?</p> <p>(b) Adoption of a participatory approach to project design and implementation through its annual work plans?</p> <p>(c) Level of focus on specific needs of end beneficiaries (relationship between river biodiversity and food security, fish processing and sale, etc.)?</p>	<p>1) Prodoc</p> <p>2) FAO documents on Gender, FPCI</p> <p>3) Provincial development plans</p> <p>4) Interviews with local government stakeholders, heads of civil society, members of end beneficiaries, education and research institutions in pilot sites</p>

Alignment with FAO Strategic Objectives and Country Programming Framework 1.3	<i>FAO - is the project supportive of FAO Strategic Objective 2 (OE2): Make agriculture, forestry and fisheries more productive and sustainable and Country Framework 2016-2020 priority no. 1 Fostering sustainable and climate resilient agricultural development (CPF P1)</i>	<p>1.3.1 Level of alignment with FAO OE2 and CPF P1</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>(a) Prodoc and work plans provide evidence of supporting OE 2 and CPF P1?</p> <p>(b) Level of commitment of stakeholders/project to meeting OE 2 and CPF P1?</p> <p>(c) Internal monitoring includes tracking of indicators relating to OE2 and CPF P1?</p>	<p>1) Prodoc</p> <p>2) Strategic documents of FAO (Our Priorities - Strategic Objectives, CPF 2016-2020);</p> <p>3) Work plans;</p> <p>4) Interviews</p>	
Alignment with GEF6 Priorities 1.4	<i>Is the project supportive of GEF 5 priority BD-2: Reduce threats to globally significant biodiversity Sustainably use biodiversity and BD4: mainstream biodiversity conservation and sustainable use into production landscapes/seascapes and sectors</i>	<p>1.4.1 Level of alignment with GEF6-BD2 programme 3: Preventing the Extinction of Known Threatened Species and BD4 programme 10: Integration of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services into Development and Finance Planning:</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>(a) Prodoc works plans support BD2-P3 and BD4-P10?</p> <p>(b) Level of commitment of stakeholders/project to meeting BD2-P3 and BD4-P10</p>	<p>1) Prodoc;</p> <p>2) GEF-6 Programming Directions</p> <p>3) Interviews</p>	

<p>Factors that may be affecting progress</p> <p>1.5</p>	<p><i>Is project design suited to delivering the expected outcomes?</i></p>	<p>1.5.1 Is the implementing mechanism appropriate to deliver results in a timely manner and in line with resources assigned?</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>(a) OPIM system of management is coherent with government interests and capacity (has the legal framework to operate)?</p> <p>(b) The project had the necessary authority to manage funds directly through OPIM and enter into Letters of Association/Agreement with third parties such as TNC?</p> <p>(c) TNC has the resources (human and financial) to support the planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting need of the project (in line with FAO/GEF procedures)</p> <p>(d) the local authorities identified as beneficiaries in the pilot sites have the capacity (human and financial resources) to support project implementation and take ownership of expected results?</p>	<p>1) Prodoc/logical framework; 2) FAO/OED Capacity Development Assessment; 3) GEF/OPIM Guide; 4) Association Agreements and contracts; 5) Interviews with OPIM staff, government stakeholders, end beneficiaries</p>
<p>1.6</p>	<p><i>Is the project's causal logic coherent and clear?</i></p>	<p>1.6.1 To what extent are the project's products (outputs), outcomes and objectives clear, practical and feasible within the timeframe allowed?</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>(a) Desk analysis confirms coherence between products, outcomes and objectives?</p> <p>(b) Project's key stakeholders find the products, outcomes and objectives are coherent and realistic?</p> <p>(c) Stakeholder groups see their engagement in the project is appropriate to reach expected products and outcomes?</p>	<p>1) Prodoc/logical framework 2) Theory of change 3) Interviews</p>

1.7	<i>Is the project actively engaging in synergies with other projects supporting the government conserve and sustainably use biodiversity in WRM?</i>	1.7.1 Number and type of synergies identified (if relevant) Judgement criteria: (a) Prodoc and inception report provides evidence of synergies to be established to avoid duplication of actions? (b) Key stakeholders confirm commitment to coordinating the synergies to reach results?	1) Prodoc 2) Association Agreements 3) Interviews
1.8	<i>Is the internal monitoring and evaluation system designed to integrate a gender focus and enhance learning on results (outcomes)</i>	1.8.1 The internal M&E system has baselines, targets and sex-disaggregated indicators Judgement criteria: (a) Baselines, targets and indicators have been sex-disaggregated during the design and updated annually since project implementation? (b) Indicators are aligned with national needs and priorities?	1) Prodoc/logical framework; 2) Monitoring and evaluation system; 3) FAO Guidelines for the assessment of gender mainstreaming 4) Interviews
1.9	<i>How well have risks been identified and managed, especially in the event there has been a change in the relevance of the project since its formulation?</i>	1.9.1 External and internal risks have been identified, ranked and integrated into annual planning Judgement criteria: (a) Risks have been identified correctly with appropriate mitigation measures (b) Stakeholders and project staff confirm risk management has been integrated into planning (c) Stakeholders confirm training on risk management has been included in annual planning (national and local levels)	1) Prodoc

2. Effectiveness - progress towards results and objectives: To what extent has the project delivered on its outputs, outcomes and objectives?

2.1 Component 1	<i>How far has biodiversity conservation been incorporated into the policy, legal and regulatory frameworks governing WRM in China?</i>	<p>2.1.1 Progress in meeting outcome 1.1: mainstream biodiversity conservation and sustainable use into key water resource management policies, plans and laws at national, provincial, prefecture and district levels.</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Level of progress in identifying and using the most promising entry points for biodiversity mainstreaming (through Gap analysis) within the existing policy framework at the national, provincial (Yunnan and Chongqing), prefecture (Pu'er, Chongqing) and district levels?</p> <p>b) What is the progress in specific activities (ouputs): (i) biodiversity mainstreamed in at least 3 national WRM policies, plans, laws; (ii) Biodiversity mainstreamed in 3 provincial level WRM policies, plans, laws in Yunnan and 3 in Chongqing; (iii) Biodiversity mainstreamed into water sector plan and river management plan at prefecture and county/district levels (to support implementation of e-flow)?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Theory of change 2) Progress reports (PIR/PPR) 3) GAP analysis and other relevant project assessments 4) Government WRM policies and plans at national and provincial levels (Yunnan and Chongqing) 5) Water sector/river management plans at prefecture and county district levels in pilot rivers Buma, Inle, Chuan rivers (Yunnan province) and Tang and Wubu rivers (Chongqing); 6) Interviews with national and provincial bodies working with the project
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	<i>What is the progress in developing administrative and technical guidelines?</i>	<p>2.1.2 Progress in meeting outcome 1.2: Develop administrative regulations as well as technical guidelines for translating biodiversity objectives into concrete WRM practices.</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Level of progress in establishing and implementing e-flows, mainstreamed into WRM regulations at national and provincial level (amendment of existing regulation or development of additional regulation)?</p> <p>b) Have technical guidelines been drafted for the national, provincial, prefecture, and county/district level policies and regulations?</p> <p>c) Progress in preparing regulations for dam construction and operation drafted or improved at national and provincial levels (Yunnan and Chongqing)?</p>	<p>1) Progress reports (PIR/PPR)</p> <p>2) e-flow and other relevant river monitoring studies;</p> <p>3) WRM regulations at national and provincial level;</p> <p>4) Interviews if deemed necessary with stakeholders at provincial level on WRM practices.</p>
	<i>What is the progress in developing new partnerships?</i>	<p>2.1.3 Progress in meeting outcome 1.3: Establish new institutional partnerships for WRM between government and CSOs</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Progress in establishing new collaborative partnerships supporting mainstreaming of biodiversity in WRM at national and provincial levels (Yunnan and Chongqing)?</p>	<p>1) Progress reports (PIR/PPR)</p> <p>2) Association agreements with CSOs</p> <p>3) Interviews with CSOs who are partners in WRM and monitoring</p>

	<i>What is the progress in developing the GLS scorecard?</i>	<p>2.1.4 Progress in meeting outcome 1.4: Develop system of principles and corresponding standards to systematically measure and certify biodiversity conservation in China's water bodies</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Progress in developing the "Green Line Scorecard" for testing in the Yunnan and Chongqing Municipality?</p> <p>b) Has the "Green Line Scorecard" been tested and endorsed by all relevant stakeholders?</p>	<p>1) Progress reports (PIR/PPR)</p> <p>2) Green-Line Scorecard;</p> <p>3) Interviews with stakeholders who tested the scorecard</p>
	<i>What is the progress in attracting government investment into biodiversity conservation?</i>	<p>2.1.5 Progress in meeting outcome 1.5: Increase levels of government investments into biodiversity conservation for river eco-systems</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Investment opportunity assessments conducted at national level as well as for both pilot provinces</p> <p>b) government investment of at least US\$20 million secured for upscaling project actions in Yunnan and Chongqing;</p> <p>c) At least 5 additional major water management programmes agreed for funding covering national and provincial/local levels</p>	<p>1) Progress reports (PIR/PPR);</p> <p>2) Government documents and WRM budgets showing new financial commitments to operating, maintaining and scaling up the Green-Line initiative;</p> <p>3) Interviews with Water authorities at national, provincial, local levels</p>

