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Mid-Term Review of the FAO-GEF-Government of Islamic Republic of Iran Project:

“Rehabilitation of forest landscapes and degraded land with particular attention to saline soils and areas prone to wind erosion (RFLDL)”
(GCP/IRA/064/GFF)

Mid-Term Review – Final Report

RFLDL

A tug of war between communities and sand storms!

From an interviewee in Kerman

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

GEF Coordination Unit

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AWP	Annual Work Plan
BD	Biodiversity
BH	Budget Holder
CBD	Convention on Biodiversity Diversity
CCA	Common Country Assessment
CD	Capacity Development
CEO	Chief Executing Officer
CSDF	Community Sustainable Development Fund
CSP	Carbon Sequestration Project
CTA	Chief Technical Advisor
DAB	Desert Affairs Bureau
DOE	Department of Environment
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FPMIS	Field Programme Management Information System
FRWO	Forest, Rangeland and Watershed Management Organization
GEF	Global Environment Facility
HQ	Headquarters
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
I.R. of Iran	Islamic Republic of Iran
IWM	Integrated Watershed Management
LD	Land Degradation
LOA	Letter Of Agreement
LTO	Lead Technical Officer
LTU	Lead Technical Unit
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MENARID	Integrated Natural Resources Management in the Middle East and North Africa
MoJA	Ministry of Jihad-e-Agriculture
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTR	Medium Term Review
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPC	National Project Coordinator
NPD	National Project Director
NPM	National Project Manager
NRM	Natural Resources Management
NRWMO	Natural Resources and Watershed Management Organization
OED	Office of Evaluation Division (FAO)
OFAC	Office of Foreign Assets Control

OPIM	Operational Partners Implementation Modality
PIF	Project Identification Form
PIR	Project Implementation Review
PPC	Project Planning Committee
PPPC	Provincial Project Planning Committee
PPG	Project Preparation Grant
PPM	Provincial Project Manager
PPR	Project Progress Report
PSC	Project Steering Committee
RBM	Results Based Management
RFLDL	Rehabilitation of Forest Landscapes and Degraded Land
RIFR	Research Institute for Forest and Rangelands
SCDF	Sustainable Community Development Fund
SFM	Sustainable Forest Management
SLFM	Sustainable Land and Forest Management
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound
SO	Strategic Objective
TC	Technical Committee
TCI	FAO Investment Center
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
USD	United States Dollar
VLP	Village Level Plan
VRMDC	Village Resource Management and Development Committee
WLP	Watershed Level Plan
WRMDC	Watershed Resource Management and Development Committee

Executive Summary

ES1. This report presents the findings of the mid-term review (MTR) of the FAO-GEF-Islamic Republic of Iran Project “*Rehabilitation of forest landscapes and degraded land with particular attention to saline soils and areas prone to wind erosion (RFLDL)*” (GCP/IRA/064/GFF), which was conducted between January and April 2016. The purpose of this MTR was to review the progress made towards achievement of outcomes in accordance with the full project document and CEO endorsement and identify corrective actions if necessary. A particular attention was on the identification of operational bottlenecks that hinder the project implementation and achievement of results and the provision of recommendations to address these bottlenecks.

ES2. Approximately 85% of Iran has an arid, semi-arid or hyper-arid environment and is home to 35 million people (43% of the country’s population). These drylands of Iran along with its neighboring countries of the near East is an area of mega-diversity for wild relatives and landraces of important food crops, fruit trees and pasture species which originated 10,000 years ago. However, these ecosystems are under threat with the persistent degradation of forests and land, which is affecting the socio-economic life in these areas. Furthermore, it was found that to remove these threats, four main barriers existed; they include:

- Weak participation of local communities in government led initiatives and limited collaboration between sectoral agencies;
- Unsustainable agricultural practices;
- Unsustainable use of rangelands;
- Lack of sustainable alternatives to resource use in forests and rangelands.

ES3. These barriers are the main justification of the RFLDL project. The project objective is to remove these barriers to participatory integrated sustainable land and forest management (SLFM) in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which will be achieved through four project expected outcomes. FAO is the GEF Agency of the project. The Forests, Rangelands and Watershed Organization (FRWO) of the Ministry of Jihad-e-Agriculture is the primary technical executing partner in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The project has a duration of five years with a starting date of July 1, 2011. It is funded by a GEF grant of USD 2,668,300 and co-financing from the Government of Iran of USD 8,338,834 for a total budget of USD 11,007,134.

ES4. This mid-term review was conducted in accordance with the guidance, rules and procedures established by FAO and GEF. It was undertaken in line with the principles of *independence, impartiality, transparency, disclosure, ethicality, partnership, competencies/capacities, credibility* and *utility*. Findings were structured around the four internationally accepted evaluation criteria, namely: *relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability*.

ES5. The review provides evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful. The findings were triangulated through the concept of “**multiple lines of evidence**” using varied evaluation tools and gathering information from various stakeholders and different levels of management. The review was conducted using the following instruments: a review matrix, documentation review, an interview guide, and semi-structured interviews.

ES6. The MTR was conducted by one independent consultant. A field mission of two weeks were organized in February 2016 to interview key stakeholders and collect evaluative evidence through observations and data collection. A debriefing was organized in Teheran on the last day of the mission followed by a debriefing at FAO in Rome. A draft report was circulated amongst all stakeholders, and the Reviewer took into consideration the comments made before finalization of the report. The

MTR's findings are summarized below in the conclusions, from which the recommendations that follow are derived.

Conclusions

Project Concept and Design

ES7. **The RFLDL project is a direct response to national priorities seeking to remove barriers to participatory and integrated SLFM:** The aim of the project has been to rehabilitate rangelands and forests through the removal of barriers to participatory integrated initiatives in rangeland and forest management. The project has been strengthening capacities at local, provincial and national levels in implementing participatory integrated SLFM plans at village and watershed levels, while ensuring sustainable alternative livelihood opportunities to meet the immediate and long term socio-economic needs.

ES8. **The RFLDL project was developed over a long period of time (46 months):** It took a long time to get this project approved. The Project Identification Form (PIF) for this project was submitted to GEF on September 10, 2007 and the GEF-CEO sent her endorsement of the project to FAO on March 29, 2011. It took almost 4 years (46 months) from the conceptualization of the project to its implementation starting date.

ES9. **Good critical changes were made during the inception phase to better align the project with the decentralization of government agencies:** Faced with the decentralization of administration and fiscal responsibilities of development activities at provincial and district levels, the project established an effective coordination with the General Governor Offices for tangible collaboration with local level government agencies and the mobilization of resources at the local level.

Project Execution

ES10. **The implementation of the project was severely hampered during the period 2011-2014 due to the impossibility to transfer funds to Iran:** Due to international sanctions imposed on Iran, FAO was not able to transfer funds. It is only in the second semester of 2014 when FAO got an OFAC license that GEF funds started to flow normally to Iran.

ES11. **The mobilization of GEF funded resources has been problematic since the start of this project:** The efficiency of the project management approach has not been satisfactory. It was found that the project administrative/financial processes are too administrative and too long. From a stakeholder point of view, there is a lack of clarity in these procedures; rendering them complex and cumbersome and preventing the development of a trusted and effective relationship.

ES12. **The project expended only 35% of the GEF grant (USD 937,165) as of end of December 2015 but the government contribution has been increased to 144% of the committed amount:** As compared to 90% of the total elapsed time of the project (54/60 months), it is obvious that the GEF grant will not be spent entirely at the end of the project on June 30, 2016. In the meantime, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has already provided a larger than planned co-financing, allowing the project to move ahead despite a very limited access to the GEF grant during the period 2011-2014.

ES13. **An effective comprehensive institutional arrangements and management structure for implementing the project:** It reflects the high contribution of the government to this project, clearly

setting it as a priority for FRWO-DAB. The government through FRWO opened project offices in Tehran, Kerman, Birjand and also 2 offices at the site level in Rigan and in Sarayan. The project management team includes about 15 staff, most of them working full time on the project and most of these positions are funded by the government. Despite that the PSC met only twice, other committees (TC and PPPCs) met regularly to review progress, discuss issues and review the plan for the following periods.

ES14. A comprehensive M&E plan but the 20 indicators do not depict the qualitative aspects of project achievements such as the strengthening of capacity of local communities to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives: The indicators are mostly quantitative indicators; that is, they monitor a quantity of deliverables as opposed to more quality-based indicators measuring the change in capacities to better manage local ecosystems. Degree of capacity developed are often better captured by qualitative indicators. Measuring how many people were trained is not enough, measuring how their capacities were developed and translated into the implementation of a SLFM approach is needed.

ES15. The RFLDL project is very “visible” in Iran: Project offices at national level, provincial and local levels are clearly marked RFLDL with signage, banners, posters, etc. Project posters are in front of the Governor’s building in Rigan, in front of the Natural Resource Office in Rigan and Sarayan, etc. Additionally, the project has a logo that is used on all printed publications, there is a flag with the logo RFLDL on it and numerous posters have been printed and posted on project activities in the targeted communities, including storybooks and printed material for schools targeting children of different age groups. A website was set-up in Farsi and English. Signboards and banners have been made for most livelihood activities and posted in these villages beside each venture. Other signboards on watershed conservation activities have been made and posted at critical points in these communities such as road intersections and entrance of villages.

Analysis of Results

ES16. The progress made by the project so far is good: It is particularly good when considering the issue of transferring the GEF funds to Iran during the period 2011 to 2014, which seriously hampered the activities to be funded by the GEF grant. However, the government of Iran stepped up its support with a larger co-financing budget during these years and allowed the implementation to move forward. The result is a project that has progressed well and in a cost effective manner.

- The project supported the establishment of 20 village committees to manage their natural resources and plan their development; 2 watershed committees focusing on the management of their respective watersheds; and 14 micro-credit schemes, which have already made over 860 loans. These communities are now vibrant communities and trust between these communities and government agencies has been reinforced.
- The project has also implemented several watershed management activities including seedling production, plantations, protection and enclosure, seed production, sowing, construction of check dams and implementation of run-off management activities. It is estimated that, so far, a total of 22,600 ha of desert land have been rehabilitated with the extensive participation of communities, providing a low cost approach to combat desertification while at the same time providing extra incomes to these communities.
- A wind erosion monitoring system was developed and the project demonstrated that wind erosion can be decreased by 30% on rehabilitated land as compared to degraded desert land.
- Alternative livelihood activities have been promoted resulting so far in 656 cases of new service providers and small-scale production businesses, which should have positive impacts on the management of lands around these communities.

- The project has made some good progress to “*integrate SLFM across different institutions and sectors*”. The RFLDL project became a member of the District Administration and Planning Councils as well as a member of employment working-groups in Rigan and Sarayan. Furthermore, a funding line for the RFLDL project within the annual funding agreement framework for Rigan in the province of Kerman facilitated by the Office of the District Governor was set up. Finally, to formalize the collaboration with local organizations/institutions, 12 partnership agreements have been signed (8 in Kerman and 4 in South-Khorasan Provinces) to foster inter-sectoral collaboration/coordination in project activities.

ES17. Despite good overall progress, the project has not made much progress in developing VLPs and WLPs: Overall, the project is progressing well towards its targets, except one area that is the development of VLPs and WLPs. Most of the work to develop these plans has been done such as mobilizing communities, identifying development needs, mapping local resources and in many cases, implementing actions addressing local needs. What is left to do is “packaging” what has been done in the targeted communities into local plans; i.e. formalizing the process that has been followed since the outset of the project, starting with the now well-developed social mobilization concept and expanding it to include development planning.

Relevance

ES18. The RFLDL project is very relevant to the development objectives of the Islamic Republic of Iran: It is about removing the existing threats to land and forest resources in arid and semi-arid ecosystems aiming at restoring and enhancing the biodiversity and the capacity of degraded forest landscapes and lands to ensure sustainable livelihoods, food security and combating desertification. The project is well aligned with national priorities and strategies such as the “*Vision 2025*”, the FRWO Outlook, the Desert Policy, the Provincial Outlooks, and the National Development Plans (NDPs). The project is “fitting” into the national planning framework for sustainable development by providing a “bottom-up” planning approach at the community level with a strong (and successful) social mobilization approach. It links the community needs with the planning system in place in Iran; particularly linking communities with the district and provincial planning processes.

Sustainability

ES19. The prospects for the long-term sustainability of project achievements are good: Being highly relevant, the project became de-facto one main component of the integrated watershed management (IWM) programme of the Islamic Republic of Iran with considerable government investments in it through FRWO-DAB. The project used a “social mobilization model” and expanded it to include a sustainable development planning component. At this point, it is anticipated that the government will continue with its IWM agenda in the foreseeable future using the key outputs of this project as a basis for expanding the reach of IWM in Iran. Therefore, project achievements should be sustained in the medium-term and used as a base to expand the use of this successful new IWM approach.

ES20. The RFLDL project is having a catalytic role in Iran to promote participatory and integrated SLFM approach: The project has been developing a public good with the expansion of the social mobilization approach to include a sustainable development planning component. At the end of the project, VLPs/WLPs should be a comprehensive tested/demonstrated model for IWM ready to be replicated in other parts of Iran. FRWO is currently in the process to expand their IWM

activities to 33 watersheds throughout Iran using the best practices developed under this project. It is the approach taken by the government to scale-up results of the RFLDL project.

Recommendations

ES21. Based on the findings of this MTR, the following recommendations are suggested.

Recommendation 1: It is recommended to extend the project by two years if the GEF funds permit.

ES22. As of the end of December 2015, 65% of the GEF grant remains to be disbursed. Considering that the project is progressing well and will soon focus on the development of VLPs and WLPs - a critical expected outcome of the project, it is strongly recommended that the project be extended for another 2 years if the GEF funds permit focusing on the development of VLPs and WLPs and also on mainstreaming SLFM across sectors/development agencies.

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that the project focuses as soon as possible on the development of VLPs and WLPs.

ES23. It should be a priority; the foundation for developing VLPs & WLPs has been done such as mobilizing communities, identifying development needs, mapping local resources and in many cases, implementing actions addressing local needs. What is left to do is “packaging” what has been done in the targeted communities and formalize the planning process into local plans (VLPs and WLPs). It is a critical result for the project to succeed and the basis for replication and scaling-up.

Recommendation 3: It is recommended to review the AWP 2016 and ensure that more activities are being conducted under outcome 1 and 3 in 2016.

ES24. Outcome 1 (USD 43.3K - 6% of the AWP) is the outcome under which VLPs and WLPs should be developed. Outcome 3 (USD 66k - 9% of the AWP) is supporting the mainstreaming of project’s findings, ensuring their sustainability and replicability. It is recommended that more activities are conducted in 2016 under outcome 1 and 3. These types of activities – planning and mainstreaming – are activities to be prioritized and fast-tracked now.

Recommendation 4: It is recommended to focus more on the dimensions of “organizations” and “enabling environment” of capacity development.

ES25. So far, most activities supported by the project are strongly focused on the “individual” dimension of capacity development in terms of transfer of knowledge and skill development such as training activities. That is certainly a positive aim; however, at this point in time, more emphasis needs to be put on “organizations” (structures and mechanisms) and particularly on the “enabling environment” (policy, legislation and governance). The success of this project depends not only on the success in the current project sites but also on the success to learn from this experience and replicate/scale-up the model developed in the 2 sites. In order to achieve this result (replicate/scale-up), there is a need for developing the capacity of organizations involved in the management of natural resources, including the need to update job descriptions, planning procedures, etc., and also a need to develop an adequate enabling environment for implementing a SLFM approach including the necessary policy, legislation and governance frameworks.

Recommendation 5: Instead of hiring a CTA, it is recommended to use international expertise on an ad-hoc basis when needed by the project.

ES26. It is recommended that the budget left for technical assistance be used on an ad-hoc basis to hire international experts for specific technical tasks as opposed to increasing the size of the project management team with a new CTA. As it stands currently, there is an extensive management team in place at both national and provincial level and the project is already hiring national technical experts as needed to conduct activities such as biodiversity assessment, wind erosion monitoring, etc. One area where it is anticipated the need for international expertise is for the development of VLPs and WLPs.

Recommendation 6: It is recommended to develop the capacity of the project management team in using FAO project management procedures more efficiently to speed up the mobilization of project resources.

ES27. Given that now FAO-Iran hired a Project Operations Officer and an M&E Consultant to provide support to the project, it is recommended to expand the capacity of the project management team including the project assistants and possibly the NPC in using FAO project management procedures - such as AWP, LOAs and Budget management processes and their respective FAO approval processes - more efficiently. Understanding better these procedures should help in using these procedures more efficiently and more timely and speed up the mobilization of project resources.

Recommendation 7: It is recommended to implement a result-based budget system as soon as possible using the FAO-FPMIS.

ES28. Project finances have been managed using the FAO financial system. However, one current limitation is that project expenditures are not captured by project expected outcome; though the feature exists. As a result, it does not provide sufficient meaningful financial information to project managers. It is recommended to develop the financial management capacity of the project management team to use the system by entering project budgets and expenditures by outcome (aligned with the project log-frame) and as a result be able to produce project financial reports by outcome. It is also recommended to use the estimated expenditures allocation by outcome used in this review for the period up to December 2015.

Recommendation 8: It is recommended that the Project Operations Officer based at FAO Office in Iran be a member of the Technical Committee (TC).

ES29. In order to increase the transparency in mobilizing resources, it is recommended that the Project Operations Officer participate to TC meetings to improve the flow of information and to better “link” any decisions made at this level with the operations of the project.

Recommendation 9: It is recommended to revise the list of indicators to measure the performance of the project and include few capacity-based indicators to better measure the progress of the project toward its objective.

ES30. In order to better measure how well the project is progressing toward its objective, more capacity-based indicators are needed. The use of the “*Theory of Change*” approach – a project management instrument focusing on the process of the desired changes - would help identifying adequate indicators. When considering the rationale of this project, indicators to measure progress at

the objective level should measure how well the project is able to remove the four existing barriers to SLFM. The success of the project will depend on how successful the project will be to remove these barriers.

Recommendation 10: It is recommended to do more gender reporting in PIRs during the remaining part of the project, including sex-disaggregated data for training activities and livelihood activities.

ES31. Despite that gender considerations have been poorly integrated in the design of this project, the activities implemented at the grassroots level in the pilot sites do involve both men and women. Gender considerations are taken into account when conducting project activities and overall there is a strong involvement of women in project activities, particularly in activities supporting the development of alternative livelihoods. Out of the 656 livelihood initiatives supported by the project, many are for women such as tailoring, needlework, carpet weaving, mushroom production, cloth weaving, homemade bakery, etc. FRWO has already been reporting some sex-disaggregated data for some activities; however, more would be needed and this information be transferred to PIRs.

Recommendation 11: It is recommended to showcase the RFLDL story through a technical and socio-economic impact assessment and a short video documentary for the general public to document the mobilization of communities in local sustainable development, including the development of VLPs/WLPs.

ES32. Part of the project strategy is to disseminate best practices and lessons learned. Considering the success of the social mobilization activities which have been translated into a strong community involvement in local sustainable development, there are already several lessons learned and best practices to disseminate outside the project areas. It is recommended to do a technical and socio-economic impact assessment during the last year of the project, documenting the technological and methodological approaches that have been applied by the project – including its social mobilization approach, the social and institutional impacts of the project and also the project impacts on biodiversity and rehabilitation of degraded lands. In addition, a short video documenting these lessons learned and best practices – including the development of VLPs/WLPs - is recommended and to be disseminated to the public at large through national and international media with English sub-titles¹. Both would provide a good legacy of the project.

Recommendation 12: It is recommended to communicate the achievements of the project through the publication of technical papers in both Farsi and English languages and the participation to regional and global events, workshops and conferences.

ES33. There is excellent work being done under this project, worth being communicated/published. The project should encourage the authors to publish some of these results in appropriate technical journals in both Farsi and English languages. It includes the work that has been done in wind erosion monitoring, the social mobilization and the related sustainable community development fund (micro-credit scheme) and income generation activities. In addition, the project should support the communication of best practices and lessons learned throughout Iran but also regionally and internationally through the participation of the regional/global events such as the international day of desertification, workshops, conferences, etc.

¹ It was noted that a first video clip was produced in 2015 and that a second one was planned. Despite that the Reviewer did not have a chance to review the first video, the recommendation is for a video that focuses on the impacts of the project, particularly on its social mobilization aspects and the development of VLPs/WLPs, which will be developed during the last year of the project. It should capture all best practices and lessons learned accumulated by the project.

Rating

ES34. The Reviewer rated two elements of the RFLDL project using the six-point GEF rating scale². These ratings are presented in the table below with their respective rationale.

Item	Rating	Rationale
Progress towards achieving project objectives	S	There is sufficient evidence that indicates a good progress toward the objective that is “to remove barriers to participatory and integrated SLFM”. Capacities of local communities, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives at the village and watershed scales have been developed; a local sustainable development planning process is emerging from these demonstrations including sustained ecosystem services; and this tested/demonstrated approach is gradually being mainstreamed in national and provincial plans and policies. This progress is particularly good when considering the issue of transferring the GEF funds to Iran during the period 2011 to 2014, which seriously hampered the activities to be funded by the GEF grant. However, the government of Iran was able to step-up its support with a larger co-financing budget during these years and allowed the implementation to move forward.
Progress in Generating Project Outputs during Implementation	S	The project has been generating good project outputs since its inception, despite a major issue in transferring GEF funds to Iran during the period 2011-2014. Through social mobilization, the project supported the establishment of 20 village committees; 2 watershed committees; and 14 micro-credit schemes, which have already made over 860 loans. These communities are now vibrant communities and with the collaboration of government agencies through investment in physical facilities in these communities such as housing, roads, schools, etc., the trust between these communities and government agencies has been reinforced. The project has also implemented several watershed management activities including seedling production (342,000), plantations (1,124 ha), protection and enclosure (17,300 ha), seed production (21 tons), sowing (274 ha), construction of 12 check dams and implementation of run-off management activities on about 2,000 ha. It is estimated that, so far, a total of 22,600 ha of desert land have been rehabilitated with the extensive participation of communities, providing a low cost approach to combat desertification while at the same time providing extra incomes to these communities. In addition, a wind erosion monitoring system was developed and the project demonstrated that wind erosion can be decreased by 30% on rehabilitated land as compared to degraded desert land. Alternative livelihood activities have been promoted resulting so far in 656 cases of new service providers and small-scale production businesses, which should have positive impacts on the management of lands around these communities over the medium and long-term. Finally, the project has made some good progress to “integrate SLFM across different institutions and sectors”. The RFLDL project became a member of the District Administration and Planning Councils as well as a member of employment working-groups in Rigan and Sarayan. Furthermore, a funding line for the RFLDL project within the annual funding agreement framework for Rigan in the province of Kerman facilitated by the Office of the District Governor was set up. Finally, to formalize the collaboration with local organizations/institutions, 12 partnership agreements have been signed (8 in Kerman and 4 in South-Khorasan Provinces) to foster inter-sectoral collaboration/coordination.

² Highly Satisfactory (HS), Satisfactory (S), Marginally Satisfactory (MS), Marginally Unsatisfactory (MU), Unsatisfactory (U), and Highly Unsatisfactory (HU).

1. Introduction

1. This report presents the findings of the mid-term review (MTR) of the FAO-GEF-I.R. of Iran Project “*Rehabilitation of forest landscapes and degraded land with particular attention to saline soils and areas prone to wind erosion (RFLDL)*” (GCP/IRA/064/GFF). This MTR (a requirement of FAO & GEF procedures) has been initiated by FAO Headquarters as the GEF Agency and was conducted during the period January to March 2016.

2. This MTR report documents the achievements of the project and includes seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the report and briefly describes the objective, scope, review users, methodology, and limitations of the review; chapter 2 presents the context and an overview of the project; chapter 3 presents the findings of the review on the project concept and design; chapter 4 presents the analysis of the execution (efficiency) of the project; chapter 5 presents the analysis of results (effectiveness); chapter 6 presents the analysis with respect to other review criteria. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are presented in chapters 7, and relevant annexes are found at the end of the report.

1.1. Purpose and Scope of the Review

3. The objective of this Mid-Term Review (MTR) was to assess the progress made towards achievement of outcomes in accordance with the full project document and CEO endorsement and identify corrective actions if necessary. The MTR assessed the project from its concept and design to current and potential results. The review provided accountability to all stakeholders, including the donor and project participants, and contributed to organizational learning. The review also served as an input to the project decision-makers to review and decide on a time extension of the project.

4. More specifically, as per the TORs the objective of the MTR was to identify operational bottlenecks that hinder the project implementation and achievement of results. The project has been facing a number of operational limitations such as low delivery (35% of the budget) vs. 90% of the total duration (5 years) and a remaining budget of over USD 1.7M with only 6 months left in the lifespan of the project; difficulties in maintaining administrative and operational capacities; and difficulties in managing implementation and partnerships. Based on the bottlenecks identified, the MTR provides recommendations to address them.

