



FAO-GEF Mid-Year Implementation Update

Period covered: 1 July 2020 to 31 March 2021



1. Project Basic Data

General Information

Region:	Latin America and the Caribbean
Country (ies):	Brazil
Project Title:	Reversing the Desertification Process in Brazil's Susceptible Areas: Sustainable Agroforestry Practices and Biodiversity Conservation (REDESER)
FAO Project Symbol:	GCP/BRA/085/GFF
GEF ID:	5324

Review and Evaluation

Expected Mid-Term review date:	December, 2021
Actual Mid-term review date:	To be determined
Terminal Evaluation Date planned (if applicable):	N/A
Expected Project Completion date (NTE):	28-February-2022

Project Contacts

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2. Information on Progress, Outcomes and Challenges of Project Implementation Activities

Please structure your response as follows:

1. *Progress since the FY20 update.* Assess component by component the progress of activities and delivery of outputs (and outcomes, if appropriate) in relation to the implementation plan to deliver on the project objective. Please provide one or two paragraphs per component summarizing the progress of each outcome.
2. *Challenges.* Provide an update on the key challenges faced by the project such as procurement, disbursement, audit findings, co-financing, M&E and effectiveness. This section should look in particular at how the challenges posed by COVID-19 are impacting project activities.
3. *Adaptive measures and actions.* Highlight the workarounds identified to adapt and enhance implementation. References to proactive actions being taken to improve implementation should be highlighted here, including management change, update in activities and possible project restructuring.

As mentioned in the last Project Implementation Report (June 2020), REDESER Project has been affected by changes in government counterparts. This influenced the dialogue and understanding on project execution between FAO and the Government. As new government teams within the Ministry of Environment (MMA) came on board (mainly changes were identified in 2018, 2019 and 2021), and government guidelines changed, the project became further delayed.

During the second semester of 2020, the Ministry of Environment (MMA) presented a proposal with the objective of "enabling a higher number of concrete positive actions for the project, enhancing delivery and enhancing the transfer of technologies and practical activities". Since October 2020, this proposal has been discussed between FAO and MMA to find the best way to support government guidelines associated with project targets. A work plan for 2021 has been negotiated, in the last three months, with the MMA, and is now in the final stage of approval by the steering committee in April/May 2021.

In the second semester of 2020, MMA submitted a proposal, which is the base of the work plan 2021. It focuses on enhancing outputs (for instance Output 1.1.1 -INRM best practices identified, evaluated and up-scaled at farm and landscape levels; Output 2.1.2- Support for the development of multiple-use SFM supply chains, and Output 3.2.2, Participatory projects for restoration of degraded lands and improvement of production landscapes and land-use practices) and staggering the transfer of technologies and good practices to combat the desertification process. It was also suggested the expansion of the REDESER project area, including priority municipalities susceptible to desertification, in Minas Gerais State. Thus, in addition to the original area of operation, originally concentrated in the Brazilian semiarid region in the states of Ceará, Bahia, Alagoas, Rio Grande do Norte and Paraíba, a nucleus of operations in Minas Gerais was involved.

The expansion of the Project area will not affect the actions and the budget, since the exchange rate appreciation has significantly increased the financial resources for carrying out the activities. For MMA, the increase in the project area will also allow the possibility of testing actions to minimize the effects of desertification on a national scale. The review of activities was planned to allow them to convert more directly into productive benefits for landowners and other actors. However, the achievement of the objectives associated with the contribution to LDN actions and landscape restoration are guaranteed.

As a priority in the work plan, structural activities stand out, such as organizing and analyzing information and creating an environment to execute activities in the field. The landscape analysis, that is already underway, is the basis for the definition and planning actions in the field. The survey of good practices which will allow targeted actions to be taken on the ground will be carried out in the coming months. The exact definition of the start of direct intervention actions in the field is associated with the current and future impacts of COVID-19 in Brazil.

In addition, the COVID pandemic significantly affected Brazil. The number of confirmed cases of infection are over 70,000 per day and more than 3000 thousand people are dying every day. This situation makes it very difficult to carry out field activities.

The MMA and FAO agreed to carry out some activities which are feasible to be done during the pandemic.

Component 1: Promoting Integrated Natural Resources (INRM) in Production Landscapes.