2.2 Component 2	<i>How far have effective on-the-ground WRM measures in the four project sites increased biodiversity protection and its sustainable use to support sustainable development objectives and reduce environmental stress?</i>	<p>2.2.1 Level of attainment of outcome 2.1: Broaden the alliance of stakeholders and clarify distribution of responsibilities to strengthen the networks of partners involved in the implementation of biodiversity conservation measures</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Progress in operation of new collaborative partnerships in Yunnan and Chongqing to implement pilot activities?</p> <p>b) Progress in establishing and operating working groups at prefecture/municipality and county/district levels to establish and monitor biodiversity conservation in 4 pilot areas?</p> <p>c) how far have responsibilities for stakeholders in river management been established to address issues such as fragmentation of competences and difficulties in the coordination of tasks across geographical borders and across institutions?</p>	<p>1) Progress reports (PIR/PPR);</p> <p>2) MoU or terms of reference of CSO partners in monitoring biodiversity at the 4 pilot sites;</p> <p>3) Interviews with provincial stakeholders engaged in WRM and river management</p>	
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	<p><i>What is the progress in conducting on-the-ground biodiversity conservation measures in Yunnan Province?</i></p>	<p>2.2.2 Level of attainment of outcome 2.2: are the pilot counties in Yunnan demonstrating successful implementation of local-level biodiversity conservation activities in the implementation of e-flows?</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) How far has biodiversity been mainstreamed into local-level pilot activities in line with mainstreaming implemented under component 1?</p> <p>b) Has the e-flow implementation strategy incorporated inputs from the new partnerships established with CSOs and been agreed on by relevant prefectures and county level government stakeholders?</p> <p>c) How far is e-flow being implemented on the Buma/Enle river allowing habitat connectivity, in particular removal of blocked upstream migration of fish by river infrastructure (culvert, small reservoir, etc.)?</p> <p>d) Has there been progress in conserving globally important biodiversity in the pilot areas: (i) Habitat improvements along Buma and Enle River (Zhenyuan County) including swamp restoration and the creation of wetlands (along the Enle river banks); (ii) Wetland rehabilitation and tree restoration along Chuan River (Jingdong County); (iii) Improvements to existing dam structures along Chuan River to a) implement e-flow; (iv) Application of aquatic biodiversity monitoring systems at two monitoring stations on both Buma and Enle rivers to support informed decision-making on new conservation measures and declaration of at least 80km certified "Green line"</p>	<p>1) Progress reports (PIR/PPR);</p> <p>2) Project technical reports;</p> <p>3) E-flow strategy documents for pilot rivers;</p> <p>4) Habitat baseline and monitoring reports for pilot sites;</p> <p>5) Interviews with provincial and local stakeholders engaged in the Green-Line initiatives along Buma, Enle and Chuan rivers in Yunnan Province</p>
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	<p><i>What is the progress in conducting on-the-ground biodiversity conservation measures in Chongqing Municipality?</i></p>	<p>2.2.3 Level of attainment of outcome 2.3: Pilot districts in Chongqing demonstrate successful implementation of local-level biodiversity conservation activities, implementing e-flows?</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) How far has biodiversity been mainstreamed into local-level pilot activities in line with mainstreaming implemented under component 1?</p> <p>b) Has the e-flow implementation strategy incorporated inputs from the new partnerships established with CSOs and been agreed on by relevant prefectures and county level government stakeholders?</p> <p>c) How far has e-flow been successfully implemented within Wubu river to improve habitat connectivity (improvements in upstream migration by resolving inadequate water infrastructure)</p> <p>d) How far have aquatic species been conserved through: (i) strict application of fish protection and fisheries regulations on Tang River (Jiangjin District), especially on sewage treatment plants on the river and river infrastructure barriers (around 75 km of waterway); (ii) application of aquatic biodiversity monitoring systems at two monitoring stations on both Wubu and Tang rivers to support informed decision-making on new conservation measures and declaration of at least 95km certified "Green line"</p>	<p>1) Progress reports (PIR/PPR);</p> <p>2) Project technical reports;</p> <p>3) E-flow strategy documents for pilot rivers;</p> <p>4) Habitat baseline and monitoring reports for pilot sites;</p> <p>5) Interviews with provincial and local stakeholders engaged in the Green-Line initiatives along Buma, Enle and Chuan rivers in Yunnan Province</p>	
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		<p>2.2.4 Level of attainment of outcome 2.4: Compilation and internal as well as external dissemination of information and best practices gained from the project?</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) How far is all relevant information being documented and results, good practices and lessons synchronised with M&E reporting?</p> <p>b) Project results are being shared with project team and relevant stakeholders?</p> <p>c) Are project result briefings compiled and distributed in an effective manner to decision-makers and to the public to promote learning, support planning and help other provinces, prefectures and counties/districts learn about integrating biodiversity conservation into WRM?</p>	<p>1) Progress reports (PIR/PPR);</p> <p>2) Project M&E reports;</p> <p>3) Project communication strategy and materials on results, lessons learned and good practices;</p> <p>4) Interviews with stakeholders at national, provincial and local levels who receive and use project communications</p>
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2.3 Component 3	<p><i>How far has the project contributed to the effective generation and processing of advanced information on river biodiversity and its conservation in the four pilot sites?</i></p>	<p>2.3.1 Level of attainment of outcome 3.1: Design and implement additional information systems to provide comprehensive river biodiversity analysis (including mappings, environmental flow analysis, river health assessments, and water accounting)</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Achievements so far in conducting mapping of Yunnan and Chongqing river systems, in particular in the four pilot rivers (Enle, Chuang, Wubu and Tang rivers)</p> <p>b) Achievements so far in E-flow analysis to identify natural cycle and impact of flow alterations and provide recommendations on measures to achieve e-flow to be implemented under component 2</p> <p>c) Achievements in conducting river health assessment at all four river sites;</p> <p>d) How far is the water accounting system operational, utilizing global scale public domain datasets</p>	<p>1) Progress reports (PIR/PPR);</p> <p>2) Project mapping reports on four pilot rivers;</p> <p>3) Project communications and from WRM authorities on e-flow application and how to improve it</p> <p>4) Interviews with stakeholders at national, provincial and local levels who operate e-flow studies and river health assessments</p>	
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	<p><i>What is the progress in biodiversity monitoring?</i></p>	<p>2.3.2 Level of attainment of outcome 3.2: Establish a comprehensive biodiversity monitoring system for aquatic biodiversity and piloting of the system in the project areas</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Level of completion of Strategy document for Yunnan Province and Chongqing Municipality and at the four project sites within first six months of project start date.</p> <p>b) Achievements so far in designing and operating the GIS database on species and ecosystems by river</p> <p>c) Achievements in developing, testing and operating the Aquatic biodiversity monitoring system at the four sites to support component 1 actions</p>	<p>1) Progress reports (PIR/PPR);</p> <p>2) Project mapping and GIS database on four pilot rivers;</p> <p>3) Interviews with stakeholders at national, provincial and local levels who operate GIS to monitor biodiversity at pilot sites and who use the GIS data to support WRM and river management and monitoring</p>
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	<i>What is the progress in training on biodiversity mainstreaming?</i>	<p>2.3.3 Level of attainment of outcome 3.3: Develop and implement system of multi-level and multifaceted biodiversity main-streaming training program targeting government officials and water management partners from local communities and civil society organizations</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) How many MWR officials and officials at provincial level and from CSOs have been trained in the mainstreaming of BD conservation objectives into WRM, planning and programming (target 30, MWR, 60 provincial, 60 CSOs)?</p> <p>b) How many water management professionals have been trained in biodiversity mainstreaming practices relevant to their area of expertise (target 400)?</p> <p>c) Achievements in training water management professionals in BD monitoring system implementation, pro-cessing and analysi s (target 400);</p> <p>d) Achievements in training water management professionals in "Green Line Scorecard" implementation (target 400).</p>	<p>1) Progress reports (PIR/PPR);</p> <p>2) Project training materials on WRM;</p> <p>3) Interviews with MWR and CSO officials engaged in WRM and the Green-Line initiative along Buma, Enle, Chuan rivers in Yunnan and Wubu and Tang rivers in Chongqing</p>
		<p>2.3.4 Level of attainment of outcome 3.4: Implementation of project monitoring and evaluation:</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) How far has the M&E plan been identified and implemented in line with criteria and reporting requirements of the Prodoc in section 4.5</p>	<p>1) Progress reports on M&E plan;</p> <p>2) Assessment of M&E plan</p> <p>2) Interviews with M&E staff</p>

2.4 Unintended results	<i>Are there any unintended consequences of the project's actions?</i>	2.4.1 Type of unintended results to date: Judgement criteria: a) Positive unforeseen change to date due to the project; b) Negative unforeseen change to date due to the project	1) Progress and annual reports; 2) Interviews with project staff, FAO-China, GEF-China and key stakeholders at national and provincial levels on positive and negative developments; 3) Follow-up interviews in the field (if approved to triangulate positive and negative developments due to project actions
2.5 Risks	<i>Are there any barriers or other risks that may prevent future progress towards and the achievement of the project's outcomes and objectives?</i>	2.5.1 Level of risk on project reaching its results Judgement criteria: a) What are the main risk identified and their current impact on the project's implementation? b) Are risk mitigation measures being implemented successfully?	1) Progress and annual reports relating to risk assessments; 2) Interviews on high, medium and low risks identified and mitigation strategy; 3) Specific interviews on the risks associated with COVID-19 pandemic on project implementation, especially relating to group actions, trainings and monitoring and identify solutions if the pandemic prolongs lockdowns and closures of businesses beyond six months
Efficiency To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently and cost effectively?			

3.1 OPIM/PSC	<i>To what extent has the project's implementation mechanism contributed to efficient implementation of main outputs?</i>	<p>3.1.1 Level of project implementation attained due to OPIM and Project Steering Committee decision-making</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) How far is the PSC guiding planning and implementation, learning from monitoring, etc.</p> <p>b) Level of understanding and commitment of government to implementing the project (including channelling of GEF funds) through FAO/OPIM?</p> <p>c) How far are roles and duties of staff applying OPIM being implemented successfully?</p> <p>d) Has the Operational Partner's Agreement been applied efficiently and has TNC and other CSOs facilitated project implementation?</p>	<p>1) Progress and annual reports;</p> <p>2) Minutes of PSC meetings</p> <p>3) Assessment of project budget and OPA</p> <p>4) Interviews with project staff, FAO-China, GEF-China and key stakeholders involved in applying OPIM, TNC and national CSOs involved in the project;</p>
3.2	<i>Has project management been able to adapt to any changing conditions to improve the efficiency of project implementation?</i>	<p>3.2.1 How far has the management of risk facilitated efficient implementation of project actions (without major delays)?</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Are risks being regularly assessed and updated to support smooth implementation as planned</p> <p>b) What are the main risks that have been/have not been mitigated to facilitate project implementation?</p> <p>c) Have any risk mitigation measures actually sped up implementation and provide lessons or good practices?</p> <p>d) Is OPIM contributing to strengthening capacities of regional, sub-regional and/or national entities?</p> <p>e) Does OPIM and support from TNC ensure ownership of project results?</p>	<p>1) Progress and annual reports;</p> <p>2) Interviews with PMO staff, TNC, FAO-China, GEF-China</p>

3.3	<i>How does the project's cost efficiency (cost/time) compare to that of similar projects?</i>	<p>3.3.1 Level of cost efficiency attained in relation to government programmes and other donor-funded projects.</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Cost of running OPIM in relation to DEX/FAO-China?</p> <p>b) Cost of project operations using GEF resources in relation to government programmes or other donor projects?</p> <p>c) Are the costs of the trainings (per capita) favourable in relation to government programmes or other projects?</p>	<p>1) Progress and annual reports;</p> <p>2) Interviews with PMO/PSC staff, TNC, FAO-China, GEF-China and Ministry of Finance</p>
3.4	<i>To what extent has the project built on synergies and complementarities with other projects, partnerships, etc. and avoided duplication of similar activities by other groups and initiatives?</i>	<p>3.4.1 Synergies in place are producing a positive effect on project implementation</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) No. of synergies in place that have avoided the duplication of project resources (cost savings)?</p> <p>b) Synergies where no clear benefits in cost savings on project implementation are evident</p>	<p>1) Progress reports</p> <p>2) Interviews with PMO/PSC staff, FAO-China and provincial stakeholders on their perception of the synergies in place</p>
3.5	<i>How far has co-financing from the government aided the project reach planned results?</i>	<p>3.5.1 Level of cofinance secured to support project implementation</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Level of cofinance committed and disbursed to March 2020;</p> <p>b) Where has cofinance been most forthcoming and important (at national, provincial, local levels)?</p>	<p>1) Prodoc;</p> <p>2) Progress and annual reports and budgets;</p> <p>3) Interviews with GEF-China, FAO-China and MWR</p> <p>4) Application of GEF Table in Appendix of ToR</p>
4. Cross-cutting priorities: To what extent have gender consideration been taken into account in project design and implementation?			