5. This MTR covered the entire period of implementation of the project since its start up in July 2011 to January 2016; including its conceptual phase prior to July 2011. The MTR focused on process and implementation aspects of the project. In particular, it:

- Assess the current relevance of the Project;
- Review the effectiveness and efficiency of project implementation;
- Assess the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of partnership arrangements;
- Review the technical and operational capacities, the quality of the deliverables produced so far by the Project, including the work-plans;
- Identify issues requiring decisions and remedial actions in relation to implementation, coordination mechanisms and institutional set-up;

6. As per the TORs (*see Annex I*), the review covered the following aspects of the project:

- a) Relevance of the project to the Government priorities, GEF strategic programme and FAO strategic objectives.
- b) Robustness and realism of the project, including logic of causal relationships between inputs, activities, expected outputs, outcomes and impact (against specific and development objectives) and validity of indicators, if any; suggestions for revision of the

- project may be made if appropriate.
- c) Particular attention will be paid to the validity of assumptions and risks as initially identified in the project document and whether unforeseen issues are negatively affecting project implementation and progress towards objectives.
 - d) Quality and realism of the project's design, including:
 - o Duration;
 - o Stakeholder and beneficiary identification;
 - o Institutional set-up and management arrangements;
 - o Approach and methodology.
 - e) Financial resources management, including:
 - o Adequacy of budget allocations (GEF grant and co-financing) to achieve outputs and promote outcomes;
 - o Rate of delivery and budget balance at the time of the review.
 - f) Management and implementation:
 - o Effectiveness of management, including quality and realism of work plans;
 - o Efficiency and effectiveness of operations management;
 - o Gaps and delays if any between planned and achieved outputs, the causes and consequences of delays and assessment of any remedial measures taken;
 - o Efficiency in producing outputs;
 - o Effectiveness of internal monitoring and review processes; this will also include information provided by the project through GEF Tracking Tools;
 - o Efficiency and effectiveness of coordination and steering bodies, e.g. the Project Steering Committee (PSC);
 - o Quality and quantity of administrative and technical support by FAO to the project, including the Lead Technical Unit, the Budget Holder and project Task Force;
 - g) Extent to which the expected deliverables and outputs have been produced, their quality and timeliness, and the expected outcomes have been achieved against plans at the time of the review, i.e. at completion of year two of implementation. The project log-frame gives an indication of the key outputs and outcomes to be assessed by the review;
 - h) Analysis of gender mainstreaming for gender equality.

1.2. Review Approach and Methodology

7. The methodology that was used to conduct this MTR review complies with FAO review methodology and GEF evaluation/review policy. It also complies with international criteria and professional norms and standards; including the norms and standards adopted by the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG).

1.2.1. Overall Approach

8. The review adopted a consultative and transparent approach with internal and external stakeholders throughout the review process. It was conducted in accordance with the guidance, rules and procedures established by FAO and GEF. It was undertaken in-line with GEF evaluation principles, which are: *independence, impartiality, transparency, disclosure, ethical, credibility and utility*. It considered the two GEF evaluation objectives at the project level: (i) promote accountability for the achievement of GEF objectives; including the global environmental benefits; and (ii) promote learning, feedback and knowledge sharing on results and lessons learned among the GEF and its partners.

9. In addition to the FAO and GEF guidance for project review, the Reviewer also applied to this

mandate his knowledge of review methodologies and approaches and his expertise in global environmental issues. He also applied several methodological principles such as (i) *Validity of information*: multiple measures and sources were sought out to ensure that the results are accurate and valid; (ii) *Integrity*: Any issue with respect to conflict of interest, lack of professional conduct or misrepresentation were immediately referred to the client; and (iii) *Respect and anonymity*: All participants had the right to provide information in confidence.

10. The review provides evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful. The findings were triangulated through the concept of “*multiple lines of evidence*” using several review tools and gathering information from different types of stakeholders and different levels of management.

11. The Reviewer developed review tools in accordance with FAO and GEF policies to ensure an effective project review. The review was conducted and the findings were structured around the four internationally accepted evaluation criteria set out by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. There are:

- *Relevance* relates to an overall assessment of whether the project is in keeping with donors and partner policies, with national and local needs and priorities as well as with its design.
- *Effectiveness* is a measure of the extent to which formally agreed expected project results (outcomes) have been achieved, or can be expected to be achieved.
- *Efficiency* is a measure of the productivity of the project intervention process, i.e. to what degree the outcomes achieved derive from efficient use of financial, human and material resources. In principle, it means comparing outcomes and outputs against inputs.
- *Sustainability* is an indication of whether the outcomes (end of project results) and the positive impacts (long term results) are likely to continue after the project ends.

12. Finally, the Reviewer conducted review activities, which were independent, impartial and rigorous. The Reviewer has personal and professional integrity and was guided by propriety in the conduct of his business.

1.2.2. Review Instruments

13. To conduct this review, the following review instruments were used:

Review Matrix: A review matrix was developed based on the scope of the review presented in the TOR, the project framework and the review of key project documents (*see Annex 2*). This matrix is structured along the four GEF evaluation criteria and includes all review questions; including the scope presented in the guidance. The matrix provided overall directions for the review and was used as a basis for interviewing people and reviewing project documents.

Documentation Review: The Reviewer conducted a documentation review during the field mission and at home office. In addition to being a main source of information, documents were also used as preparation for the mission of the Reviewer to Iran. A list of documents was identified during the start-up phase and further searches were done through the web and contacts. The list of documents to be reviewed were completed during the mission (*see Annex 3*).

Interview Guide: Based on the review matrix, an interview guide was developed (*see Annex 4*) to solicit information from stakeholders. As part of the participatory approach, the Reviewer

ensured that all parties view this tool as balanced, unbiased, and structured.

Mission Agenda: An agenda for the mission of the Reviewer to Iran was developed during the preparatory phase (see Annex 5). The list of Stakeholders to be interviewed was reviewed, ensuring it represented all project Stakeholders. Then, interviews were planned in advance of the mission with the objective to have a well-organized and planned mission to ensure a broad scan of Stakeholders' views during the limited time allocated to the mission.

Interviews: Stakeholders were interviewed (see Annex 6). The semi-structured interviews were conducted using the interview guide. All interviews were conducted in person or with skype with some follow up using emails when needed. Confidentiality was guaranteed to the interviewees and findings were incorporated in the final report.

Achievement Rating: The Reviewer rated project achievements according to the guidance provided in the TORs. Using the FAO-GEF six-point scale system³, the Reviewer rated the list of items provided in the TORs:

- Progress towards achieving project objectives;
- Progress in Generating Project Outputs during Implementation.

1.2.3. Sequence of Assignment and Schedule

14. On the basis of the TORs, the Reviewer conducted the assignment in four phases as presented in the table below; including a mission in Iran during the period January 30th to February 10th 2016 inclusive and a visit at FAO-HQ in Rome from February 11th to 12th, 2016 (see Annex 5).

Phase / Task	Jan. 24	Jan. 31	Feb. 7	Feb. 14	Feb. 21	Feb. 28	Mar. 6	Mar. 13
I. Inception Phase <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collect and review programme documents ▪ Develop review instruments ▪ Prepare mission: agenda and logistic ▪ Elaborate and submit Inception Report 	*							
II. Mission / Collect Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mission to Iran for the Reviewer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mission briefing ○ Interviews as per mission agenda ○ Collect related documents ○ Mission debriefings (<i>Debriefing Presentation</i>) 			*					
III. Analyze Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Finalize phone/skype interviews if needed ▪ In-depth analysis and interpretation of data collected ▪ Follow-up interviews (if necessary) ▪ Draft and submit Draft Review Report 						*		
IV. Finalize Review Report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Circulate draft report to client ▪ Integrate comments and submit Final Review Report 								*

Legend: * = Assignment Deliverables

3 GEF six-point scale system: Highly Satisfactory (HS), Satisfactory (S), Marginally Satisfactory (MS), Marginally Unsatisfactory (MU), Unsatisfactory (U), and Highly Unsatisfactory (HU).

1.3. Roles and Responsibilities

15. Roles and responsibilities to conduct this mid-term review are summarized below:
- The FAO Budget Holder (BH), the Lead Technical Officer (LTO) and the Project Task Force of the project were responsible for initiating the review process, contributing to the drafting of the Terms of Reference, and for making available information and documentation as necessary. They supported the Reviewer during his work, and commented on the draft final report.
 - The FAO GEF Coordination Unit assisted the BH and LTO in drafting the TOR, in the identification of the consultants and in the organization of the work. It briefed the Reviewer on the review methodology and process and reviewed, in consultation with the Office of Evaluation (OED), the final draft report for Quality Assurance purposes in terms of presentation, compliance with the TOR and timely delivery, quality, clarity and soundness of evidence provided and of the analysis supporting conclusions and recommendations.
 - The Reviewer was responsible for conducting the review, applying the methodology as appropriate and for producing the review report.
 - The Reviewer was free to expand the scope, criteria, questions and issues provided in the TORs, as well as develop his own review tools and framework, within time and resources available.
 - The Reviewer conducted the review, identified and discussed key findings with stakeholder, identified conclusions and recommendations and prepared the final draft and the final report.
 - The Reviewer was fully responsible for the review report, which may not reflect the views of the Government of Iran and/or of FAO. A review report was not subject to technical clearance by FAO although OED is responsible for Quality Assurance of the review report.

1.4. Limitations and Constraints

16. The approach for this MTR was based on a total planned level of effort of 30 days, including a two-week mission in Iran to interview key stakeholders and collect evaluative evidence and to visit project sites and stakeholders in two provinces where the project support activities. Within the context of these resources, the independent Reviewer was able to conduct a detailed assessment of actual results against expected results and successfully ascertains whether the project should meet its main objective - as laid down in the project document - and whether the project initiatives are, or are likely to be, sustainable after completion of the project. The Reviewer also made recommendations for any necessary corrections and adjustments to the overall project work plan and timetable and also for reinforcing the long-term sustainability of project achievements.

2. Context of the Project

17. According to the project document, approximately 85% of Iran has an arid, semi-arid or hyper-arid environment and is home to 35 million people (43% of the country's population). These areas are also home to a unique biodiversity, which has successfully adapted to surviving in these harsh conditions. Drylands of Iran along with its neighboring countries of the near East is an area of mega-diversity for wild relatives and landraces of important food crops, fruit trees and pasture species such as dates, almond, olive, pistachio, wheat, fig, lentil, pea, vetch, sorghum and barley which originated

10,000 years ago.

18. The agrobiodiversity in this region is most outstanding for inter and intra species genetic diversity and a high number of endemic species. Iran is also host to a vast diversity of domestic animal species including 110 livestock and poultry eco-types. It is also home to four of the six main honeybee species of the world. This genetic diversity and local knowledge of propagation and use are important keys to global food security especially relevant in a world with increasing challenges from climate change, diseases, abiotic stresses and unabated human demands on agriculture.

19. However, despite that the agricultural sector in Iran accounts for about 26% of national GDP, for more than 33% of employment, and for the supply of 80% of the food, it is under threat. Forests, which play a recognizable role in contributing to food security and to the protection of watersheds and eco-systems, are disappearing faster than in most parts of the world. Forests and land degradation is a critical issue in Iran; it became part of national priorities and addressing this issue is now part of the Forestry and Range Development Country Vision 2020.

20. Soil erosion including wind and water erosion is considered as one of the most important elements of land degradation in Iran; millions of hectares are affected by salinity and/or threatened by other types of degradation, including the risk of becoming infertile. Soil salinity is a major limiting factor in agricultural development in Iran. It is a consequence of naturally occurring phenomena and anthropogenic activities. It is particularly an issue for irrigated areas where water shortages have led to the need for deeper wells resulting in use of more saline water, which through evapotranspiration contributes to greater soil salinization. It is estimated that the annual economic losses due to salinization are over USD 1 billion.

21. During the formulation of this project, the main anthropogenic threats to land and forest resources were identified; they include:

- **High grazing pressure around villages & settlements in the rangelands and forests:** Lack of effective management controls at local level; higher AU per unit of range than marked for sustainability; reduced mobility of pastoralists and lack of adequate water points;
- **Uncontrolled over-exploitation of biodiversity:** Breakdown/loss of traditional management systems and inadequate land tenure policies;
- **Deforestation for fuelwood:** Shortage of energy supplies, lack of sustainable energy options, use of wood for construction;
- **Advancing degradation (desertification) of vegetation and soils:** Lack of appropriate management of vegetation (forest and range); overexploitation of resources; lack of soil rehabilitation technologies and practices for large scale rehabilitation, increased salinity due to deep water irrigation;
- **Unsustainable agro pastoral practices:** Inadequate alternative livelihood options, lack of economic incentives for conservation, and inadequate access to markets and lack of marketing policies to support alternative products;
- **Inappropriate and destructive sustainable use models:** Lack of integration of scientific and indigenous knowledge; unavailability of and lack of access to relevant data; lack of participatory integrated approach in natural resource management; lack in skills in planning implementing sustainable use of resources.

22. Overall, the studies conducted for the development of the project document found that overexploitation of pastures, forests, biodiversity and soils were caused by inappropriate policies and management responses to the increasing pressure on natural resources caused by a combination of

natural and human factors, such as increasing population pressure and climate change impacts. Furthermore, research indicated that integrated salinity management and mitigation approaches with the involvement of communities had the potential to successfully address the complex problems of salt-induced land degradation in Iran. It was recognized that to remove these threats, four main barriers exist; they include:

- Weak participation of local communities in government led initiatives and limited collaboration between sectoral agencies;
- Unsustainable agricultural practices;
- Unsustainable use of rangelands;
- Lack of sustainable alternatives to resource use in forests and rangelands.

23. These barriers are the main justification of the RFLDL project. The goal of the RFLDL project is to restore and enhance the biodiversity and the capacity of degraded forest landscapes and lands to deliver expected goods and services for sustainable livelihoods, food security and combating desertification by promoting participatory integrated SLFM initiatives at watershed level in two target provinces and enhancing national and local capacity to support the widespread implementation of these initiatives across other arid and semi-arid zones of Iran.

24. The project objective is to remove barriers to participatory integrated sustainable land and forest management (SLFM) in the Islamic Republic of Iran by:

- i. Strengthening capacity of local communities, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives at the village and watershed scales;
- ii. Adoption and implementation of the defined plans including sustainable alternative livelihood options with socio-economic and environmental benefits sustaining ecosystem services and
- iii. Enhancing capacity at local and national levels to mainstream these approaches into national plans, policies and processes.

25. This objective will be achieved through the implementation of four components that will lead to four expected outcomes:

1. Strengthened capacity of local communities in 45 pilot villages, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives;
2. Status of forests and range improved severity of wind erosion decreased and natural resources managed sustainably on 75,000 ha of land;
3. Enhanced capacity at local and national levels to integrate SLFM across different institutions and sectors;
4. Project managed, monitored and evaluated effectively and best practices and lessons learnt disseminated widely with a view to their replication in other areas

26. FAO is the GEF Agency of the project. The Forests, Rangelands and Watershed Organization (FRWO) of the Ministry of Jihad-e-Agriculture is the primary technical executing partner in the Islamic Republic of Iran. FRWO, in collaboration with several national partners executes the project with administrative and technical support from FAO through Letters of Agreement between FAO and FRWO. The project has a duration of five years; it was declared operationally active on 1 July 2011 and should complete its activities on 30 June 2016. It is funded by a GEF grant of USD 2,668,300 and co-financing from the Government of Iran of USD 8,338,834 for a total budget of USD 11,007,134.

3. Analysis of Project Concept and Design

27. As discussed in the previous section, soil erosion is considered as one of the most important elements of land degradation in Iran; millions of hectares are affected by salinity and/or threatened by other types of degradation, including the risk of becoming infertile. This degradation is a consequence of both naturally occurring phenomena and anthropogenic activities. As described above, the main anthropogenic threats to land and forest resources were identified during the formulation of this project.

28. Furthermore, it was found that overexploitation of pastures, forests, biodiversity and soils were caused by inappropriate policies and management responses to the increasing pressure on natural resources caused by a combination of natural and human factors, such as increasing population pressure and climate change impacts. Research also indicated that integrated natural resource management approaches with the involvement of communities had the potential to successfully address the complex problems of land degradation in Iran and remove the barriers such as unsustainable agricultural and rangelands practices and development of sustainable alternatives to use forests and rangelands resources.

29. At the time the project was conceived, government policy was highly focused on irrigated and mechanized rain-fed cultivation. Little applicable provision had been made in government policies, strategies and plans to develop and support smallholder production systems other than the policy which allowed for small farmers to plant the same crop together treating the small plots as part of a big plot. There were incentives to use this policy, but they were not widely used due to socio-economic challenges and needs. At the same time, the Project Preparation Grant (PPG) studies indicated that the contribution of smallholder production systems were considered to be important for maintaining local employment and for contributing to national economic output and various plans that had been put in place for food security. Yet, apart from government approval of some multilateral pastoral development projects, there was no national coordinated strategy to rehabilitate and preserve smallholder agro-ecosystems. Switching from unsustainable agriculture practices to sustainable ones by adopting appropriate changes in cultivation practices, irrigation and cropping pattern were seen as critical to address SLFM challenges.

30. The project was conceived as a response to these challenges. It was also well aligned with the National Desertification Plan, the National Strategy for the Mitigation of Climate Change and the National Strategy on Biodiversity. The project was developed by FAO and the FRWO seeking to rehabilitate rangelands and forests that provide habitats for globally significant biodiversity; restore ecosystem integrity and recovery of critical functions and services, such as water regulation and retention, soil retention, provision of food, water and other ecosystem services critical to human well-being; demonstrate cross-area synergies associated with the development and implementation of site-specific SLFM plans; develop experiences and "lessons-learned" that could prove to be catalytic in shaping the efforts of the Government of Iran to address SLFM practices; and disseminate useful information to promote the regulation and provisioning of ecological services in key ecosystems of global importance elsewhere in the region.

31. The strategy to address land degradation and loss of biodiversity ensuing from unsustainable use of rangelands and forests was through the removal of barriers to participatory integrated initiatives in rangeland and forest management. The aim was through strengthening capacity at local, provincial and national levels in developing and implementing participatory integrated SLFM plans at village and watershed levels and ensuring sustainable alternative livelihood opportunities to meet the immediate and long term socio-economic needs. Such an approach was meant to overcome these barriers through trust building, capacity development and establishing linkages through a common

SLFM platform to address diverse interconnected threats with practical, ecosystem and economic need based solutions.

32. As a result, the project was formulated and approved by GEF in March 2011. The Logical Framework presented in the project document indicates a good set of expected results with a satisfactory and logical “*chain of results*” – Activities → Outputs → Outcomes → Objective → Goal. Project resources have been used to implement planned activities to reach a set of expected outputs (21), which have been contributing in achieving a set of expected outcomes (4), which together should contribute to achieve the objective and the goal of the project over the medium and long term. This framework also includes - for each outcome - a set of indicators and targets to be achieved at the end of the project and that are used to monitor the performance of the project (see Section 4.6). This logical framework has been used as a “*blueprint*” on a day-to-day basis by the implementation team; it is used as an implementation guide.

33. The logic model of the project consists of a goal, an objective, 4 expected outcomes and a set of 21 distinct expected outputs. There are presented in the table below (see also Annex 7 for the related planned activities).

Table 1: Project Logic Model

<p>GOAL: To restore and enhance the biodiversity and the capacity of degraded forest landscapes and lands to deliver expected goods and services for sustainable livelihoods, food security and combating desertification by promoting participatory integrated SLFM initiatives at watershed level in two target provinces and enhancing national and local capacity to support the widespread implementation of these initiatives across other arid and semi-arid zones of Iran.</p>
<p>OBJECTIVE: To remove barriers to participatory and integrated SLFM by: (i) strengthening capacity of local communities, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives at the village and watershed scales; (ii) adoption and implementation of the defined plans including sustainable alternative livelihood options with socioeconomic and environmental benefits sustaining ecosystem services and iii) enhancing capacity at local and national levels to mainstream these approaches into national plans, policies and processes.</p>
<p>Outcome 1: Strengthened capacity of local communities in 45 pilot villages, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 1.1: At least 200 people of the population in each of the two watersheds and 70% of the provincial staff including men and women trained on SLFM • Output 1.2: 6 Participatory Village Resource Management Councils established • Output 1.3: 45 village level plans and 2 watershed level plans formulated • Output 1.4: Rural Development Funds established for at least 30 pilot villages (1 rural development fund per pilot village).
<p>Outcome 2: Status of forests and range improved, severity of wind erosion decreased and natural resources managed sustainably on 75,000 ha of land.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 2.1: At least 30 pilot villages (20 in Rigan and 10 in Se Galeh) implementing the village level and watershed level plans • Output 2.2: 30% decrease in erosion in pilot villages (baseline to be established in year 1) • Output 2.3: 75% of rangelands rehabilitated of projected 19,100 ha in pilot sites • Output 2.4: 2,250 hectares of farm and rangeland in selected villages restored with drought and salinity resistant plants. • Output 2.5: 25% recovery in globally important wild species and species of importance/ used as Non Wood Forest Products (baseline to be established in year 1) • Output 2.6: At least 5 sustainable alternative livelihood initiatives are developed with demonstrated benefits to environmental services.
<p>Outcome 3: Enhanced capacity at local and national levels to integrate SLFM across different institutions and sectors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 3.1: One SLFM platform/ Inter-sectoral coordination mechanism established and operational at national level. • Output 3.2: At least 5 policies revised to mainstream participatory SLFM

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 3.3: At least 5 departments in NRM ministry working with inter- and intra-departmental linkages and at least two linkages established between two ministries (Department of Environment (DOE) and Forest, Rangeland and Watershed Management Organization (FRWO) at provincial levels; at least one such linkage at the national level.
<p>Outcome 4a: Project monitored and evaluated effectively and lessons learnt and best practices disseminated widely with a view to their replication in other areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 4a.1: Project data collection and Monitoring and Evaluation system established • Output 4a.2: Project progress and monitoring reports prepared and mid-term and final evaluations conducted in a timely manner • Output 4a.3: Lessons learnt, publications and documentaries prepared and widely distributed • Output 4a.4: Stakeholders beyond residents of the 45 pilot villages familiar with project approach and results • Output 4a.5: Decision makers and ministry professionals aware of project results
<p>Outcome 4b: Project managed effectively</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 4b.1: Project management Unit established • Output 4b.2: Project Steering Committee (PSC) and Technical Committee (TC) established at the national level • Output 4b.3: Two Project Planning Committees (PPC) and Two Project Offices are established at provincial level (one in each province)

34. In the meantime, the review indicates that it took a rather long time to get this project approved. The Project Identification Form (PIF) for this project was submitted to GEF on September 10, 2007. It was then re-submitted to GEF after addressing a first set of comments on October 3, 2007. The official letter from the GEF Operational Focal Point in Iran to confirm the commitment of co-financing the project was sent to the GEF CEO on June 20, 2010. The request for CEO Endorsement/Approval of the project was submitted to GEF on September 21, 2010 and re-submitted on February 8, 2011. Finally, the GEF-CEO sent her endorsement of the project to FAO on March 29, 2011 and the project started officially on July 1, 2011. It took a period of almost 4 years (46 months) from the conceptualization of the project to its implementation starting date.

35. The review of the alignment of the project design with the original PIF indicates that components planned during the concept phase were regrouped and renamed without losing the essence of the outcomes to be achieved. These changes were shaped mostly by the results from the studies conducted under the PPG phase. The major change between the 2 stages is that the project was planned to intervene in 3 provinces during the PIF stage, which was reduced to 2 provinces at the project formulation stage.

36. As indicated in the table below, the project strategy in the PIF was to intervene in 3 provinces: Kerman, South Khorasan, and Yazd. In each province a set of activities was to be implemented: in Kerman Province: participatory SLFM in arid and semi-arid zone forests; in Khorasan Province: control of wind erosion through sand dune fixation; and in Yazd Province: community based agro-forestry activities on saline soils. Based on the results from the PPG studies, it was found that for an effective planning and implementation of the project within the allocated budget, the sites should be restricted to two provinces (Kerman and South Khorasan) instead of three provinces (Kerman, South Khorasan and Yazd).

Table 2: Alignment between PIF and Project Document

PIF	Project Document
<p>OBJECTIVE: To reduce land and forest degradation by investing in sustainable land and forest management in three target provinces and developing national and local capacity to support the widespread implementation of these techniques across the whole of the country.</p>	<p>OBJECTIVE: To remove barriers to participatory and integrated SLFM by: (i) strengthening capacity of local communities, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives at the village and watershed scales; (ii) adoption and</p>

PIF	Project Document
	implementation of the defined plans including sustainable alternative livelihood options with socioeconomic and environmental benefits sustaining ecosystem services and iii) enhancing capacity at local and national levels to mainstream these approaches into national plans, policies and processes.
<p>Component 1: Participatory SLFM in arid and semi-arid zone forests (Kerman Province).</p> <p>Outcome 1: Best practices in SLFM implemented in the province and long-term capacity developed to implement SLFM elsewhere.</p> <p>Outcome 2: Land and forest degradation reduced or reversed in the province.</p> <p>Outcome 3: Best practices disseminated across all of Iran to allow up-scaling of SLFM techniques in other locations.</p>	<p>Outcome 1: Strengthened capacity of local communities in 45 pilot villages, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives.</p>
<p>Component 2: Control of wind erosion through sand dune fixation (Khorasan Province).</p> <p>Outcome 1: Desertification in the province is reduced through control of wind erosion and sand dune stabilization.</p> <p>Outcome 2: Local capacity to implement future desertification control programs is created.</p> <p>Outcome 3: Best practices for desertification control through tree planting are disseminated across all of Iran to allow up-scaling in other locations.</p>	<p>Outcome 2: Status of forests and range improved, severity of wind erosion decreased and natural resources managed sustainably on 75,000 ha of land.</p>
<p>Component 3: Community based agro-forestry activities on saline soils (Yazd Province).</p> <p>Outcome 1: Soil fertility improved on at least 50,000 ha of saline soils in the province.</p> <p>Outcome 2: Local capacity is created to implement future programs to restore soil fertility in saline areas.</p> <p>Outcome 3: Best practices disseminated across all of Iran to allow up-scaling of SLFM techniques in other locations.</p>	<p>Outcome 3: Enhanced capacity at local and national levels to integrate SLFM across different institutions and sectors.</p>
<p>Component 4: Project Management</p>	<p>Outcome 4a: Project monitored and evaluated effectively and lessons learnt and best practices disseminated widely with a view to their replication in other areas</p> <p>Outcome 4b: Project managed effectively</p>

37. Following the PPG studies, one project site in each province (2) was selected for the implementation of the project. It consists of the Rigan site with a total land area of 587,461ha located in the Kerman province and the Se Ghale site with a total land area of 163,568ha located in the South Khorasan province. These sites were selected on the basis of site selection criteria established at the outset of this project. They included general indicators, ecological indicators and socio-economic indicators (see Annex 8).