In the last 6 months the project activities were focused on planning processes and establishing an initial structure to assess and define the actions that will be implemented in the target territories. The activity "Landscape analysis in the municipalities that are the focus of the project" is in execution stage. This activity is the base of some outcomes, since the generation of information and analysis of the landscape will allow a definition of the actions and development of outputs, such as:

- (i) Outcome 1.1 – INRM mainstreamed and scaled up at landscape level- Output 1.1.1- INRM best practices identified, evaluated and up-scaled at farm and landscape levels;
- (ii) Outcome 2.1 - Forest area under SFM have been increased- Output 2.1.1 -Innovative small- and large- scale SFM practices identified, evaluated and replicated in selected experimental areas, and;
- (iii) (iii) Forest connectivity sites have been defined, sustainably managed and restored- Appropriate sites identified and restoration plans under implementation for restoration and establishment of forest connectivity using cost-effective and adapted restoration techniques.

This activity is being conducted by consultants hired by the project and is structured in 3 basic processes:

- i. Landscape analysis, identification of degradation and recovery trends in the Project's focus areas;
- ii. Structure for the validation of information and participatory construction of a decision-making tool (contact with actors, virtual surveys), and;
- iii. Study of good practices: joint planning for the acquisition and analysis of data.

The project consultants are working together with MMA technicians and national reference institutions, in order to continue with the validation of information, in addition to what has already been developed in the country. This tool should be incorporated by the Brazilian Institutions after the project is over.

Associated with this activity, the project will provide actions to identify and analyze the best practices to combat desertification and land degradation as site level investments are defined (Generation of information about good practices). This is scheduled for the second semester of 2021 and the methodology and execution process is in an evaluation stage due to the COVID-19 risks in Brazil. These activities were moved to the second semester of 2021 as it wasn't feasible (realistic) to carry them out during the first half of 2021. If field actions are not possible during this period, virtual mapping tools and dialogue with actors will be used. This work is the base to plan the direct actions that will be executed in 2022 on the field (or in the second semester of 2021, if Covid risks decrease).

Component 2: Promoting Multiple-use Forest Management

Due to COVID-19, it hasn't been feasible to implement field activities and there is no schedule defined to carry them out yet. Nevertheless, the project team is following closely how the pandemic is evolving in Brazil and analyzing possible scenarios for implementation of activities. In spite of this situation, it is still possible to prepare action plans and exchange with potential partners. This initiative was included in the activity of component 1 ("Landscape analysis in the municipalities that are the focus of the project") and will provide the base for discussions to identify sites and actors.

Component 3: Forest and Landscape Restoration (FLR)

The activities planned for the last 6 months in component 3 have not been carried out. The hiring process for the component coordinator was halted as the Ministry of the Environment's proposal to increase the area of intervention was not agreed upon. This proposal would require a resizing of the team in order not to compromise the original budget. Also, the difficulties in acting in the field directly compromise the actions of component 3. This fact is linked to the forest restoration chain and reforestation actions. The activity in component 1 will support the search of possible areas for reforestation, which will be validated in the field.

Component 4: Knowledge Management, Capacity Development and Awareness-Raising

During this reporting period, component 4 was the most affected, because the actions of communication and knowledge management are transversal and depend on the activities defined for each territory, interest groups, mapping of needs and knowledge improvement. Training actions are planned for the use of LDN analysis methodology and tools, as well as the exchange of experiences and knowledge between national agencies and the FAO LDN team.

3. Stakeholders Engagement

Please report on progress, challenges and outcomes on stakeholder engagement (based on the description of the Stakeholder engagement plan included at CEO Endorsement/Approval (when applicable))

Covid-19 pandemic is a very important pressure factor for the execution of the project, which strongly depends on activities in the field and on the support of high-level stakeholders' arrangement. Covid impacted the articulation and mapping actors in the field. In this reporting period, travel and missions were forbidden. Travel to the field is still not possible.

MMA defined that the stakeholders contact, and articulation should be done through them, i.e. through the political focal point in Redeser (UNCCD focal point). However, UGP was not communicated and involved in this process. Given recent changes in government counterparts, the new leading team in MMA is evaluating the arrangement and the articulation process which was led by the previous director.