4.1 (participation)	<i>¿What has been the level of participation of women and youths in project planning, trainings, implementation of activities and monitoring?</i>	<p>4.1.1 Women and youths confirm they participate actively in the project's planning and implementation</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Evidence M&E system is sex-disaggregated</p> <p>b) Number of women in relation to men participating in project planning and implementation, M&E?</p> <p>c) Perception of women and youths concerning their level of access to information, training, resources, etc. and benefits derived from project actions?</p> <p>d) Is training focused on both women and men so the latter can value and recognise the role of women in biodiversity conservation?</p> <p>e) Number of women and youths at all levels, but particularly in the four pilot sites, who have assumed leadership roles in project-related activities since the start (against baseline data)</p> <p>f) Positive or negative developments on women due to project's actions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Prodoc 2) Work plans; 3) Technical, training and workshop reports; 4) Assess M&E system 5) FAO/GEF Gender objectives and guidance documents 6) WRM policy documents and plans 7) Group and individual interviews with women and youths to determine the value and quality of their participation and access to resources and project benefits 	
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4.2	<i>To what extent were social concerns (inclusive approach) taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project to ensure the participation of the most vulnerable groups in project activities at the project pilot sites?</i>	<p>4.2.1 Level of participation of vulnerable groups (ethnic minorities, families under the poverty line, disabled, etc.) in the design, planning, implementation and monitoring of the project's actions</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Level of application of FPIC as per FAO guidelines</p> <p>b) Perception of project staff, FAO-China, GEF-China and government stakeholders on inclusion of ethnic communities and other vulnerable groups and how far this is monitored by the M&E system;</p> <p>c) How far have project methods and dialogue channels been adapted to meet the needs and priorities of vulnerable groups?</p>	<p>1) Prodoc</p> <p>2) Work plans;</p> <p>3) Technical, training and workshop reports;</p> <p>4) Assess M&E system</p> <p>5) FAO/GEF objectives and guidance documents on FPIC and the rights of ethnic minorities</p> <p>6) WRM policy documents and plans</p> <p>7) Group and individual interviews with vulnerable groups to determine the value and quality of their participation and access to resources and project benefits</p>
4.3	<i>To what extent were environmental concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project?</i>	<p>4.3.1 How far has biodiversity conservation been linked to the wider needs of sustaining the river ecosystem?</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Level of integration of the ecosystem approach in the project to promote biodiversity conservation and its sustainable use</p> <p>b) Level of integration of strategic and environmental assessment (SEA, EIA) in project's main activities?</p>	<p>1) Prodoc</p> <p>2) Work plans;</p> <p>3) Technical, training and workshop reports;</p> <p>4) Use of SEA and EIA practices in WRM and other relevant sector policy documents and plans (in particular relating to agriculture, transport and energy)</p> <p>5) Interviews with project staff and government officials at national and provincial levels</p>

4.4 (in addition to Tour)	<i>Has food security and nutrition priorities of women been taken into account in the promotion of biodiversity conservation (especially of fish species)? (If relevant)</i>	<p>4.4.1 How far have food security and nutrition (FSN) been linked to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, especially of fish stocks?</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Evidence of FSN considerations in policy reforms taken place, in studies on e-flow and on biodiversity monitoring</p> <p>b) Perception among the end beneficiaries of importance of conserving wild/local varieties of food crops</p>	<p>1) Prodoc</p> <p>2) Work plans and progress/annual reports;</p> <p>3) Technical, training and workshop reports;</p> <p>4) Assess M&E system</p> <p>5) FAO/GEF objectives on local varieties (and on local food varieties linked to ITPGRFA</p> <p>6) WRM policy documents and plans</p> <p>7) Group and individual interviews with women and men on conservation of local varieties of fish and foodstuffs</p>
4.4 (in addition to Tour)	<i>Has the project communicated effectively to ensure the sharing of information and results reaches women, youths and vulnerable groups?</i>	<p>4.5.1 How far has the project established a communication strategy to meet the needs of different groups, including women, youths and vulnerable groups?</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) How far does project communications focus on the needs and priorities of women, youths, vulnerable groups?</p> <p>b) How far has the project established the capacity to meet these needs?</p>	<p>1) Prodoc</p> <p>2) Work plans and progress/annual reports;</p> <p>3) Technical, training and workshop reports;</p> <p>4) M&E reports</p> <p>5) Project communications</p> <p>6) WRM policy documents and plans</p> <p>7) Group and individual interviews with women, youths and vulnerable groups</p>
5. Sustainability	What is the likelihood that the project results can be sustained after the end of the project?		

5.1	<i>What are the key risks that may affect the sustainability of the project results and its benefits (financial, socioeconomic, institutional and governance, and environmental aspects, as well as the risks identified in the project document)?</i>	<p>51.1. How far do high/medium risks, including the pandemic and lack of ownership of results, pose a threat to sustaining the main outputs and outcomes achieved?</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Capacity to continue managing risk as an integral part of WRM and green line initiatives in the pilot areas</p> <p>b) Level of risk mitigation that can be sustained with national/provincial/local resources in the pilot areas</p> <p>c) capacity in fiduciary risk management in place by project end among main stakeholders, especially at the provincial level</p>	<p>1) Prodoc</p> <p>2) Work plans and progress/annual reports;</p> <p>3) Technical, training and workshop reports;</p> <p>4) M&E reports</p> <p>5) Project communications</p> <p>6) WRM policy documents and plans</p> <p>7) Group and individual interviews government stakeholders</p>
5.2	<i>Has the project established sustainable institutional arrangements or cross-sector partnerships?</i>	<p>5.2.1 Degree to which the beneficiary institutions and CSO partners can continue to operate and maintain project outputs and sustain outcomes</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Mechanisms identified/in place to continue the OPIM, partnerships and funding beyond project closure;</p> <p>b) Funding and support identified/in place for river monitoring at pilot sites;</p> <p>c) capacity of government institutions identified/in place to upscale good practices from the project;</p> <p>d) stakeholders have identified how the communication strategy should be continued and amplified for all parties involved;</p> <p>e) Internal capacity of CSOs to operate as planned beyond the project in areas such as biodiversity monitoring, applying sustainable use of biodiversity through suitable practices, etc.</p>	<p>1) Prodoc</p> <p>2) Work plans and progress/annual reports;</p> <p>3) Technical, training and workshop reports;</p> <p>4) M&E reports</p> <p>5) Project communications</p> <p>6) WRM policy documents and plans</p> <p>7) Group and individual interviews with project staff, government and CSO stakeholders</p>

5.3	<i>Has the exit strategy been identified in the project design, or during implementation so far, to clarify how all resources and materials will be transferred to stakeholders?</i>	<p>5.3.1 Degree to which the exit strategy has been identified to date?</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Work plans show evidence of main actions to be incorporated in the exit strategy as and when planned outputs and outcomes have been reached;</p> <p>b) PSC, PMO and FAO-China have discussed the exit strategy and incorporated a first draft of it in the latest work plan for 2020;</p> <p>c) Key stakeholders interviewed confirm they are satisfied there will be in the exit strategy: (i) methodological guides to support the continuation of biodiversity conservation in the green lines established; (ii) post closure plan of main actions to continue project actions, association agreements, and grass root partnerships); (iii) project systematisation report including good practices and lessons learnt to be applied post project.</p>	<p>1) Prodoc</p> <p>2) Work plans and progress/annual reports;</p> <p>3) WRM policy documents and plans</p> <p>4) Interviews with stakeholders on the exit strategy and lessons to be incorporated into this strategy</p>
6. Lessons and good practices Are there lessons learnt, or good practices identified to support GEF/FAO guide future projects planned in China and elsewhere?			
6.1 (in addition to ToR)	<i>What results, lessons or experiences are likely to be replicated or scaled up in the near future?</i>	<p>6.1.1 Level of lessons learned and good practices that are feeding into project planning and implementation</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Lessons and good practices are being reported by the project as outputs and outcomes happen or are monitored</p> <p>b) Interviewees confirm they are using lessons learned and good practices to conserve biodiversity</p>	<p>1) All documents consulted</p> <p>2) Interviews with stakeholders</p>

6.2 (in addition to ToR)	<i>¿Is the project producing a catalytic effect in other provinces in China concerning biodiversity conservation and sustainable use in the water and/or other sectors?</i>	<p>6.2.1 Number of provinces that have shown an interest to/will replicate project activities, or participate in seminars, trainings, workshops, receive communications, etc.</p> <p>Judgement criteria:</p> <p>a) Interviewees confirm one or more new provinces have contacted the project and/or participated in project activities</p>	<p>1) Interviewees with stakeholders</p>
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* To support analysis and not overburden interviewees with questions the MTR provided the following groups of stakeholders with a selected set of most relevant questions: FAO-CN/FAO-RAP; PMO/MWR in Beijing; PMO/MWR in the two pilot provinces; CTA, National Adviser and TNC; Civil society representatives and members of MWR's Bureaus at the county/district levels.

