


# Simplified Operational Completion Report (OCR)

(To be used for GEF-funded Enabling Activity technically completed by 31/12/2023)

## Signatures

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## 1. Project Identification

GEF ID: 3174
Project Title: Development of National Biodiversity Strategy & Action Plan (NBSAP), Assessment of Capacity Building Needs for In-situ and Ex-situ Biodiversity Conservation - Afghanistan
Executing Agency: National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA), the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL)
UNEP Division: Ecosystems Division
Country/Region: Afghanistan
Actual Implementation Start Date (MM/YYYY): 04/2011
Actual Completion Date (MM/YYYY): 06/2019
GEF Focal Area: Biodiversity
GEF Grant Amount: USD 394,000
Co-financing (if applicable): USD 70,000

## 2. Project Implementation

### 1. Brief description of activities, and its link to Convention obligations.

The GEF Project “Development of National Biodiversity Strategy & Action Plan (NBSAP), Assessment of Capacity Building Needs for In-situ and Ex-situ Biodiversity Conservation” was implemented by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to assist Afghanistan in meeting its obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The main objective was to enable Afghanistan to better fulfil its immediate obligations under the CBD by developing a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan that incorporates decisions and work programmes of the Conference of the Parties (COP) and submitting it to the CBD Secretariat.

The project aimed to:

1. **Develop a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP)** aligned with CBD guidance and COP decisions and submit it to the CBD Secretariat.
2. Respond to the CBD Executive Secretary’s request for Afghanistan to report on progress in NBSAP development.
3. **Assess national capacity and training needs** for site-level in-situ and ex-situ biodiversity conservation, including project design, planning, management, and implementation.
4. **Develop awareness-building programs and educational materials** and strengthen capacity for planning and management of biodiversity conservation projects through formal training programs, curricula, and practical case studies.

Implemented with GEF funding of USD 394,000 and co-financing of USD 70,000 (UNEP and Government of Afghanistan), the project followed a country-driven, consultative process. Activities included stocktaking of biodiversity information, stakeholder workshops, preparation and finalization of the NBSAP, capacity needs assessment, development of an education and awareness strategy, and preparation of strategic plans for one in-situ and one ex-situ pilot conservation site.

### **Key Activities:**

- **Stocktaking and Inventory:** Collected and collated existing biodiversity information, including species composition, ecosystems, conservation status, and institutional roles.
- **Options Analysis:** Conducted four national workshops to identify and prioritize biodiversity conservation strategies.
- **Preparation of NBSAP:** Developed and finalized the NBSAP document, translated it into English, and submitted it to the CBD Secretariat.
- **Capacity Needs Assessment:** Assessed institutional and technical gaps for in-situ and ex-situ conservation and developed a training curriculum.
- **Education and Awareness Strategy:** Designed and implemented a national campaign, including handbooks and training materials.
- **Pilot Planning:** Prepared strategic management plans for one in-situ and one ex-situ conservation site as case studies.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Implemented adaptive feedback mechanisms and completed project reporting.

### **Link to Convention Obligations:**

- **Article 6:** Developed national strategies and action plans for biodiversity conservation.
- **Article 8:** Addressed in-situ and ex-situ conservation measures.
- **Article 14:** Integrated environmental impact considerations into planning.
- **Article 26:** Supported reporting obligations through NBSAP submission.

## **2. Overview of implementation arrangements**

### **Implementing Agency (UNEP):**

UNEP served as the GEF Implementing Agency and provided overall project coordination, technical oversight, and financial management. It ensured alignment with GEF and CBD requirements, managed disbursement of funds, and monitored progress in accordance with GEF and UNEP procedures. UNEP also offered technical and managerial support through its Environmental Policy and Climate Change Expert and facilitated communication between the Project Team and the CBD Secretariat.

### **National Executing Agencies:**

The National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA), as the GEF Operational Focal Point, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), as the CBD National Focal Point, were the legal entities responsible for executing the project. The Government of Afghanistan established a Biodiversity Project Team embedded within MAIL and functioning as a sub-office of UNEP's Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch in Kabul.