Nevertheless, the landscape analysis work allowed contact with national institutions and the participation of regional and local actors. They are expected to contribute with information and other inputs for decision making on the application of good practices in the territory and, at the same time, support Brazilian Government to define LDN targets at national scale. Therefore, MMA required an adjustment on execution activities. The Project has begun working on desk activities and will support the decisions to promote the activities in the field, such as the analysis of the landscape and the survey of good practices. Tools are being developed for research on a virtual basis, as well as virtual meetings with key actors to define the best way and possible sites to implement the project.

One point to be considered is to provide wider autonomy for the Project Management Unit to carry out activities of local articulation, and identifying prospects for partnerships in order to implement the action plan and reach the project goals.

4. Gender-responsive measures

Please report on the progress of gender-responsive measures taken as documented at CEO Endorsement/Approval in the gender action plan or equivalent (when applicable)

Please provide an update with a particular focus on how COVID-19 is impacting gender and how the project is overcoming these challenges, for instance consequences of women facing disruptions in health and education services, local women's organizations supported etc. Please mention as well any major non-COVID related change since the FY20 update.

No update to be reported.

5. Knowledge Management Activities

Please report on the progress of implementation of the project's Knowledge Management Approach approved at CEO Endorsement (when applicable), knowledge products documenting good practices, lessons learned, websites/ other platforms developed, a communication strategy adopted.

Please provide an update with a particular focus on how COVID-19 is impacting knowledge management activities and how the project is overcoming these challenges, for example "face-to-face knowledge events are moved to virtual settings". Please mention as well any major non-COVID related change since the FY20 update.

There are no knowledge management or best practices developed within the project that can be presented at this time.

6. Risks

RISK TABLE

<p><i>The following table summarizes risks identified in the Project Document and reflects also any new risks identified in the course of project implementation. The <u>Notes</u> column should be used to provide additional details concerning manifestation of the risk in your specific project, as relevant.</i></p>

	Risk	Risk rating ¹	Mitigation Action	Progress on mitigation actions ²	Notes from the Project Task Force
1	<p>The increased frequency of droughts and drastic reduction in rainfall.</p> <p>Several changes related to climate events affect the target population</p>	M	<p>The project will introduce best practices for soil moisture conservation and water accumulation through the installation of underground dams and surface water collection systems and systems that favor the penetration of water under regional soil structure conditions.</p> <p>Other prevention or mitigation actions are planned to support small irrigation projects and the diversification of family farming initiatives for food security, including the distribution and production of traditional seeds that are more resilient to the effects of climate change, as well as the introduction of agroforestry and silvopastoral systems compatible with semi-arid environments.</p> <p>The project will use participatory planning to deal with climate uncertainty, and support seminars for the exchanging of experiences on appropriate practices in crops located under semi-arid conditions.</p>	Field actions were not initiated.	Landscape analysis will allow exploring time series of biophysical indicators (Earth and Climate) for decision making on actions in the project territory and with national reach.

¹ GEF Risk ratings: Low, Medium, Substantial or High

	Risk	Risk rating ¹	Mitigation Action	Progress on mitigation actions ²	Notes from the Project Task Force
2	<p>Increased forest fragmentation in the selected areas.</p> <p>Increased pollution of water resources due to unsustainable land and forest management practices.</p>	M	<p>The project will promote best practices for sustainable land management and the adoption of sustainable forest management. As for the maintenance of productive landscape mosaics, the project will contribute to the capacity-building of the staffs in state environmental agencies for the implementation of the National Rural Registry (CAR) and the Environmental Regularization Program (PRA) in line with the New Brazilian Forest Code, ensuring compliance with the Permanent Preservation Areas (PPA) and Legal Reserve (LR) requirements.</p>	No progress to be reported	<p>Landscape analysis will provide information and show the main areas to be connected.</p>

² If a risk mitigation plan had been presented as part of the Environmental and Social management Plan or in previous PIR please report here on progress or results of its implementation. For moderate and high risk projects, please Include a description of the ESMP monitoring activities undertaken in the relevant period.