Changes at Inception Phase

38. An inception phase was conducted at the beginning of the project and an inception report documented this phase (July 2012), including the changes made to the strategy of the project. No

significant changes were made at the inception. However, from a design perspective, three points are worth noting:

- It was noted the need for the project to embrace the increasing trend in administrative and fiscal decentralization of various government agencies, particularly the increasing role of provincial and district level general governors' offices in provincial and district level development activities respectively. It was recommended to establish an effective coordination with the General Governor Offices for tangible collaboration with local level government agencies and the mobilization of resources at the local level. Additionally, the project was to try to benefit from the credit facilities available within the MOJA designed for the promotion of agro based micro enterprises and sustainable and eco friendly farming practices in the pilot sites.
- It was decided to focus project activities at sub-watersheds level rather than whole watersheds as proposed in the project document. The Cunarnai sub-watershed in Ab Barik watershed in Rigan and Hamboo sub-watershed in Se Qhale watershed were selected for project activities. Then, based on lessons learned and best practices, activities may be extended to other sub-watersheds to achieve sustainability of ecosystem goods and services in larger landscapes.
- The project management structure of RFLDL was "decentralized" by giving more management responsibilities to provincial project management teams (2) and modifying the national project management role into a more coordination role of project activities managed by PPMs; including the renaming of the National Project Manager (NPM) to National Project Coordinator (NPC). Along these changes, a review of project committees was also done and changes made (*see Section 4.4*).

4. Analysis of Project Execution

39. This Section presents the findings on the efficiency of the project, which is a measure of the productivity of the project intervention process. It reviews to what degree achievements are derived from an efficient use of financial, human and material resources. It reviews the overall management approach, the financial management of the project, the institutional arrangements and the monitoring approach to measure the project's progress.

4.1. Project Management Approach

40. The review found that the efficiency of the project management approach is so far not satisfactory. Overall, it follows FAO project implementation procedures. The project management team applies - when needed - an adaptive management approach to secure project outcomes while maintaining adherence to the overall project design. The detailed project document – including the logical framework - has been used to guide the implementation of the project and track its achievements. Project progress is regularly reported following the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan identified at the outset of the project, including the annual Project Implementation Reviews (PIRs). Management procedures to procure project assets and equipment and to contract consultants follow the existing FAO rules and procedures. All project transactions are recorded and classified and show internal control mechanisms to manage and control project resources. However, the review found that despite adequate management procedures in place, the process to use these procedures seems to delay, at times, the implementation of the project and sometimes act as constraints for an effective implementation of project supported activities. It includes the development of LOAs, the development of annual work plans, which are complex and lengthy processes, often delaying the implementation of project activities.

Mobilization of Project Resources

41. An FAO project financial system is in place to track financial expenditures by project outcome and by budget line such as training cost, travel cost, short term consultant cost, etc. Project management procedures such as annual work planning, progress monitoring and reporting, etc. are in place as well as contracting procedures for short term consultants such as TORs, selection process, contracting process, etc. There is a project management structure allocating roles and responsibilities within the FAO organization with an overall responsibility center for the project that is the “*Budget Holder (BH)*” and that is often the FAO Representative in the country as it is the case for FAO Iran.

42. FAO has a process to allocate project financial resources to project partners through Letters of Agreement (LOAs). An LOA is an administrative instrument to formalize contractual arrangements with execution partners; they are an expenditure category in the FAO financial system. Each LOA that is signed with an execution partner includes terms of reference with the list of services to procure and an attached budget. LOAs are usually administered by the FAO Offices, but they can also be administered directly by HQ.

43. Nevertheless, despite all these procedures in place, their day-to-day use often hampers the effective mobilization of project resources, hence slowing the implementation of the project. Furthermore, these lengthy and relatively complex procedures lead the project management team to focus much more on managing/administering project inputs and less on managing by results. The review found that the project administrative/financial processes are viewed as too administrative and too long. It is also compounded with the not-so-simple project management structure (*see Section 4.4*) that is also adding some complexity in mobilizing project resources. From a stakeholder point of view, there is a lack of clarity in these procedures; rendering them complex and cumbersome and preventing the development of a trusted and effective relationship.

44. The analysis conducted during this review reveals that developing the capacity of the project management team in using these procedures – particularly on processes such as AWP, LOAs and Budget management, including their respective FAO approval processes - may help to speed up the mobilization of project resources (*see recommendation in Section 7.2*). Over the last year, a project management team has been established at FAO-Iran and all project procedures are in place for an effective implementation. It is now a matter of increasing the capacity of this team to use these procedures effectively with a focus on a timely mobilization of project resources.

45. It is also important to note that this lack of efficiency in mobilizing project resources has also been majorly affected by the difficulty to transfer GEF funds to Iran. As it is discussed in Section 4.3, FAO as a UN agency was not able to transfer funds to Iran under the international sanctions imposed on Iran. It is only in 2014 when FAO got an OFAC license⁴ (*see Section 4.3*) that GEF funds started to flow normally to Iran. In the interim, various schemes had been found to mobilize project resources; but overall, it was far from being efficient and seriously limited the implementation of project activities to be funded by the GEF grant. It certainly contributed to the perception of an overall low efficiency of FAO mobilizing resources to this project.

Implementation Scheduling

4 The Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) is administered by the US Department of the Treasury. It administers and enforces economic sanctions programs primarily against countries and groups of individuals, such as terrorists and narcotics traffickers. An OFAC license is an authorization from OFAC to engage in a transaction that otherwise would be prohibited.

46. As stated in section 3, the project started officially on July 1, 2011. However, as described in the previous paragraph, the implementation of the project has been seriously affected since its inception and until late 2014 due to the almost impossible task of transferring project financial resources to Iran. Since 2006, Iran was under international sanctions (*Resolution 1696*) that included banking transactions⁵. The only possibility for FAO to transfer funds to Iran was to obtain an OFAC license from the US Department of the Treasury. For unknown reason, the Reviewer understands that FAO as a UN agency did not get an OFAC license until mid-2014, contrary to other UN agencies such as UNDP and UNHCR which got an OFAC license much earlier and, therefore, were able to transfer funds to Iran.

47. As a result of this cash transfer issue, the implementation schedule has been severely hampered; particularly for project activities to be funded by the GEF grant. As discussed in section 4.3, the result of this issue has also been a low disbursement of GEF funds for the period 2011 to 2014. However, in the meantime, the Reviewer noted that the government of Iran co-financed the project (cash and in-kind) and allowed it to move ahead with the implementation as per the plan. An inception phase was conducted at the outset of the project and was concluded by an inception workshop on November 22, 2011 and documented in an inception report finalized in June 2012.

48. When considering the cash transfer issue and the efficiency in mobilizing project resources, it is not surprising that the review of the project timetable and its current achievements indicate that overall the implementation of the project is behind the original implementation plan. So far, the project has made excellent progress in mobilizing and organizing targeted communities (*social mobilization*), in implementing activities to control wind erosion and soil salinity, and in developing alternative livelihood activities in these communities, including the establishment of Community Sustainable Development Funds (CSDF). However, much more progress is still needed to achieve the project objective, particularly the development of Village Level Plans (VLPs) and Watershed Level Plans (WLPs), and the mainstreaming of SLFM approach in related institutions and policies (*see Section 5*).

49. This unique case of, in one hand, a GEF grant that was not adequately available until the end of 2014 and, on the other hand, the government of Iran that provided a large and timely contribution (cash and in-kind) to this project renders the analysis of the implementation schedule difficult. Despite these sanctions affecting the access to the GEF grant, the project was able to set up a project management team as planned - including a CTA for the period November 2011 to 2013 and a management team that including over 10 staff funded by FRWO - and activities took place in the two targeted sites. Currently, despite delays in mobilizing GEF fund, the project is in an excellent position to carry on with the remaining activities and succeed in the development of VLPs and WLPs. After over 3 years of social mobilization in the selected sites, local communities are vibrant and benefit from bettered livelihoods; ready to do more!

4.2. Quality of Technical Assistance / Use of National Capacity

50. The standard of technical assistance to the RFLDL project is excellent and the Reviewer noted a clear motivation to achieve the anticipated results. The project is managed by a high caliber management team, which has good management and administrative capacities to mobilize project resources but also technical guidance to implement project activities in a timely way at the field level. Few top national experts were hired to carry out specific set of activities supported by the project, all of whom are well qualified in SLFM and related topics, as well as being experienced - and clearly

⁵ Since January 16, 2016, these UN sanctions were lifted, following the agreement reached by the P5+1 and Iran on April 2, 2015 in Lausanne, Switzerland.

motivated to achieve results. It is the case of the expert from the Natural Resources and Desert Studies Faculty of Yazd University who was recruited by the project to conduct wind erosion monitoring activities. His work resulted in excellent results demonstrating a system to monitor/measure wind erosion and also demonstrating through measurement the possibility to control wind erosion through the rehabilitation of land. It also includes a Chief Technical Advisor (CTA) who worked on the project from 2011 to 2013 (22 months). This person had also an excellent track record to be CTA for the RFLDL project as he was the ex. CTA of the UNDP-GEF project on carbon sequestration in Iran; a precursor to this project. FAO has also been providing a strong technical team to backstop the project, providing cutting-edge guidance in key topics around SLFM methodology.

51. To this impressive pool of knowledge can be added the particular role of FRWO and its considerable relevant knowledge in arid and semi-arid ecosystems. The project is executed by the Desert Affairs Bureau, a department of FRWO focusing on these ecosystems. A well qualified team of over 10 staff from FRWO works full time on the RFLDL project. They also benefit from the pool of knowledge existing within FRWO in arid and semi-arid ecosystems and also from the extensive network of FRWO provincial and district level offices. Finally, it is also worth mentioning the layer of technical assistance that is close to the targeted communities: this comprises the “service providers” such as the provincial project management teams in Kerman and in South Khorasan and consultants contracted to support social mobilization activities in these communities. Together, they bring their own specific set of expertise to engage these communities in developing a more sustainable livelihood; including the sustainable management of natural resources and the potential positive impact on wind erosion and sand storms, a critical natural hazard affecting negatively these communities.

4.3. Financial Resources Management

52. Project finances have been managed using the FAO financial system and procedures; including the production of financial reports. However, it was noted during this review that the current financial management approach has a strong limitation for project managers in that project expenditures have not been entered into the financial system by expected outcome; hence the system cannot produce a breakdown of project expenditures by project expected outcome. Current financial reports on project finances are mostly a breakdown of expenditures by expense categories such as salaries, consultant fees, travel expenses, training expenses, etc., but cannot automatically associate these expenses to one or more project outcomes in accordance with the project budget originally defined in the project document. It does not provide sufficient meaningful financial information to project managers.

53. This limitation renders the management of project finances a difficult task, with limited accuracy and not timely either. In order to produce any meaningful financial report for the project, the project management team has to review any expenses entered into the system and, manually, using a separate spreadsheet, allocate each expense to the proper outcome.

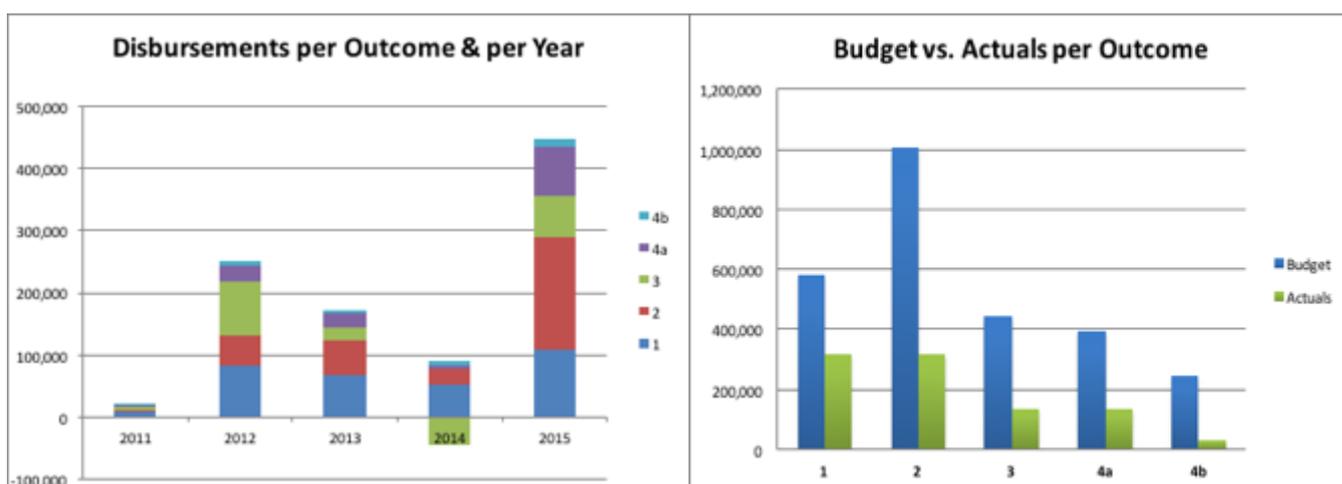
54. Nevertheless, since May 2013, a Results-Based Budget system has been created in the FAO-FPMIS that can financially report up to the output level. Therefore, as discussed above, the FAO project financial system can track financial expenditures by project outcome and by budget line such as training cost, travel cost, short term consultant cost, etc. It is a matter of developing the management/administrative capacity of the project management team to use the system by entering project budgets and expenditures by result (aligned with the project log-frame) and as a result be able to produce financial reports by outcome. These reports would be very useful to track project expenditures by outcome. It is recommended to implement a result-based budget system using the FAO-FPMIS as soon as possible.

55. For the purpose of this review, the Project Management Team was able to manually disaggregate this financial information by outcome and provided the Reviewer with the following financial information about the project presented in the table below. As of the end of December 2015, the project overall disbursement of the GEF grant is USD 937,165, representing about 35% of the GEF budget of US\$ 2.67M versus 90% of the total duration of the project (54/60 months). From a timeline perspective, the project disbursements of the GEF grant are much behind (35% vs. 90%). Only 6 months of implementation remain (out of 60) with about 65% of the total budget. In term of project expenditures, the project will have to spend an average of about \$289k per month during the remaining period as opposed to an average of \$17k per month since its start-up. It does not need a complicated analysis to acknowledge that the GEF grant will not be spent entirely at the end of the project on June 30, 2016.

Table 3: Status of GEF Grant Utilization

Outcome / Year	Budget	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total	Total/ Budget
Outcome 1	579,370	7,887	81,901	67,268	52,739	108,859	318,654	55%
Outcome 2	1,004,410	4,434	49,262	55,480	25,413	181,116	315,705	31%
Outcome 3	443,495	4,434	87,861	21,530	-43,401 ⁶	66,475	136,899	31%
Outcome 4a	395,725	2,725	24,951	22,253	5,092	78,718	133,739	34%
Outcome 4b	245,300	85	7,943	5,088	7,458	11,593	32,167	13%
TOTAL	2,668,300	19,565	251,918	171,619	47,301	446,761	937,165	35%

(*) Figures obtained from the project document and from the Project Management Team



56. In addition to a low disbursement so far, the diagram on the left also indicates that these disbursements were irregular over time. Very little money was spent during the first 6 months in 2011; 2012 and 2013 include the cost of the CTA; 2014 was low again, waiting for the OFAC license to be able to transfer funds to Iran and finally, 2015 was a better year from a disbursement point of view with almost USD 450k spent. There is no trend from this disbursement profile since 2011. However, as discussed in section 4.1, once FAO got an OFAC license from the US Department of the Treasury in late 2014 and was able to transfer funds to Iran, disbursements of the GEF grant

6 The 2014 negative number includes a correction of a LOA expenditure made in 2013.

started to pick up with almost half a million dollars spent in 2015.

57. The diagram above on the right indicates the budget and actual financial figures per outcome⁷. It shows that over 50% of the budget for outcome 1 has been spent, however, only about 30-34% of the budgets for outcome 2, 3 and 4a have been spent so far. The diagram also indicates that 40% of the remaining GEF grant (USD 1.73M) is planned for activities to be conducted under outcome 2 that is to improve the management of natural resources in the site areas (USD 689k).

58. Furthermore, it is expected that the level of disbursements in 2016 will be higher. The planned expenditures to be expended in the 2016 Annual Work Plan (AWP) are USD 702,824. The table below presents the breakdown of these planned expenditures by outcome.

Table 4: AWP 2016 Budget per Outcome

Outcome	AWP 2016	%
Outcome 1	43,300	6%
Outcome 2	300,417	43%
Outcome 3	66,000	9%
Outcome 4a	153,145	22%
Outcome 4b	139,962	20%
TOTAL	702,824	100%

(*) Figures obtained from the Project Management Team

59. The review of this budget indicates a relatively low level of disbursement under outcome 1. The AWP was in the process of being finalized during the mission of the Reviewer in Iran. However, this low amount (USD 43.3K or 6% of the AWP) is an area to analyze further⁸. Outcome 1 is the outcome under which VLPs and WLPs should be formulated. As discussed later in this report in section 5, the project needs to speed up this planning process. It is through these plans that the project will succeed in sustaining the results achieved so far, including the anticipated objective of replicating these results in other areas in Iran. The same is true for outcome 3 with only USD 66k and 9% of the AWP 2016 budget. This is the main outcome that will support the mainstreaming of the project's findings, ensuring their sustainability and replicability. It is recommended to review the AWP 2016 and ensure that more activities are being conducted under outcome 1 and 3 in 2016. These types of activities – planning and mainstreaming – are not activities to be conducted during the last phase of a project.

Co-financing Review

60. The co-financing commitments at the outset of the project totaled the amount of USD 8,338,834⁹, which represented about 76% of the total budgeted amount in the project document of USD 11,007,134 (GEF grant + co-financing) and a ratio of 3:1 when compared to the GEF grant. As indicated in the table below, co-financing commitments included an estimated USD 5,003,280 of cash contribution by the government of Iran and a further estimated in-kind contribution by the government of Iran of USD 3,335,554 as the national executing agency of the project.

⁷ It is important to remember that this allocation of expenditures per outcome is an estimate only.

⁸ At the time of this review, the project management team were in the process to review this budget in the AWP 2016.

⁹ Confirmed by a letter from the GEF Operational Focal Point in Iran to the GEF-CEO dated June 20, 2010.

Table 5: Co-Financing Status

Partner	Type	Commitments (USD)	Actuals (estimated in USD)
Government of Iran	Cash	5,003,280	4,006,535
Government of Iran	In-kind	3,335,554	7,993,465
Total Co-Financing (USD)		8,338,834	12,000,000

(*) Source: FRWO Progress Report as of December 2015

61. Based on the FRWO progress report as of the end of December 2015, overall, the government of Iran already contributed a larger amount when compared to the commitment made at the outset of this project (144% of the committed amount), which includes an in-kind contribution that is almost double the committed in-kind co-financing. A breakdown of these contributions is given in the table below.

Table 6: Detailed Co-Financing Contributions

Partner	Cash (IRR)	In-Kind (IRR)	Totals (IRR)
National Budget	61,582,260,000	0	61,582,260,000
Province of Kerman	15,000,000,000	154,522,283,397	169,522,283,397
Province of South Khorasan	2,710,133,900	3,674,507,202	6,384,641,102
Total Co-Financing (IRR)	79,292,393,900	158,196,790,599	237,489,184,499

(*) Source: FRWO Progress Report as of December 2015

62. The review of the detailed contributions reveals that a larger amount has been contributed to the province of Kerman when compared to South Khorasan. When the national contribution (cash) is allocated to the respective provinces, the analysis shows that so far from the total co-financing amount of about USD 12M (see table 5 above), 87% has been invested in the province of Kerman (USD 10.4M) and 13% in the province of South Khorasan (USD 1.6M). This difference is mostly due to the fact that the site in Kerman (in the County of Rigan) is much larger; hence the total amount of state and governmental budget allocated to various organizations in this County is significantly larger than in Sarayan County in South Khorasan province¹⁰. The site in Rigan County covers 58 villages with a population of 68,000 persons as compared to 3 villages and one small urban center in the Sarayan County. Furthermore, as an underdeveloped County, Rigan has access to specific funding for underdeveloped zones. Considering the needs in Rigan County, it is expected that the contribution will continue to be heavily invested toward this County during the remaining period of this project.

4.4. Institutional and Management Arrangements

63. The institutional arrangements of the RFLDL project is as follows:

- The *GEF Agency* for this project is the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO);

¹⁰ Some activities funded under the provincial “in-kind” budget from the province of Kerman includes investment in physical facilities such as asphalted roads, road construction, land leveling, installing notice signs, installing water piping system, pylon, wind pump, health station, equipment for school, construction of school, qanat rebuilding, construction of spawn pond, etc.

- The primary technical *Executing Partner* of the project is the Forests, Rangelands and Watershed Organization (FRWO) of the Ministry of Jihad-e-Agriculture through its Desert Affairs Bureau (DAB);
- The project is guided by a *Project Steering Committee (PSC)* that is chaired by the NPD. The PSC is composed of NPD, NPC, PPMs, CTA and 2 Senior Experts from DAB as permanent members. On an ad-hoc basis as required Senior Experts from FRWO or other organizations, including universities may be invited. The plan is to meet twice a year and as required. The PSC is the broad policy review and advisory body of the project. It provides overall advice to the project; promote linkages between different governmental bodies particularly with Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Industry & Mines, Ministry of Road and Transportation, Management & Plan Organization, non-governmental actors, universities and research agencies. The PSC reviews and approves annual work plans and budgets. It evaluates project progress and impact and ensures the integration of project outputs into sectoral and provincial policies and plans. The participants have delegated authority to take decisions;
- A *Technical Committee (TC)* has been created as a scientific and technical advisory body of the project. It provides advice and guidance to the NPD and NPC. The TC is comprised of technical experts from FRWO, RIFR, DOE, as well as representatives from at least three Iranian Universities with proven track record in rangeland, agriculture and forestry research relevant to RFLDL;
- Two *Provincial Project Planning Committees (PPPCs)* have been established (one in each province). The General Director of the respective provincial NRWMOs are the chairs of these PPPCs. These committees are to develop solid foundation for the successful planning and implementation of SLFM and the implementation of the project. It consists of representatives from relevant provincial FRWO, Provincial Agriculture and Natural Resource Research Centres, DOE, Village Council members, civil society and private sector;
- The *FAO Lead Technical Unit (LTU)* is the Forest Conservation Team (FOMC) of the Forest Assessment, Management and Conservation Division at the FAO Forestry Department;
- The *FAO GEF Coordination Unit* in the Investment Centre Division (TCI) reviews project progress reports, project implementation review (PIR) reports, financial reports and budget revisions;
- The *FAO Finance Division* clears budget revisions, provides annual financial reports to the GEF Trustee and, in collaboration with the GEF Coordination Unit, calls for project funds on a six-monthly basis from the GEF Trustee;
- The *FAO Office in Iran* has been providing support to the project, particularly before the Project Operational Officer was hired.

64. The project is implemented by a large management team. The management structure of the RFLDL project is as follows:

- A *National Project Director (NPD)* - a senior officer in FRWO – has been designated officially by the Head of FRWO as the NPD. His responsibility entails ensuring effective communications between the partners and monitoring progress of the project towards its expected results (*full time based at FRWO and funded by the government*);
- A *Deputy National Project Director* – a senior officer in FRWO – has been designated by FRWO and is supporting the NPD to carry out his functions (*full time based at FRWO and funded by the government*);
- A *National Project Coordinator (NPC)* has been recruited by FRWO. This position was supposed to be fully funded by the GEF grant; however, during the inception phase and

documented in the inception report, a government decision was made to fund this position from the FRWO budget and that the equivalent budget be reallocated to capacity enhancement activities such as national and international training workshops, study tours and other activities. The NPC is responsible for the day-to-day management of the project, including communication with provincial authorities, implementation of project activities, ensuring regular communications and coordinating activities with partner institutions and stakeholder at both national and provincial levels, disseminating best practices and lessons learned, and guiding and providing advice to the Provincial Project Managers (PPMs). The NPC reports directly to the NPD and was supported by the CTA during the period 2011-2013 (*full time based at FRWO and funded by the government*);

- A *Senior Expert* has been recruited by FRWO and is based at FRWO to support the NPC in carrying out its project responsibilities (*full time based at FRWO and funded by the government*);
- A *Project Assistant* has been hired by FRWO to assist the NPD and the NPC in carrying out their project responsibilities (*full time based at FRWO and funded by the GEF grant*);
- A *Chief Technical Advisor (CTA)* was appointed by FAO in close consultation with FRWO for the period Nov. 2011 – Sept. 2013. The CTA was supported by the Lead Technical Unit (FAO Forestry Department (FOMC)) and the multidisciplinary Project Task Force which has been constituted within FAO. The CTA reported directly to the NPD and to FAO. The CTA provided technical guidance to the project and supported the NPD in ensuring project activities were technically sound (*was full time and funded by the GEF grant*);
- Two *Provincial Project Managers (PPMs)* have been appointed by FRWO; one in each province. PPMs are responsible for the day-to-day management of project activities at the provincial level, monitoring and reporting on project progress and impact (*both full time, one based in Kerman and one based in Birjand and funded by the government*);
- Two *Project Assistants* have been recruited to support the PPMs in each province (both full time and based in Birjand and in Kerman and funded by the government);
- Three *Village Facilitators* have been recruited to conduct project activities in villages (full time based in Rigan (2) and Sarayan (1) and funded by the government);
- A *Communication Expert* has been hired by FAO-Iran to assist the project in its communication activities (*full time based at FAO-Iran Office and funded by the GEF grant*);
- The *Budget Holder* of the GEF grant of the project is the FAO Representative (FAOR) in Iran. He is responsible for timely operational, administrative and financial management of the project (*part time based at FAO-Iran Office and funded by FAO*);
- The *Assistant FAOR* (Programme) supervised the implementation of the project and was fully engaged in the project till early 2016. She currently provides part time support to the project (*part time based at FAO Iran and funded by FAO*);
- A *Project Operations Officer* has been hired by FAO-Iran to support the operations of the project and liaise between the project management team based at FRWO and FAO-HQ (*full time based at FAO-Iran Office and funded by the GEF grant*);
- A *Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Consultant* has been hired by FAO-Iran to support the monitoring function of the project when required (*full time based at FAO-Iran Office and funded by FAO*).