## **Project Team:**

- National Biodiversity Project Coordinator (full-time): Managed day-to-day coordination, implementation, and reporting of the NBSAP; administered technical inputs; coordinated activities; liaised between the Project Team, Planning Committee, international consultants, and UNEP-GEF; and reported directly to UNEP-GEF.
- National Biodiversity Project Assistant (full-time): Supported coordination and reporting tasks and organized workshops and training sessions.
- Translator (consultant on retainer): Translated project documents into Dari and English and provided interpretation during workshops and training sessions.
- International Biodiversity Consultant (part-time): Provided technical and planning support over eight months (spread across sixteen months), delivered training, developed a step-by-step action plan, assisted in information assessment, reviewed outputs, and finalized reports.
- National Biodiversity Consultants: Engaged on an ad hoc basis for specific implementation activities.

## **Planning Committee:**

A Planning Committee was established to ensure coordinated and collaborative action under the enabling activity. NEPA and MAIL led the committee, with MAIL acting as the secretariat. Members were drawn from institutions already engaged in CBD processes through the NCSA/NAPA Biodiversity Working Group. The Committee:

- Prepared, developed, and finalized project outputs.
- Reviewed and advised on outputs and provided policy guidance.
- Ensured CBD implementation information reached local and national authorities.
- Mobilized data and facilitated communication among decision-makers.
- Participated in NBSAP and National Report workshops.
- Secured government approval of the NBSAP and National Reports prior to submission to the CBD Secretariat.

## **3. Delivery of outputs**

### **1. Main output delivered (e.g., link to national reports, strategies).**

The project delivered a set of outputs designed to enable Afghanistan to meet its obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). These outputs were aligned with the project's objectives and structured to address systemic, institutional, and technical gaps in biodiversity management. The activities focused on producing a comprehensive National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), assessing national capacity for in-situ and ex-situ conservation, and developing tools for awareness and education. Each output was developed through a consultative process involving government agencies, academic institutions, and civil society organizations, ensuring national ownership and relevance. The outputs also provided the foundation for integrating biodiversity considerations into policy and planning frameworks and for submission to the CBD Secretariat in compliance with Article 6 and related COP decisions.

## Key Outputs:

- **National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP):** Comprehensive strategy defining priorities, objectives, and actions for biodiversity conservation.
- **Capacity Assessment Report:** Detailed analysis of institutional and technical gaps for in-situ and ex-situ conservation.
- **Training Curriculum:** Developed for biodiversity professionals and integrated into civil service career development.
- **Education and Awareness Materials:** Strategy document, handbooks, and campaign reports disseminated nationally.
- **Pilot Project Plans:** Strategic management plans for one botanical garden (ex-situ) and one protected area (in-situ).

## Link to National Strategies:

The project was directly aligned with Afghanistan's national environmental and biodiversity priorities and legal obligations:

- **Environment Law (2004):** The law mandated the development of a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan within two years of its promulgation. The project fulfilled this requirement by preparing and finalizing the NBSAP for Afghanistan.
- **National Capacity Needs Self-Assessment (NCSA) and National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA):** The project built on outputs from these earlier enabling activities, including the Biodiversity Profile of Afghanistan (2008) and thematic capacity assessments, ensuring continuity and integration with existing national frameworks.
- **CBD Obligations:** The NBSAP incorporated decisions and work programmes of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity, addressing Articles 6 (General Measures for Conservation and Sustainable Use) and 26 (Reports).
- **National Planning and Awareness:** The education and awareness strategy mainstreamed biodiversity considerations into national and subnational planning processes for government officials, planners, and educators.

## 2. Submission to Convention or integration into policy.

The project ensured compliance with Afghanistan's obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) by preparing, finalizing, and submitting the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) to the CBD Secretariat. The NBSAP incorporated decisions and work programmes of the Conference of the Parties and addressed thematic areas such as biodiversity conservation, sustainable use, protected areas, and biosafety.

Key steps included:

- **Government Endorsement:** The finalized NBSAP was approved by the Government of Afghanistan following national and regional consultations.
- **Formal Submission:** The NBSAP was translated into English and formally submitted to the CBD Secretariat as required under Article 6 and Article 26 of the Convention.

