



Mid-Term Review of FAO-GEF Project

FAO Project ID: GCP/MAU/001/GFF

GEF Project ID: 9294

Integrated Management of Ecosystems for Sustainable Human Development in Mauritania

Final Report

MTR mission conducted from 2 to 17 January 2023

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Nouakchott MAURITANIA

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Executive Summary

Introduction

1. Since its start in April 2019, the GCP/MAU/001/GFF project, commonly known as the "MAU 001 Project", has been working for the "Integrated Management of Ecosystems for Sustainable Human Development in Mauritania". The project aims to sustainably improve the livelihoods and natural resource base on which rural communities depend in southern Mauritania. The project is implemented within the framework of a partnership between the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (MEDD) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) for a period of five years (April 2019-April 2024), based on a grant of USD 8,222,505 from the Global Environment Facility (GEF).
2. The objective of the project is to increase sustainable human development through the restoration of ecosystem services and an integrated ecosystem management approach in three areas of southern Mauritania, in the wilayas of Brakna, Gorgol and Assaba. The three areas were pre-selected in a participatory manner based on the critical ecosystem services they provide to local populations. The project activities aim to achieve five results:
 - Outcome 1: The use of land and natural resources is informed and governed by an integrated, participatory and gender-sensitive approach;
 - Outcome 2: Land degradation is reduced and vegetation cover is restored thanks to a participatory and integrated ecosystem approach;
 - Outcome 3: Sustainable use and management of water reserves for increased water availability during dry periods;
 - Outcome 4: Increased, diversified and stable sources of income for the local population thanks to a more sustainable exploitation of natural resources; And
 - Outcome 5: Decision-makers and local and national authorities have better knowledge of development and environmental issues on which they are able to base their decisions in land use planning and natural resource management .
3. The Mid-Term Review (MTR) is a monitoring tool whose purpose is to assess the progress made towards the achievement of the expected results of the project, to identify the obstacles and to define the corrective measures that will allow the project to continue and be on track to achieve optimal results at the time of its completion. The implementation of the project having experienced significant delays (COVID crisis, slow procedures, late recruitment of experts, etc.), the MTR planned for Mid-way finally took place between November 2022 and January 2023; i.e. at 45 of the 60 months of the project. The main intended users of the results of the MTR are FAO, the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (MEDD) and the GEF.

4. The MTR followed a standardized approach, structured according to a framework that includes the main evaluation questions, indicators and sources of information. The logic of the MTR covers the usual criteria: 1) relevance; 2) efficiency; 3) efficiency; 4) durability; 5) factors affecting performance; and 6) transverse dimensions. The MTR consisted of seven steps: A) in-depth review of project documentation; B) preparation for the field visit; C) interviews and focus groups with stakeholders (remotely, in Nouakchott, in the field); D) analysis of the data against the review criteria; E) the provisional report; F) return of results to stakeholders for comments and validation; and G) the final report. The visit carried out by the MTR team in the period from January 2-17, 2023, and the online interviews, involved a total of 47 interviews with stakeholders. The first results of the field visit were discussed with the project team and the FAO (January 16, 2023) and then all the results with the main stakeholders (February 1, 2023).

Main Findings

Relevance

5. The relevance of the MAU 001 project **is satisfactory (S)**. The human and animal pressure on the space south of Mauritania is obvious. In the dry season, this is felt in the large number of herds dependent on the same relatively humid space in southern Mauritania. The MAU 001 project aims to contribute to greater consideration of all economic and social interests, and of all sections of the population, in land use planning for the space.
6. During the formulation of the MAU 001 project, the priorities and interests of the beneficiary populations were inventoried. MEDD and FAO actively consulted regional and local authorities. The mayors of the municipalities of intervention were involved in several key activities of the project including the choice of intervention sites, the establishment of Management Committees, and the formulation of a strategy for the establishment of the reserve of Biosphere El Atf.
7. Overall, the project intervention strategies are in line with national, FAO and GEF policies; and adapted to the needs and priorities of the populations. The MTR team notes, however, that the implementation of the project does not go in parallel with the activities of economic interest which are of importance to the beneficiary populations in the short term (eg IGAs), in the medium term (eg the exploitation of planted trees and restored fodder) and in the long term (eg the preservation of the El Atf Biosphere Reserve). IGAs are to be developed.

Effectiveness

8. Overall, the effectiveness of MAU 001 project set-up and implementation has been **Moderately Satisfactory (MS)**. The project is currently at 75% of its official duration, and about halfway through its implementation, Delays related to the Covid-19 crisis, the delays in recruiting the Project Management Unit (PMU), and other delays resulting from the internal

procedures of the project and the FAO in Mauritania and elsewhere, were significant. The project would therefore deserve a cost-free extension.