65. As discussed in section 3, the project management structure and the institutional arrangements of the RFLDL project were reviewed during the inception phase and changes documented in the inception report. Overall, the decision was to “decentralize” the management of the project at the provincial level by giving more management responsibilities to provincial project managers (2 PPMs) and modifying the project management role at the national to a more coordination role of project

activities that are managed by PPMs at the provincial level.

66. The original Project Planning Committees at the provincial level were renamed Provincial Project Planning Committees (PPPCs) and the Chairs of these committees were changed from being the PPMs to be the General Directors of the respective provincial NRWMOs.

67. The PSC met only twice since the beginning of this project. The first meeting was on March 3, 2013; it reviewed the progress made in 2012 and approved the AWP for 2013. The second meeting was held on April 29, 2015; it reviewed the progress made so far by the project, acknowledged the resolution of the FAO-GEF funds transfer issue since August 2014 and finally approved the 2015 AWP. Other committees (TC and PPPCs) met regularly to review progress, discuss issues and review the plan for the following periods.

68. Overall, the institutional arrangements and the management structure of the project are very comprehensive. It reflects the high contribution of the government to this project, clearly setting it as a priority for FRWO-DAB. The government through FRWO opened project offices in Tehran, Kerman, Birjand and also 2 offices at the site level in Rigan and in Sarayan. The project management team includes about 15 staff, most of them working full time on the project and most of these positions are funded by the government.

4.5. Risks and Assumptions / Risk Mitigation Management

69. A number of risks were identified during the formulation of this project and were documented in the project document. None of them were seen as a severe threat to the implementation of the project and the achievements of its expected results. The table below presents these risks identified at the beginning of the project with their respective mitigation measures.

Table 7: List of Risks in Project Document

Risk	Probability	Mitigation
Slow uptake of participatory integrated SLFM approach and policy recommendations	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field visits, workshops and meetings with relevant sites and projects stakeholders will ensure that lessons will be taken into the project since the very beginning. It will also ensure the interaction and exchange of information to assure that the relevant lessons between village clusters and provincial and national representatives and key decision makers are exchanged. Additionally, the fourth project component including activities designed for dissemination of information and best practice will support the above mentioned transfer of knowledge and lessons, and will reach to the public at large.
Project coordination	No rating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During implementation, it will be the task of FRWO as the project's national executing agency to ensure continued support from all stakeholders and to identify and resolve any potential issues early in the project cycle before they begin to affect implementation activities and their success.
Village/village cluster selection and participation	Medium to Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This risk is addressed by the rapid assessment of the project area (to select village clusters) and baseline assessment (to select pilot villages from clusters) envisaged to be completed in the early part of the project. The assessments will have several ecological, socio-economic and institutional indicators to ensure the selection process accomplishes its goal of finding representative village clusters and villages in the project sites. The risk that the selected villages will be unwilling to cooperate with the GEF project is limited due to the tangible social and economic benefits their households

Risk	Probability	Mitigation
		can derive from their participation. Also, one of the indicators for site selection included willingness to participate in the project activities.
Prolonged drought and climate change	No rating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Such risks cannot be totally avoided, however, the emphasis placed on providing sustainable livelihood opportunities and increased adoption of sustainable agriculture practices by the project is expected to empower rural households by building their capacity to plan for the sustainable management of their local ecosystem resources, on which their livelihoods depend and enable them to respond and cope with prolonged drought and climate change events. Because drought is an ever present threat in the project areas the project will seek out traditional coping strategies which make the communities better able to deal with changing rainfall/drought patterns. The project will build on these traditional coping strategies, and assist communities to identify and adopt locally appropriate water harvesting, soil moisture and nutrient conservation practices with potential to mitigate the effects of low rainfall and drought.
Financial resources transfer to Iran	Moderate to High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FAO will monitor the situation carefully, and any impediments that could delay or adversely affect project implementation will be brought to the attention of the Government of Iran and the GEF Secretariat
Recruitment of the most technically qualified CTA	Medium to High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The FAO Lead Technical Unit will work closely with FAO-Iran and FRWO to broadly advertise the position and identify the most qualified candidates to be selected through a transparent selection process.
Co-financing	No rating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The National Project Coordinator will closely monitor disbursements of co-financing and immediately bring to the attention of the NPD, FAO and, as necessary, the PSC any shortfalls that may affect project implementation. FAO will monitor the project financing (GEF and co-financing) through the PPRs, PIRs and frequent contact with the NPD.

Source: Project Document

70. The review of these risks indicates that there were not well followed up through the progress reports and that overall, risk management is not consistent and does not seem to be a key management tool to manage the project. No risk analysis was conducted in the quarterly progress reports produced in 2012. In the semi-annual Project Progress Reports (PPRs) for the periods Jan. to June 2014 and July to December 2014, a review of problems and risks were conducted; however, with no “link” to the risks above that were identified during the formulation of the project. In addition, this is a weak analysis of risks with almost identical narratives in both reports.

71. In the Project Implementation Reviews (PIRs), as per PIR guidelines, a section (#5) of the report is on the review of risks with a “Moderate” and/or “High” ratings. The review of risks in these reports indicates an uneven analysis. The risk analyses conducted in the last 2 PIRs (2014 and 2015) are more consistent with those identified in the project document and more complete, including a mitigation plan for those risks rated “High”. However, in the PIR-2013, 2 new risks were identified and no reference to those risks identified in the project document was made. It was also noted that 2013 was a difficult year for the project with the failure to transfer GEF funds to Iran. The table below presents the risks included in these PIRs with a “High” or “Moderate” ratings.

Table 8: List of Risks in PIRs

Year	Risks
2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failure in integrated planning due to lack of appropriate technical capacity in the project team (<i>High</i>) Failure in timely allocation of GEF resources for project activities (<i>High</i>)
2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial resources transfer to Iran (<i>High</i>)

Year	Risks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further delay in formulation and implementation of WLPs and VLPs (<i>High</i>) • Recruitment of technically qualified CTA (<i>Low</i>) • Prolonged drought and climate change (<i>Moderate</i>)
2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial resources transfer to Iran (<i>High</i>) • Further delay in formulation and implementation of WLPs and VLPs (<i>High</i>) • Lack of adequate technical support on the ground (in Iran) (<i>Low</i>) • Prolonged drought and climate change (<i>Moderate</i>)

Source: Project Implementation Reviews (PIRs) 2013, 2014 and 2015.

72. When considering the difficulties to transfer the GEF funds and the negative impact it had on the implementation of the project, a more consistent risk analysis at the beginning of the project would have offered project managers with the necessary information to identify, select and implement mitigation measures. Risk management is part of project management tools used to manage projects and should not be underestimated.

4.6. Monitoring Approach and Progress Reporting

73. A comprehensive M&E plan with budget was developed during the formulation of the project in accordance with standard FAO and GEF procedures, including the FAO Handbook – Project Cycle. An M&E budget of USD 415,000 was allocated - excluding the salary of the M&E expert – of which USD 143,000 were to be funded by the GEF grant, the rest was to be funded by GIRI-FAO. The M&E budget funded by the GEF grant represents about 5.4% of the total GEF grant.

74. This comprehensive plan describes monitoring, evaluation and reporting activities that was planned to be implemented during the lifetime of the project. As stated in the project document, “FAO will provide oversight and monitor project progress largely through the recording and verification of inputs, including financial disbursements and technical levels-of-effort, and the quarterly project implementation reports (QPIRs), quarterly project progress reports (PPRs) and periodic supervision and backstopping missions. The project’s M&E system will monitor the project based on the outcome and output indicators and timeframe for delivery as stated in the project log-frame and agreed project work plan. The system will compare financial disbursements to technical activities programmed in the project work plan and identify and assess any significant discrepancies between the two.”

75. For each M&E activity, responsible parties were clearly identified. These activities were also reviewed during the inception phase and documented in the inception report. Day-to-day monitoring of project implementation has been the responsibility of the NPC with support from the CTA; staff meeting every 2 weeks at provincial level; staff meeting once a month at national level; quarterly meetings would take place to conduct periodic monitoring of implementation progress; quarterly PPPCs meetings to review project progress; semi-annual monitoring would occur through PSC meetings, reviewing annual PIR reports; technical committee meetings as required; and finally, the PSC will hold a final meeting during the last month of project operations to review the project terminal report and close the project.

76. The M&E plan listed specific reports that were to be prepared, they include:

- Project inception report
- Quarterly project implementation reports (QPIRs) completed by the BH
- Quarterly project progress reports (PPRs)
- Annual Project Implementation Review (PIR)
- Biodiversity and land degradation tracking tools reports
- Technical reports

- Co-financing reports
- Terminal report

77. The M&E plan was based on the logical framework matrix that included a set of performance monitoring indicators along with their corresponding targets at mid-term and end of project and their sources of verification. As presented in the table below, it comprises a set of 20 indicators with their respective target at the end of the project.

Table 9: List of Project Monitoring Indicators and their Targets

Expected Results	Indicators	Target at End of Project
<p>OBJECTIVE: To remove barriers to participatory and integrated SLFM by: (i) strengthening capacity of local communities, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives at the village and watershed scales; (ii) adoption and implementation of the defined plans including sustainable alternative livelihood options with socioeconomic and environmental benefits sustaining ecosystem services and iii) enhancing capacity at local and national levels to mainstream these approaches into national plans, policies and processes.</p>	<p>1. Reduction in severity of land degradation and biodiversity loss achieved through participatory and integrated SLFM approaches</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 45 pilot villages (30 in Rigan project site and 15 in Se Ghaleh project site) totaling approximately 75,000 ha including range, forest and agricultural lands (rain fed and irrigated) under participatory and integrated SLFM and delivering ecosystem services and goods ▪ 75% cumulative decrease in unsustainable land use and management practices in 30 pilot villages in each watershed by end of project
	<p>2. Increased awareness and capacity of stakeholders at local, provincial and national levels on participatory and integrated SLFM</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All relevant ministries aware of SLFM and collaborating on land and forest management; at least 5 cross cutting policies revised and or merged to mainstream participatory integrated watershed approach for SLFM by EOP ▪ Capacity enhanced and awareness raised for at least 50% of the population in the 45 villages on SLFM
<p>Outcome 1: Strengthened capacity of local communities in 45 pilot villages, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 1.1: At least 200 people of the population in each of the two watersheds and 70% of the provincial staff including men and women trained on SLFM • Output 1.2: 6 Participatory Village Resource Management Councils established • Output 1.3: 45 village level plans and 2 watershed level plans formulated • Output 1.4: Rural Development Funds established for at least 30 pilot villages (1 rural development fund per pilot village). 	<p>3. Workshop participants trained in participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives and are using their new skills on the ground</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ At least 200 people of the population in each of the two watersheds and 70% of the provincial staff including men and women trained on SLFM
	<p>4. Participatory Village Resource Management Council (PVRMC) and Village Councils SLFM Village Level Plan (VLP) and Watershed Level Plan (WLP) developed for the pilot villages and village clusters respectively</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 6 Participatory Village Resource Management Councils established ▪ 45 Village Level Plans formulated ▪ 2 watershed level plans formulated
	<p>5. Rural Development Funds established in pilot villages</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rural Development Funds established for at least 30 pilot villages (1 rural development fund per pilot village)

Expected Results	Indicators	Target at End of Project
<p>Outcome 2: Status of forests and range improved, severity of wind erosion decreased and natural resources managed sustainably on 75,000 ha of land.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 2.1: At least 30 pilot villages (20 in Rigan and 10 in Se Galeh) implementing the village level and watershed level plans • Output 2.2: 30% decrease in erosion in pilot villages (baseline to be established in year 1) • Output 2.3: 75% of rangelands rehabilitated of projected 19,100 ha in pilot sites • Output 2.4: 2,250 hectares of farm and rangeland in selected villages restored with drought and salinity resistant plants. • Output 2.5: 25% recovery in globally important wild species and species of importance/ used as Non Wood Forest Products (baseline to be established in year 1) • Output 2.6: At least 5 sustainable alternative livelihood initiatives are developed with demonstrated benefits to environmental services. 	6. Number of villages implementing VLP and WLP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ At least 30 pilot villages (20 in Rigan and 10 in Se Galeh) implementing the village level and watershed level plans
	7. Surface of forest, range and under SLFM field interventions (including wind breaks, restoration of degraded land, improved water harvesting techniques, livestock management and sustainable agriculture)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 75% rehabilitated rangelands of the projected 19 400 ha in pilot sites
	8. Number of sustainable alternative livelihoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ At least 5 sustainable alternative livelihoods initiatives developed with demonstrated benefits to environmental services
	9. Percentage of biodiversity and forest recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No baseline established and no target
	10. Forest areas for conservation and rehabilitation are identified and mapped	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Areas for conservation activities and rehabilitation are defined
	11. Changes in the number of species of flora and fauna as measured by species composition and canopy cover, direct spot, pellet group counts and tracks in the identified conservation and rehabilitation areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One Non Hunting Area established in Rigan. ▪ 25% recovery in globally important wild species and species of importance to Non Wood Forest ▪ 50 % decrease in over-grazing and fuel wood harvest inside the forest boundaries defined for conservation activities
<p>Outcome 3: Enhanced capacity at local and national levels to integrate SLFM across different institutions and sectors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 3.1: One SLFM platform/ Inter-sectoral coordination mechanism established and operational at national level. • Output 3.2: At least 5 policies revised to mainstream participatory SLFM • Output 3.3: At least 5 departments in NRM ministry working with inter- and intra-departmental linkages and at least two linkages established between two ministries (Department of Environment (DOE) and Forest, Rangeland and Watershed Management Organization (FRWO) at provincial levels; at least one such linkage at the national level. 	12. Increased inter and intra sectoral coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One SLFM platform/ Inter-sectoral Coordination Mechanism established and operational at national level
	13. SLFM integrated into relevant sectoral policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ At least 5 policies revised to mainstream participatory SLFM ▪ At least 5 departments in NRM ministry working with inter and intra-departmental linkages and at least two linkages established between 2 ministries (DOE and FRWO) at provincial levels; at least one such linkage at the national level.
<p>Outcome 4a: Project monitored and evaluated effectively and lessons learnt and</p>	14. Project data collection and Monitoring and Evaluation system established	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ First semester

Expected Results	Indicators	Target at End of Project
best practices disseminated widely with a view to their replication in other areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 4a.1: Project data collection and Monitoring and Evaluation system established • Output 4a.2: Project progress and monitoring reports prepared and mid-term and final evaluations conducted in a timely manner • Output 4a.3: Lessons learnt, publications and documentaries prepared and widely distributed • Output 4a.4: Stakeholders beyond residents of the 45 pilot villages familiar with project approach and results • Output 4a.5: Decision makers and ministry professionals aware of project results 	15. Project progress and monitoring reports prepared and mid-term and final evaluations conducted in a timely manner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ First semester
	16. Lessons learnt, publications and documentaries prepared and widely distributed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stakeholders beyond residents of the 45 pilot villages familiar with project approach and results through Y1-Y5. ▪ Decision makers and ministry professionals aware of project results
Outcome 4b: Project managed effectively <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 4b.1: Project management Unit established • Output 4b.2: Project Steering Committee (PSC) and Technical Committee (TC) established at the national level • Output 4b.3: Two Project Planning Committees (PPC) and Two Project Offices are established at provincial level (one in each province) 	17. Project management unit established 18. Project Steering Committee (PSC) and Technical Committee established at national level 19. Provincial Project Offices and Project Planning Committees established in the provincial level (one for each site) project sites 20. Activities implemented on time within available budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All staff and committees and offices established by year 0.5

78. The review noted that during the inception phase, the indicators to measure the progress of the project were reviewed. The recommended changes were documented in the inception report. However, these changes were not implemented, but no information was found by the Reviewer indicating the reason why these changes did not take place.

79. It was noted that out of these 20 indicators, 7 of them are project management related to monitor progress of outcome 4 and do not particularly measure development progress in achieving the objective of the project. The remaining 13 indicators provide a decent monitoring framework to measure the progress made by the project. All 20 indicators were used yearly to report progress in the PIRs.

80. The review of these indicators reveals that there are mostly quantitative indicators; that is, they monitor a quantity of deliverables as opposed to more quality-based indicators measuring the change in capacities to better manage local ecosystems. Quantitative indicators give a very clear measure of things and are numerically comparable. They also provide an easy comparison of a project progress over time and are easy to monitor and do not require too much resources to collect data.

81. However, quantitative indicators also do not depict the status of something in more qualitative terms. Degree of capacity developed are often better captured by qualitative indicators. For example, how to measure the strengthening of capacity of local communities to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives may not be measurable in strict quantitative terms, but

they could be graded based on qualitative findings. Measuring how many people were trained is not enough, measuring how their capacities were developed and translated into the implementation of a SLFM approach is needed.

82. In the case of capacity development initiatives such as this project that is “*to remove barriers to participatory and integrated SLFM*”, using a mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators would allow the project team to better measure its performance; particularly to measure how these barriers are removed, allowing local communities to better manage their ecosystems through an integrated SLFM approach. A mix of both types of indicators would be more suited for the measurement of the performance of this project offering quantity and quality information about project achievements.

83. Using the SMART¹¹ criteria to analyze these 20 indicators, the findings from this review include:

- Measuring progress at the objective level should have used indicators closer to the four existing barriers to SLFM. This is the rationale of the project and ultimately the success of the project will be if it was able to remove these barriers. Measuring how the project is removing these barriers is what is needed.
- Using the “*number of people trained*” as a proxy to measure progress toward an outcome such as “*Strengthened capacity of local communities in 45 pilot villages, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives*” is not specific enough. It is a proxy to measure a project deliverable, such as a project output but not to measure progress toward an outcome;
- Few capacity-based indicators would be needed to measure how well the capacity development of these communities have been translated into a better management of their ecosystems through a SLFM approach, particularly to measure progress under outcome 1 and 2;
- Indicators to measure progress toward outcome 3 are not specific enough. It is not clear how increasing inter and intra coordination would contribute to integrating SLFM across institutions and sectors. Sectoral policies to be changed should have been identified at the outset of the project;

84. Overall, this list of 20 indicators could be seen as SMART, however, despite that they are specific, easy to measure, attainable and time-bound, these indicators are not fully relevant when measuring how well the project is progressing toward its objective. More capacity-based indicators would be needed to better measure the progress of the project toward its objective. The use of the “*Theory of Change*”¹² approach – a project management instrument focusing on the process of the desired changes - would help identifying adequate indicators. It would also help to focus on the change that the project is seeking.

85. In terms of reporting progress made by the project, the annual PIRs – a GEF reporting requirement – have been completed every year since 2013. These reports are comprehensive progress reports, following the GEF guidelines for PIRs. They review the progress made by the project as of the date of the report. They include a review of the progress made toward the development objectives (objective and outcomes) using the set of 20 indicators and their respective targets; progress in project outputs; a review of project risks and their related mitigation measures (see Section 4.5); and other

11 SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound.

12 The “*Theory of Change*” is an approach that focuses on explaining the process of change by outlining causal linkages in an initiative: its shorter-term, intermediate, and longer-term outcomes. When used at the emergence of a project concept, the “*Theory of Change*” defines long-term goals and then maps backward to identify the necessary preconditions to reach these goals. The identified changes are mapped – as the “*outcomes pathway*” – showing each outcome in logical relationship to all the others, as well as chronological flow. The innovation of this approach lies (1) in making the distinction between desired and actual outcomes, and (2) in requiring stakeholders to model their desired outcomes before they decide on forms of intervention to achieve those outcomes.

sections on financing/co-financing, and possible adjustment made to the project strategy. They provide a good “*snapshot*” of the project at the end of the period reported.

4.7. Visibility and Knowledge Sharing

86. As per the project document, a communication and visibility strategy was to be prepared during the inception phase. A set of tools were proposed to ensure the visibility of the project; they include:

- *Basic visibility at field level*: signboards, display panels and banners; operational publications and materials such as training manuals and posters; supplies and equipment;
- *Printed publications*: brochures, leaflets, flyers and other publications on project activities and results;
- *Website*: partnerships and links; project information (objectives, activities, expected results, etc.);
- *Media contacts*: reach large audience through press release, interviews and press conferences;
- *Photos and photos exhibitions*: panels with photos showing project activities to be used during project events;
- *Audiovisual*: a documentary for distribution by the media (mainly for television, campaigns and internet) to be prepared to disseminate project lessons learnt and results including technical information and practices to local population, project partners and authorities;
- *Public events*: annual seminars including press releases.

87. This is a comprehensive visibility strategy, which was recommended to be the responsibility of the project team, with support from the CTA, LTU and FAO communication team to ensure visual identity of the project and partners; highlighting of project’s partners in media interviews, press releases, etc.; and supporting documents such as photos of logos in the field, photos of activities, copies of press released to be included in progress and final reports.

88. However, the assessment conducted for this review reveals that no such strategy has been drafted; no mention of it was made in the inception report. Nevertheless, the project is much visible in Iran, particularly within the provinces of Kerman and South Khorasan and the respective (2) sites. Project offices are set up at national level, provincial and local levels; each one is clearly marked RFLDL with signage, banners, posters, etc. It includes external visibility such as posters in front of the Governor’s building in Rigan, in front of the Natural Resource Office in Rigan and Sarayan, etc.

89. Additionally, the project has a logo (*see logo on front page of this report*) that is used on all printed publications, there is a flag with the logo RFLDL on it and numerous posters have been printed and posted on project activities in the targeted communities. A website was set-up (<http://rflldl.ir>) in both languages: Farsi and English. Signboards and banners have been made for most livelihood activities and posted in these villages beside each venture. Other signboards on watershed conservation activities have been made and posted at critical points in these communities such as road intersections and entrance of villages. Finally, uniforms with the RFLDL logo printed on them have been distributed to communities involved in project activities. A few pictures taken during this review are presented in Annex 9.

90. Based on the visits conducted during this review, we can ascertain that this project is visible. At this point, it is recommended that a short video documentary be made to highlight the mobilization

of communities, targeting the general public¹³.

5. Analysis of Progress Towards Results

91. This section presents the findings on the effectiveness of the project, which is a measure of the extent to which formally agreed expected project results have been achieved, or will be achieved in the future.

5.1. Achievements Towards Expected Outcomes

92. As presented in Sections 3, the project was implemented through four (4) expected outcomes. The first outcome seeks to strengthen the capacity of local communities in 45 pilot villages, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives. The second outcome seeks to improve the status of forests and rangeland, decrease the severity of wind erosion and manage sustainably natural resources on 75,000 ha of land. The third outcome seeks to enhance the capacity at local and national levels to integrate SLFM across different institutions and sectors. Finally, the fourth outcome is about implementing, monitoring and evaluating the project properly. The implementation progress is measured through a set of 20 indicators with their respective target values at the end of the project. Below is a table listing key results achieved so far by the project against each outcome and their corresponding targets set at the outset of the project. It is based on the compilation of available progress reports and notes and observations collected during the mission of the Reviewer.

13 It was noted that a first video clip was produced in 2015 and that a second one was planned; however, the Reviewer did not have a chance to review the first video during this review. Nevertheless, a video is recommended to be made during the last year of the project, focusing on the impacts of the project, particularly on its social mobilization aspects and the development of VLPs/WLPs. It should capture/document all best practices and lessons learned accumulated by the project.

Table 10: Achievements Towards Expected Outcomes

Expected Results	Targets at End of Project	Key Results
<p>Objective: To remove barriers to participatory and integrated SLFM by: (i) strengthening capacity of local communities, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives at the village and watershed scales; (ii) adoption and implementation of the defined plans including sustainable alternative livelihood options with socioeconomic and environmental benefits sustaining ecosystem services and iii) enhancing capacity at local and national levels to mainstream these approaches into national plans, policies and processes.</p>		
<p>Outcome 1: Strengthened capacity of local communities in 45 pilot villages, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 1.1: At least 200 people of the population in each of the two watersheds and 70% of the provincial staff including men and women trained on SLFM • Output 1.2: 6 Participatory Village Resource Management Councils established • Output 1.3: 45 village level plans and 2 watershed level plans formulated • Output 1.4: Rural Development Funds established for at least 30 pilot villages (1 rural development fund per pilot village). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 200 people of the population in each of the two watersheds and 70% of the provincial staff including men and women trained on SLFM • 6 Participatory Village Resource Management Councils established • 45 Village Level Plans formulated • 2 watershed level plans formulated • Rural Development Funds established for at least 30 pilot villages (1 rural development fund per pilot village) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In total 434 people from national, provincial and local FRWO as well as other line ministries were introduced to participatory and integrated SLFM approaches through 25 workshops, 19 meetings, 2 visits to the Carbon Sequestration Project (CSP), and 2 stakeholders analysis workshops • Through 192 orientation workshops, a total of 20 Village Resource Management and Development Committees (VRMDCs) have been established (10 in each of the project pilot basins) with a total of 209 members (M: 140 and F: 69) and 2 Watershed Resource Management and Development Committees (WRMDCs) have also been established (one per each pilot basin) with a total of 42 members (M: 28 and F: 14) • Held 118 workshops for VRMDCs and Sustainable Community Development Funds (SCDFs) members on local communities mobilization, office management related with the management of VRMDC, office and financial management of SCDFs, new methodologies on NRM and sustainable farming, range and forest protection, biodiversity and importance of animal and plant species with global value, establishment of living windbreak around farmlands, cultivation of mushroom, ornamental plants breeding, apiculture, sprinkle irrigation and vermi-compost production, livestock insurance, rotational grazing, agricultural products insurance, cultivation of alternative crops (medicinal herb farming and packing), data collection and analysis of wind erosion data, relief and rescue, carpet weaving, waste management and disposal • Supported 3 local study tours for VRMDCs members for a total of 122 participants • Started development of VLPs/WLPs: developed 14 village resource maps and conducted 27 need assessments to investigate rural development needs. Activities conducted with the strong participation of communities through the newly established VRMDCs • 14 SCDFs have been established (each one is a group of villages, 10 in Kerman province and 4 in South-Khorasan Province) with a total of 2,943 members (M: 1,577 and F: 1,366) reaching 1,897 households. These SCDFs have raised a capital of 3,229 (million IRR) and made 860 loans (M: 495 and F: 365) for a total of 4,559 (million IRR). The rate of repayment of loans has been 94.5% so far.