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<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fenvs.2018.00064/full>

Appendix 6: Results matrix at 31 March 2020 with MTR ratings & observations*

Results Chain	Indicators	Baseline	Progress at first PIR (30 June 2018) ⁶⁵	Progress to date (31 March 2020)	End of project targets (31 May 2020)	Achievement rating (HS, S, MS, MU, U, HU)	Justification for rating
Outcome 1	"Changing the framework" - Institutional and planning framework for mainstreaming biodiversity into water resources management at national, provincial and local levels.						
Outcome 1.1	Mainstream biodiversity objectives and practices into key water resource management policies, planning, and legal stipulations at the national, provincial, prefecture and county/district levels.						
Output 1.1.1	Gap analysis conducted at national, provincial and municipal level to identify entry points and suitable targets for mainstreaming of biodiversity (policies, development plans, laws) including a regular review of new entry points throughout the project duration	Existing water resource management policies, plans, regulations and institutional structures have not adequately mainstreamed biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection into water resources management; Existing policy framework in place (Three Red Lines) supports sound water management in area of water use, water use efficiency and water pollution	Assessment of water resource management policies on WRM and biodiversity conservation in the US, EU, France and South Africa drafted with the support of TNC to guide gap analysis.	Analysis on WRM policies for biodiversity conservation at national and provincial completed, gaps identified and recommendations made to improve the legal and regulatory framework; Special plans to protect e-flow of rivers and lakes and its supervision presented to MWR and awaiting decision.	Initial gap analysis conducted at national level, provincial level for two pilot provinces, and municipal level for four pilot municipalities; renewal of results at a 6-months interval.	S	Gap analysis has largely been completed at all levels and is supporting the reform process to mainstream BD and e-flow protection in the water sector's policy, legal and regulatory framework
Output 1.1.2	Biodiversity mainstreaming objectives and priorities incorporated into key water sector policies and plans at national level	No national water sector policies, laws, regulations or action plans have adequately mainstreamed aquatic biodiversity	N/A	At the national level, recommendations made in the Analysis Report on China's Water Resources Management Policies	Biodiversity mainstreamed into at least 3 important national level WRM policies, plans, or laws	MS#	Mainstreaming process is advancing despite delays (5 reforms completed) and interviews confirm strong commitment to continue the process. Extension of at

⁶⁵ If available

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	(including e.g. National Comprehensive Water Resources Plan; incl. Five Year Development Plan and Sectoral Development Plans)	conservation and e-flow protection		for Biodiversity Conservation is completed. MWR formulated the 2019 Key Rivers and Lakes Ecological Flow (Water Volume) Research and Guarantee Work Plan, selecting 21 key rivers and lakes as pilots for implementation.			least two years needed to meet targets, which should be reassessed as reform process takes more time than planned
Output 1.1.3	Biodiversity mainstreaming objectives and priorities incorporated into key water sector policies and plans at provincial level in Chongqing and Yunnan (including e.g. Provincial Water Resources Protection Plans).	No provincial water sector policies, laws, regulations or action plans have adequately mainstreamed aquatic biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection (Yunnan Province and Chongqing Municipality).	N/A	Yunnan provincial government has issued 3 provincial water sector policies and plans, including the Yunnan Province Total Water Use Control Plan, Yunnan Province Implementation Plan for the Protection and Restoration of the Six Major River Systems focusing on the Yangtze River, and Yunnan Water Resources Protection Plan, put forward specific measures for ecological water demand protection, and clarified the minimum requirements for the E-flow. The Implementation Plan for Small Hydropower Cleanup and Rectification in the	Biodiversity mainstreamed into at least 3 provincial level WRM policies, plans or law for each of the two provinces (min. 6 provincial level improvements in total)	MS#	Mainstreaming process is advancing despite delays (7 in Yunnan and 6 in Chongqing) and there is strong commitment to mainstream BD and e-flow. Extension of at least two years needed to meet targets, which should be reassessed as reform process takes more time than planned and provinces say they need more regular training and supervision to meet targets and implement them correctly

				Yangtze River Economic Belt in Chongqing was issued by Chongqing Government.			
Output 1.1.4	Biodiversity mainstreaming objectives and priorities incorporated into the water sector development plan and the river management plan for Pu'er prefecture & Chongqing municipality , as well as county/district level in all four pilot sites (including e.g. prefecture/municipality and county/district level water resource management etc.; River Basin Master Plans for pilot rivers)	No prefecture/municipal water sector policies, laws, regulations or action plans have adequately mainstreamed aquatic biodiversity conservation (Pu'er prefecture or Chongqing municipality)	Drafted ecological protection schemes in pilot prefectures.	Research Reports on WRM Policies for the Biodiversity Protection in both provinces are completed. A Notice on Strengthening the Protection of Aquatic Organisms in the Yangtze River was issued by Jiangjin district government. Current water resources development and river management plans of the 4 pilot counties are investigated and evaluated. Relevant suggestions for incorporating biodiversity mainstreaming goals and priorities into local water and river management policies and plans are proposed.	Biodiversity mainstreamed into water sector plan as well as river management plan for each of the four pilot sites (prefecture, county/district level)	MS#	Recommendations on mainstreaming BD and e-flow goals into river management plans made. Both provinces confirmed recommendations can be implemented over next two years (assuming an extension is made and more regular training and supervision is provided).
Outcome 1.2:	Develop administrative regulations as well as technical guidelines for translating bio-diversity objectives into concrete WRM practices (with special emphasis on e-flow implementation through corresponding adjustment of human-made flow alteration)						
Output 1.2.1	Biodiversity considerations, with specific focus on systematically establishing and implementing e-flows,	No WRM regulations at national and provincial level have adequately mainstreamed biodiversity	N/A	MWR issued the Technical Guidance on Ecological Flow Supervision Platform for Small Hydropower, which aims to	Indicators and Targets: Biodiversity mainstreamed into at least 3 important national level regulations and 3	MS#	MWR has capacity to mainstream and implement e-flow regulations given it already has RHA/ hydrological monitoring sites already established.

	mainstreamed into WRM regulations at national and provincial level (amendment of existing regulation or development of additional regulation).	conservation and e-flow protection		strengthen technical guidance on ecological flow supervision of hydropower stations with installed capacity of 50MW and below, and to effectively supervise the ecological flow release of small hydropower stations. Biodiversity has been mainstreamed into 3 government regulations in provincial level, such as Water Resources Management Regulations of Chongqing, River Management Regulations in Chongqing, and Notice on Strengthening Rural Hydropower Capacity Expansion in Chongqing, which requires ecological water use and ecological flow release.	important provincial level regulations for each of the two pilot provinces		monitored. But reaching targets are ambitious at provincial level without more regular technical supervision and support
Output 1.2.2	Technical guidelines formulated and implemented, providing advice to river managers on translating biodiversity objectives into concrete action at the local level.	No technical guidelines drafted at the national, provincial, prefecture, and county/district level to guide implementation of reformed water sector policies (under outcome 1.1) and	N/A	Needs assessment and gap analysis has been conducted at the national level. Technical Guidelines for River and Lake Health Assessment is developed.	Technical guidelines drafted for the national, provincial, prefecture, and county/district level policies (outcome 1.1) and regulations (outcome 1.2); other suitable policies and regulations will be	MU#	MWR in consensus that GLS concept should be integrated into RHA Technical Guidelines (TG) Yunnan and Chongqing both drafting new TG. But several challenges exist: 1) N. and S. China have different water stress levels so one set of standards not

		regulations (under outcome 1.2)			included as far as possible		feasible and need to be eclectic (aligned to international standards and specific characteristics in china) ; 2) Risk management and CC need to be integrated in TG; 3) effective BD monitoring needs adequate sampling stations at key locations (pilot rivers av. 2 locations); 4) Permanent body with funding to process, validate, interpret monitoring data and supervise a surveillance strategy needed.
Output 1.2.3	Regulations on dams and dam cascades expanded and improved to include considerations on the implementation of e-flow into both construction and operation of small and medium river dams.	No regulations on e-flow for dam construction and operation available in Yunnan and Chongqing Municipality	Elaborated the briefing document of Method and Application of Eco-Regional Assessment introducing the progress and the cases using ERA method.	The national level has completed the Environmental Flow Background Research Report, conducted a gap analysis of domestic environmental flow research, and put forward suggestions for China's environmental flow guarantee.	Regulations for dam construction and operation drafted and improved at national and provincial level (for both pilot provinces)	MS#	Government is in the review stage of recommendations on e-flow regulations for small dams up to 50 MW. However, more feedback is required from pilot provinces on lessons and good practices
Outcome 1.3	Establish new institutional partnerships for WRM between government and CSOs						
Output 1.3.1	New partnerships among government and civil society organizations established to mainstream biodiversity into water resources management.	No CSO networks (including academic/research institutions) officially engaged in supporting the water sector conserve aquatic biodiversity and e-flow protection at national,	The local government and civil groups work together for environmental protection and water saving publicity during the World	An inter-ministerial joint mechanism has been established at the national level. Both Yunnan and Chongqing have implemented River (Lake) Chief System, and have established five levels	New collaborative partnerships operational at national level, provincial level for 2 pilot provinces; Working group/Stakeholder network established	S	New partnerships have been established. Inter-ministerial mechanism offers new opportunity to work closer with MEE, MARA, etc. River Chief System working well at provincial, municipal, district/county and village

		provincial or local levels in Yunnan and Chongqing Municipality.	Water Day and the Chinese Water Week.	of river chiefs at provincial, city, county, township and village. River chief offices have been set up in the pilot areas. In accordance with the normal management mechanism and requirements of the River Chief System, river health and biodiversity protection targets have been incorporated into the responsibility of the River Chiefs.	and operational at prefecture/municipal level as well as county/district level for 4 pilot areas.		levels supported by creation of civil chiefs selected from civil society. Challenge will be CSOs level of freedom to enforce accountability and new laws relating to BD conservation and e-flow
Outcome 1.4	Develop system of principles and corresponding standards to systematically measure and certify biodiversity conservation in China's water bodies						
Output 1.4.1	Create an official "Green Line Scorecard" system for measurement and certification of advanced ecosystem-based river management and achievement of biodiversity conservation objectives	No system for measurement and certification relating to river biodiversity protection and e-flow protection in place	Background materials compiled for reference to GLS developing	MWR has conducted river health assessment in major rivers and lakes across the country as pilots. A research report on Green Line Scorecard and the River Health Assessment (RHA) Standards, Methods and Application Report were completed. The RHA has been tested in the 4 pilot rivers.	"Green Line Scorecard" developed and ready to be tested in the pilot sites (see component II).	MS#	GLS concept now has clarity within the context of RHA. Testing of the concept is on-going at the pilot sites. Feedback indicates applying RHA is a feasible approach for GLS as RHA already covers longitudinal connectivity, riparian stability, veg. coverage, artificial disturbance, etc. But more training required in areas such as BD monitoring, habitat connectivity and ecosystem management.
Output 1.4.2	"Green Line Scorecard" agreed by relevant stakeholders at national (e.g. across MWR		N/A	A discussion meeting on the GLS and RHA has been conducted at the national level.	"Green Line Scorecard" created with input from and	MS#	MTR found agreement on applying an GLS within R/LHA has been reached, but there are challenges to