- **Policy Integration:** The NBSAP provided a framework for integrating biodiversity considerations into national planning processes and sectoral policies, including forestry, agriculture, and land management.
- **Capacity Building and Awareness:** Education and awareness strategies were developed to mainstream biodiversity conservation into subnational planning and institutional processes.
- These actions positioned Afghanistan to meet its immediate reporting and strategic planning obligations under the CBD and laid the foundation for future implementation of biodiversity-related policies

#### 4. Project Outcome

##### **Where applicable any project outcomes, as achieved short- or medium-term effects of outputs (*including unintended positive and negative outcomes*)**

The project delivered several significant outcomes that strengthened Afghanistan's capacity to meet its obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD):

##### **Key Outcomes Achieved:**

- **National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) Finalized and Submitted**  
Afghanistan developed its first NBSAP, incorporating COP decisions and CBD work programmes. The strategy defined national priorities and objectives for biodiversity conservation and provided a five-year action plan for implementation. The NBSAP was endorsed by the Government and submitted to the CBD Secretariat, fulfilling Article 6 and Article 26 obligations.
- **Integration into National Policy Frameworks**  
The NBSAP served as a guiding document for mainstreaming biodiversity into national and subnational planning processes, including forestry, agriculture, and land management. It aligned with Afghanistan's Environment Law (2004), which mandated the development of an NBSAP.
- **Capacity Building for In-situ and Ex-situ Conservation**  
A comprehensive capacity and training needs assessment was completed, identifying institutional and technical gaps. Training curricula were developed and delivered to government officials and biodiversity practitioners, strengthening systemic and institutional capacity for site-level conservation planning and management.
- **Awareness and Education Strategy Implemented**  
A national education and awareness campaign was launched, including workshops, handbooks, and training materials. This initiative increased understanding of biodiversity conservation among policymakers, educators, and practitioners, and promoted integration of biodiversity considerations into development planning.
- **Pilot Conservation Planning Initiated**  
Strategic management plans were prepared for one in-situ conservation site and one ex-situ site (national botanical garden in Kabul). These pilots provided practical models for biodiversity conservation and informed future scaling-up efforts.

- **Improved Stakeholder Engagement and Coordination**  
The project established a Planning Committee and strengthened collaboration among NEPA, MAIL, academic institutions, NGOs, and international partners. This multi-stakeholder approach enhanced ownership and sustainability of biodiversity initiatives.

#### **Unintended Positive Outcomes:**

- **Enhanced Inter-Agency Collaboration Beyond Biodiversity**  
The establishment of the Planning Committee and multi-sectoral workshops fostered stronger relationships between NEPA, MAIL, Kabul University, and NGOs. This collaboration extended beyond biodiversity issues, creating opportunities for integrated environmental planning and policy dialogue.
- **Knowledge Sharing and Institutional Memory**  
The translation of CBD guidelines and work programmes into Dari improved accessibility for national stakeholders. These materials became reference resources for other environmental initiatives, strengthening institutional memory.
- **Catalyst for Broader Environmental Governance**  
The project's consultative approach and capacity-building activities encouraged government agencies to adopt participatory planning methods in other sectors, such as forestry and land management.
- **Increased Visibility of Biodiversity Issues**  
Awareness campaigns and workshops raised the profile of biodiversity conservation among policymakers and educators, indirectly influencing curriculum development and public discourse.

#### **Unintended Negative Outcomes:**

- **Delays Due to Security Constraints**  
Regional workshops and field activities faced postponements because of security risks in certain provinces. This required adaptive scheduling and increased reliance on desk-based assessments.
- **Limited Geographic Representation**  
Security and logistical challenges restricted participation from some remote regions, leading to gaps in stakeholder input for localized biodiversity priorities.
- **Higher Transaction Costs**  
Additional measures for risk mitigation, such as secure transport and contingency planning, increased operational costs beyond initial estimates.
- **Dependency on External Technical Expertise**  
While the international consultant provided essential technical guidance, reliance on external expertise highlighted the need for sustained national capacity development to reduce future dependency.