Expected Results	Targets at End of Project	Key Results
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 cooperatives were created (one in each site) and raised a total capital of over 1.08 billion IRR (USD 50k) • Supported/facilitated the development of physical facilities in the targeted communities including: established and improved green spaces for a total area of 310 m² in the village of Dustabad, (collaboration with the District Housing Foundation Office); re-constructed and equipped schools (collaboration with the District Education Office); established rural kindergartens (with participation of the District Welfare Office); improved rural educational facilities: flooring the yard of Shariati school in Zangooi village, installed a smart vision and heating systems in Bostaq village (collaboration with the District Education Office); restored aqueducts and intubation of water transduction pathways, and established pressurized irrigation systems (with participation of District Jihad –e-Agriculture Office); constructed 2 water storage facilities with total capacity of 78 m³ in Bostaq village; repaired and constructed roads as well as installation of traffic signs; built a bridge on the road to Zangooi village (collaboration with District Road Office); established and equipped rural health stations and constructed sanitary bathrooms for households (collaboration with University of Medical Sciences); installed TV relay and telecommunication antenna
<p>Outcome 2: Status of forests and range improved, severity of wind erosion decreased and natural resources managed sustainably on 75,000 ha of land.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 2.1: At least 30 pilot villages (20 in Rigan and 10 in Se Galeh) implementing the village level and watershed level plans • Output 2.2: 30% decrease in erosion in pilot villages (baseline to be established in year 1) • Output 2.3: 75% of rangelands rehabilitated of projected 19,100 ha in pilot sites • Output 2.4: 2,250 hectares of farm and rangeland in selected villages restored with drought and salinity resistant plants. • Output 2.5: 25% recovery in globally important wild species and species of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 30 pilot villages (20 in Rigan and 10 in Se Galeh) implementing the village level and watershed level plans • 75% rehabilitated rangelands of the projected 19 400 ha in pilot sites • At least 5 sustainable alternative livelihoods initiatives developed with demonstrated benefits to environmental services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 22,600 ha rehabilitated with extensive participation of communities including production of 342,000 seedlings (bare-root and potted seedlings); plantation of 1,124ha including 906 ha of planted areas irrigated; protection and enclosure of 17,300 ha; collection of almost 21 tons of seed; sowing of 274 ha; construction of 12 check dams with an estimated use of about 37,000 m³ of earth; and implementation of run-off management activities (crescent-like basins associated with seed cultivation) on almost 2,000 ha • Established the first wind erosion monitoring station in Iran in Dehreza village (Rigan site). Regular monitoring of dust and sand storms have been conducted. Results were used to wrote three academic papers and presented at the 3rd national conference on wind erosion and dust storms in Yazd (Feb. 2014) • About 27ha of living windbreak around communities established • The project supported vocational training through the Vocational Training Organization as well as supporting the financial support to communities through SCDFs, including workshops, courses and visits of alternative occupations. The results so far have been the establishment of 60 different alternative options of livelihoods with a total of 656 cases of service providers and small-scale production businesses in both sites. New businesses include: camel breeding, ostrich farming, poultry breeding, closed cattle breeding, turkey breeding, plantation of palm trees, plantation of foliage, kitchen gardens, mushroom production, bakery, grocery shops, carpet weaving, etc.

Expected Results	Targets at End of Project	Key Results
<p>importance/ used as Non Wood Forest Products (baseline to be established in year 1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 2.6: At least 5 sustainable alternative livelihood initiatives are developed with demonstrated benefits to environmental services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of biodiversity and forest recovery • Areas for conservation activities and rehabilitation are defined • One Non Hunting Area established in Rigan. • 25% recovery in globally important wild species and species of importance to Non Wood Forest • 50 % decrease in over-grazing and fuel wood harvest inside the forest boundaries defined for conservation activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoted alternative crops cultivation such as medicinal herb farming: 2 ha of medicinal herb farming in Sarayan (rosemary, artichoke, wormwood, thyme, sage, hyssop, etc.). Identified and promoted multi-purpose species (calotropis procera, myrtus communis, withania somnifera , etc.) and modified other multi-purpose species compatible with local conditions (aloe vera, safflower, thyme, ...) in Rigan as income generation for villagers • Promoted alternative energy resources: installed 8 solar water heaters, 9 water tanks, 7 solar packages, distributed 159 gas ovens and 29 bakery gas ovens among local communities • One consultant recruited to conduct an inventory of flora and fauna in the area and it is in progress, for 3 training workshops on biodiversity conservation were held in collaboration with DOE. • No systematic study has taken place under the project though FRWO has detailed studies through which areas in need of rehabilitation are identified • No-hunting area has been established in Rigan by DOE as a result of project intervention and cooperation with provincial DOE. As a further step DOE has decided to upgrade the area to be registered as a Protected Area (PA). All needful studies for establishment of the protected area have been conducted (but not yet provided to FAO).
<p>Outcome 3: Enhanced capacity at local and national levels to integrate SLFM across different institutions and sectors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 3.1: One SLFM platform/ Inter-sectoral coordination mechanism established and operational at national level. • Output 3.2: At least 5 policies revised to mainstream participatory SLFM • Output 3.3: At least 5 departments in NRM ministry working with inter- and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One SLFM platform/ Inter-sectoral Coordination Mechanism established and operational at national level • At least 5 policies revised to mainstream participatory SLFM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLFM platforms have been established at the provincial level where development planning takes place within the context of decentralization to provincial, district and local levels in Iran • The RFLDL project became a member of the District Administration and Planning Councils as well as a member of employment working-groups in Rigan and Sarayan. These Councils are comprised of all line ministries and stakeholders at the district level. Decisions taken by these Councils are supported by Provincial Planning and Development Councils which are chaired by Provincial Governors • All departments under provincial Natural Resources and Watershed Management Offices are interlinked and cooperating in project activities and fulfilment of its objective. The project has established very strong linkages between NRWMOs and DOE at the provincial

Expected Results	Targets at End of Project	Key Results
<p>intra-departmental linkages and at least two linkages established between two ministries (Department of Environment (DOE) and Forest, Rangeland and Watershed Management Organization (FRWO) at provincial levels; at least one such linkage at the national level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 5 departments in NRM ministry working with inter and intra-departmental linkages and at least two linkages established between 2 ministries (DOE and FRWO) at provincial levels; at least one such linkage at the national level 	<p>level (both provinces). The project has also facilitated cooperation between NRWMOs and provincial Jihad-e Agriculture Organizations (affiliated to the Ministry of Jihad-e Agriculture).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set-up a funding line for the RFLDL project within the annual funding agreement framework for Rigan in the province of Kerman facilitated by the Office of the District Governor 12 partnership agreements have been signed (8 in Kerman and 4 in South-Khorasan Provinces) with provincial and local institutions/organizations to foster inter-sectoral collaboration/coordination in project activities such as Imam Khomeini Relief Committee, Jihad- e- Agriculture, DOE, Research Institute on Range and Forest, Red Crescent Organization, Technical and Vocational Training Organization, Welfare Office, etc.
<p>Outcome 4a: Project monitored and evaluated effectively and lessons learnt and best practices disseminated widely with a view to their replication in other areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Output 4a.1: Project data collection and Monitoring and Evaluation system established Output 4a.2: Project progress and monitoring reports prepared and mid-term and final evaluations conducted in a timely manner Output 4a.3: Lessons learnt, publications and documentaries prepared and widely distributed Output 4a.4: Stakeholders beyond residents of the 45 pilot villages familiar with project approach and results Output 4a.5: Decision makers and ministry professionals aware of project results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project data collection and Monitoring and Evaluation system established Project progress and monitoring reports prepared and mid-term and final evaluations conducted in a timely manner Stakeholders beyond residents of the 45 pilot villages familiar with project approach and results through Y1-Y5. Decision makers and ministry professionals aware of project results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No systematic data collection and M&E system mechanism is in place yet. FRWO conducted a baseline study, FAO is awaiting the report. A monitoring and evaluation system is under preparation under the lead of the national consultant Project progress is being monitored against indicators reflected in the project document. However, the M&E framework of the project needs revision and indicators should be revised. The project has been visible on media in both provinces as well as at the national level during project implementation. The project documentary film is also under preparation capturing all implementation stages Supported 2 sport teams including establishment of a football field in Rigan Participated to the natural resources week in Sarayan: held painting contest among rural students, distributed seedlings, planted trees, prepared and distributed educational and promotional materials (natural resources-based novels, banners, brochures, etc.), distributed stationeries among rural students with the cooperation of the District Education Office Developed and published brochures, educational packages, documentary movies, information signboards, etc.; Released papers and articles about project activities in accredited journals; designed, set-up and manage the project web site and short message service (SMS); compiled two booklets about project activities; participated in press interviews and broadcasting programs on the project approach and achievements 8 site visits have been organized (5 visits to Rigan and 3 visits to Sarayan) for 123 individuals from authorities and key stakeholders. Several briefing sessions and meetings have been organized with FRWO and MoJA authorities at the national and provincial levels. One communication expert was recruited to facilitate the implementation of communication activities

Expected Results	Targets at End of Project	Key Results
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Research and Studies: Supported a research with the Provincial Natural Resources and Agriculture Research Institute on the indigenous knowledge of residents of desert-lands in terms of conservation and wise using of farmlands (case study: Se Qaleh district); supported research on consistency of medicinal plants; propagation of medicinal plants using tissue culture; effective materials existing in thyme; and germination percentage of <i>Collygonum spp</i>
<p>Outcome 4b: Project managed effectively</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Output 4b.1: Project management Unit established ● Output 4b.2: Project Steering Committee (PSC) and Technical Committee (TC) established at the national level ● Output 4b.3: Two Project Planning Committees (PPC) and Two Project Offices are established at provincial level (one in each province) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All staff and committees and offices established by year 0.5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Project central office was established in Tehran and equipped through the FRWO. All project committees have been established and are functioning ● Project Technical Committee has been established and functioning soon after project start. Two PPMs attend the Project Technical Committee. PSC has been established though has not met regularly ● The project has two offices in South-Khorasan Province and three offices in Kerman. All project offices are very well equipped by NRW bureaus of both provinces. All project committees have been established and functioning at the provincial level ● Implementation of activities has been delayed in some cases as the project GEF financial resources have not been easily accessible due to challenges FAO faced in money transfer to the country because of sanctions. Government financial resources have been allocated and disbursed in a timely manner and on the ground implementation activities have been conducted on-time

Source: PIR-2015, FRWO Progress Report (December 2015), and notes/information collected during mission

93. Overall, the progress made by the project so far is good. It is particularly good when considering the issue of transferring the GEF funds to Iran during the period 2011 to 2014, which seriously hampered the activities to be funded by the GEF grant. However, as discussed in section 4.1, the government of Iran stepped up its support with a larger co-financing budget during these years and allowed the implementation to move forward. The result is a project that has progressed well and in a cost effective manner.

94. A detailed review of the progress made indicates that the focus of project activities so far has been on social mobilization and implementation of watershed management activities. Activities supported under outcome 1 led to the establishment of 20 village committees to manage their natural resources and plan their development, and 2 watershed committees focusing on the management of their respective watersheds. In addition, 14 micro-credit schemes have been established, which have already made over 860 loans with a high rate of repayment of 94.5%. The visits conducted during this review confirm the success of these social mobilization activities. These communities are now vibrant communities. They now have a collaborative structure to make decisions at the community level; i.e. their respective committees. They also have access to credit to borrow funds for business development, which is a low-cost community-based credit scheme offering loans at a low interest. Finally, one result from these social mobilization activities has also been a trust building exercise between these communities and government services. With the help of governmental development agencies in the project areas such as housing, roads, education, etc., physical facilities that were needed by these communities were developed, reinforcing the trust between these agencies and the communities.

95. On the natural resources management side (outcome 2), the project has implemented several activities including seedling production, plantations, protection and exclosure, seed production, sowing, construction of check dams and implementation of run-off management activities. It is estimated that, so far, a total of 22,600 ha of desert land have been rehabilitated with the extensive participation of communities, which is reinforcing the community ownership of these activities, and providing a low cost approach to combat desertification (as compared to private contractors) while at the same time providing extra incomes to these communities. In addition, alternative livelihood activities have been promoted resulting so far in 656 cases of new service providers and small-scale production businesses. It is still early to fully assess the effectiveness of these measures but observations made during this review and interviews conducted led to believe that they will have positive impacts on the management of lands around these communities. Some degraded land was rehabilitated – particularly those areas contributing to sand storms - and existing productive land are protected from being degraded by overexploitation. The offices of FRWO at the provincial and district levels are now monitoring these measures and over time, effectiveness of these measures will regularly be assessed and best practices to be replicated identified.

96. It is also worth noting the work that has been supported by the project on wind erosion monitoring. The initial hypothesis made by the project was to demonstrate that wind erosion can be decreased by 30% on rehabilitated land as compared to degraded desert land. Sand storms are among the main weather hazards in these areas in Iran with sand storms that can last almost a week at a time, leading to numerous negative impacts on health, agricultural production, road accidents, degradation of public infrastructures, etc. An expert from Yazd University – whose PhD thesis was on “*Wind Erosion Measurement and Application of Wind Erosion Prediction System*” - was recruited to implement these activities. They consisted in the development of a wind erosion monitoring protocol, the selection of 2 areas where wind erosion was to be monitored - a first one in a bare area in the Rigan district prone to wind erosion, and a second one in a rehabilitated area, the set-up of 2 wind erosion monitoring stations and the monitoring of wind erosion over a certain period including the monitoring of wind speed (velocity), collecting sediment samples, and recording wind erosion events.

Data was collected and analyzed and the results are that, yes, rehabilitated land can protect from wind erosion. Initial results show that a decrease of up to 50% in wind erosion can be observed on a rehabilitated land area when compare to a degraded land area.

97. Under outcome 3, the project has made some good progress to “*integrate SLFM across different institutions and sectors*”. Following the decision during the inception phase to decentralize the management of the project at the provincial level, the collaboration with other development agencies at this level but also district and local levels resulted in good mainstreaming of project activities within the work of other development agencies. The RFLDL project became a member of the District Administration and Planning Councils as well as a member of employment working-groups in Rigan and Sarayan. These Councils are comprised of all line ministries and stakeholders at the district level. Decisions taken by these Councils are supported by Provincial Planning and Development Councils which are chaired by Provincial Governors. Furthermore, the lobbying of the project for mainstreaming the RFLDL approach resulted in the setting up of a funding line for the RFLDL project within the annual funding agreement framework for Rigan in the province of Kerman facilitated by the Office of the District Governor. Finally, to formalize the collaboration with local organizations/institutions, 12 partnership agreements have been signed (8 in Kerman and 4 in South-Khorasan Provinces) to foster inter-sectoral collaboration/coordination in project activities such as Imam Khomeini Relief Committee, Jihad-e-Agriculture, DOE, Research Institute on Range and Forest, Red Crescent Organization, Technical and Vocational Training Organization, Welfare Office, etc.

98. Due to the delays in implementing GEF funded activities during the first few years of the project but the larger than planned government contribution to this project during these years allowing the project to move ahead, it is difficult to assess the progress made by the project. It certainly progressed well towards its expected results, particularly when considering that only 35% of the GEF grant has been spent as of end of December 2015. When comparing the actual results with the targets set at the outset of project (see table 10 above), the project has made good progress and with 65% of the GEF grant remaining, it is evident that this project should exceed its targets at the end of its life.

99. Overall, the project is progressing well towards its targets, except one area that is the development of VLPs and WLPs. Based on this review, it should now be a priority to focus on these plans. Most of the work to develop these plans has been done such as mobilizing communities, identifying development needs, mapping local resources and in many cases, implementing actions addressing local needs. What is left to do is mostly a matter of “packaging” what has been done in the targeted communities into local plans; i.e. formalizing the process that has been followed since the outset of the project, starting with the now well-developed social mobilization concept and expanding it to include development planning. The RFLDL project is well underway to also succeed in developing these plans.

5.2. Achievements Towards the Objective

100. As discussed in Section 3, the objective of the project is to remove barriers preventing the implementation of a participatory and integrated SLFM approach in arid and semi-arid ecosystems. The table below presents the key achievements at the objective level, against the four targets set at the outset of the project to measure the progress of the project.

Table 11: Achievements Towards Expected Objective

Expected Results	Targets at End of Project	Key Results
<p>Objective: To remove barriers to participatory and integrated SLFM by: (i) strengthening capacity of local communities, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives at the village and watershed scales; (ii) adoption and implementation of the defined plans including sustainable alternative livelihood options with socioeconomic and environmental benefits sustaining ecosystem services and (iii) enhancing capacity at local and national levels to mainstream these approaches into national plans, policies and processes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 45 pilot villages (30 in Rigan project site and 15 in Se Ghaleh project site) totaling approximately 75,000 ha including range, forest and agricultural lands (rain fed and irrigated) under participatory and integrated SLFM and delivering ecosystem services and goods ● 75% cumulative decrease in unsustainable land use and management practices in 30 pilot villages in each watershed by end of project ● All relevant ministries aware of SLFM and collaborating on land and forest management; at least 5 cross cutting policies revised and or merged to mainstream participatory integrated watershed approach for SLFM by EOP ● Capacity enhanced and awareness raised for at least 50% of the population in the 45 villages on SLFM 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 22,600 ha rehabilitated with extensive participation of communities including production of 342,000 seedlings (bare-root and potted seedlings); plantation of 1,124ha including 906 ha of planted areas irrigated; protection and exclosure of 17,300 ha; collection of almost 21 tons of seed; sowing of 274 ha; construction of check dams with an estimated use of about 37,000 m³; and implementation of run-off management activities (crescent-like basins associated with seed cultivation) on almost 2,000 ha ● Established the first wind erosion monitoring station in Iran in Dehreza village (Rigan site). Regular monitoring of dust and sand storms have been conducted ● Implemented an extended programme of social mobilization, which resulted in the formation of 20 VRMDCs with a total of 209 members (M: 140 and F: 69); 2 WRMDCs with a total of 42 members (M: 28 and F: 14); 14 SCDFs with a total of 2,943 members (M: 1,577 and F: 1,366) reaching 1,897 households and made 860 loans (M: 495 and F: 365) for a total of 4,559 (million IRR) and a rate of repayment of 94.5% so far; and 2 cooperatives ● Supported/facilitated the development of physical facilities in targeted communities ● Started development of VLPs/WLPs: developed 14 village resource maps and conducted 27 need assessments to investigate rural development needs. Activities conducted with the strong participation of communities through the newly established VRMDCs ● All relevant ministries have been included in established SLFM platforms at the provincial level in both project pilot areas. The RFLDL project became a member of the District Administration and Planning Councils as well as a member of employment working-groups in Rigan and Sarayan. Decisions taken by these Councils are supported by Provincial Planning and Development Councils which are chaired by Provincial Governors ● Established 60 different alternative options of livelihoods with a total of 656 cases of service providers and small-scale production businesses in both sites, including the promotion of alternative crops cultivation such as medicinal herb farming and the promotion of alternative energy resources with the installation of 8 solar water heaters, 9 water tanks, 7 solar packages, and the distribution of 159 gas ovens and 29 bakery gas ovens among local communities ● Held 118 workshops for VRMDCs and SCDFs members on varied topics, including NRM topics such as sustainable farming, range and forest protection, biodiversity and importance of animal and plant species with global value, establishment of living windbreak around farmlands, apiculture, sprinkle irrigation and vermi-compost production, rotational grazing, cultivation of alternative crops, data collection and analysis of wind erosion data, waste management and disposal, etc.

Source: PIR-2015, FRWO Progress Report (December 2015), and notes/information collected during mission

101. It is still early to assess how well the project is progressing toward its objective. However, based on the review of the progress made in the previous section, there is sufficient evidence through this

review that indicates a good progress toward the objective of this project that is “*to remove barriers to participatory and integrated SLFM*”. Capacities of local communities, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives at the village and watershed scales have been developed; a local sustainable development planning process is emerging from these demonstrations including sustained ecosystem services; and this tested/demonstrated approach is gradually being mainstreamed in national and provincial plans and policies.

102. One of the main targets of the project was to rehabilitate 75,000 ha of range, forest and agricultural lands using a participatory and integrated SLFM approach. While it is too early to say if the project will meet this target at the end - now at 22,600 ha, the main result of the RFLDL project may not be to reach 75,000 ha but the development of a local sustainable development planning approach encompassing socio-economic development (rural livelihood) and protection and sustainable use of natural resources surrounding these communities. The project took a tested social mobilization concept, expanded it to include sustainable development planning and is now testing/demonstrating it. Once the model will be tested/demonstrated, it will be available for replications and scaling up. As it is discussed in section 6.2.2, it is already happening through FRWO with the expansion of their IWM activities to 33 watersheds throughout Iran using the model being demonstrated in the Rigan and Sarayan areas.

5.3. Gender equality

103. FAO has a defined policy on gender equality. Its goal is to achieve equality between women and men in sustainable agricultural production and rural development for the elimination of hunger and poverty. Furthermore, it has five objectives to accomplish this goal:

- Women participate equally with men as decision-makers in rural institutions and in shaping laws, policies and programs;
- Women and men have equal access to and control over decent employment and income, land and other productive resources;
- Women and men have equal access to goods and services for agricultural development and to markets;
- Women’s work burden is reduced by 20% through improved technologies, services and infrastructure; and
- Percentage of agricultural aid committed to women/gender-equality related projects is increased to 30% of total agricultural aid.

104. The policy recognizes that the major responsibility for achieving this goal and objectives lies with its member countries. However, FAO is accountable for the quality, efficiency and timeliness of its contribution at the output level; including the monitoring of progress toward the achievement of its gender equality goal and objectives. FAO’s contributions toward achieving its gender equality goal and objectives include the generation and communication of gender disaggregated data; the development and sharing of gender equality norms and standards; the incorporation of gender analysis in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of all field programs and projects; the development of internal structures and systems to promote gender equality and ensure equal participation of men and women in decision making in FAO; and other similar actions.

105. There are two strategic directions in its implementation: (1) adopt gender mainstreaming internally in all its work; and (2) carry out programs and projects specifically targeted at women in cases where the gender equality gap is so large that women cannot access opportunities that are available. Furthermore, the policy states that the function of an evaluation is to assess the extent to

which FAO addresses gender equality issues in the project.

106. The RFLDL project falls clearly under the first strategic direction stated above that is to adopt gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the RFLDL project. The review of the project document indicates that gender considerations were key to succeed. It recognized that the “*success of SLFM initiatives depends upon the complete participation of women in planning, sharing suggestions for resource use and in taking resource-use decisions as reflected in their active participation during the PPG phase. The project should continue to assure the full involvement of women, notably in the village clusters. This is to be achieved by the employment of a participatory and socio economic specialist with good gender related experience to advise and help design activities ensuring accessibility and involvement of women. The project will also involve experienced and relevant Iranian government departments such as the Department of Nomadic and Pastoral Women’s Affairs within the MoAJ and women’s NGOs*”.

107. However, despite that gender was recognized as a key implementation strategy, the review of the project log-frame indicates a weak integration of gender-based sensitivity and gender considerations into the formulation of the project. It is only mentioned under output 1.1 that men and women should be trained in SLFM. As a result, almost no gender reporting - including sex-disaggregated data - is being done in progress reports (PIRs and PPRs); except in the FRWO progress report (December 2015) where progress made includes sex-disaggregated data.

108. Finally, from the observations made during the mission of the Reviewer in Iran, the RFLDL project has a mixed profile with respect to gender equality. Taking sex ratio as the simplest means of quantifying and assessing “gender equality” the review indicates that:

- At FAO, the project oversight is done by two women (Lead Technical Unit and GEF Coordination Unit);
- In Iran, the project scores poorly at senior level with the Budget Holder, NPC, NPD and the two PPMs all men.
- Part of the project implementation team, 7 staff are women (6 as project assistants and village facilitators) and 10 are men (mostly in management and technical positions);
- While there are no data to support this, it seems that most short term consultants (project service providers) who worked on the project have been men.
- At grassroots level, however, there is a better distribution of men and women amongst the communities involved in project activities; 67% of VRMDC members are men and 33% are women, 67% of WRMDC members are men and 33% are women, 54% of SCDF members are men and 46% are women, and 58% of loans were given to men and 42% to women;

109. In conclusion, despite that gender considerations have been poorly integrated in the design of this project, the activities implemented at the grassroots level in the pilot sites do involve both men and women. Visits conducted during this review confirm that there is a strong involvement of women in project activities, particularly in activities supporting the development of alternative livelihoods but also activities focusing on rehabilitation of degraded lands through seedling production and plantations. Out of the 656 livelihood initiatives supported by the project, many are for women such as tailoring, needlework, carpet weaving, mushroom production, cloth weaving, homemade bakery, etc. It is recommended that more gender reporting be done during the remaining part of the project, including sex-disaggregated data for training activities and livelihood activities.

5.4. Capacity Development

110. Capacity development is a core function highlighted in FAO's strategic framework and it is a key to sustainable results at country level and to ensure that FAO's efforts lead to lasting changes. The FAO *Corporate Strategy on Capacity Development (2010)*¹⁴ states that FAO's approach to capacity development (CD) is intended as a principal 'modus operandi' underpinning FAO's programme of work. At the core of this strategy, there is a CD framework that is an analytical tool to assess existing capacities and identify appropriate types of interventions for developing the required capacities in countries. This CD framework encompasses the need for technical capacities in the food and agriculture areas. It also focuses on four functional capacities that would enable countries to sustain the change initiatives supported by FAO: (1) policy and normative capacity; (2) knowledge capacity; (3) partnering capacity; and (4) implementation capacity. Finally, the framework has three dimensions: (i) enabling environment; (ii) organizations; and (iii) individuals.