	Risk	Risk rating ¹	Mitigation Action	Progress on mitigation actions ²	Notes from the Project Task Force
3	Increased pressure from the agribusiness sector, resulting in increasing deforestation in vulnerable transition areas.	M	The project will expand the actions supported by the international cooperation agreement, promoting capacity-building and institutional strengthening in the state environmental agencies for the implementation of the national rural registry (CAR) and the environmental regularization program (PRA). The project will promote systematic actions with the staffs of the agencies for the understanding and adoption of SFM as an alternative to the full removal of vegetation for alternative land uses.	The Landscape Analysis tool is under development and will provide information for working with staff agencies.	The discussions with the agencies' focal points allowed, in the validation phase of the Landscape analysis tool, the promotion for adoption of SFM as an alternative to the removal of vegetation for alternative land uses.

	Risk	Risk rating ¹	Mitigation Action	Progress on mitigation actions ²	Notes from the Project Task Force
4	<p>Institutional/financial risk.</p> <p>Participating entities fail to meet financial commitments.</p>	M	<p>The project will guarantee that the co-financing is maintained via project governance instances such as the National Desertification Combat Committee, and by insisting on the importance of upholding international commitments. The project will maintain an ongoing dialogue with civil society through its organizations in order to ensure that the commitments between the project and its various partners are maintained.</p> <p>The participating institutions have signed Co-Financing Letters related to the project. These institutions are also members of the Project Steering Committee; and this will help guarantee, to a greater extent, their commitment to the project. Contributions under the PSC and project co-financers will be coordinated to guarantee their commitment to annual budget allocation, and their contributions, whether in cash or in kind, will be monitored.</p>	No progress to be reported	

	Risk	Risk rating ¹	Mitigation Action	Progress on mitigation actions ²	Notes from the Project Task Force
5	Institutional instability	S	Institutional structure that ensures the technical execution of project actions and the strengthening of partnerships.	An approximation was made to bring the technical area of the Ministry closer to the FAO focus groups that work with the theme of Land Degradation Neutrality and the Wocat system. A joint action agenda was planned. However, the national director of the project was removed from the position and at the moment, in direct dialogue with the Deputy Secretary for Climate Change, the ministry team and focal points are being restructured.	For manage this risk, one point to be considered is providing wider autonomy for the Project Management Unit to carry out actions of local articulation and identifying prospective partners to implement the planned activities.

	Risk	Risk rating ¹	Mitigation Action	Progress on mitigation actions ²	Notes from the Project Task Force
6	COVID-19 Pandemic	S	The actions related to the minimization of the Covid-19 pandemic include the adoption of security measures for technicians, managers and beneficiaries of the project, and routine updates on the effects of the pandemic in the Project.	Since no field actions can be carried out at the time, the telework of the project team has focused on Spatial analysis of the degradation of the project areas from satellite data, according to subnational and national levels	FAO hired a team of specialists that is working on a participatory tool that can provide technical information and conduct a survey among key stakeholders.

Project overall risk rating (Low, Medium, Substantial or High):

FY2020 rating	Mid-Year 2021 rating	Comments/reason for the rating for Mid-Year 2021 and any changes (positive or negative) in the rating since the previous reporting period
M	M	<p>Despite COVID and Institutional risks in the MMA, Project Unit is carrying out an important activity supported by FAO LDN area and a team of consultants that was hired. This activity promotes the development of a methodology and information collection between government institutions to support decision-making in the context of LDN. It focusses on developing decision-making tools to determine LDN targets (national territory) and priority sites to invest on actions that combat the desertification process and restore degraded areas.</p> <p>Nevertheless, some structural issues should be strengthened, mainly the institutional arrangement and the capacity in the field to promote actions. MMA is restructuring its staff and FAO has hired a team of specialists to strengthen the capacity for execution.</p> <p>Other foreseen activities were not implemented due to the discussions in the planning process that took more time than was expected. But the action plan has now been agreed.</p>