9. The MAU 001 project experienced significant delays in its establishment and implementation. The Project Management Unit (PMU) has finally been able to deploy innovative strategies to deal with the challenges linked to the start-up delay: a large number of Letters of Agreement were signed in 2022 with at least 33 NGOs for the implementation of MAU 001 activities. The team was mainly able to analyze the activities linked to results 1 (integrated approach), 2 (land restoration) and 5 (decision-makers have more information). Activities 3 (management of water reserves) and 4 (income generating activities – IGA) have not yet made much progress.
10. The agreements with NGOs are for a period of only six months, rather than a longer-term mutual commitment. The MTR team has the impression that the beneficiary communities - with some exceptions - are not yet ready to ensure the sustainability of the results; i.e. that the activities of support NGOs should be extended. The ANGMV, contracted structure for the fixation of dunes in the area of the Great Green Wall, has not yet been able to carry out all the agreed activities (especially the production and planting of trees, the effective establishment of five Integrated Community Agricultural Farms (FACI), the establishment of water points and solar pumps, etc.). At present, the three NGGW sites of 40 hectares each (ie 120 hectares total) are half-finished.
11. The sites chosen by the project do not entirely correspond with the administrative division (i.e. Assaba, Gorgol, Brakna), which complicates the implementation at least in the area of the Triangle of Hope, where the authorities based in Kaédi and Kiffa are to consult and involve both at the same time. Some selected villages are also very far from the administrative site (up to 200 km). Regional coordinators lack the means of transport to carry out close monitoring and “surprise” monitoring of activities in the field.

Efficiency

12. The efficiency of the establishment and implementation of the MAU 001 Project has been **Unsatisfactory (U)**. The delays in the effective start of the project were too long. The efficiency of the establishment and implementation of the project was affected by the slow and complex procedures for recruiting staff, renting vehicles for monitoring missions, the purchase of materials by FAO , and -in general- by the procedures for approving various visits and missions by superiors in Nouakchott and partly outside the country. The whole team and the Regional Coordinators testified to this.
13. In the field, the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of implementation of the MAU 001 project have been compromised by the lack of means of transport for the Regional Coordinators. At present, they are excluded from making emergency visits or surprise visits as part of the monitoring of the quality of project interventions in their area by the supporting NGOs. It should also be noted that the majority of NGOs contracted by the MAU 001 project reside in Nouakchott. The coming and going of these structures leads to significant fuel costs and environmental emissions.

Sustainability

14. The sustainability of the establishment and implementation of the MAU 001 project is **Moderately Likely (ML)**. Institutional sustainability is fostered by the close collaborative ties between the project PMU and MEDD staff and DREDDs. The involvement of a large number of local NGOs and agencies also contributes to this. The sustainability of field interventions (reforestation, RNA, etc.) remains to be confirmed. It depends above all on the awareness, will and capacity of local communities to preserve what has been won.
15. The MAU 001 project has so far worked for the consultation and involvement of authorities and populations in land preservation and restoration activities through reforestation, FMNR and planting of productive trees. . In order to ensure that the communities effectively take charge of the management and monitoring of the project intervention sites after its closure, it is essential that the Village and/or Communal Management Committees are formed and made operational from the start. Their operations are to be sustained through income drawn in the short term from straw and in the medium and long term from the fruits of the trees planted (e.g. Gum Arabic, Balanites, green fodder, etc.).
16. Achieving the project objectives will largely depend on the willingness and ability of local communities and all other users to jointly adhere to and implement Land Use Plans (LUPs). This requires, on the one hand, the awareness of the actors on the relevance of the new community policy for the preservation of certain areas and spaces and the restoration of other lands in order to be able to serve as fodder and income for the populations in the future. On the other hand, this requires a mechanism for safeguarding, monitoring and/or guarding in order to guarantee compliance with community commitments by everyone. For this, the authorities and the populations will already be able to rely on other restrictive local policies (e.g. fines payable per head of cattle).

Factors Affecting Performance

17. The MAU 001 project experienced significant delays in its establishment and implementation. It was only during the 3rd year that interventions in the field actually started thanks to agreements or contracts established with a large number of agencies and NGOs. The cause of the delays are factors external to the project (Covid-19) and internal factors (slow administrative procedures, delay in recruitment, etc.). The formulation of the project was also not perfect insofar as the initial budget did not allow for expenditure on consumables and did not correctly take into account the transport needs of the regional coordinators.