111. Within this context, the project has a strong focus on capacity development. When reviewing the project strategy, outcome #1 and #3 are focusing mainly on developing capacities. Outcome #1 is about *strengthening the capacity of local communities in 45 pilot villages, and of provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives*. Outcome #3 is about *enhancing the capacity at local and national levels to integrate SLFM across different institutions and sectors*. This is confirmed when reviewing the achievements of the project so far (see Section 5.1). The project supported numerous training activities to develop the capacity of local communities in alternative livelihoods but also in managing their natural resources. The project has also been supporting the development of capacity of district, provincial and national staff in implementing participatory and integrated SLFM approaches in arid and semi-arid ecosystems.

112. Perhaps the clearest example of capacity developed, much appreciated by most communities met during this review, has been the training given to communities to organize themselves in committees (VRMDCs), set-up SCDFs to access credit when needed, and startup small businesses. Because of this training, their livelihoods improved significantly since the outset of the project. Undoubtedly the consultant employed for social mobilization activities was much appreciated, and the results in these communities are a testimony to his competency. A model is emerging from these pilots, which can/should be replicated throughout similar areas in Iran.

113. These communities are now vibrant and more in sync with their environment. Along the way to improve their livelihoods, they also gained better knowledge on how to manage their environment collectively, which has been decreasing the pressure on local natural resources by adopting new approaches. It includes better grazing management techniques including better protection and exclosure of some sensitive areas, use of alternative fuel for household fuel needs, establishing living windbreak around communities to decrease sand-storm impacts, and developing/maintaining vegetation cover to limit wind erosion.

114. However, the review found that most capacity development activities supported by the project are strongly focused on the "individual" dimension in terms of transfer of knowledge and skill development. That is certainly a positive aim; however, at this point in time, more emphasis needs to be put on "organizations" (structures and mechanisms) and particularly on the "enabling environment" (policy, legislation and governance). The success of this project depends not only on the success in the current project sites but also on the success to learn from this experience and replicate/scale-up the model developed in the 2 sites. In order to achieve this result (replicate/scale-up), there is a clear need for developing the capacity of organizations involved in the management of natural resources, and also a need to develop an adequate enabling environment for implementing a SLFM approach including the necessary policy, legislation and governance frameworks.

¹⁴<http://www.fao.org/capacitydevelopment/en/>

5.5. The Human- Rights Based Approach (HRBA)

115. The UN Common Understanding on Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) was adopted by the UN Development Group (UNDG) in 2003. It is part of the FAO's five UN Country Programming Principles that were introduced mid-2012 in FAO's Project Cycle Guidelines, which includes normative principles: Human Rights Based Approaches (HRBA) / Right to Food / Decent Work; Gender equality, and Environmental sustainability and two enabling principles: Capacity Development (CD) and Results-Based Management (RBM).

116. The purpose of the UN common understanding on HRBA was to ensure that UN agencies, funds and programmes apply a consistent Human Rights-Based Approach to common programming processes at global and regional levels, and especially at the country level in relation to the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). The statement of this common understanding on HRBA includes three main directions: (1) All programmes of development co-operation, policies and technical assistance should further the realization of human rights as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments; (2) Human rights standards contained in, and principles derived from, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments guide all development cooperation and programming in all sectors and in all phases of the programming process; and (3) Programmes of development cooperation contribute to the development of the capacities of duty-bearers to meet their obligations and of 'rights-holders' to claim their rights.

117. The project was designed before the HRBA guidelines were put in place through the FAO's five UN Country Programming Principles (2012). However, the review found that through the design of this project, a HRBA has been adopted. The dimension of "*decent rural employment concerns*" has particularly been an integral part of the strategy of this project. The objective of the project includes the "*strengthening of the capacity of local communities, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives at the village and watershed scales*". The project seeks to achieve this objective through the sustainable development of these communities with a strong focus on socio-economic development with the promotion of alternative livelihood initiatives. In most cases, these activities are generating additional incomes for these communities and also the creation of local jobs, including other cost-benefit sharing mechanisms for the provision of environmental services.

5.6. Partnerships and Alliances

118. Partnerships and alliances have been part of the implementation strategy of the RFLDL project since its outset, though not particularly well described/planned in the project document. No mention is made in the project document about the importance of developing partnerships and alliances, particularly at the provincial and local levels. However, as it was discussed in section 3, a decision was made during the inception phase to decentralize the project at the provincial, district and local levels to be more aligned with the increasing trend at the time in Iran in administrative and fiscal decentralization of various government agencies and the increasing role of provincial and district level general governors' offices. A recommendation was made and documented in the inception report to establish an effective coordination with the General Governor Offices for tangible collaboration with local level government agencies, including the ability to mobilize resources at the local level and the possibility of benefiting from the credit facilities available within the Jihad-e-Agriculture designed for the promotion of agro based micro enterprises and sustainable and eco-friendly farming practices in the pilot sites.

119. Following up on this recommendation made at the inception, the project has been very successful so far to develop partnerships and alliances at the provincial, district and local levels. As described in section 5.1, the project promoted the establishment of SLFM platforms at the provincial level where provincial development planning takes place. Furthermore, the RFLDL project became a member of the District Administration and Planning Councils as well as a member of employment working-groups in Rigan and Sarayan. These Councils are comprised of all line ministries and stakeholders at the district level. Decisions taken by these Councils are supported by Provincial Planning and Development Councils which are chaired by Provincial Governors.

120. All departments under provincial Natural Resources and Watershed Management Offices are interlinked and cooperating in project activities. The project also established very strong linkages between NRWMOs and DOE at the provincial level (in both provinces). The project has also facilitated cooperation between NRWMOs and provincial Jihad-e Agriculture Organizations (affiliated to the Ministry of Jihad-e Agriculture).

121. As a result of developing these partnerships and alliances, 12 partnership agreements have been signed (8 in Kerman and 4 in South-Khorasan) with provincial and local institutions/organizations to foster inter-sectoral collaboration/coordination in project activities such as Imam Khomeini Relief Committee, Jihad- e- Agriculture, DOE, Research Institute on Range and Forest, Red Crescent Organization, Technical and Vocational Training Organization, Welfare Office, etc. Furthermore, becoming part of the District Administration and Planning Councils resulted in the setting up of a funding line for the RFLDL project within the annual funding agreement framework for Rigan in the province of Kerman facilitated by the Office of the District Governor.

122. Finally, this excellent approach also resulted in the project – as a development agent – to collaborate with other development agencies and be able to mobilize resources to the targeted communities. As described in section 5.1, it includes the development of physical facilities in these targeted communities such as establishment of green spaces in the village of Dustabad, (in collaboration with the District Housing Foundation Office); re-construction and equipment of schools (in collaboration with the District Education Office); establishment of rural kindergartens (with the participation of the District Welfare Office); improvement of rural educational facilities: flooring the yard of Shariati school in the village of Zangooi, installation of a smart vision and heating systems in the village of Bostaq (in collaboration with the District Education Office); restoration of aqueducts and intubation of water transduction pathways, and establishment of pressurized irrigation systems (with the participation of the District Jihad –e- Agriculture Office); construction of 2 water storage facilities with total capacity of 78 m³ in the village of Bostaq; repair and construction of roads as well as installation of traffic signs; building of a bridge on the road to the village of Zangooi (in collaboration with the District Road Office); establishment and equipment of rural health stations and construction of sanitary bathrooms for households (in collaboration with the University of Medical Sciences); and installation of TV relay and telecommunication antenna.

6. Analysis by Other Review Criteria

123. This section presents other findings of this mid-term review, using two internationally recognized review/evaluation criteria: Relevance and Sustainability.

6.1. Relevance of the project

124. Within the context of the UNCCD and CBD implementation in Iran, the project seeks to

demonstrate a participatory, integrated SLFM approach to remove existing barriers preventing the sustainable use of rangelands and forests in arid and semi-arid ecosystems. The benefits expected from the project includes both national benefits (e.g., improved management of rangelands, forests and natural resource base and reductions in resource use conflicts affecting their livelihoods) as well as global benefits such as the rehabilitation of rangelands and forests, conservation of biodiversity, partial restoration of ecosystem integrity and recovery of its underlying functions and services, and promotion of use of appropriate technologies and practices designed to reduce pressure on rangelands and forest resources and habitat in project sites. This section discusses the relevance of the project to FAO, the GEF and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

6.1.1. To the Development Objectives of the Islamic Republic of Iran

125. As discussed in section 2, this project is about removing the existing threats to land and forest resources in arid and semi-arid ecosystems. It is a direct response in addressing critical barriers preventing the removal of these threats through “*restoring and enhancing the biodiversity and the capacity of degraded forest landscapes and lands to deliver expected goods and services for sustainable livelihoods, food security and combating desertification by promoting participatory integrated SLFM initiatives at watershed level*”. It focuses on two targeted provinces and seeks also to enhance national and local capacity to support the widespread implementation of these initiatives across other arid and semi-arid zones of Iran.

126. This review indicates that the RFLDL project is highly relevant for Iran and its development objectives. It is well aligned with national priorities and strategies such as the “*Vision 2025*”, the FRWO Outlook, the Provincial Outlooks, and particularly the National Development Plans (NDPs). It is also aligned with the Desert Policy that is a long-term strategy, approved in 2013, to combat desertification and land degradation in arid and hyper-arid ecosystems, representing 64% of the area of Iran. It seeks “*the development of green cover, shifting sand stabilization and runoff management for combating wind erosion*”. This policy includes strategies within which the RFLFL has been contributing to.

127. In the 6th NDP that is currently under review by the Parliament, 2 priorities are important for this project: (1) develop an integrated watershed management (IWM) approach; and (2) engage local stakeholder in their own development and management of local natural resources. FRWO, as the national agency responsible for watershed management, is responsible to implement these priorities. As the executing agency of the RFLDL, it is a key project for FRWO to implement these priorities. As a result, the review indicates that the RFLDL project became de-facto one main component of the watershed management programme of the Islamic Republic of Iran with considerable government investments in it (*see Section 4.3*) through FRWO-DAB.

128. Due to its design, the RFLDL project is well aligned with the existing development planning framework. It includes the *National Outlook – Vision 2025* that is setting national targets; the NDP that is a five-year planning tool to set national policies, regulations, etc.; and Provincial Development Plans and District Development Plans that are the plans to guide government investments in development activities at the provincial and district levels. The last “piece” of this planning framework is Local/Village Development Plans to guide government investments in local sustainable development. However, this is the weakest link in this planning framework that is somewhat a “top-down” planning approach. Despite multiple attempts by government, communities, particularly rural communities, haven’t been engaged in development planning of their own areas.

129. This is where the project is fitting into this planning framework for sustainable development;

at the community level. It provides a “bottom-up” planning approach at the community level with a strong (and successful) social mobilization approach. It links the community needs with the planning system in place in Iran; particularly linking communities with the respective district and provincial planning processes. So far, the work that has been supported by the project at the community level indicates a strong interest from these communities, reflected in their strong engagement in all promoted activities.

130. However, as it was noted in section 5.1, this local planning process still needs to be formalized through the formulation of Village Level Plans (VLPs) and Watershed Level Plans (WLPs). So far ad-hoc planning took place through the mobilization of these communities and rapid social assessments, which allowed the identification of community needs. Then, the project has been supporting activities addressing these needs. The result is a sustainable socio-economic development of these communities with a focus on using their environment sustainably. It is now time to formalize these demonstrations into a planning process leading to the formulation of these local plans (VLPs and WLPs). It will be the main focus of the RFLDL project during its remaining implementation period.

131. Finally, the relevance of this project in Iran is also related to 2 other major initiatives that have been underway in Iran: (i) Carbon Sequestration Project (CSP) and (ii) MENARID project, both FRWO-UNDP implemented projects. The CSP intervenes in the province of South Khorasan. It started in 2003 with phase 1, ending in 2009, had a budget of USD 1.7M funded by the GEF and targeted 144,000 ha and 31 villages with a total population of 3,290. Phase 2 started in 2010, was completed in 2015 and had a budget of USD 1.4M funded by UNDP, targeting 200,000 ha and 40 villages in an area adjacent to the phase 1 area. The CSP is the project where the “social mobilization model” that has been used by the RFLDL project was conceptualized and developed. The initial goal was to “*help local people to harness their potentialities for their development by themselves*”. This model includes the formation of communities’ committees and micro-credit schemes. This initiative was very successful and RFLDL has been building on it, expanding the use of the model to other arid areas in Iran. However, in the meantime, the RFLDL project is not only applying the model developed by CSP, it is also expanding its concept, particularly by introducing the concept of sustainable development planning through the development of VLPs and WLPs. In other words, the value added of the RFLDL project is adding a sustainable development planning function to the social mobilization concept originally developed under the CSP. It is worth mentioning here that the same experts who developed this social mobilization model have worked on both projects.

132. The MENARID project started in 2010 and should be completed in 2017. Its aim is “*to remove barriers to Integrated Natural Resources Management by developing and strengthening institutional knowledge, capacity and coordination and by demonstrating and up-scaling successful sustainable land and water management practices*”. It is funded by the GEF with a grant of USD 4.34M and a co-financing of USD 15.74M and it is implemented by UNDP (GEF Agency) and FRWO. Contrary to the CSP and the RFLDL project, the MENARID project is focusing on strengthening the capacity of institutions involved in land management and on improving the enabling environment for integrated natural resources management. Nevertheless, this project that is still on-going is much aligned with the RFLDL and potentially may collaborate with the RFLDL project under outcome 3 that is to enhance the capacity at local and national levels to integrate SLFM across different institutions and sectors.

6.1.2. To FAO’s Strategic Objectives

133. FAO has revised its Strategic Framework 2010-19 as part of the established planning,

programme and budget system. This new strategic framework was presented and endorsed by the FAO Conference at the 38th Session in Rome in June 15-22, 2013. It is accompanied by the Medium Term Plan 2014-2017 which was also tabled at the same session. The FAO's vision is "*of a world free of hunger and malnutrition where food and agriculture contributes to improving the living standards of all, especially the poorest, in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable manner*". The set of core functions in this framework is made up of five strategic objectives (SOs). They represent the main areas of work on which FAO concentrates its efforts in striving to achieve its Vision and Global Goals. There are:

- Eradicate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition;
- Increase and improve provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner;
- Reduce rural poverty;
- Enable more inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems at local, national and international levels; and
- Increase the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises.

134. A sixth objective covers the provision of technical knowledge, quality and services for the work of the organization, encompassing core normative work.

135. The review of the Strategic Framework 2010-2019, and the Medium-Term Plan 2014-2017 accompanied by the Programme of Work and Budget 2014-2015 indicates that the project is well aligned with two SOs. The aim of the project aims at "*increasing and improving the provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner*" (SO2); it also aims a "*reducing rural poverty*" (SO3). The RFLDL project is particularly relevant to FAO strategy under the first outcome of SO2 that is "*producers and natural resource managers adopt practices that increase and improve the provision of goods and services in agricultural sector production systems in a sustainable manner*". It is also relevant under the first outcome of SO3 that is "*the enabling environment is created or improved so that the rural poor have voice and equitable access to resources, services, institutions and policy processes to move out of poverty*". Through a participatory and integrated SLFM approach, the project supports a comprehensive approach focusing on socio-economic development of rural communities and on the protection and conservation of their environment. As a result, communities are learning to use their environment more sustainably and the implementation of alternative livelihood activities have contributed to bettering the socio-economic life of these communities, hence reducing rural poverty. In addition, collaborating with all local development actors, the project has been a major catalyst in allocating government resources where needed in these communities.

6.1.3. To GEF Objectives

136. Iran has ratified the Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in 1997 and the Convention of Biological Diversity in 1996 (also the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2005). The project was designed during the GEF4 cycle (2006-2010), started its implementation under the GEF5 cycle (2010-2014) and currently the GEF6 cycle (2014-2018). At the approval stage, the RFLDL project was falling under two focal areas: (1) Land Degradation (LD) and (2) Biodiversity (BD) and under the following GEF strategic programs: # 1 *Supporting Sustainable Agriculture and Rangeland Management* and # 2 *Supporting Sustainable Forest Management in Production Landscapes*; both under the land degradation focal area; and # 4 *Strengthening the Policy and Regulatory Framework for Mainstreaming Biodiversity*; under the biodiversity focal area.

137. Since 2010, the GEF objectives and programmes in these areas evolved through GEF5 and now

GEF6. The review of GEF6 strategies in these focal areas indicates that the project falls under multiple objectives and programmes. The RFLDL project is particularly well aligned with the land degradation strategy:

- *Programme # 1: Agro-ecological Intensification* (under LD-1): As per the focus of this programme, the project focuses on improving rangeland management and sustainable pastoralism; on regulating livestock grazing pressure through sustainable intensification and rotational grazing systems; on strengthening community-based agricultural management, including participatory decision-making by smallholder farmers; on integrated watershed management where SLM interventions can improve hydrological functions and services for agro-ecosystem productivity; and on implementing integrated approaches to soil fertility and water management.
- *Programme #3: Landscape Management and Restoration* (under LD-2): The project focuses on the sustainable management of forests and agroforestry for increased ecosystem services; on landscape regeneration through the use of locally adaptive species, including agroforestry and farmer-managed natural regeneration; on SLM approaches to avoid deforestation and forest degradation in production landscapes; including practices for sustainable supply of wood and biomass energy; and on good practices in community and small-holder land management, including local knowledge.
- *Program 4: Scaling-up sustainable land management through the Landscape Approach* (under LD-3): The project focuses on institutional capacity development and institutional finance for sustainable land management; on securing innovative market and financing mechanisms that provide incentives for reducing the pressures and competition between land use systems; and on multi-stakeholder landscape planning involving both public and private sectors to inform decision-making on integrated management of ecosystem services.
- *Program 5: Mainstreaming SLM in Development* (under LD-4): The project focuses on incorporating SLM in new public-private partnership agricultural investments developed by Iran in the context of smallholder agriculture; and on improving valuation of natural resource assets and ecosystem services from production landscapes to inform decision-making on investments.

138. Based on the experience from GEF4 and GEF5, the GEF decided to “open” a separate focal area called “*Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) Strategy*” under GEF6. The RFLDL project is also aligned with some objectives under this area:

- *Objective 2: Enhanced Forest Management: Maintain flows of forest ecosystem services and improve resilience to climate change through SFM*: The project focuses on developing the SFM capacity of local communities, increasing the devolution of forest management to local communities providing opportunities for a range of livelihood, sustainable development, and conservation benefits.
- *Objective 3: Restored Forest Ecosystems: Reverse the loss of ecosystem services within degraded forest landscapes*: The project focuses on supporting the development of integrated natural resource management including agroforestry techniques, especially for small scale land users, to achieve a mix of conservation, commercial, and community focused restoration, capturing potential synergy between reforestation efforts, local community livelihood opportunities, and restoration of forest ecosystem services.

139. Finally, within the biodiversity focal area, the project is also aligned with the programme #9 *Managing the Human-Biodiversity Interface* that is under the Biodiversity Objective 4 - *Mainstream Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use into Production Landscapes/Seascapes and Sectors*. The project focuses on embedding biodiversity conservation and sustainability objectives in the management of wider production landscapes through engagement of communities and land-use

planning to ensure that land and resource use is appropriately situated to maximize production without undermining or degrading biodiversity.

6.2. Sustainability of Project Achievements

140. This section discusses the potential for the long-term sustainability of project achievements. It is an indication of whether outcomes (end of programme results) and positive impacts (long-term results) are likely to continue after the project ends.

6.2.1. Sustainability of Results Achieved

141. The prospects for the long-term sustainability of project achievements are good. The project has been a direct response to national priorities and is highly relevant in the context of an overall government strategy to improve the management of watersheds in Iran. As discussed in section 6.1.1, the RFLDL project became de-facto one main component of the watershed management programme of the Islamic Republic of Iran with considerable government investments in it through FRWO-DAB. It has certainly contributed to the removal of some barriers identified during the formulation of this project and which were the rationale for this project. The project used a “social mobilization model” conceptualized under the CSP and expanded it to include a sustainable development planning component. At this point, it is anticipated that the government will continue with its IWM agenda in the foreseeable future using the key outputs of this project as a basis for expanding the reach of IWM in Iran. Therefore, project achievements should be sustained in the medium-term and used as a base to expand the use of this successful new IWM approach.

142. The Reviewer noted the good sustainability strategy documented in the project document. The premise of the sustainability of the RFLDL project was that by adopting a participatory integrated SLFM approach that takes into account the interdependency of human well-being and ecological functioning, as well as the interdependency of the different actors involved in SLFM from local stakeholders to provincial and national institutions, it will result in achieving a sustainable management of lands and forest over the long-term.

143. It also stated that at the outset of the project, there was a strong local political support and commitment in the 2 provinces for this project, including the provincial governors and local officials, showing a readiness and willingness to engage in consultative decision-making processes. This support also existed at the highest level when the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran renewed the need to emphasize the use of participatory approaches and the need to protect the environment, which was translated into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Provincial FRWOs and DOE to collaborate on these aspects. The review confirms that after 5 years, this strong political support and commitment by officials is still there and should continue in the foreseeable future.

144. From a financial sustainability point of view, the review did not identify any particular financial risks to the sustainability of project outcomes. The project has been a core project for FRWO and it has been largely supported by the government budget during the difficult period until FAO was able to obtain an OFAC license and be able to transfer funds from the GEF grant to Iran. It is expected that FRWO’s annual budgetary resources will be able to meet any recurrent costs resulting from the implementation of the RFLDL project. At the local level, the SCDFs are mostly financially autonomous and should be able to sustain themselves over time, particularly with the continued support of the project until its closure; assuming that the current success of these funds will continue. Finally, the local development agencies investing in local development should also pursue their development agenda in relation with the national development agenda. Overall, no financial issue

was identified, which could hamper the long-term sustainability of project achievements.

6.2.2. Catalytic Role / Upscaling Project Achievements

145. Using a definition of the catalytic role of projects used by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the aim is that such funded projects will attract additional resources, pursue strategies that have a greater result than the project itself, and/or accelerate a process of development or change. The review of the catalytic role of the RFLDL project is to consider the extent to which the project has demonstrated: a) production of a public good, b) demonstration, c) replication, and d) scaling up.

146. Considering the current achievements of this project, the review of the RFLDL project indicates that it should have an excellent catalytic role over time. Using the definition above, the project has been developing a public good with the expansion of the social mobilization approach to include a sustainable development planning component. At the end of the project, VLPs/WLPs should be a comprehensive tested model for IWM ready to be used in other parts of Iran. Through interventions in 2 sites, the project has been testing/demonstrating and refining the approach to end up with a tested/demonstrated approach ready to be replicated. Finally, FRWO is already in the process to expand their IWM activities to 33 watersheds throughout Iran (one per province) using the best practices developed under the RFLDL project, the CSP and MENARID. It is the approach taken by the government to scale-up the results of the RFLDL project, CSP and MENARID.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1. Main Conclusions

147. This section is a compilation of the main findings of this review. It is based on the analysis conducted for this mid-term review and they are arranged by sections used in the analysis.

Project Concept and Design

148. The RFLDL project is a direct response to national priorities seeking to remove barriers to participatory and integrated SLFM: At the time the project was conceived, government policy was highly focused on irrigated and mechanized rain-fed cultivation and little has been made to develop and support smallholder production systems. Yet, studies indicated that the contribution of smallholder production systems were considered to be important for maintaining local employment and for contributing to national economic output and various plans that had been put in place for food security. Switching from unsustainable agriculture practices to sustainable ones was seen as critical to address Sustainable Land and Forest Management (SLFM) challenges. The project was conceived as a response to these challenges. Its aim was to rehabilitate rangelands and forests and the strategy was through the removal of barriers to participatory integrated initiatives in rangeland and forest management. The project was to strengthen capacity at local, provincial and national levels in developing and implementing participatory integrated SLFM plans at village and watershed levels and ensuring sustainable alternative livelihood opportunities to meet the immediate and long term socio-economic needs.

149. The RFLDL project was developed over a long period of time (46 months): It took a long time to get this project approved. The Project Identification Form (PIF) for this project was submitted to GEF on September 10, 2007. The official letter from the GEF Operational Focal Point in Iran to confirm the commitment of co-financing the project was sent to the GEF CEO on June 20, 2010. The request for CEO Endorsement/Approval of the project was submitted to GEF on September 21, 2010.

Finally, the GEF-CEO sent her endorsement of the project to FAO on March 29, 2011 and the project started officially on July 1, 2011. It took a period of almost 4 years (46 months) from the conceptualization of the project to its implementation starting date.

150. Good critical changes were made during the inception phase to better align the project with the decentralization of government agencies: As the government agencies were decentralizing their administration and fiscal responsibilities and the role of provincial and district level general governors' offices in development activities were increasing, it was decided that the project will seek to establish an effective coordination with the General Governor Offices for tangible collaboration with local level government agencies and the mobilization of resources at the local level. The management structure of the project was also reviewed and decentralized by giving more management responsibilities to provincial project management teams (2).

Project Execution

151. The implementation of the project was severely hampered during the period 2011-2014 due to the impossibility to transfer funds to Iran: The lack of efficiency in mobilizing project resources has also been majorly affected by the difficulty to transfer GEF funds to Iran. FAO was not able to transfer funds to Iran under the international sanctions imposed on Iran. It is only in the second semester of 2014 when FAO got an OFAC license that GEF funds started to flow normally to Iran. In the interim, various schemes had been found to mobilize project resources; but overall, it was not efficient and seriously limited the implementation of project activities to be funded by the GEF grant and severely hampered its implementation schedule.

