



Mid-Term Review of FAO-GEF Project
FAO Project ID: GCP/ECU/093/GFF
GEF ID: 10184

**LDN Target-Setting and Restoration of Degraded Landscapes
in Western Andes and Coastal areas**

Final Report

Mission conducted between 23 of March and 30 of April 2025

OOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
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Acknowledgments

The MTR team was led by international consultant Doris Cordero, serving as lead evaluator and head of the evaluation team, and José Gómez, specialist in agriculture and rural development, as national evaluator.

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MTR Team

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- RE1. The project “LDN Target-Setting and Restoration of Degraded Landscapes in Western Andes and Coastal areas” complements national efforts to drive transformative change toward Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN). It is implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and executed under the Operational Partners Implementation Modality (OPIM) by the Consortium for the Sustainable Development of the Andean Ecoregion (CONDESAN).
- RE2. CONDESAN is a regional non-governmental organization that works integrally, informedly, and cooperatively to conserve, restore, and responsibly use the resources of the Andean mountains, in favor of sustainable development for its people.
- RE3. The total project budget is USD 32,744,997, of which USD 4,416,210 are provided as GEF grant and USD 28,328,787 as co-financing.
- RE4. The LDN project began implementation on September 21, 2021, with the signing of the OPIM agreement between FAO and CONDESAN and the first disbursement. The project is scheduled to close in August 2026.
- RE5. The mid-term review (MTR) aims to analyze the results achieved against planned objectives and identify potential recommendations and adjustments to strengthen the ongoing intervention and guide execution through project completion.

Findings

Relevance

- RE6. Finding 1. The project's objectives, outcomes, and intervention strategy are aligned with global priorities and guidelines aimed at promoting Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) and advancing sustainable production systems.
- RE7. Finding 2. The project responds to the strategic guidelines of the Ecuadorian State related to soil conservation and restoration, the strengthening of sustainable production, the fight against desertification and land degradation, and climate change adaptation and mitigation. The actions carried out in the intervention sites address the needs of local stakeholders, including Indigenous peoples, peasant organizations, women's organizations, and local communities.

Coherence

- RE8. Finding 3. CONDESAN has successfully established linkages with other projects, programs, and processes led by FAO, MAATE, and MAG, enhancing synergies and complementarities, and contributing to the achievement of the project's outcomes (internal coherence).
- RE9. Finding 4. All project actions are connected to ongoing processes led by partner entities, including the provincial GADs of Imbabura, Bolívar, and Santa Elena, civil society organizations, and other cooperation actors. This has enabled the strengthening of synergies, the development of complementary actions, greater effectiveness, and improved prospects for sustainability (external coherence).

Effectiveness

- RE10. Finding 5. Progress in achieving the expected results is enabling the project to fulfill its objective of preventing, reducing, and reversing land degradation processes, while promoting the sustainable development of rural communities and contributing to the provision of ecosystem services and food sovereignty. As of March 31, 2025, an estimated 87% progress has been made toward mid-term targets.
- RE11. Finding 6. The project has achieved approximately 91% progress in Component 1 relative to mid-term targets. Significant advances have been made in establishing an LDN monitoring system, building local capacities for applying the LDN approach in planning and implementing Sustainable Land Management (SLM) practices, and integrating these into intersectoral coordination mechanisms and public policies.
- RE12. Finding 7. The project has met the mid-term target for Component 2, benefiting approximately 1,628 individuals (50% women) through the implementation of Sustainable Land Management practices. As part of field monitoring and follow-up actions, the project evaluates the implementation of practices on each plot, within a continuous feedback process.
- RE13. Finding 8. The project has fully achieved (100%) and exceeded the mid-term target for Component 3, benefiting approximately 831 individuals with incentives for Sustainable Land Management in value chains, and 1,490 individuals with strengthened capacities in the LDN approach.
- RE14. Finding 9. In the three landscapes where the project operates—particularly in the pilot sites—skills and knowledge of farmers and producers engaged in family farming have improved regarding the use of Sustainable Land Management practices linked to value chains. Notably, sustainable livestock practices have been implemented in the Sierra Centro landscape.