Cross-Cutting Issues

18. The consideration of cross-cutting dimensions in the project strategy was partial and is therefore considered **Moderately Satisfactory (MS)**. Aspects of gender and social inclusion were taken into account in the design and formulation of the project, but less so in the set-up and implementation of the project. The project does not have a specific gender or social inclusion strategy. However, the participation of women in the activities is significant, thanks also to the individual policies of the contracted NGOs. Women represent at least one third of the total seats on the Management Committees.

Conclusions

- C1: The implementation of the MAU 001 project is relatively satisfactory (SR). The project is at 75% of its official duration, and approximately halfway through its implementation, it deserves an extension at no cost.
- C2: The FEM-6 project relies on the Regional Delegations of the MEDD (DREDD), the decentralized authorities (wilaya, moughataa, municipality) and on dozens of NGOs and local agencies.
- C3: The MAU 001 project is financially supported by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to the tune of USD 8.3 million. It has hardly been able to mobilize co-financing.
- C4: The FEM-6 project intervenes in three zones which do not fully correspond to the administrative division, and whose complementarity is to be confirmed.
- C5: The ANGMV agency was unable to honor the commitments made with the FEM-6 project in 2022.
- C6: The efficiency, effectiveness and quality of implementation of the MAU 001 project are compromised by the lack of means of transport for the Regional Coordinators.
- C7: Outside the designated El Atf Biosphere Reserve, the integration of MAU 001 activities is yet to be clarified. The detailed maps and Land Use Plans (LUP) recently produced for all three areas can serve as a "glue" between the different components of the project.
- R8: The relevance of the MAU 001 project is satisfactory (S). Human and animal pressure on community spaces, ecosystems and protected areas is real. The overexploitation of spaces requires comprehensive planning of spaces and economic activities. Community participation is largely a function of income from IGAs.
- C9: The effectiveness of the establishment and implementation of the MAU 001 project is relatively sufficient (RS). The MAU 001 project experienced significant delays. Component 2 (Land restoration) and Component 1 (Biosphere El Atf) have made great progress since 2022.
- C10: The future designation of the El Atf Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO would be recognition and encouragement for the preservation and restoration of the area.
- C11: Achievement of the MAU 001 project objectives will largely depend on the will and capacity of local communities and all other users.

C12: The efficiency of the establishment and implementation of the MAU 001 project was insufficient (I). The non-COVID delays have been too long and are related to the quality of activity planning, activity approval times, and lack of transport for regular follow-up.

C13: The sustainability of the establishment and implementation of the MAU 001 project is relatively likely (RP). Institutional sustainability is ensured by MEDD and DREDD staff, and collaboration with a large number of NGOs and agencies. In the field, the sustainability of the interventions (reforestation, RNA, etc.) and of the Management Committees remains to be confirmed.

C14: Aspects of gender and social inclusion were taken into account in the design and formulation of the project, but little in the establishment and implementation of the project.

Recommendations

R1 (COPIL, FAO, GEF): Grant the MAU 001 project an extension of the project at no cost for the duration of 12 to 20 months.

R2 (UGP, LTO, BH): Establish real agreements on a broader collaboration program, lasting several years, in order to ensure the spirit of partnership.

R3 (PMU, BH, FLO): Document the achievements of co-financing "in cash", "in kind" and "in parallel". Request letters of accomplishment from co-donors.

R4 (UGP, COPIL, MEDD): Match the areas of intervention with the administrative division. Prioritize activities in the wilayas of Assaba and Gorgol. Ensure the complementarity of the zones.

R5 (UGP, ANGGW, MEDD): Ensure that the commitments made in 2022 are carried out in 2023.

R6 (PMU, BH): Ensure availability of transport (locally hired - or even private) for MAU 001 project follow-up activities; by means, package or financial compensation.

R7 (UGP, MEDD, DREDD): Develop Action Plans in a participatory manner by area to translate Land Use Plans into concrete activities. Ensure their wide distribution.

R8 (PMU, DREDD, DRA/DRE, research): Ensure that IGAs go hand in hand with community surveillance and guarding activities. Collaborate with DREDDs, DRAs and DREs. Accompany interventions with research to assess outcomes and impacts.

R9 (UGP, COPIL): Continue implementation partnerships with NGOs and agencies.

R10 (UGP, MEDD, UNESCO): Anticipate UNESCO procedures. Study the possibility of a cross-border Biosphere Reserve of El Atf and Ferlo. Ensure that local communities and mobile users are fully involved in the processes and well compensated.