	Departments), provincial and local levels in pilot provinces and sites			Participants reached consensus on the next steps.	endorsed by all relevant stakeholders		implement it effectively. In particular, BD monitoring at pilots needs a minimum number of sampling stations (in line with international standards) to be effective. This is costly and needs support from MEE, TNC and international experts over more than two years before can be fully agreed and applied in line with international standards.
Outcome 1.5	Increase levels of government investments into biodiversity conservation for river eco-systems						
Output 1.5.1	Expert assessments to identify suitable opportunities for river biodiversity investments maximizing effectiveness as well as efficiency of investments implemented	No government investment assessments in place targeting BD conservation and e-flow protection in the water sector	N/A	Started to evaluate investment opportunities for river biodiversity conservation, and will achieve preliminary results in 2020.	Investment opportunity assessments conducted at national level as well as for both pilot provinces	MU#	Investment assessments are well behind schedule due to project delays in areas such as BD monitoring and processing of data. However, MWR confident these assessments can be consolidated over next two years.
Output 1.5.2	Government investment in aquatic biodiversity related water management practices significantly and measurably increased		N/A	The government investment on river management focused on biodiversity increased at least 12 million US\$. The central and provincial governments invested billions of yuan in projects to improve the water environment of the whole country.	Increase in relevant government investment of at least US\$20 million in value	MU#	MTR informed investment has risen in areas such as restoring water quality and e-flow due to application of Three Red Lines. MTR unable to verify how much of alleged USD 12 m. investment figure is directly related to project activities. More information on direct investment needed.
Output 1.5.3	Expansion of number of water management	No water management programmes and	N/A	In pilot areas, the government budgets	At least 5 additional major water	MS#	Interviews with stakeholders in pilot

	programs and related budgets that include biodiversity conservation as an objective	budgets in place to support biodiversity conservation at the national or provincial level.		on river management focused on biodiversity increased by a large margin. 4 additional major water management programs (1 at Pu'er Prefecture level and 2 at Chongqing Municipal level and 1 at Banan District level) include biodiversity conservation.	management programs (all government levels combined with at least one national level initiative) and related budgets include biodiversity conservation		provinces confirm new programmes to conserve BD are taking place and increasing learning at same time, (see outputs under outcomes 2.2 and 2.3)
Component 2	"Enhancing Implementation" -- Demonstrate on-the-ground activities for mainstreaming biodiversity in pilot rivers in Yunnan Province and Chongqing Municipality						
Outcome 2.1	Broaden the alliance of stakeholders and clarify distribution of responsibilities to strengthen the networks of partners involved in the implementation of biodiversity conservation measures						
Output 2.1.1	Pilot provinces/municipalities, prefectures and counties/districts establish new partnerships between government and civil society organizations to mainstream biodiversity into water resources management; includes corresponding prefecture and county/district level stakeholder groups.	Low active participation of CSOs (including academic/research institutions) in the pilot sites	ERA method introduced in the TNC materials	New collaborative partnerships has been established at provincial and county levels through River Chief System, and carried out supervision work veritably. Within the mechanism, working group/Stakeholder is established.	New collaborative partnership operational at provincial level for 2 pilot provinces (supporting mainstreaming under 1.1.3 as well as strengthening implementation capacity for pilot activities; Working group/Stakeholder network established and operational at prefecture/municipality level as well as county/district level for the 4 pilot areas.	S#	Both provinces confirmed new partnerships with civil society have been established and this is raising awareness on the importance of BD conservation and e-flow protection as well as allowing dialogue on managing other related interests, such as retaining old dams for heritage purposes, or creating green public spaces within wetland restoration prog.
Output 2.1.2	Clarify responsibilities and tasks for all	No specific responsibilities and	N/A	Both Chongqing and Yunnan have	Clear biodiversity-related	S#	Interviews with stakeholders (including civil

	stakeholders involved in river biodiversity conservation (e.g. appointment of dedicated river managers) at provincial, prefecture and county/district level.	tasks in place for stakeholders to apply river biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection at pilot sites in Yunnan Province and Chongqing pilot sites.		established River Chief Systems that clarifies the responsibilities related to biodiversity protection in river management. Policy Framework and Typical Case Study Report on Biodiversity Protection under the Background of River and Lake Chief System was completed at the national and provincial level, which summarized the experience and lessons since the implementation of the River Chief System, and proposed further policy suggestions.	responsibilities for stakeholders in river management established, effectively addressing fragmentation of competences and coordination of tasks across geographical borders as well as across institutions		society) confirm they understand their roles and responsibilities in supporting BD conservation and e-flow protection at pilot rivers. In Chongqing this is supported by a phone app. Main challenges: more TA support from TNC and develop a more effective communication strategy.
Outcome 2.2	Pilot counties in Yunnan Province demonstrate successful implementation of local-level biodiversity conservation activities, implementing e- flows						
Output 2.2.1	Ensure that pilot activities at county level are included and embedded in the WRM planning processes at provincial and prefecture level under component I.	No specific pilot activities in place to promote the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and e-flow protection in Yunnan Province	N/A	The Analysis Report on Water Resources Management Policy Framework for Biodiversity Conservation of Yunnan Province is developed, covering the baseline evaluation. TNC compiled Methods and Cases for the Assessment of Priority Areas for Freshwater Ecological Protection, introducing the US experience.	Indicators and Targets: Biodiversity mainstreaming under component I explicitly mentions pilot activities.	MS#	Interviews confirm learning from the pilot sites will be integrated into WRM plans to support the up-scaling of good practices (such as greater focus on habitat conservation to ensure a landscape approach to BD conservation

Output 2.2.2	Support the decision-making process on how to best balance e-flow implementation with development objectives based on recommendations provided by the e-flow analysis under component III.	No clear technical guidelines in place to support decision-making to protect e-flow in the in Yunnan Province in general.	N/A	The Report on Environmental Flow Analysis in Yunnan Province for Biodiversity Conservation (Draft) was completed. The design principles and standards for E-flows will be further developed in 2020, and technical support will continue to be provided for the decision-making process.	E-flow implementation strategy determined and agreed upon by all relevant prefectures as well as county level government stakeholders (incorporating expertise and recommendations from the "new partnerships", see above).	MS#	Due to delays and need to wait for the dry season (in Yunnan Province) this work is still on-going, but MTR informed e-flow assessments run smoothly as MWR already has hydrological stations in place to facilitate these. But more TA supervision rec.
Output 2.2.3	Review and adjustment of existing river flow alteration (especially dam structures, embankments and abstraction pattern) along Buma and Enle River (Zhenyuan County) to establish e-flow, enhance habitats and increase connectivity (based on recommendations from e-flow analysis, river health assessment and water accounting.)	No protection of e-flow in place at the pilot sites; Low levels of habitat connectivity due to high number of physical infrastructures on Buma/Enle Rivers	N/A	Researches on E-flow analysis, river health assessment and water accounting for Buma/Enle river have been carried out in Yunnan pilot areas. E-flow control will be implemented in the pilot rivers. Through trainings and on-site guidance, TNC is providing technical support for the pilot rivers.	E-flow successfully implemented within Buma/Enle river; habitat not blocked to upstream migration by inadequate culvert, small reservoir and other water infrastructure design, resulting in improved habitat connectivity Area directly covered by BD mainstreaming: 14 400 ha	MS#	E-flow analysis progressing and MWR in Yunnan and Pu'er prefecture clear on importance of a second assessment in dry season (2020-2021) to support more effective decision-making on e-flow application. Pu'er prefecture has also identified gaps in conducting effective e-flow (such as need to regulate sand mining in rivers and river demarcation). Prodoc target not realistic by 2022.

Output 2.2.4	Habitat improvements along Buma and Enle River (Zhenyuan County) including swamp restoration and the creation of wetlands (along the Enle river banks).	High number of aquatic habitats threatened by physical infrastructures and human activity	Nearly half a million endemic fish fingerlings released into the Bum/Enle rivers and river habitats improved (and in some cases connected) through biodiversity conservation activities and natural propagation.	Water ecological surveys and river health assessments were conducted on Buma River and Enle River. The restored and created wetland reached 19.25 ha (Buma river 4.65 ha and Enle river 14.6 ha), and about 400,000 local fish fry were artificially put into the Enle and Buma rivers.	Increased ecosystem ability to sustain globally significant biodiversity (e.g. potamodromous fish species such as: <i>Tor sinensis</i> ; <i>Clupisoma sinense</i> =; Largemouth Bronze Gudgeon (<i>Coreius guichenoti</i>) & Royal Clown Loach (<i>Leptobotia elongate</i>) Area of improved habitats: 9.3 ha	MS#	Habitat restoration is progressing and target realistic by 2022. Site visits needed to determine quality of restoration and connectivity achieved. Also, approach to habitat conservation appears to be a good way to communicate how to be most effective in applying BD conservation but field interviews needed.
Output 2.2.5	Wetland rehabilitation and tree restoration along Chuan River (Jingdong County) to revive habitat for fish and especially aquatic bird species	Natural wetlands in poor physical state due to e-flow alterations and other man-made activity on Chuan River	N/A	Plan for Wetland Protection and Construction of "One Reservoir One river" in Jingdong was completed, which provided relevant plans for the wetland restoration along the Chuan river. 665.82 ha of wetlands in the upper reaches of the Chuan River have been included in the protection scope, and 13.1 ha of river side wetland has been restored.	Enhanced habitat for and increasing population of aquatic birds as measured by bird monitoring system (monitoring stations in two towns); ca. 35 km of minimal disturbance of key habitats Area of improved habitats and restored wetlands: 25 ha	MS#	Wetland rehabilitation is progressing and facilitating learning on role of wetlands. Target appears to be realistic. Main challenge: more education to promote the function of wetlands in terms of ecological, recreational and flood management functions
Output 2.2.6	Improvements to existing dam structures along Chuan River to a) implement e-flow (based on recommendations from e-flow assessment;	Existing dam structure alters natural flow cycle creating negative BD effects; no e-flow	Cleaned out the channels and riparian garbage to aid fish migration in Chuan River; Reinforced the embankment and	The preliminary Report on the Investigation and Research on Water Ecology in Chuan River was completed. A Preliminary Scheme for Fishway on	E-flow successfully implemented within Buma/Enle river; Installation of fish migration channels and/or ladders or	MS#	Improvements to dam structures is progressing. Stakeholders starting to see advantages of e-flow protection in relation to migration of endemic fish species. Target ambitious

	and b) facilitate fish migration		interconnected the Chuan river system.	Lianhuatang Overflow Dam in Chuan River and Chuan River Ditch Overflow Dam was developed.	other suitable migration instruments Area directly covered by BD mainstreaming: 7500 ha		and needs better linkage to MWR capacity
Output 2.2.7	Application of aquatic biodiversity monitoring system as well as "Green Line Scorecard" certification system in both pilot sites	No BD monitoring system in place to support GLS certification in Yunnan Province	Water Administration supervision and ecological monitoring conducted.	Water ecological survey and RHA were carried out in pilot rivers in light of RHA methodology. River administration supervision is continuously strengthened in fields.	BD monitoring system established with two monitoring stations per river and used for improvement of BD conservation measures; ca. 80km of river with newly certified "Green Line" water management practices Area covered by GLS in Yunnan: 21 900 ha	MU#	Stakeholders confirm monitoring of samples aids learning on BD and its functions. But sampling sites are too few to support effective decision-making on public investment responses. Target unrealistic in timeframe and needs to be revised.
Outcome 2.3	Pilot districts in Chongqing demonstrate successful implementation of local-level bio-diversity conservation activities, implementing e-flows						
Output 2.3.1	Ensure that pilot activities are included and embedded in the WRM planning processes at provincial/municipal level under component I.	No specific pilot activities in place to promote the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and e-flow protection in Chongqing Municipality	N/A	The Analysis Report on Chongqing Water Resources Management Policy Framework for Biodiversity Conservation is developed, covering the baseline evaluation. TNC compiled Methods and Cases for the Assessment of Priority Areas for Freshwater Ecological Protection, introducing the US experience.	Biodiversity mainstreaming under component I explicitly mentions pilot activities.	MS#	Pilot activities are still on-going, but interviews confirm learning from the pilot sites is being integrated into WRM plans to support the up-scaling of good practices (such as greater focus on habitat conservation to ensure a landscape approach to BD conservation)