Efficiency

- RE15. Finding 10. The project has faced technical, administrative, and operational challenges that have affected its efficiency. Staff turnover within partner institutions has limited continuity and ownership among technical teams, resulting in gaps in coordination, knowledge transfer, and activity implementation.
- RE16. Finding 11. The project's response to contextual changes—such as the lack of commitment from organizations in the provinces of Tungurahua and Chimborazo (within the Sierra Centro landscape)—demonstrates its adaptive management capacity and the efficient coordination led by CONDESAN and the project team.
- RE17. Finding 12. As of December 31, 2024, budget execution is reported at a low level of 35%. Half of the project's investment budget is allocated to the purchase of consumable goods, which lacks coherence with the ongoing implementation approach.
- RE18. Finding 13. Out of the programmed co-financing, 69% of has been received, contributed by FAO, MAG, CONDESAN, and GIZ. There is no clarity regarding the delivery of the committed co-financing from MAATE.

Sustainability

RE19. Finding 14. The integration of the LDN approach and the tools and instruments developed by the project into national, provincial, and local plans, regulations, and public policy instruments will contribute to the sustainability of the results achieved.

RE20. Finding 15. The sustainability of the project's results will depend, first and foremost, on the effective completion of ongoing activities, in order to create the necessary conditions for follow-up. It will also be essential to ensure technical capacities, institutional commitment, and ownership by co-executing partners, as well as by the institutions and organizations involved. Risks that could affect sustainability include changes in authorities, shifts in public policy approaches, and limitations in resource availability.

Factors Affecting Progress

Implementation and Execution

RE21. Finding 16. The technical strength, credibility, and management capacity of CONDESAN as the executing agency—combined with governance arrangements developed through the participation of multiple stakeholders—have facilitated the implementation of project actions at both national and landscape levels.

RE22. Finding 17. FAO, as the implementing agency, has fulfilled its roles and responsibilities in project oversight and administration. However, the complexity of its administrative procedures has posed a challenge for project execution.

RE23. Finding 18. The OPIM modality has generated both opportunities and challenges. It has enabled CONDESAN to strengthen its capacity for direct execution, facilitating fieldwork and decentralized technical implementation. Nonetheless, a significant institutional learning curve is evident regarding the administrative and financial procedures required by FAO.

Stakeholder Engagement

RE24. Finding 19. The governance arrangements and dynamics developed by the project at national, provincial, and local levels have ensured the participation, ownership, and commitment of institutional actors and partner organizations.

Communication and Knowledge Management

RE25. Finding 20. The implementation of the Communication Strategy has shown significant progress since mid-2024. However, the absence of clear guidelines for knowledge management and results systematization limits the project's ability to make its actions, outcomes, and impacts visible.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

RE26. Finding 21. To date, the project has a Monitoring and Evaluation System in place, including a procedure for the systematic collection of information, fed by members of the executing team. The data contained in this system will support decision-making to adapt and improve project planning and implementation.

Gender and Social Inclusion

RE27. Finding 22. The integration of a gender approach has been progressive. Although it was not robustly incorporated in the project design, significant progress has been made during

implementation in the territories—particularly in the provinces of Imbabura and Santa Elena, where work is being carried out with women's groups.

RE28. Finding 23. Collective construction processes have been developed with Indigenous peoples and local communities to define the actions and practices to be implemented in the landscapes and pilot sites. To date, six Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) agreements have been signed, with one additional agreement currently in process.

RE29. Finding 24. Social and environmental safeguards have been fully considered in both the design and implementation of the project. As part of the implementation strategy, measures to mitigate social and environmental risks were incorporated. The project's environmental and social risk classification remains at a moderate level.

Recommendations

For FAO, CONDESAN, MAATE and MAG

Recommendation 1. Structurally integrate the project's instruments and approaches—including the National Observatory on Land Degradation (ONLD)—into national, provincial, and local development plans and policies. This should be complemented by resource mobilization strategies and institutional strengthening efforts across multiple scales. (Sustainability).

Recommendation 2. Assess the possibility of requesting a no-cost extension of the project for a period of six to twelve months. This extension would allow for the consolidation of ongoing technical and territorial processes, the systematization and packaging of key results and good practices, and the strengthening of conditions for institutional ownership and the integration of the LDN approach into public policies.