152. The mobilization of GEF funded resources has been problematic since the start of this project: The efficiency of the project management approach has not been satisfactory. Despite using FAO project implementation procedures, the process to use these procedures seems to delay, at times, the implementation of the project and sometimes act as constraints for an effective implementation of project supported activities. It was found that the project administrative/financial processes are too administrative and too long. The not-so-simple project management structure is also adding to the complexity of mobilizing project resources. From a stakeholder point of view, there is a lack of clarity in these procedures; rendering them complex and cumbersome and preventing the development of a trusted and effective relationship.

153. The project expended only 35% of the GEF grant (USD 937,165) as of end of December 2015 but the government contribution has been increased to 144% of the committed amount: As of the end of December 2015, the overall disbursement of the GEF grant is USD 937,165, representing about 35% of the GEF budget of US\$ 2.67M versus 90% of the total duration of the project (54/60 months). Considering that only 6 months of implementation remain (out of 60) with about 65% of the total budget, it is obvious that the GEF grant will not be spent entirely at the end of the project on June 30, 2016. In the meantime, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran provided a larger than planned co-financing, allowing the project to move ahead despite a very limited access to the GEF grant during the period 2011-2014. As of end of December 2015, the government of Iran already contributed 144% of its committed amount with 87% invested in the province of Kerman – a much larger site with greater needs - and 13% in the province of South Khorasan.

154. An effective comprehensive institutional arrangements and management structure for implementing the project: The institutional arrangements and the management structure of the project are comprehensive and effective. It reflects the high contribution of the government to this project, clearly setting it as a priority for FRWO-DAB. The government through FRWO opened project offices in Tehran, Kerman, Birjand and also 2 offices at the site level in Rigan and in Sarayan.

The project management team includes about 15 staff, most of them working full time on the project and most of these positions are funded by the government. Despite that the PSC met only twice, other committees (TC and PPPCs) met regularly to review progress, discuss issues and review the plan for the following periods.

155. A comprehensive M&E plan but the 20 indicators do not depict the qualitative aspects of project achievements such as the strengthening of capacity of local communities to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives: The indicators are mostly quantitative indicators; that is, they monitor a quantity of deliverables as opposed to more quality-based indicators measuring the change in capacities to better manage local ecosystems. Quantitative indicators give a very clear measure of things and are numerically comparable. However, they also do not depict the status of something in more qualitative terms. Degree of capacity developed are often better captured by qualitative indicators. Measuring how many people were trained is not enough, measuring how their capacities were developed and translated into the implementation of a SLFM approach is needed.

156. The RFLDL project is very “visible” in Iran: The project is much visible in Iran, particularly within the provinces of Kerman and South Khorasan, including in the 2 sites. Project offices are set up at national level, provincial and local levels; each one is clearly marked RFLDL with signage, banners, posters, etc. It includes external visibility such as posters in front of the Governor’s building in Rigan, in front of the Natural Resource Office in Rigan and Sarayan, etc. Additionally, the project has a logo that is used on all printed publications, there is a flag with the logo RFLDL on it and numerous posters have been printed and posted on project activities in the targeted communities, including storybooks and printed material for schools targeting children of different age groups. A website was set-up in Farsi and English. Signboards and banners have been made for most livelihood activities and posted in these villages beside each venture. Other signboards on watershed conservation activities have been made and posted at critical points in these communities such as road intersections and entrance of villages.

Analysis of Results

157. The progress made by the project so far is good: It is particularly good when considering the issue of transferring the GEF funds to Iran during the period 2011 to 2014, which seriously hampered the activities to be funded by the GEF grant. However, the government of Iran stepped up its support with a larger co-financing budget during these years and allowed the implementation to move forward. The result is a project that has progressed well and in a cost effective manner:

- With an initial focus on social mobilization and implementation of watershed management activities, the project supported the establishment of 20 village committees to manage their natural resources and plan their development; 2 watershed committees focusing on the management of their respective watersheds; and 14 micro-credit schemes, which have already made over 860 loans. These communities are now vibrant communities and with the collaboration of government agencies through investment in physical facilities in these communities such as housing, roads, schools, etc., the trust between these communities and government agencies has been reinforced.
- The project has also implemented several watershed management activities including seedling production, plantations, protection and exclosure, seed production, sowing, construction of check dams and implementation of run-off management activities. It is estimated that, so far, a total of 22,600 ha of desert land have been rehabilitated with the extensive participation of communities, providing a low cost approach to combat desertification while at the same time providing extra incomes to these communities.
- A wind erosion monitoring system was developed and the project demonstrated that wind

erosion can be decreased by 30% on rehabilitated land as compared to degraded desert land.

- Alternative livelihood activities have been promoted resulting so far in 656 cases of new service providers and small-scale production businesses, which should have positive impacts on the management of lands around these communities.
- The project has made some good progress to “*integrate SLFM across different institutions and sectors*”. The RFLDL project became a member of the District Administration and Planning Councils as well as a member of employment working-groups in Rigan and Sarayan. Furthermore, a funding line for the RFLDL project within the annual funding agreement framework for Rigan in the province of Kerman facilitated by the Office of the District Governor was set up. Finally, to formalize the collaboration with local organizations/institutions, 12 partnership agreements have been signed (8 in Kerman and 4 in South-Khorasan Provinces) to foster inter-sectoral collaboration/coordination in project activities.

158. Despite good overall progress, the project has not made much progress in developing VLPs and WLPs: Overall, the project is progressing well towards its targets, except one area that is the development of VLPs and WLPs. Most of the work to develop these plans has been done such as mobilizing communities, identifying development needs, mapping local resources and in many cases, implementing actions addressing local needs. What is left to do is “packaging” what has been done in the targeted communities into local plans; i.e. formalizing the process that has been followed since the outset of the project, starting with the now well-developed social mobilization concept and expanding it to include development planning.

Relevance

159. The RFLDL project is very relevant to the development objectives of the Islamic Republic of Iran: This project is about removing the existing threats to land and forest resources in arid and semi-arid ecosystems. It is a direct response in addressing critical barriers preventing the removal of these threats through restoring and enhancing the biodiversity and the capacity of degraded forest landscapes and lands to deliver expected goods and services for sustainable livelihoods, food security and combating desertification by promoting participatory integrated SLFM initiatives at watershed level. The project is well aligned with national priorities and strategies such as the “Vision 2025”, the FRWO Outlook, the Provincial Outlooks, and particularly the National Development Plans (NDPs). It is also aligned with the Desert Policy that is a long-term strategy, approved in 2013, to combat desertification and land degradation in arid and hyper-arid ecosystems, which represent 64% of the area of Iran. The project is “fitting” into the national planning framework for sustainable development by providing a “bottom-up” planning approach at the community level with a strong (and successful) social mobilization approach. It links the community needs with the planning system in place in Iran; particularly linking communities with the respective district and provincial planning processes.

Sustainability

160. The prospects for the long-term sustainability of project achievements are good: Being highly relevant, the project became de-facto one main component of the watershed management programme of the Islamic Republic of Iran with considerable government investments in it through FRWO-DAB. It has certainly contributed so far to the removal of some barriers identified during the formulation of this project. The project used a “social mobilization model” conceptualized under the CSP and expanded it to include a sustainable development planning component. At this point, it is anticipated that the government will continue with its IWM agenda in the foreseeable future using the key outputs of this project as a basis for expanding the reach of IWM in Iran. Therefore, project

achievements should be sustained in the medium-term and used as a base to expand the use of this successful new IWM approach.

161. The RFLDL project is having a catalytic role in Iran to promote participatory and integrated SLFM approach: Using the GEF definition of a catalytic role, the project has been developing a public good with the expansion of the social mobilization approach to include a sustainable development planning component. At the end of the project, VLPs/WLPs should be a comprehensive tested/demonstrated model for IWM ready to be replicated in other parts of Iran. FRWO is currently in the process to expand their IWM activities to 33 watersheds throughout Iran (one per province) using the best practices developed under this project. It is the approach taken by the government to scale-up results of the RFLDL project.

Rating

162. As a conclusion and as part of the TORs, the Reviewer was to rate two elements of the RFLDL project using the six-point GEF rating scale¹⁵. These ratings are presented in the table below with their respective rationale.

Table 12: Rating Table

Item	Rating	Rationale
Progress towards achieving project objectives	S	Based on the detailed review of the progress made, there is sufficient evidence that indicates a good progress toward the objective that is “to remove barriers to participatory and integrated SLFM”. Capacities of local communities, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives at the village and watershed scales have been developed; a local sustainable development planning process is emerging from these demonstrations including sustained ecosystem services; and this tested/demonstrated approach is gradually being mainstreamed in national and provincial plans and policies. This progress is particularly good when considering the issue of transferring the GEF funds to Iran during the period 2011 to 2014, which seriously hampered the activities to be funded by the GEF grant. However, the government of Iran was able to step-up its support with a larger co-financing budget during these years and allowed the implementation to move forward. The result is a project that has progressed well so far and in a cost effective manner.
Progress in Generating Project Outputs during Implementation	S	The project has been generating good project outputs since its inception, despite a major issue in transferring GEF funds to Iran during the period 2011-2014. Through social mobilization, the project supported the establishment of 20 village committees; 2 watershed committees; and 14 micro-credit schemes, which have already made over 860 loans. These communities are now vibrant communities and with the collaboration of government agencies through investment in physical facilities in these communities such as housing, roads, schools, etc., the trust between these communities and government agencies has been reinforced. The project has also implemented several watershed management activities including seedling production (342,000), plantations (1,124 ha), protection and exclosure (17,300 ha), seed production (21 tons), sowing (274 ha), construction of 12 check dams and implementation of run-off

¹⁵ Highly Satisfactory (HS), Satisfactory (S), Marginally Satisfactory (MS), Marginally Unsatisfactory (MU), Unsatisfactory (U), and Highly Unsatisfactory (HU).

	<p>management activities on about 2,000 ha. It is estimated that, so far, a total of 22,600 ha of desert land have been rehabilitated with the extensive participation of communities, providing a low cost approach to combat desertification while at the same time providing extra incomes to these communities. In addition, a wind erosion monitoring system was developed and the project demonstrated that wind erosion can be decreased by 30% on rehabilitated land as compared to degraded desert land. Alternative livelihood activities have been promoted resulting so far in 656 cases of new service providers and small-scale production businesses, which should have positive impacts on the management of lands around these communities over the medium and long-term. Finally, the project has made some good progress to “integrate SLFM across different institutions and sectors”. The RFLDL project became a member of the District Administration and Planning Councils as well as a member of employment working-groups in Rigan and Sarayan. Furthermore, a funding line for the RFLDL project within the annual funding agreement framework for Rigan in the province of Kerman facilitated by the Office of the District Governor was set up. Finally, to formalize the collaboration with local organizations/institutions, 12 partnership agreements have been signed (8 in Kerman and 4 in South-Khorasan Provinces) to foster inter-sectoral collaboration/coordination in project activities.</p>
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7.2. Recommendations

163. Based on the findings of this mid-term review, the following recommendations are suggested. They are in no particular order of hierarchy.

Recommendation 1: It is recommended to extend the project by two years if the GEF funds permit.

Issues to address

164. The project expended only 35% (USD 937,165) of the GEF grant of US\$ 2.67M as of end of December 2015 versus 90% of the total duration of the project (54/60 months). Considering that only 6 months of implementation remain (out of 60) with about 65% (USD 1,731,135) of the total budget, it is evident that the GEF grant will not be spent entirely at the end of the project on June 30, 2016. This slow disbursement was mostly due to the fact that it was impossible to transfer GEF funds to Iran during the period 2011-2014, until FAO got a OFAC license in mid-2014. In the meantime, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran provided a larger than planned co-financing, allowing the project to move ahead. As of end of December 2015, the government of Iran already contributed 144% of its committed amount with 87% invested in the province of Kerman – a much larger site with greater needs - and 13% in the province of South Khorasan.

165. The project is progressing well on multiple fronts except the development of VLPs and WLPs; a critical expected outcome of the project. The project needs now to focus on the development of these VLPs and WLPs. Most of the work to develop these plans has been done such as mobilizing communities, identifying development needs, mapping local resources and in many cases, implementing actions addressing local needs. What is left to do is “packaging” what has been done in the targeted communities into local plans; i.e. formalizing the process that has been followed since the outset of the project, starting with the now well-developed social mobilization concept and

expanding it to include development planning. The RFLDL project is well underway to also succeed in developing these plans. It is strongly recommended that the project be extended for another 2 years, if the GEF funds permit, focusing on the development of VLPs and WLPs and also on mainstreaming SLFM across sectors/development agencies.

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that the project focuses as soon as possible on the development of VLPs and WLPs.

Issues to address

166. Although the foundation of the VLP & WLP is ready now, so far the project has not made much progress in developing VLPs and WLPs. It should now be a priority to focus on. Most of the work to develop these plans has been done such as mobilizing communities, identifying development needs, mapping local resources and in many cases, implementing actions addressing local needs. What is left to do is “packaging” what has been done in the targeted communities into local plans; i.e. formalizing the process that has been followed since the outset of the project, starting with the now well-developed social mobilization concept and expanding it to include development planning. It is important that the project makes progress in this area. It is a critical result for the project to succeed and the basis for replication and scaling-up.

Recommendation 3: It is recommended to review the AWP 2016 and ensure that more activities are being conducted under outcome 1 and 3 in 2016.

Issues to address

167. The review of the (draft) 2016 AWP budget indicates a relatively low level of disbursement under outcome 1 (USD 43.3K - 6% of the AWP). Outcome 1 is the outcome under which VLPs and WLPs should be developed and it should be a priority for the project. It is through these plans that the project will succeed in sustaining the results achieved so far, including the anticipated objective of replicating these results in other areas in Iran. The same is true for outcome 3 (USD 66k - 9% of the AWP). This is the main outcome that will support the mainstreaming of the project’s findings, ensuring their sustainability and replicability. It is recommended to review the AWP 2016 and ensure that more activities are being conducted under outcome 1 and 3 in 2016. These types of activities – planning and mainstreaming – are not activities to be conducted during the last phase of a project; considering the timing, they need to be prioritized and fast-tracked now.

Recommendation 4: It is recommended to focus more on the dimensions of “organizations” and “enabling environment” of capacity development.

Issues to address

168. From a capacity development point of view, most activities supported by the project are strongly focused on the “individual” dimension of capacity development in terms of transfer of knowledge and skill development such as training activities. That is certainly a positive aim; however, at this point in time, more emphasis needs to be put on “organizations” (structures and mechanisms) and particularly on the “enabling environment” (policy, legislation and governance), which is the aim of outcome 3. The success of this project depends not only on the success in the current project sites but also on the success to learn from this experience and replicate/scale-up the model developed in the 2 sites. In order to achieve this result (replicate/scale-up), there is a need for developing the capacity of organizations involved in the management of natural resources, including the need to

update job descriptions, planning procedures, etc., and also a need to develop an adequate enabling environment for implementing a SLFM approach including the necessary policy, legislation and governance frameworks.

Recommendation 5: Instead of hiring a CTA, it is recommended to use international expertise on an ad-hoc basis when needed by the project.

Issues to address

169. The project budget included the recruitment of a CTA for a period of 36 months to provide technical support to the project team. A CTA was hired in 2011 and worked on the project for 22 months. During this review, discussions took place on the need for recruiting a CTA. Based on the assessment conducted during this review, it is recommended that the budget left for technical assistance be used on an ad-hoc basis to hire international experts for specific technical tasks as opposed to increasing the size of the project management team with a new CTA. As it stands currently, there is an extensive management team in place at both national and provincial level. The project is already hiring national technical experts as needed to conduct activities such as biodiversity assessment, wind erosion monitoring, etc. It is recommended that instead of hiring a CTA for a certain number of months, this budget be used to hire international experts when needed. One area where it is anticipated the need for international expertise is for the development of VLPs and WLPs.

Recommendation 6: It is recommended to develop the capacity of the project management team in using FAO project management procedures more efficiently to speed up the mobilization of project resources.

Issues to address

170. From a stakeholder point of view, there is a lack of clarity in FAO project management procedures; rendering them complex and cumbersome and preventing the development of an effective relationship. Project administrative/financial processes are viewed as too administrative and too time consuming. Given that now FAO-Iran hired a Project Operations Officer and an M&E Consultant to provide support to the project, it is recommended to expand the capacity of the project management team including the project assistants and possibly the NPC in using FAO project management procedures – such as AWP, LOAs and Budget management processes and their respective FAO approval processes - more efficiently. Understanding better these procedures should help in using these procedures more efficiently and more timely and speed up the mobilization of project resources.

Recommendation 7: It is recommended to implement a result-based budget system as soon as possible using the FAO-FPMIS.

Issues to address

171. Project finances have been managed using the FAO financial system. However, one current limitation is that project expenditures are not captured by project expected outcome; hence cannot produce a breakdown of project expenditures by expected outcome. Current financial reports on project finances are mostly a breakdown of expenditures by budget line such as salaries, consultant fees, travel expenses, training expenses, etc. It does not provide sufficient meaningful financial information to project managers.

172. Nevertheless, since May 2013, a Results-Based Budget system has been created in the FAO-

FPMIS that can financially report up to the output level. Therefore, the FAO project financial system can track financial expenditures by project outcome and by budget line such as training cost, travel cost, short term consultant cost, etc. It is a matter of developing the management/ administrative capacity of the project management team to use the system by entering project budgets and expenditures by result (by outcome aligned with the project log-frame) and as a result be able to produce project financial reports by outcome. These reports would be very useful to project managers. It is also recommended to use the expenditures allocation by outcome used in this review for the period up to December 2015.

Recommendation 8: It is recommended that the Project Operations Officer based at FAO Office in Iran be a member of the Technical Committee (TC).

Issues to address

173. The mobilization of GEF funded resources has been problematic since the start of this project and has been the source of delays. From a stakeholder point of view, there is a lack of clarity in these procedures; rendering them complex and cumbersome and preventing the development of a trusted and effective relationship. Following the hiring of a Project Operations Officer, it is hoped that the mobilization of project resources will be expedited. In order to also facilitate these aspects, the participation of the Project Operations Officer to the TC meetings would improve the flow of information and would better “link” any decisions made at this level with the operations of the project.

Recommendation 9: It is recommended to revise the list of indicators to measure the performance of the project and include few capacity-based indicators to better measure the progress of the project toward its objective.

Issues to address

174. The existing list of 20 indicators could be seen as SMART, however, despite that they are specific, easy to measure, attainable and time-bound, these indicators are not fully relevant when measuring how well the project is progressing toward its objective. More capacity-based indicators would be needed to better measure the progress of the project toward its objective. The use of the “*Theory of Change*” approach – a project management instrument focusing on the process of the desired changes - would help identifying adequate indicators. When considering the rationale of this project, indicators to measure progress at the objective level should measure how well the project is able to remove the four existing barriers to SLFM. The success of the project will depend on how successful the project will be to remove these barriers.

Recommendation 10: It is recommended to do more gender reporting in PIRs during the remaining part of the project, including sex-disaggregated data for training activities and livelihood activities.

Issues to address

175. Despite that gender considerations have been poorly integrated in the design of this project, the activities implemented at the grassroots level in the pilot sites do involve both men and women. Gender considerations are taken into account when conducting project activities and overall there is a strong involvement of women in project activities, particularly in activities supporting the development of alternative livelihoods. Out of the 656 livelihood initiatives supported by the project, many are for women such as tailoring, needlework, carpet weaving, mushroom production, cloth

weaving, homemade bakery, etc. FRWO has already been reporting some sex-disaggregated data for some activities; however, more would be needed and this information be transferred to PIRs.

Recommendation 11: It is recommended to showcase the RFLDL story through a technical and socio-economic impact assessment and a short video documentary for the general public to document the mobilization of communities in local sustainable development.

Issues to address

176. Part of the project strategy is to disseminate best practices and lessons learned (outcome 4a). Considering the success of the social mobilization activities which have been translated into a strong community involvement in local sustainable development, there are already several lessons learned and best practices to disseminate outside the project areas.

177. It is recommended to do a technical and socio-economic impact assessment during the last year of the project, documenting the technological and methodological approaches that have been applied by the project – including its social mobilization approach, the social and institutional impacts of the project and also the project impacts on biodiversity and rehabilitation of degraded lands. This publication should focus less on project related concepts such as evaluation of indicators, financial efficiency, targets met and objectives reached, and more on capturing knowledge built, documenting best practices and extracting key lessons learned. In addition, a short video documenting these lessons learned and best practices - including the development of VLPs/WLPs - is recommended and to be disseminated to the public at large through national and international media with English sub-titles¹⁶. Both would provide a good legacy of the project.

Recommendation 12: It is recommended to communicate the achievements of the project through the publication of technical papers in both Farsi and English languages and the participation to regional and global events, workshops and conferences.

Issues to address

178. There is excellent work being done under this project, worth being communicated/published. The project should encourage the authors to publish some of these results in appropriate technical journals in both Farsi and English languages. It includes the work that has been done in wind erosion monitoring, the social mobilization and the related sustainable community development fund (micro-credit scheme) and income generation activities. In addition, the project should support the communication of best practices and lessons learned throughout Iran but also regionally and internationally through the participation of the regional/global events such as the international day of desertification, workshops, conferences, etc.

¹⁶ It was noted that a first video clip was produced in 2015 and that a second one was planned. Despite that the Reviewer did not have a chance to review the first video, the recommendation is for a video that focuses on the impacts of the project, particularly on its social mobilization aspects and the development of VLPs/WLPs, which will be developed during the last year of the project. It should capture all best practices and lessons learned accumulated by the project.

Annex 1 MTR Terms of Reference (TORs)

MID-TERM REVIEW

FAO-GEF PROJET GCP/IRA/064/GFF “Rehabilitation of forest landscapes and degraded land with particular attention to saline soils and areas prone to wind erosion”

1. Introduction

The project “Rehabilitation of forest landscapes and degraded land with particular attention to saline soils and areas prone to wind erosion”, henceforth referred to as the Project, is a GEF-funded initiative. FAO is the GEF Agency of the project. The Forests, Rangelands and Watershed Organization (FRWO) of the Ministry of Jihad-e-Agriculture (MoJA) is the primary technical executing partner.

The Project Document established that an independent Mid-Term Review (MTR) will be undertaken at the end of the third year of the project to review progress and effectiveness of implementation in terms of achieving project objective, outcomes and outputs. Findings of this review will be incorporated as recommendations and will be instrumental for bringing improvement in the overall project design and execution strategy for the remaining period of the project’s term if necessary. FAO will arrange for the Mid-Term Review in consultation with the project team. The review will, inter alia:

- a) review the effectiveness, efficiency and timeliness of project implementation;
- b) analyze effectiveness of implementation and partnership arrangements;
- c) identify issues requiring decisions and remedial actions;
- d) identify lessons learned about project design, implementation and management;
- e) highlight technical achievements and lessons learned; and
- f) propose any mid-course corrections and/or adjustments to the implementation strategy as necessary.

These Terms of Reference (ToR) have been prepared in close consultation among all stakeholders, including the Project Coordination Unit, the FAO Representation in Iran, the FAO GEF Coordination Unit within FAO’s Investment Centre (TCID) and the FAO Office of Evaluation (OED).

The MTR has been postponed in several occasions and is now planned to take place during the final year of the project, early 2016 and be completed by the end of March 2016.

2. Background of the project

2.1 Brief description of the project

The project development objective is to remove barriers to participatory integrated sustainable land and forest management (SLFM) in the Islamic Republic of Iran by:

- (i) strengthening capacity of local communities, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives at the village and watershed scales;
- (ii) adoption and implementation of the defined plans including sustainable alternative livelihood options with socio-economic and environmental benefits sustaining ecosystem services and
- (iii) enhancing capacity at local and national levels to mainstream these approaches into national plans, policies and processes.

The project’s global environmental objective is to reverse and reduce land degradation and biodiversity loss and their subsequent negative impacts on ecosystem health, goods and services, through increased capacity to plan and implement participatory integrated SLFM initiatives based on practical solutions addressing immediate and long term socio-economic needs while ensuring sustainable management of natural resources and sustained ecosystem services on watershed scale.

The project has four components:

- Participatory integrated SLFM capacity development;
- Implementation of participatory integrated watershed and village level plans in selected pilot sites;
- Improving the policy and institutional environment for participatory integrated SLFM approach;
- Awareness raising and dissemination of best practices and lessons learnt; and Project management.

The project aims to achieve the following four main outcomes:

- Strengthened capacity of local communities, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives;
- Status of forests and range improved severity of wind erosion decreased and sustainable management of natural resources;
- Enhanced capacity at local and national levels to integrate SLFM into different institutions and across sectors, and
- Project managed and evaluated effectively and lessons learnt disseminated

2.2 Institutional arrangements

FAO is the GEF Agency of the project. The Forests, Rangelands and Watershed Organization (FRWO) of the Ministry of Jihad-e-Agriculture (MoJA) is the primary technical executing partner. FRWO, in collaboration with several national partners executes the project with administrative and technical support from FAO: this is done through Letters of Agreement between FAO and FRWO.

2.3 Budget and duration

The project has a GEF grant of USD 2,668,300 and co-financing from Government of USD 8,338,834 (total budget of USD 11,007,134).

The project has a duration of five years; it was declared operationally active on 1 July 2011 and should complete its activities on 30 June 2016.

3. Purpose of the mid-term review

The project is facing a number of operational limitations;

- Low delivery (35%) during 86% of the total duration (5 years); USD 1,720,896 are still available with only 6 months left in the lifespan of the project;
- Difficulties in maintaining administrative and operational capacities;
- Difficulties in managing implementation and partnerships.

The purpose of the MTR is to identify operational bottlenecks that hinder the project implementation and achievement of results. The MTR is expected to examine the project management and adaptive management, review the progress being made by the Project towards achievement of results, identify weaknesses and gaps, and recommend corrective actions as required, including on the extension of the project. In particular, the MTR will assess the project design (suggest changes in the project design if needed), the implementation strategy of the project and will propose short-term and long-term corrective actions.