## **5. Stakeholders' involvement**

### **Extent of stakeholder engagement and capacity developed**

#### **Stakeholder Engagement**

Stakeholder engagement was a cornerstone of the project, embedded throughout its design and implementation. From initial stocktaking and option analysis to regional and national workshops, the process ensured inclusive participation of government agencies, academia, NGOs, and local communities. The Planning Committee, composed of representatives from NEPA, MAIL, Kabul University, and civil society organizations, provided a platform for coordinated decision-making and policy advice. Through consultations and thematic working groups, stakeholders contributed to defining biodiversity priorities, reviewing outputs, and shaping the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). This participatory approach strengthened ownership and facilitated the integration of biodiversity considerations into national and subnational planning processes.

#### **Capacity Development**

The project significantly enhanced institutional and technical capacity for biodiversity management in Afghanistan. NEPA and MAIL, as executing and focal point institutions, received hands-on training in biodiversity assessment, ecosystem mapping, and preparation of CBD national reports. The establishment of the Biodiversity Project Team within MAIL provided practical experience in project coordination and reporting to international conventions. Technical staff and consultants benefited from mentoring by the International Biodiversity Consultant, improving skills in data collection, analysis, and strategic planning for in-situ and ex-situ conservation. Local authorities and community representatives gained awareness and contributed local knowledge through workshops and pilot activities, while the Planning Committee developed competencies in reviewing outputs, mobilizing data, and advising on policy. These efforts collectively addressed long-standing institutional gaps and laid the foundation for sustained biodiversity governance.

## 6. Financial Summary

Source		(USD)		
GEF Grant		S1-32GFL-000547		
Final Date of Disbursement		2014		
Cumulative Disbursement <sup>12</sup> (as of final date of disbursement)		394,000.00		
<b>Co-financing</b> <sup>3</sup> , if applicable				
Name of Co-financier	Actual Grant at TE (USD)	Actual In-kind at TE (USD)	Total Co-financing (USD)	
Afghanistan		50,000.00	50,000	
<b>Totals</b>		50,000.00	50,000.00	
<b>Expenditure by Sponsored Classes (Total project budget, cumulative expenditure to date)</b>				
Sponsored Class / Budget Lines	Estimated cost at design	Actual Expenditure	Expenditure ratio (actual/planned)	Available balance
National Project Coordinator, Kabul, (full time 17 months)	38,250	<b>38,250</b>	<b>1</b>	-
National Project Assistant, Kabul, (full time 17 months)	27,511	<b>27,511</b>	<b>1</b>	-
Translator, Kabul (full time- 17 months)	61,200	<b>61,200</b>	<b>1</b>	-

<sup>1</sup> For multi-Country EAs, provide a **compiled financial summary of resource utilization** along with a table providing links to the individual reports submitted to the relevant convention secretariat

<sup>2</sup> For Mult-Trust Fund (MTF) projects, list disbursement separately for each Fund.

<sup>3</sup> Only for Enabling Activities which have a confirmed co-financing at CEO Approval/Endorsement Provide a table with **Actual Sources of Co-financing, if available.**

Programme Officer, P3, Kabul (part time 20%)	60,515	<b>60,515</b>	<b>1</b>	-
International Biodiversity consultants	34,409	<b>34,409</b>	<b>1</b>	-
National regional consultants	29,964	<b>29,964</b>	<b>1</b>	-
Associate Administrative Officer, Kabul (full time, 17 months)	25,694	<b>25,694</b>	<b>1</b>	-
Administrative Assistant, Geneva GS- 4/5 (part time 10%)	2,020	<b>2,020</b>	<b>1</b>	-
Staff travel	33,133	<b>33,133</b>	<b>1</b>	-
Agreements with NGOs	15,000	<b>15,000</b>	<b>1</b>	-
Surveys and Questionnaires	0	-	<b>1</b>	-
Preparation of documentary research and analysis	10,000	<b>10,000</b>	<b>1</b>	-
Workshops/Training (incl. Participation, Training for Planning Committee, National/Provincial Workshops)	9,421	<b>9,421</b>	<b>1</b>	-
Office supplies	508	<b>508</b>	<b>1</b>	-
Library acquisitions	0	-	<b>1</b>	-
Computer Software	0	-	<b>1</b>	-