Output 2.3.2	Support the decision-making process on how to best balance e-flow implementation with development objectives based on the information and recommendations provided by the e-flow analysis under component III.	No clear technical guidelines in place to support decision-making to protect e-flow in the in Chongqing Municipality in general.	N/A	The Report on the Status Quo of Environmental Flow in Chongqing (Draft) was completed. Relevant work on ecological flow release of small hydropower station was started in Chongqing.	E-flow implementation strategy determined and agreed upon by all relevant municipal and district level government stakeholders (incorporating expertise and recommendations from the “new partnerships”, see above).	MS#	E-flow analysis is progressing in Chongqing Prov. due to online monitoring already in place for larger rivers. TNC is supporting develop 12 GIS datasets to aid decision-making on ecological needs of e-flow. But relationship with MNR to coordinate on land use management has not been fully addressed
Output 2.3.3	Review and adjustment of existing river flow alteration (especially dam structures, embankments and abstraction pattern) along Wubu River (Banan District) to establish e-flow, enhance habitats and increase connectivity (based on recommendations from e-flow analysis, river health assessment and water accounting.)	No protection of e-flow in place at the pilot sites; Low levels of habitat connectivity due to high number of physical infrastructures on Wubu River.	Cleanout the channels and riparian garbage to aid fish migration on Wubu River. Reinforced river embankments and interconnected the river system.	Survey Report on Aquatic Ecological in Wubu River (Draft) was completed. Banan District has compiled and implemented the Plan for Ecological Flow Control of Wubu River Hydropower Stations, installing ecological flow outlet facilities to each hydropower station in the river, installing ecological flow monitoring equipment (online monitoring platform) to avoid water reduction and dehydration, restored 21 ha of ecological conservation area.	E-flow successfully implemented within Wubu river; habitat not blocked to upstream migration (e.g. by inadequate culvert, small reservoir and other water infrastructure design) resulting in improved habitat connectivity Area directly covered by BD mainstreaming: 1043 ha; Area of habitats improved and restored: 32 ha	S#	Stakeholders confirm good progress in dealing with dam barriers on Wuhu River, including measures in place to conserve old dams with heritage characteristics and tourist potential. Target: realistic
Output 2.3.4	Implement strict biodiversity conservation measures along Tang River (Jiangjin	River in pristine condition with ecosystem still largely functioning;	N/A	The Survey Report on aquatic ecosystem of Tang River in Jiangjin County (Draft) was	Retain population of aquatic species through strict application of fish	MS#	BD conservations measures progressing. Quality of measures needs verification in the field, especially as

	District) to protect its still relatively pristine conditions.	Environmental pressures on the increase due to expanding human activity		completed. 900Tons of garbage along Tang River and 4.5 km ² of river surface have been cleaned out. 600,000 fish fries were released to increase the number of fish populations. A sewage treatment plant project was built to meet the standards for discharge. 58 ha of ecological conservation area was restored in the Tang River.	protection and fisheries regulation; assess biodiversity impact of several sewage water treatment options along the river; avoid unnecessary obstructions in the future and improve few existing obstructions through fish migration approaches (river length ca. 75 km) Area directly covered by BD mainstreaming: 30 000 ha; Area of habitats improved and restored: 120 ha		source of Tang River is in Sichuan Province (but no inter-provincial coordination established). Targets are over ambitious and need to be revised down
Output 2.3.5	Application of aquatic biodiversity monitoring system as well as "Green Line Scorecard" certification system in project area	No BD monitoring system in place to support GLS certification in Chongqing Municipality	Water administration supervision and ecological monitoring conducted.	Water ecological survey and RHA were carried out in pilot rivers in light of RHA methodology. Chongqing aquatic biological monitoring system on pilot rivers was preliminarily established.	BD monitoring system established with two monitoring stations per river and used for improvement of BD conservation measures; ca. 95km of river with newly certified "Green Line" water management practices Area covered by GLS in Chongqing: 31 043 ha	MU#	Effective application of BD monitoring requires better network of monitoring stations and more training from universities and TNC needed on data collection, processing, validation and use to support informed decision-making on public investment.
Outcome 2.4	Compilation and internal as well as external dissemination of information and best practices gained from the project						

Output 2.4.1	Thorough documentation of information on project activities and results, experiences gathered, best practices identified	Documentation list identified in project start-up phase	N/A	Relevant project documents, reports and records have been properly kept. The newsletters were published simultaneously in the GEF column of MWR PMO.	All relevant information documented; project results reports synchronized with M&E reporting schedule (see section 4)	S#	Documents produced as in Prodoc schedule, but has lost almost 2 years of operations.
Output 2.4.2	Communication of this information within the project, ensuring the mutually reinforcing interaction between project components	Communication strategy identified in project start-up phase	N/A	Communication and discussion meetings were continuously carried out within the team and among stakeholders. MWR, PMO and TNC developed a project publicity strategy.	Project results shared with project team and relevant stakeholders	MS#	Communication is aided by fact PMO operates within MWR and has direct com. channels with representatives in provinces. Newsletters also keep stakeholders informed bi-annually. Challenges: road map needed to clarify project implementation over next two years and after project closure (exit strategy); more timely communication from PMO to provinces on implementing road map; more effective strategy needed to communicate value of BD and e-flow to central government
Output 2.4.3	Dissemination of project information and examples of successful biodiversity conservation achieved by the project to decision-makers as well as the broader public	Dissemination of project information to stakeholder identified in project start-up phase	2 newsletters were developed and distributed to concerned departments for dissemination.	More than 20 newsletters and 2 newspapers on the project were distributed to concerned agencies and the general public.	Project result briefings compiled and distributed to decision-makers; public dissemination campaign including project report, DVD	MS#	Dissemination of information through newsletters provides insight into progress, lessons and good practices. Challenges: tailor dissemination to the needs of different audiences, in particular combining with education establishments

							in provinces, municipalities and counties/districts and villages; up-scale and replicate the WRM app applied in Chongqing Municipality
Output 2.4.4	Targeted best practices and lessons learned to potential replication and scaling-up areas	Communication strategy identified at start-up phase includes provision for communication of best practices	N/A	The communication strategy is developed. Project staff participated in seminars, exchanging ideas and experiences.	Best practices report compiled and distributed to other provinces, prefectures and counties/districts suitable for replication	MS#	Project still in early phase of implementation, but more needs to be done to capture good practices and lessons at the local level through civil river chiefs.
Component 3	"Improving Information" - Creation of improved information systems and capability to use these systems to inform better and continuously improving water management practices serving enhanced conservation of river biodiversity.						
Outcome 3.1	Design and implement additional information systems to provide comprehensive river biodiversity analysis (including mappings, environmental flow analysis, river health assessments, and water accounting)						
Output 3.1.1	Mapping of critical river ecotopes including existing as well as planned obstruction and flow alterations as well as species' populations along life cycle and corresponding BD threat assessment/hotspot identification conducted in four pilot areas as well as at province level (with appropriate level of detail)	No maps of ecotopes showing e-flow barriers and BD threat assessments available at pilot sites, or in a more general level in Yunnan Province and Chongqing Municipality	N/A	At the national level, the preliminary results of the study on the framework of the aquatic ecological monitoring system are put forward, and the Baseline Survey Report on River Ecological Zone is completed.	Mappings conducted in Chongqing and Yunnan Province with particularly detailed mappings in the four pilot sites	MU#	Due to challenges in establishing effective monitoring on BD it is not clear how detailed the GIS mapping can be id eco zones and determine the ecological needs of BD in e-flow. This is particularly case where water stress is growing in pilot rivers, but also in rest of provinces. Unlikely this can be rectified in 2-yr extension unless closer coordination with MNR and MEE
Output 3.1.2	E-flow analysis conducted in all four project areas and corresponding rivers to a) determine adequate quantity, timing, and	No e-flow data available at pilot sites	N/A	E-flow baseline survey and information collection for all project sites are conducted.	E-flow analysis conducted; natural cycle as well as impact of flow alterations identified; recommendations for	MS#	E-flow analysis is progressing aided by MWR network of RHA and hydrological stations in place. Challenge is to determine ecological needs

	quality of water flows to sustain BD; b) develop recommendations to achieve a corresponding flow regime (to be used as basis for pilot activities under component II)				measures to achieve e-flow provided (implementation under component II)		without effective BD monitoring in place.
Output 3.1.3	River health assessment , based on mapping results, conducted including water infrastructure assessment (small dam, culvert) for impacts on biodiversity and ecosystem vitality for all four project sites (see also outcome 3.2).	No RHA available at four project sites that includes an assessment on biodiversity and ecosystem vitality	N/A	The report of River Health Assessment Study: Standards, Methods and Applications, was completed. Yunnan and Chongqing carried out RHA in pilot rivers. Relevant information is collected, including hydrological regime, riparian plants, fish, terrestrial organisms, water quality, river management, etc.	River health assessment conducted for all project counties	MS#	RHAs progressing in both provinces, aided by fact MWR in both provinces conducted RHA before project.
Output 3.1.4	Design and implementation of comprehensive water accounting system for pilot rivers including all natural and man-made factors for abstractions, discharges and consumption	No comprehensive water accounting system available for pilot sites	N/A	The Preliminary Report on Standard, Methodology of Water Resources Accounting and Application in Pilot Rivers was developed at the national level.	Water accounting system operational, utilizing global scale public domain datasets (WA+)	MS#	Preliminary activities have started and MWR committed to establishing the water accounting system in line with international standards, but too early to report on progress.
Outcome 3.2	Establish a comprehensive biodiversity monitoring system for aquatic biodiversity and piloting of the system in the project areas						
Output 3.2.1	Formulate a strategy for systematically feeding biodiversity information (combined from outcomes 3.1 and 3.2) into the	No strategy in place at pilot sites	N/A	Strategy documents for both provinces and all four project sites are started.	Strategy document formulated for both provinces and all four project sites after 6 months of project start date.	MU#	Until more effective monitoring sampling is in place in the pilots it is not clear how the strategy can be identified and developed. But developing strategy is possible if