- R11 (PMU, support NGO, Management Committees):** Organize the communities around social and cultural animation activities, in order to strengthen the cohesion of the group and the communities.
- R12 (PMU, CTA, BH, LTO, FLO, FAO/GEF CU):** Organize a frank exchange between the PMU, CTA, BH, LTO, FLO and FEM/FAO CU on ways to avoid delays. Increase the availability of financial and administrative officers at CTA and PMU FEM-6.
- R13 (UGP, DREDD, Town Halls, support NGOs, Management Committees):** Double the efforts of social organization around protected areas and promote IGA activities.
- R14 (PMU, BH, LTO, supporting NGOs):** Develop a clear gender strategy,
- R15 (FAO-MR):** Explain the FAO-MR strategy for taking into account the different social strata in personnel policy, decision-making and project implementation.

MTR ratings and achievements summary table

GEF criteria/sub-criteria	Rating ¹	Summary comments ²
A. STRATEGIC RELEVANCE		
A1. Overall strategic relevance	S	Overall relevant
A1.1. Alignment with GEF and FAO strategic priorities	S	Satisfactory except for the Gender aspect
A1.2. Relevance to national, regional and global priorities and beneficiary needs	HS	Aligned with priorities
A1.3. Complementarity with existing interventions	HS	With DREDD and authorities
B. EFFECTIVENESS		
B1. Overall assessment of project results	MS	Moderately Satisfactory
B1.1 Delivery of project outputs	MS	Delays are there but catching up
B1.2 Progress towards outcomes ³ and project objectives	MS	
- Outcome 1	S	Substantial progress

¹ See rating scheme at the end of the document.

² Include reference to the relevant sections in the report.

³ Assessment and ratings by individual outcomes may be undertaken if there is added value.

- Outcome 2	S	Has picked up speed.
- Outcome 3	MU	Water related activities lagging / not well elaborated
- Outcome 4	MU	IGA related activities lagging/ not well elaborated
- Outcome 5	MS	More progress expected towards the end of the project
- Overall rating of progress towards achieving objectives/ outcomes	MS	Progress to be consolidated by communities
B1.3 Likelihood of impact	Not rated at MTR	
C. EFFICIENCY		
C1. Efficiency ⁴	U	Many delays
D. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES		
D1. Overall likelihood of risks to sustainability	ML	Sustainability relatively likely
D1.1. Financial risks	L	Little or no risks
D1.2. Sociopolitical risks	L	Little or no risks
D1.3. Institutional and governance risks	L	Little or no risks
D1.4. Environmental risks	L	Little or no risks
D2. Catalysis and replication	MS	Moderately satisfactory
E. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE		
E1. Project design and readiness ⁵	S	Satisfactory
E2. Quality of project implementation	MS	Delays and slow progress
E2.1 Quality of project implementation by FAO (BH, LTO, PTF, etc.)	S	Good quality but slow progress
E2.1 Project oversight (PSC, project working group, etc.)	S	PSC is functional
E3. Quality of project execution	MS	Relatively satisfactory

⁴ Includes cost efficiency and timeliness.

⁵ 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.

E3.1 Project execution and management (PMU and executing partner performance, administration, staffing, etc.)	MS	Relatively satisfactory
E4. Financial management and co-financing	MS	Relatively satisfactory
E5. Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement	S	Satisfactory
E6. Communication, knowledge management and knowledge products	MS	Still planned
E7. Overall quality of M&E	MS	Monitoring and Management needed
E7.1 M&E design	MS	Adaptive
E7.2 M&E plan implementation (including financial and human resources)	MS	Adaptive
E8. Overall assessment of factors affecting performance	MS/MU	Repeated delays
F. CROSS-CUTTING CONCERNS		
F1. Gender and other equity dimensions	MU	No strategy
F2. Human rights issues	S	RAS
F2. Environmental and social safeguards	MS	Needs to be ensured
Overall project rating	MS	

How to assess ratings for specific criteria

Rating	Description
Highly satisfactory (HS)	<i>Level of outcomes achieved clearly exceeds expectations and/or there were no shortcomings</i>
Satisfactory (S)	<i>Level of outcomes achieved was as expected and/or there were no or minor shortcomings</i>
Moderately satisfactory (MS)	<i>Level of outcomes achieved more or less as expected and/or there were moderate shortcomings</i>
Moderately unsatisfactory (MU)	<i>Level of outcomes achieved somewhat lower than expected and/or there were significant shortcomings</i>
Unsatisfactory (U)	<i>Level of outcomes achieved substantially lower than expected and/or there were major shortcomings</i>
Highly unsatisfactory (HU)	<i>Only a negligible level of outcomes achieved and/or there were severe shortcomings</i>
Unable to assess (UA)	<i>The available information does not allow an assessment of the level of outcome achievements</i>

Source: GEF (2017c)