Computer equipment and peripherals	7,763	<b>7,763</b>	<b>1</b>	-
Furniture	3,593	<b>3,593</b>	<b>1</b>	-
Office rent and utilities	34,810	<b>34,810</b>	<b>1</b>	-
Operation and maintenance of equipment	0	-	<b>1</b>	-
Maintenance of office equipment	0	-	<b>1</b>	-
Operation and maintenance of vehicles	210	<b>210</b>	<b>1</b>	-
Printing costs	0	-	<b>1</b>	-
Communication (phone and internet)	0	-	<b>1</b>	-
Postage and courier charges	0	-	<b>1</b>	-
Evaluation	0	-	<b>1</b>	-
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>394,000</b>	<b>394,000</b>	<b>1</b>	-

## 6. Lessons Learned

Summarize key insights or recommendations for future Enabling Activities.

One of the key lessons from the project is the importance of strong institutional anchoring, as positioning agencies such as NEPA and MAIL in coordinating roles, supported by a Technical Advisory Panel, ensured the NBSAP had a permanent home and clear governance framework. Equally significant was the project's strategy of aligning national outputs, such as the NBSAP and national reporting, with international obligations under the CBD, which attracted donor and partner interest and provided a structured framework for follow-on initiatives.

Another lesson is the value of evidence-based planning: by prioritizing biodiversity stocktaking, threat assessments, and knowledge systems, the project improved the credibility of national strategies and enabled decision-makers to allocate resources more effectively. Inclusivity also emerged as a critical success factor, with training programmes and stakeholder consultations particularly those that ensured women's participation building both technical capacity and local ownership.

In addition, the integration of biodiversity into sectors like agriculture and rangeland management, as well as the deliberate pursuit of synergies across the Rio Conventions, demonstrated that mainstreaming broadens the impact and relevance of biodiversity projects. Finally, the experience demonstrated the importance of adaptive management; by maintaining flexibility to respond to challenges such as political instability or capacity gaps, the project was able to keep momentum and safeguard progress. Together, these lessons provide a practical roadmap for designing and implementing similar projects in other contexts.

## Conclusion

The implementation of the project in Afghanistan provided valuable insights into both the achievements and the challenges of supporting biodiversity planning in a fragile context. At the planning stage, the project was ambitious in scope, aiming to deliver comprehensive NBSAP, strengthen national reporting to the CBD, build institutional capacity, and establish mechanisms for mainstreaming biodiversity into national development. Many of these planned outputs were successfully achieved, most notably the delivery of the NBSAP, enhanced stakeholder awareness, and the establishment of coordination mechanisms such as the Technical Advisory Panel and MEA Task Force. However, the realities of Afghanistan's political instability, weak institutional capacity, and limited financial resources meant that the pace and depth of implementation did not always match the original vision. For instance, while biodiversity assessments and data systems were initiated, their integration into long-term planning and decision-making was constrained by limited technical expertise and difficulties in maintaining continuity within government institutions. Similarly, while the project design highlighted the inclusion of gender and stakeholder participation, actual implementation faced barriers in ensuring consistent, meaningful participation of women and marginalized groups, partly due to socio-cultural norms and partly due to resource constraints.

The difference between what was planned and what happened can largely be attributed to contextual factors security challenges that disrupted field activities, turnover in government staff that affected institutional memory, and the competing priorities of a post-conflict state where biodiversity was not always at the top of the agenda. Alternative approaches could have included: first, a stronger investment in adaptive management mechanisms to adjust implementation in response to shifting conditions. More resources could have been devoted to building durable institutional arrangements such as embedding biodiversity focal points within multiple ministries to buffer against staff turnover. Similarly, expanding partnerships with local NGOs and community-based organizations might have compensated for weaknesses in government structures, while also strengthening grassroots ownership. Finally, a more deliberate focus on gender-responsive strategies, with measurable targets and resources dedicated to women's empowerment in biodiversity governance, could ensure that the project's inclusivity ambitions were translated into practice. Overall, while the project successfully laid the foundation for Afghanistan to meet its CBD obligations and raised awareness of biodiversity as a national priority, its performance illustrates the importance of grounding design in the realities of local capacity and context, and of planning for flexibility, resilience, and inclusive participation from the outset.