	mainstreaming activities under component I.						minimum BD monitoring standards are implemented
Output 3.2.2	Establish GIS-based aquatic biodiversity database linking species and ecosystem lists to rivers to enable robust biodiversity-oriented review of water development projects; partially using the information gathered under outcome 3.1.	No BD database available	N/A	The construction method of GIS-based aquatic biodiversity database is proposed. The database framework is established. Report on Establishing a Robust Aquatic Biodiversity-Oriented Ecological Zone Management System (Draft) is presented.	GIS database designed and operational	MU#	GIS database in initial stages of development with 12 datasets identified. Challenge is to obtain reliable BD monitoring data to correctly map ecological zones, which is unlikely to be achieved by 2022.
Output 3.2.3	Design comprehensive aquatic biodiversity monitoring program in two pilot provinces using traditional instruments as well as modern "environmental DNA" approaches where possible.	No dedicated and continuous BD monitoring in place in Yunnan Province and Chongqing Municipality	N/A	Aquatic biodiversity monitoring system was preliminary designed and under improvement.	Aquatic biodiversity monitoring system designed and operational	MU#	Current BD monitoring programme in pilot sites can only be seen as a first step to developing a more robust programme supported by: 1) automatic monitoring capacity; 2) engaging civil society in fish identification, monitoring state of riparian strips, wetlands and habitats, etc.; 3) long-term engagement of universities. But this can be achieved in a 2-yr extension
Output 3.2.4	Pilot monitoring system in project areas: Aquatic biodiversity conservation targets (species number and condition; habitat condition; related amount of investment)	No aquatic biodiversity conservation targets identified in the pilot sites	N/A	Pilot river monitoring systems have been initially developed to monitor the water quantity, quality, and plants, fish and large benthic animals in the target reaches at	Monitoring system successfully piloted in project areas	MU#	If design of BD monitoring programme is strengthened it can be piloted in pilot sites, but on proviso that it will receive long-term public investment to embed it in

	established and monitored.			regular intervals. Water ecology surveys were carried out in the pilot rivers.			the pilots and upscaled in the two pilot provinces.
Outcome 3.3	Develop and implement system of multi-level and multifaceted biodiversity main-streaming training program targeting government officials and water management partners from local communities and civil society organizations						
Output 3.3.1	Training for government officials and CSO stakeholders of the new partnerships for WRM on principles and policies related to biodiversity mainstreaming (incl. national and international workshops/ symposia to bring together project stakeholders as well as national and international river ecosystem experts)	Capacity and knowledge on BD mainstreaming low; No corresponding training modules on BD mainstreaming conducted at the national level	At least 20 MWR officials as well as 35 officials at provincial level plus the same number of stakeholders from CSOs trained in the mainstreaming BD conservation objectives into water resources management planning and programming; 6 workshops were organized.	Focusing on the principles and policies related to BD mainstreaming, 15 workshops were held at the national and provincial levels. More than 30 MWR officials, 60 provincial officials and 60 stakeholders from CSOs participated in the trainings of integration mainstreaming BD conservation objectives into water management planning and programming.	At least 30 MWR officials as well as 60 officials at provincial level plus the same number of stakeholders from CSOs trained in the mainstreaming BD conservation objectives into water resources management planning and programming; at least four workshops and symposia organized	MS#	Trainings have covered a satisfactory number of MWR officials and civil society members. But provincial staff confirm more needs to be done to have a regular training and TA supervision programme and funding in place. MTR sees this could be parts of next 5-year Plan from 2021.
Output 3.3.2	Training for government officials and other relevant stakeholder at the national, provincial, prefecture, and county/district level to improve capacity for the implementation and utilization of advanced BD information systems (river health assessment, e-flow analysis, advanced water accounting)	Capacity and knowledge on BD mainstreaming low No corresponding training modules on BD information systems conducted at the two pilot provinces	N/A	More than 320 officials and stakeholders participated in training in BD mainstreaming trainings, increasing their capacity to establish and use advanced BD information systems.	At least 400 water management professionals trained in biodiversity mainstreaming practices relevant to their area of expertise.	MU#	Insufficient evidence to confirm an effective information system to manage BD data and support decision-making on where to target government co-finance has been agreed. But MTR believes it is possible to design and pilot the information system using international over next two years.
Output 3.3.3	Training for government officials and other relevant stakeholder on	Capacity and knowledge on BD mainstreaming low	N/A	The training is planned to be implemented in 2020.	At least 400 water management professionals trained	MU#	No training conducted so far. However, even if an effective BD monitoring

	the use of the aquatic biodiversity monitoring system, processing of data and translation into biodiversity conservation measures at all levels	No corresponding training modules on BD monitoring and data translation into BD conservation conducted at the two pilot provinces			in BD monitoring system implementation, processing and analysis		and suitable information system is piloted over next two years, it will be difficult for decision-makers to take informed decisions until sufficient information is processed in 2023.
Output 3.3.4	Training for government officials and other relevant stakeholder on the use of the "Green Line Scorecard" certification system	Capacity and knowledge on BD mainstreaming low No corresponding trainings available	N/A	More than 150 water management professionals have been trained in the RHA/GLS and river ecological restoration to master the technical methods for assessing the health of rivers and lakes.	At least 400 water management professionals trained in "Green Line Scorecard" implementation	MS#	Trainings have been instrumental in clarifying how to apply the GLS concept through the RHA approach supported by 5 components on BD conservation and e-flow protection. But integrating, testing and upscaling the new RHA approach will be time consuming and may need more than 2 years to perfect
Output 3.3.5	Training for local community level to improve understanding of biodiversity conservation objectives and practices and strengthen capacity for implementation	Capacity and knowledge on BD mainstreaming low No corresponding trainings existent	N/A	The local agencies actively carried out trainings and publicities in conjunction with the River Chief System, World Water Day, China Water Week and World Environment Day activities, and raised the awareness of protecting river biodiversity of local people. In 2018-2019, more than 28,500 villagers received various trainings and promotions. Women and ethnic minorities in	Provision of training on river biodiversity to local population with a special focus on empowering and educating women and ethnic minorities.	MS#	Training of local communities has progressed facilitating greater awareness on the functions and benefits of BD conservation and their roles in supporting conservation and protection of e-flow. Civil River Chief system and on-commitments to habitat conservation seen as good practice to protect BD locally, but more engagement in monitoring of BD is needed.

				particular account for a large proportion of the beneficiaries.			
Outcome 3.4	Project Monitoring and Evaluation						
Output 3.4.1	Implementation of project monitoring and evaluation	M&E reporting plan identified in project start-up phase in line with Prodoc (section 4.5.2)	M&E reporting plan implemented as expected (submission of Inception report, AWP 1 & 2, PIR 1, PPR 1& 2, technical and co-financing reports)	MWR PMO passed external spot check in Nov 2019. Project implementation monitoring and evaluation system established. Total of 5 PPRs and 2 PIRs were submitted to FAO.	M&E plan implemented (according to criteria and reporting requirements)	MS#	Project has a very large list of outputs and immediate outcomes that is time consuming to manage, interpret and evaluate.

* As presented in the results framework in Prodoc, or updated by the Project Steering Committee (PSC) at project inception # Assumes at least two-year extension of project is granted

Indicator assessment key

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

Sources of co-financing ⁶⁶	Name of co-financer	Type of co-financing ⁶⁷	Amount confirmed at CEO approval ⁶⁸ (29 Sept. 2016)		Actual amount materialized (to 31 March 2020)		Actual amount materialized at mid-term (30 Sept 2018)	Expected total disbursement at end of project (31 May 2020)
			Cash	In kind	Cash	In kind		
National Gov.	MWR/IETCEC	National contribution		19,300,000		14,089,000	5,983,000	14,668,000
Provincial Gov.	MWR Yunnan	Provincial contribution		3,100,000		1,932,956	844,103	1,957,957
Provincial Gov.	MWR Chongqing	Provincial contribution		3,000,000		2,179,000	1,155,000	2,228,000
International NGO	TNC*	Grant		500,000		260,000	0	260,000
UNO	FAO*	Grant		75,000		34,000	0	34,000
TOTAL				25, 975,000		18,494,956	7,982,103	19,147,957

⁶⁶ Sources of Co-financing may include: Bilateral Aid Agency(ies), Foundation, GEF Agency, Local Government, National Government, Civil Society Organization, Other Multi-lateral Agency(ies), Private Sector, Beneficiaries, Other.

⁶⁷ Grants, loans, equity participation by beneficiaries (individuals) in the form of cash, guarantees, in kind or material contributions and other (please explain).

⁶⁸ The type of co-financing whether cash or in-kind should be indicated separately

* No data provided on the TNC and FAO co-finance

Appendix 8. GEF evaluation criteria rating table and rating scheme

Table 5: MTR ratings and achievements summary table

GEF criteria/sub-criteria	Rating ⁶⁹	Summary comments ⁷⁰
A. STRATEGIC RELEVANCE		
A1. Overall strategic relevance	HS	Continues to be a high priority for national and provincial governments
A1.1. Alignment with GEF and FAO strategic priorities	S	Conforms with BD-2 and SO2. Less direct alignment with CPF
A1.2. Relevance to national, regional and global priorities and beneficiary needs	HS	Highly relevant to the NBCSAP, WRM policies and high-level government initiatives, such as President Xi Jinping "Beautiful Rivers and Lakes Initiative"
A1.3. Complementarity with existing interventions	MU	FAO-CN has organised meetings and exchanges between GEF-funded projects on management and M&E, which allowed PMO staff to exchange phone numbers and WeChat addresses. The LTO has made suggestions in 2019 on inviting consultants from project 052 to assess wetland restoration in project 057, but this has not led to any synergy with project 052 where there are areas of mutual interest (such as concerning wetland management, restoration and development of income streams, etc.). Likewise, information exchange with project 056 is not evident in areas of mutual interest, such as on developing tree nurseries to support restoration work.
B. EFFECTIVENESS		
B1. Overall assessment of project results	MS	Progress was very slow, but since March 2019 has demonstrated a significant increase in project activities thanks to the signature of the service contract with TNC and later the contracting a=of a CTA in August 2019.
B1.1 Delivery of project outputs	MS	The project has achieved reforms in plans, regulations and guidelines and completed on-the-ground activities planned in the pilot sites.
B1.2 Progress towards outcomes ⁷¹ and project objectives	MS	Overall progress is showing signs the project can fulfil expected outcomes in a two-year extension, except in the case of biodiversity monitoring and data management, which will take longer than two years to develop before it can support decision-making
- Outcome 1	S	Progress is behind schedule, but MWR has already reformed and is piloting/applying new plans and guidelines and has clarified the application of GLS in R/LHAs and the River Chief System applied in both pilot provinces

⁶⁹ See rating scheme at the end of the document.

⁷⁰ Include reference to the relevant sections in the report.