7. Development Objective Ratings, Implementation Progress Ratings and Overall Assessment

	Mid-Year 2021 Development Objective rating ³	Mid-Year 2021 Implementat ion Progress rating ⁴	Comments/reasons justifying the ratings for Mid-Year FY2021 and any changes (positive or negative) in the ratings since the previous reporting period
Project Coordinator	U	MU	<p><i>Despite the impact of the pandemic that makes it impossible to carry out certain activities associated with the need for re-planning to incorporate new government guidelines, FAO led the technical definitions for surveying the characteristics of the landscape and the trends of recovery and degradation. The consolidation of information in a support tool for decision making is the great achievement of the last months.</i></p> <p><i>However, external factors are still interfering in the execution of the project. As reported in last PIR, the COVID-19 crisis and the social distancing measures adopted, directly interfere in the field actions, discussions, events and training sessions.</i></p>
Budget Holder	U	MU	<p><i>FAO Brazil has been committed to strengthening the partnership with the Federal Government (MMA) to make significant progress in the Project's activities. The completed work plan and the actions already started indicate that the project's implementation is progressing with a promising execution horizon. However, it is necessary to continuously monitor the actions and create a structure, in the field, to be able to respect the milestones that the project is required to reach.</i></p>

³ Development/Global Environment Objectives Rating – please refer to Annex 1.

⁴ Implementation Progress Rating – please refer to Annex 1.

Lead Technical Officer⁵	U	MU	<p><i>The project maintains delays in its implementation mainly due to the contingency of the COVID-19 pandemic, institutional changes and the need to integrate the new government guidelines.</i></p> <p><i>However, in this period there has been a reactivation in the implementation of some activities and, especially, an important advance in the dialogue with the government for the agreement and approval of the Annual Work Plan.</i></p> <p><i>It is evident that the Project Management Unit is carrying out an important activity supported by FAO and the implementation of the project is progressing in the context of the pandemic. The monitoring of this process by FAO is essential to support those measures that strengthen the management of the 2021 AWP and facilitate articulation actions and partnerships to implement the planned activities.</i></p>
FAO-GEF Funding Liaison Officer	U	MU	<p><i>The Government of Brazil has shown commitment to advance with project implementation. Currently, efforts are being made to formally approve the 2021 AWP and to advance with activities that are feasible within the context of the pandemic. The willingness of the government to see the project implemented gives hope to the project team that despite the delays, good results can be achieved. Nonetheless, FAO will keep tight watch on the approval and implementation of the AWP and will inform GEFSEC on any major changes.</i></p>

⁵ The LTO will consult the HQ technical officer and all other supporting technical Units.

Annex 1. – GEF Performance Ratings Definitions

Development/Global Environment Objectives Rating – Assess how well the project is meeting its development objective/s or the global environment objective/s it set out to meet. **DO Ratings definitions:**
Highly Satisfactory (HS) - Project is expected to achieve or exceed **all** its major global environmental objectives, and yield substantial global environmental benefits, without major shortcomings. The project can be presented as “good practice”); **Satisfactory (S)** - Project is expected to achieve **most** of its major global environmental objectives, and yield satisfactory global environmental benefits, with only minor shortcomings); **Moderately Satisfactory (MS)** - Project is expected to achieve **most** of its major relevant objectives but with either significant shortcomings or modest overall relevance. Project is expected not to achieve **some** of its major global environmental objectives or yield some of the expected global environment benefits); **Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU)** - Project is expected to achieve of its major global environmental objectives with major shortcomings or is expected to achieve only **some** of its major global environmental objectives); **Unsatisfactory (U)** - Project is expected **not** to achieve **most** of its major global environment objectives or to yield any satisfactory global environmental benefits); **Highly Unsatisfactory (HU)** - The project has failed to achieve, and is not expected to achieve, **any** of its major global environment objectives with no worthwhile benefits.)

Implementation Progress Rating – Assess the progress of project implementation. **IP Ratings definitions:**
Highly Satisfactory (HS): Implementation of all components is in substantial compliance with the original/formally revised implementation plan for the project. The project can be resented as “good practice”.
Satisfactory (S): Implementation of most components is in substantial compliance with the original/formally revised plan except for only a few that are subject to remedial action. **Moderately Satisfactory (MS):** Implementation of some components is in substantial compliance with the original/formally revised plan with some components requiring remedial action. **Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU):** Implementation of some components is not in substantial compliance with the original/formally revised plan with most components requiring remedial action. **Unsatisfactory (U):** Implementation of most components is not in substantial compliance with the original/formally revised plan. **Highly Unsatisfactory (HU):** Implementation of none of the components is in substantial compliance with the original/formally revised plan.