To manage this extension, the first recommended step is to review and adjust the current budget structure to ensure continuity and consolidation of ongoing technical and territorial processes. This adjustment should prioritize resource allocation to strategic activities such as technical assistance, capacity building, and the operation of the ONLD. Additionally, it is essential to analyze actual expenditures against the original results-based budget to demonstrate that available resources are sufficient to complete the activities without deviating from the project's objectives. Budget planning must be accompanied by a detailed and realistic activity plan. (Effectiveness / Efficiency / Sustainability)

For MAATE and MAG

Recommendation 3. Strengthen synergies among the Climate Change, Land Degradation, and Biodiversity Conventions by promoting a more balanced articulation of these commitments. The Sustainable Land Management (SLM) approach represents a strategic opportunity to highlight the integrated contributions of implemented practices in adaptation, mitigation, biodiversity conservation, and ecosystem degradation reduction—thus overcoming a fragmented vision in the management of these issues. (Relevance / Coherence)

For la FAO and CONDESAN

Recommendation 4. Review the administrative procedures established in the Operational Manual, identifying those that stakeholders consider eligible for simplification, with the aim of implementing improvements that streamline the project's technical and administrative management. In parallel,

strengthen management capacities within FAO and CONDESAN teams to reduce delays in the submission and review technical and financial reports. (Efficiency)

For FAO

Recommendation 5. Provide intensive technical and administrative support, accompanied by an induction program, to reduce the learning curve related to FAO's administrative procedures and the mechanisms for timely reporting and submission of technical and financial reports. This support should be offered during the initial months of implementation of new projects, particularly those under the OPIM modality. (Efficiency)

For CONDESAN

Recommendation 6. Strengthen knowledge management actions framed within the Communication Strategy and the Capacity Building Strategy to enable the systematization of good practices, technological innovations, results, impacts, and lessons learned at local, provincial, and national levels. Additionally, continue developing communication products to disseminate the project's achievements and progress to both internal and external audiences. (*Factors Affecting Progress / Communication and Knowledge Management*)

Recommendation 7. Consolidate the established Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) System, ensuring its integration into the project's planning and decision-making processes. Also, strengthen the capacities of professionals responsible for the technical and financial reporting mechanisms required by FAO. (*Factors Affecting Progress / M&E*)

Recommendation 8. Bundling the products and services contracted to organizations and consulting firms in the territories could improve cost-efficiency and accelerate budget execution. (*Effectiveness / Efficiency*)

Recommendation 9. Strengthen budgetary and programmatic planning processes to expedite activity and budget execution, and ensure a continuous cash flow that guarantees the proper functioning of the project. (*Effectiveness / Efficiency*)

Recommendation 10. With the support of specialists in gender, interculturality, and LDN, review the scope of Outcome 1.1 related to indicators, protocols, and institutional arrangements of the LDN monitoring system that are sensitive to gender and interculturality. This review should define clear criteria for effectively integrating gender and intercultural variables into the system, recognizing that access to productive resources, capacities, and power differs among women, men, and ethnic groups.

GEF Criteria Rating Summary

GEF Criteria / Dimensions	Rating ¹	Comments
A. RESULTS		
A1. Overall Strategic Relevance	AS	The project aligns with global and national policies related to LDN, as well as with local priorities and needs.
A2. Coherence	AS	All project activities are linked to ongoing initiatives, generating synergies and complementarities.
A3. Effectiveness	MS	83% of mid-term targets have been achieved.
A4. Efficiency	MI	Technical, administrative, and operational challenges have affected efficiency. Budget execution stands at 35%.
B. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT RESULTS		
D1. Overall Risk Probability for Sustainability	MP	Moderate financial, sociopolitical, institutional, and governance risks may affect sustainability.
D1.1. Financial Risks	MP	
D1.2. Sociopolitical Risks	MP	
D1.3. Institutional and Governance Risks	MP	
D1.4. Environmental Risks	P	No significant environmental risks to sustainability.
D2. Scaling and Replication Potential	P	Risks to scaling and replication are minimal.
C. IMPLEMENTATION	MS	Some implementation gaps, such as limited initial support to the executing partner. Results moderately meet expectations.
D. EXECUTION	MS	Execution challenges include lack of clarity on co-financing and knowledge management. Results moderately meet expectations.
D.1 Monitoring & Evaluation System	MS	The M&E system was finalized in April 2025. It is solid and well-structured, meeting expectations.
D.2 M&E Implementation (human and financial resources)	MS	The M&E system was delayed due to the responsible professional not being exclusively dedicated to the project.
Overall Project Rating	MS	

¹ Ver el sistema de calificación al final del documento.