⁷¹ Assessment and ratings by individual outcomes may be undertaken if there is added value.

		are both being piloted at the national level before finalising them in policy reforms.
- Outcome 2	MS	The River Chief System has successfully demonstrated the benefits of working in partnership with civil society on advancing biodiversity conservation in the pilot provinces, but there is a general absence of intra-provincial cooperation and inter-institutional coordination and synergies to implement activities of mutual interest such as e-flow analysis and protection.
- Outcome 3	MS	Trainings have covered over 28,500 representatives from civil society and over 400 staff at MWR, but the biodiversity monitoring and data management is still in a rudimentary stage as it is dependent on a limited number of sampling sites and university staff and students to do the monitoring
- Overall rating of progress towards achieving objectives/ outcomes	MS	The project is on track to meet objectives, but there are indications the project placed too much emphasis on developing a highly vertical approach to biodiversity monitoring
B1.3 Likelihood of impact	Not rated at MTR	
C. EFFICIENCY		
C1. Efficiency ⁷²	MS	The project has since 2019 demonstrated it can convert its resources in to outputs and positive outcomes, apply cost-efficiency and effectiveness.
D. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES		
D1. Overall likelihood of risks to sustainability	MU	The project faces major challenges in developing effective biodiversity monitoring, because there are a low number of sampling sites on each pilot river and the monitoring is highly dependent on external expertise from educational establishments. This situation may make some project activities (such as the application of R/LHA), difficult to apply and fund over the mid to long-term.
D1.1. Financial risks	ML	MWR has demonstrated it can provide co-finance as planned and remains fully committed to meeting objectives. However, the COVID-19 pandemic remains a threat to how much public co-finance in cash may be made available by end of 2020.
D1.2. Socio-political risks	ML	The project enjoys the support of the MWR at all levels and is improving through civil society.
D1.3. Institutional and governance risks	ML	Institutional reforms have been completed and mandates clarified, which indicate minor upheaval only is expected.

⁷² Includes cost efficiency and timeliness.

D1.4. Environmental risks	MS	The project continues to comply with the same level of risk classification provided in the Environmental and Social Checklist (EES) of 2016 (Low risk). However, on ESS 2.1: <i>"Make reasonable and feasible effort to avoid practices that could have a negative impact on biodiversity, including agricultural biodiversity and genetic resources"</i> the MTR found the project has not placed enough emphasis on working with MEE, MNR, MARA, Ministry of Housing, MWR in Sichuan Province, etc. on land use management in the watersheds of the pilot rivers to address the current and future pressures and drivers of development that put at risk aquatic biodiversity (such as soil erosion and/or contamination of run-off water due to agricultural chemical inputs, inadequate solid waste management, etc.).
D2. Catalysis and replication	ML	The River Chief System and R/LHAs are in the process of being piloted nationwide and projected to be rolled out incorporating lessons learned and best practices from the piloting phase.
E. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE		
E1. Project design and readiness ⁷³	MS	The project's design is generally coherent, but contains some over ambitious targets and adopts a vertical approach to developing more effective WRM
E2. Quality of project execution	MS	Stakeholders report general satisfaction on the way the project is executed by the Ministry of Water Resources (International Economic and Technical Cooperation and Exchange Centre – IETCEC) - the operating partner. However, efforts by GCU at project start-up to support the MWR/IETCEC apply some of the <i>ad hoc</i> conditions set by FAO's Senior Management in the OPA proved difficult to fulfil, due to external factors, staff rotation, the part-time nature of the PMO and because the Prodoc had not been designed to fund the application of some of these conditions, such as assurance activities. Furthermore, national rules and regulations concerning the management of GEF funds and contracting of The Nature Conservancy (TNC), contributed to delays in the opening of the project bank account, recruitment of consultants and not starting some of the project's main activities until 2019.
E2.1 Quality of project implementation by FAO (BH, LTO, PTF, FAO CN.)	MS	FAO provides a satisfactory level of technical support from FAO-RAP, while administrative support is provided from FAO-CN. but more needs to be done to train staff in advance of

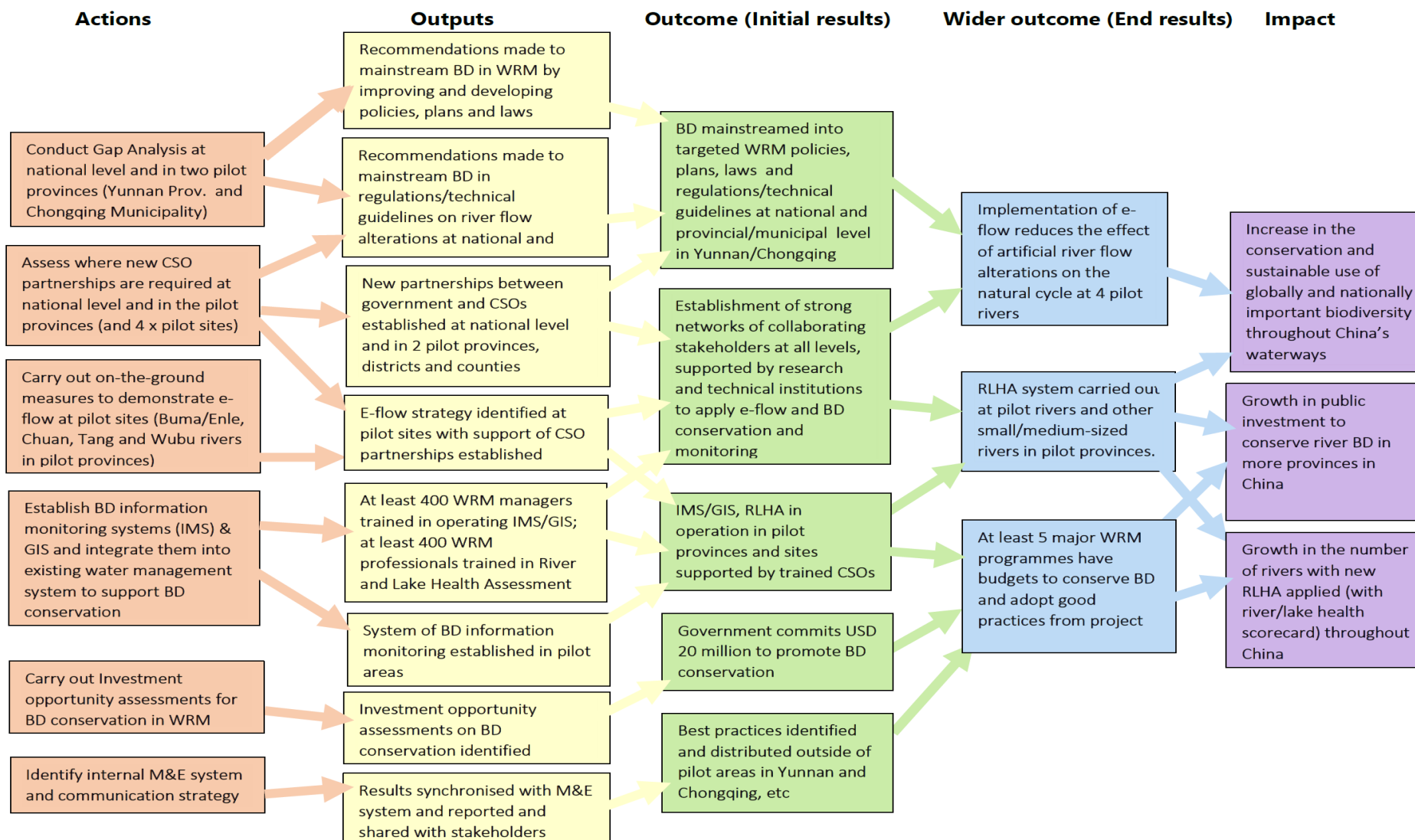
⁷³ This refers to factors affecting the project's ability to start as expected, such as the presence of sufficient capacity among executing partners at project launch.

		project start-up to support the national execution of the project. However, this situation restricts the ability of FAO to attend field visits and technical meetings, especially at short notice
E2.1 Project oversight (PSC, project working group, etc.)	S	PSC and PAC have provided timely levels of support and ensured the PMU has full-time staff and support from a CTA since August 2019
E3. Quality of project execution	MS	The MWR/IETCEC has provided a satisfactory level of support to project execution since 2019. This has been demonstrated by the recruitment of the CTA, establishing full-time staff in the PMO in Beijing and the smooth implementation of the TNC contract (following an amendment to the OPA allowing FAO to manage this contract rather than the MWR/IETCEC. Indeed, the MTR has observed a marked improvement in the delivery of project activities and outputs since 2019 and to a satisfactory standard. For example, the reforms to the R/LHAs has resulted in the inclusion of the ecological protocol and development of the tiered approach to the River Chief System in partnership with civil society. However, there are still demands for better coordination between the PMO in Beijing and the pilot provinces (including the disbursement of funds).
E3.1 Project execution and management (PMU and executing partner performance, administration, staffing, etc.)	MS	Project execution and management experienced major problems in executing the project, but this has improved.
E4. Financial management and co-financing	S	The MWR has provided over 60 % of the planned co-finance in the form of cash and in kind.
E5. Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement	MS	Partnerships with civil society have improved due to the application of the River Chief System. However, partnerships with other stakeholders are either ad hoc, or have not resulted in close coordination and synergies.
E6. Communication, knowledge management and knowledge products	MU	Despite some positives such as the Newsletters, the project's communications are mainly focused on reporting operational progress and outputs. There is no communication expert to support the systematisation of results and develop a strategy to promote learning and engage the private sector or civil society in the up-scaling of biodiversity conservation practices and investments in the proposed extension period and beyond.

E7. Overall quality of M&E	MU	The M&E is based on the RM, but lacks guidance from a ToC to clarify final outcomes and desired impact to support the “vision and mission” of the project. In most cases, outcomes are confused with outputs, or activities rather than their actual outcome (such as the official approval and application of guidelines as the immediate outcome and what results from their application as the wider outcome). Also, there are too many outcomes (over 50) to allow for efficient monitoring.
E7.1 M&E design	MU	The project design together with the mandatory GEF templates applied to all projects on M&E require the PMO to engage in micro management, which is time consuming, increases transactions and is mainly centred on producing reports, rather than the development of a tool for learning, reflection and problem solving.
E7.2 M&E plan implementation (including financial and human resources)	MS	The MTR found the delays of two years in implementation rendered the M&E plan on achieving outputs and outcomes to be out of date. However, the PMO has provided updates on financial and human resources in accordance with the reporting requirements in the PIRs and PPRs. However, a breakdown of co-finance expenditure (for each pilot province and by year) would be allow greater clarity on the current status of expenditure against the allocations agreed in the Prodoc.
E8. Overall assessment of factors affecting performance	MU	There are several factors that need to be addressed in the extension phase to support and facilitate implementation and achievement of planned results.
F. CROSS-CUTTING CONCERNS		
F1. Gender and other equity dimensions	MU	The project provides little or no sex-disaggregated data and its analysis of its support to women and other groups is largely absent.
F2. Human rights issues	MU	The project also provides little or no details on its approach to working with ethnic minorities, or on identifying their specific knowledge on aquatic biodiversity.
F2. Environmental and social safeguards	S	The project continues to meet the standards applied in the ESS produced in 2016 prior to implementation
Overall project rating		
MS		

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

Appendix 9. Participatory Theory of Change (Final version from PMO, dated 03 September 2020)



Cross cutting priorities → Gender equality, socially inclusive approach, environmental protection, good water governance (including risk management)

Assumptions → Political willingness and CSO commitment to reform WRM policies and invest in biodiversity conservation in river systems; no natural disasters at sites