4. Scope of the Mid-term Review

The focus of the MTR will be on process and implementation aspects. In particular, it will:

- assess the current relevance of the Project;
- review the effectiveness and efficiency of project implementation;
- assess the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of partnership arrangements;
- review the technical and operational capacities, the quality of the deliverables produced so far by the Project, including the work-plans;
- identify issues requiring decisions and remedial actions in relation to implementation, coordination mechanisms and institutional set-up;

In this context, the following features will be assessed:

- a. Relevance of the project to the Government priorities, GEF strategic programme and FAO strategic objectives.
- b. Robustness and realism of the project, including logic of causal relationships between inputs, activities, expected outputs, outcomes and impact (against specific and development objectives) and validity of indicators, if any; suggestions for revision of the project may be made if appropriate.
- c. Particular attention will be paid to the validity of assumptions and risks as initially identified in the project document and whether unforeseen issues are negatively affecting project implementation and progress towards objectives.
- d. Quality and realism of the project's design, including:
 - Duration;

- Stakeholder and beneficiary identification;
- Institutional set-up and management arrangements;
- Approach and methodology.
- e. Financial resources management, including:
 - Adequacy of budget allocations (GEF grant and co-financing) to achieve outputs and promote outcomes;
 - Rate of delivery and budget balance at the time of the review.
- f. Management and implementation:
 - Effectiveness of management, including quality and realism of work plans;
 - Efficiency and effectiveness of operations management;
 - Gaps and delays if any between planned and achieved outputs, the causes and consequences of delays and assessment of any remedial measures taken;
 - Efficiency in producing outputs;
 - Effectiveness of internal monitoring and review processes; this will also include information provided by the project through GEF Tracking Tools;
 - Efficiency and effectiveness of coordination and steering bodies, e.g. the Project Steering Committee (PSC);
 - Quality and quantity of administrative and technical support by FAO to the project, including the Lead Technical Unit, the Budget Holder and project Task Force;
- g. Extent to which the expected deliverables and outputs have been produced, their quality and timeliness, and the expected outcomes have been achieved against plans at the time of the evaluation, i.e. at completion of year two of implementation. The project log-frame gives an indication of the key outputs and outcomes to be assessed by the evaluation;
- h. Analysis of gender mainstreaming for gender equality.

Based on the above analysis, the review will draw specific conclusions and formulate short term and long term recommendations for any necessary remedial action by FAO and the Government to improve project performance and effectiveness.

5. Review methodology

The review will adopt a consultative, participative and transparent approach with internal (Project Coordination Unit, Project Steering Committee) and external stakeholders throughout the review process. Triangulation of evidence and information gathered will underpin the validation of evidence collected and its analysis, and will support conclusions and recommendations.

The review will make use of the following tools: review of existing reports, semi-structured interviews with key informants, stakeholders and workshops with Project Coordination Unit and key partners.

The review will include the following activities:

- i. A desk review of the project documents, outputs and monitoring reports (e.g. : annual work plans, project inception report, PSC reports and reports from other relevant meetings; project implementation review reports (PIR); six-monthly progress reports, backstopping missions reports from LTO), and other internal documents including consultants' and financial reports;
- ii. Interviews/face to face meetings with staff and partner institutions involved in project implementation, including consultants, LTO, the Budget Holder, the GEF Unit, the GEF OFP;
- iii. A meeting/workshop will be hold at the end of the mission with Project Coordination Unit, Project Steering Committee (FRWO, FAO, etc) in Tehran to share findings of the review process and assess corrected/ revised logframe, workplan, management arrangements and proposed changes and corrective actions.

6. Consultation and Participation process

The Project Coordination Unit will prepare all necessary information for the MTR. The information will be ready in December to enable the reviewer to receive this information/ documentation at the start date of the MTR consultancy, prior to initial meetings between the reviewer and Project executives.

The MTR will be done on close consultation and with the participation of the Project Coordination Unit and

all the key partners.

The reviewer will maintain close liaison with the FAO-GEF Coordination Unit, FAO Office of Evaluation, LTO, BH and the key project partners.

The reviewer will be free to discuss with the authorities concerned anything relevant to his/her assignment, but will not be authorized to make any commitment on behalf of the project partners, the donor or FAO.

The Terms of Reference of the review and the final draft report will be circulated among the project key partners before finalisation; comments and suggestions will be incorporated as deemed appropriate by the reviewer.

7. The review Report

The reviewer will prepare an outline of the report, based on the template provided in Annex 1, and discuss it with GEF Coordination Unit and OED early in the review process. The report will be prepared in English, with numbered paragraphs.

The review report will illustrate the evidence found that responds to the evaluation issues, questions and criteria listed in the TOR. It will include an executive summary. Supporting data and analysis should be annexed to the report when considered important to complement the main report.

The recommendations will be addressed to the different stakeholders and prioritized: they will be evidence-based, relevant, focused, clearly formulated and actionable.

The reviewer bears responsibility for submitting the final draft report to GEF Coordination Unit and OED by (date to be agreed), on which comments might be provided within one week. The revised report will be circulated to other FAO stakeholders, who within two additional weeks will submit to the reviewer comments and suggestions that the reviewer will include as appropriate in the final report (within one week of receipt of the comments).

Annexes to the review report will include, but are not limited to:

- Terms of reference for the review;
- Profile of the reviewer;
- List of documents reviewed;
- List of organizations and persons met during the review process;¹⁷
- Itinerary of the review mission;
- Data collection instruments (e.g. copies of questionnaires, surveys – if applicable)

8. Ratings

In order to facilitate comparison with routine reporting to GEF (in particular the Project Implementation Review-PIR report), the reviewer will rate the two items listed below, with comments:

- Progress towards achieving project objectives;
- Progress in Generating Project Outputs during Implementation.

The GEF six-point scale system will be used for the ratings: Highly Satisfactory (HS), Satisfactory (S), Marginally Satisfactory (MS), Marginally Unsatisfactory (MU), Unsatisfactory (U), and Highly Unsatisfactory (HU).

9. Reviewer

In consideration of the work-load and type of work required for this mid-term review, it was decided that a single reviewer could meet this Terms of Reference within the available time, provided that he/she has the required level of evaluation and process skills and experience.

The reviewer will have had no previous direct involvement in the formulation, implementation or backstopping of the project. He/she is responsible for conducting the review, applying the methodology,

participating in briefing and debriefing meetings and discussions, and preparing the final written report.

The reviewer is fully responsible for his/her independent report which may not necessarily reflect the views of FAO. A MTR report is not subject to technical clearance by FAO but to a quality clearance by OED.

The reviewer should have the following skills and competences:

- Demonstrated experience in project and process management, with technical understanding of forestry and land degradation and restoration;
- Demonstrated experience in the evaluation of GEF and FAO projects;
- University Degree and a minimum of 15 years of relevant professional experience; and
- Fluency in English.

10. MTR timetable

Box below contains the time-table for the whole process of the mid-term review. If adjustments will be required, these will be discussed and agreed among the reviewer and FAO-GEF Coordination Unit.

Time-table for the mid-term review (tentative) – Dates to be discussed and agreed with the counterpart and the reviewer)

Activity	Date
Finalization of TOR (including consultations with project partners)	End November 2015
Selection of Reviewer	End November 2015
The Project management group/ executants team will prepare all necessary summary reports and data (financial and technical) for provision to the reviewer.	Early December 2015
Background reading (home base); Skype briefing	December 2015
Mission in Iran (10 days) Meetings with key partners End-of-mission workshop to share key findings and assess logframe, workplan, management arrangement and corrective actions.	Early 2016
Draft report provided to GEF Coordination Unit	February 2016
Comments by GEF Coordination Unit	March 2016
Finalization of report	March 2016
Circulation of final draft to other stakeholders	March 2016

Annex 2 Review Matrix

The review matrix below served as a general guide for the review. It provided directions for the review; particularly the collect of relevant data. It was used as a basis for interviewing people and reviewing programme documents. It also provided a basis for structuring the review report as a whole.

Evaluated component	Sub-Question	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
Review criteria: Relevance - How did the Project relate to the main objectives of GEF, FAO and to the environment and development priorities of Iran?				
<i>Is the Project relevant to GEF and UNCCD objectives?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How does the Project support the related strategic priorities of the GEF and of the UNCCD? ▪ Were GEF criteria for Project identification adequate in view of actual needs? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Level of coherence between project objectives and those of the GEF and of the UNCCD ▪ Extent to which the project is actually implemented in line with incremental cost argument 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project documents ▪ GEF policies and strategies ▪ GEF web site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Documents analyses ▪ Interviews with government officials and other partners
<i>Is the Project relevant to FAO objectives?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How does the Project support the objectives of FAO in this sector? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Existence of a clear relationship between project objectives and regional programme objectives of FAO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project documents ▪ FAO strategies and programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Documents analyses ▪ Interviews with government officials and other partners
<i>Is the Project relevant to national priorities and development objectives of Iran?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How does the Project support the development objectives of Iran? ▪ How country-driven is the Project? ▪ Does the Project adequately take into account national realities, both in terms of institutional framework and programming, in its design and its implementation? ▪ To what extent were national partners involved in the design of the Project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Degree to which the project support national environmental and development objectives ▪ Degree of coherence between the project and national priorities, policies and strategies ▪ Appreciation from national stakeholders with respect to adequacy of project design and implementation to national realities and existing capacities? ▪ Level of involvement of government officials and other partners into the project ▪ Coherence between needs expressed by national stakeholders and FAO-GEF criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project documents ▪ National policies, strategies and programmes ▪ Key government officials and other partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Documents analyses ▪ Interviews with government officials and other partners
<i>Does the Project address the needs of target beneficiaries?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How does the Project support the needs of target beneficiaries? ▪ Is the implementation of the Project inclusive of all relevant Stakeholders? ▪ Are local beneficiaries and stakeholders adequately involved in Project design and implementation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strength of the link between project expected results and the needs of target beneficiaries ▪ Degree of involvement and inclusiveness of beneficiaries and stakeholders in project design and implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Beneficiaries and stakeholders ▪ Needs assessment studies ▪ Project documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Document analysis ▪ Interviews with beneficiaries and stakeholders

Evaluated component	Sub-Question	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
<i>Is the Project internally coherent in its design?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Is there a direct and strong link between project expected results (log frame) and the Project design (in terms of Project components, choice of partners, structure, delivery mechanism, scope, budget, use of resources etc.)? ■ Is the length of the Project conducive to achieve project outcomes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Level of coherence between project expected results and project design internal logic ■ Level of coherence between project design and project implementation approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Program and project documents ■ Key project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Document analysis ■ Key Interviews
<i>How is the Project relevant in light of other donors?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Does the Project remain relevant in terms of areas of focus and targeting of key activities in the context of other donors? ■ How do GEF-funds help to fill gaps (or give additional stimulus) that are crucial but are not covered by other donors? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Degree to which program was coherent and complementary to other donor programming in Iran ■ List of programs and funds in which the future developments, ideas and partnerships of the project are eligible? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Other Donors' policies and programming documents ■ Other Donor representatives ■ Project documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Documents analyses ■ Interviews with other Donors
Future directions for similar Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What lessons have been learnt and what changes could have been made to the Project in order to strengthen the alignment between the project and the Partners' priorities and areas of focus? ■ How could the project better target and address priorities and development challenges of targeted beneficiaries? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Data collected throughout the review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Data analysis
Review criteria: Effectiveness – To what extent are the expected outcomes of the Project being achieved?				
<i>How is the Project effective in achieving its expected outcomes?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Is the project being effective in achieving its expected outcomes? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strengthened capacity of local communities in 45 pilot villages, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives; ○ Status of forests and range improved severity of wind erosion decreased and natural resources managed sustainably on 75,000ha of land; ○ Enhanced capacity at local and national levels to integrate SLFM across different institutions and sectors; ○ Project managed, monitored and evaluated effectively and best practices and lessons learnt disseminated widely with a view to their replication in other areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ New methodologies, skills and knowledge ■ Change in capacity for information management: Knowledge acquisition and sharing; Effective data gathering, methods and procedures for reporting. ■ Change in capacity for awareness raising <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Stakeholder involvement and government awareness ○ Change in local stakeholder behavior ■ Change in capacity in policy making and planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Policy reform for sustainable land and forest management and the restoration of degraded land and forest ○ Legislation/regulation change to improve the sustainable management of land and forest and the restoration of degraded land and degraded forest ○ Development of national and local strategies and plans supporting sustainable management of land and forest and the restoration of degraded land and forest ■ Change in capacity in implementation and enforcement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Design and implementation of risk assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Project documents ■ Key stakeholders including FAO, Project Team, Representatives of Gov. and other Partners ■ Research findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Documents analysis ■ Meetings with main Project Partners ■ Interviews with project beneficiaries

Evaluated component	Sub-Question	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Implementation of national and local strategies and action plans through adequate institutional frameworks and their maintenance ○ Monitoring, evaluation and promotion of pilots ▪ Change in capacity in mobilizing resources ○ Leverage of resources ○ Human resources ○ Appropriate practices ○ Mobilization of advisory services 		
<i>How is risk and risk mitigation being managed?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How well are risks and assumptions being managed? ▪ What is the quality of risk mitigation strategies developed? Are these sufficient? ▪ Are there clear strategies for risk mitigation related with long-term sustainability of the project? ▪ Are there unforeseen issues that are negatively affecting project implementation and progress towards objectives? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Completeness of risk identification and assumptions during project planning ▪ Quality of existing information systems in place to identify emerging risks and other issues? ▪ Quality of risk mitigations strategies developed and followed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project documents and evaluations/reviews ▪ FAO, Project Staff and Project Partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Document analysis ▪ Interviews
Future directions for similar Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What lessons have been learnt for the project to achieve its outcomes? ▪ What changes could have been made (if any) to the design of the project in order to improve the achievement of the project's expected results? ▪ How could the project be more effective in achieving its results? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Data collected throughout the review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Data analysis
Review criteria: <i>Efficiency</i> - How efficiently is the Project implemented?				
<i>Is Project support channeled in an efficient way?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is adaptive management used or needed to ensure efficient resource use? ▪ Are the project logical framework and work plans and any changes made to them used as management tools during implementation? ▪ Is the project management structure clear, coherent and efficient? ▪ Is the technical and administrative support provided by FAO efficient? ▪ Are accounting and financial systems in place adequate for project management and be able to produce accurate and timely financial information? ▪ What is the quality and realism of work plans? ▪ What is the quality and efficiency of the M&E system in place to monitor the progress of the project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Availability and quality of financial and progress reports ▪ Timeliness and adequacy of reporting provided ▪ Level of discrepancy between planned and utilized financial expenditures ▪ Planned vs. actual funds leveraged ▪ Cost in view of results achieved compared to costs of similar projects from other organizations ▪ Adequacy of project choices in view of existing context, infrastructure and cost ▪ Quality of RBM reporting (progress reporting, monitoring and evaluation) ▪ Occurrence of change in project design/ implementation approach (i.e. restructuring) when needed to improve project efficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project documents and evaluations/reviews ▪ FAO, Representatives of Gov. and Project Staff ▪ Beneficiaries and Project partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Document analysis ▪ Key Interviews

Evaluated component	Sub-Question	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are progress reports produced accurately, timely and responded to reporting requirements including adaptive management changes? ▪ Is project implementation as cost effective as originally proposed (planned vs. actual) ▪ Is the leveraging of funds (co-financing) happening as planned? ▪ Are financial resources utilized efficiently? Could financial resources be used more efficiently? ▪ What is the rate of delivery and budget balance? ▪ How is RBM used during project implementation? ▪ Are there an institutionalized or informal feedback or dissemination mechanisms to ensure that findings, lessons learned and recommendations pertaining to project design and implementation effectiveness are shared among project stakeholders, FAO and GEF Staff and other relevant organizations for ongoing project adjustment and improvement? ▪ What is the visibility of the project (leaflets, video, news, etc.)? ▪ Does the project mainstream gender considerations into its implementation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Existence, quality and use of M&E, feedback and dissemination mechanism to share findings, lessons learned and recommendation on effectiveness of project design. ▪ Cost associated with delivery mechanism and management structure compare to alternatives ▪ Gender disaggregated data in project documents 		
<i>How efficient are partnership arrangements for the Project?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To what extent partnerships/linkages between institutions/organizations are encouraged and supported? ▪ Which partnerships/linkages are facilitated? Which one can be considered sustainable? ▪ What is the level of efficiency of cooperation and collaboration arrangements? (between local actors, FAO/GEF and relevant government entities) ▪ Which methods are successful or not and why? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Specific activities conducted to support the development of cooperative arrangements between partners, ▪ Examples of supported partnerships ▪ Evidence that particular partnerships/linkages will be sustained ▪ Types/quality of partnership cooperation methods utilized 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project documents and evaluations/reviews ▪ Project Partners ▪ Beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Document analysis ▪ Interviews
<i>Does the Project efficiently utilize local capacity in implementation?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is an appropriate balance struck between utilization of international expertise as well as local capacity? ▪ Does the Project take into account local capacity in design and implementation of the project? ▪ Is there an effective collaboration with scientific institutions with competence in SLFM? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Proportion of total expertise utilized taken from Recipient Countries ▪ Number/quality of analyses done to assess local capacity potential and absorptive capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project documents and evaluations/reviews ▪ FAO, Project Team and Project partners ▪ Beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Document analysis ▪ Interviews
Future directions for similar Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What lessons can be learnt from the project on efficiency? ▪ How could the project have more efficiently addressed its key priorities (in terms of management structures and procedures, partnerships arrangements etc...)? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Data collected throughout the review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Data analysis

Evaluated component	Sub-Question	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What changes could have been made (if any) to the project in order to improve its efficiency? 			
Review criteria: Sustainability - Are the initiatives and results of the Project allowing for continued benefits?				
<i>Are sustainability issues adequately integrated in Project design?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are sustainability issues integrated into the design and implementation of the project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence/Quality of sustainability strategy Evidence/Quality of steps taken to address sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations/reviews FAO, project staff and project Partners Beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews
<i>Financial Sustainability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the project adequately address financial and economic sustainability issues? Are the recurrent costs after project completion sustainable? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level and source of future financial support to be provided to relevant sectors and activities after Project end? Evidence of commitments from international partners, governments or other stakeholders to financially support relevant sectors of activities after Project end Level of recurrent costs after completion of project and funding sources for those recurrent costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations/reviews FAO, project staff and project Partners Beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews
<i>Organizations arrangements and continuation of activities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are results of efforts made during the project implementation period well assimilated by organizations and their internal systems and procedures? Is there evidence that project partners will continue their activities beyond project support? What degree is there of local ownership of initiatives and results? Were appropriate 'champions' being identified and/or supported? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degree to which project activities and results have been taken over by local counterparts or institutions /organizations Level of financial support to be provided to relevant sectors and activities by in-country actors after project end Number/quality of champions identified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations/reviews FAO, project staff and project Partners Beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews
<i>Enabling Environment</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are laws, policies and frameworks addressed through the project, in order to address sustainability of key initiatives and reforms? Are the necessary related capacities for lawmaking and enforcement built? What is the level of political commitment to build on the results of the project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efforts to support the development of relevant laws and policies State of enforcement and law making capacity Evidences of commitment by the political class through speeches, enactment of laws and resource allocation to priorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations/reviews FAO, project staff and project Partners Beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document analysis Interviews
<i>Institutional and individual capacity building</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the capacity in place at the national, provincial and local levels adequate to ensure sustainability of results achieved to date? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elements in place in those different management functions, at the appropriate levels (national, provincial and local) in terms of adequate structures, strategies, systems, skills, incentives and interrelationships with other key actors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents and evaluations/reviews FAO, Project staff and project Partners Beneficiaries Capacity assessments available, if any 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviews Documentation review

Evaluated component	Sub-Question	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Method
<i>Social and political sustainability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does the project contribute to key building blocks for social and political sustainability? ▪ Does the project contribute to local Stakeholders' acceptance of the new practices? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Example of contributions to sustainable political and social change in support of SLFM reform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project documents and evaluations/reviews ▪ FAO, project staff and project Partners ▪ Beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interviews ▪ Documentation review
<i>Replication</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Are project activities and results replicated elsewhere and/or scaled up? ▪ What is the project contribution to replication or scaling up of innovative practices or mechanisms that support sustainable management of land and forest and the restoration of degraded land and forest? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number/quality of replicated initiatives ▪ Number/quality of replicated innovative initiatives ▪ Volume of additional investment leveraged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Other donor programming documents ▪ Beneficiaries ▪ FAO, project staff and project Partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Document analysis ▪ Interviews
<i>Challenges to sustainability of the Project</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are the main challenges that may hinder sustainability of efforts? ▪ Have any of these been addressed through project management? ▪ What could be the possible measures to further contribute to the sustainability of efforts achieved with the project? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Challenges in view of building blocks of sustainability as presented above ▪ Recent changes which may present new challenges to the Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project documents and evaluations/reviews ▪ Beneficiaries ▪ FAO, project staff and project Partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Document analysis ▪ Interviews
Future directions for the Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Which areas/arrangements under the project show the strongest potential for lasting long-term results? ▪ What are the key challenges and obstacles to the sustainability of results of the project initiatives that must be directly and quickly addressed? ▪ How can the experience and good project practices influence the strategies for sustainable management of land and forest and the restoration of degraded land and forests? ▪ Are national decision-making institutions (Parliament, Government etc.) in Iran ready to improve their sustainable management of land and forest and the restoration of degraded land and forests? 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Data collected throughout the review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Data analysis

Annex 3 List of Documents Consulted

- Department of Environment, March 2009, National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan of the I.R. of Iran
- Department of Environment, UNDP, 2016, Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs)
- Department of Environment, UNDP, GEF, October 2010, Fourth National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity
- FAO, 2011, Manual Section on LOAs
- FAO, 2011, TORs CTA
- FAO, 2016, Operational Modalities – Operational Partners Implementation Modality
- FAO, April 20, 2011, Memorandum – Programme and Project Review Committee Review of RFLDL
- FAO, copies of LOAs
- FAO, Expenditure Transaction Listing (Trust Funds) – Period 2011-11 to 2019-13
- FAO, FAO Handbook – Project Cycle
- FAO, FAO Handbook – Projects - Roles and Responsibilities
- FAO-GEF, FAO Project Mid-Term Review/Supervision Report
- FAO, GEF, Project Document – RFLDL
- FAO, June 2013, Reviewed Strategic Framework
- FAO, LTO's Reports
- FAO, TORs M&E
- FAO, TORs International Consultant (retired) in “Watershed/Village management techniques and measures: planning and implementation”
- FRWO, 2015, RFLDL at a Glance
- FRWO, 2004, The National Action Programme to Combat Desertification and Mitigate the Effects of Drought of Islamic Republic of Iran
- FRWO, Report - Sub-region Workshop on the Alignment of National Action Programme for UNCCD country Parties of the Northeast, Southeast and South Asia sub-regions, Tehran, Iran
- GEF, 2007, PIF – RFLDL
- GEF, 2011, Request for Endorsement/Approval of RFLDL
- GEF, 2014, GEF-6 Programming Directions
- GEF, CEO Endorsement Letter
- GEF, GEF Secretariat Review of RFLDL
- GEF, Land Degradation (Desertification and Deforestation) Strategy
- GEF, UNDP, FRWO, 2008, PIF: Institutional Strengthening and Coherence for Integrated Natural Resources Management
- Globe, Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Climate Change Legislation in Iran – An excerpt from the 2015 Global Climate Legislation Study – A review of Climate Change Legislation in 99 Countries
- H. R. Azimzadeh, A report on the activities implemented for the Establishment Wind Erosion Monitoring Stations and Analysis of Wind Erosion Data of RFLDL, FAO Project
- I.R. of Iran, The Fifth National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity

Mehdi Ghorbani, Political action plan monitoring and evaluation of social networking in empowering local communities and land management

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Co-financing Letter

National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan Secretariat, December 2000, The First National Report for the Convention on Biological Diversity

RFLDL, 2015, TORs CTA

RFLDL, Annual Work Plans: 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016 (draft)

RFLDL, Desert Affairs Bureau, July 2015, The Concise Manual for Preparing Watershed & Village Integrated Development Plan with focus on Natural Resources

RFLDL, FRWO, Analysis and Evaluation of Social-Policy Networks in Sustainable Rural Development

RFLDL, FRWO, GEF, FAO, VRMDC and WRMDC Formation Mechanism

RFLDL, January 31, 2016, Project Progress Briefing Meeting (Sep. 2011- Dec. 2015) - South Khorasan, Sarayan

RFLDL, January 2016, Project Progress Kerman Province

RFLDL, July 2012, Inception Report

RFLDL, List of Members for PSC, PPC and TC

RFLDL, Project Implementation Review (PIR): 2013, 2014 and 2015

RFLDL, Progress Reports (quarterly and semi-annually)

RFLDL, PSC Minutes – 1st meeting (March 3, 2013) and 2nd meeting (April 29, 2015)

Tuba Rezayi Givshad, July 2014, Summary of Human Development Index (HDI) Report (Case study of Carbon Sequestration Project)

UN, September 27, 2011, UNDAF – The I.R. of Iran 2012-2016

UNDP, Carbon Sequestration Project Highlights

UNDP, Country Programme 2012-2016

UNDP, GEF, FRWO, Social Mobilization Manual for Dryland Resource Management – CSP Iran

UNDP, Success Story: The Carbon Sequestration Project

_____, 2015, Budget Monitoring and Budget Revisions (Operational Guidelines)

_____, 2015, Human Resources – Casual Labor (Operational Guidelines)

_____, 2015, Human Resources, National PSA and National Project Personnel (NPPs) (Operational Guidelines)

_____, 2015, The Work Plan and Work Plan Revisions (Operational Guidelines)

_____, April 2010, CSP - Project Document Addendum

_____, A fifth five-year development program - Islamic Republic of Iran

_____, Action Plan for Implementing the Programme of Work on Protected Areas of the Convention on Biological Diversity

_____, Appendix 4: FAO-GEF Project Cycle Procedures

_____, Birjand Development Plan

_____, BTO Reports

_____, December 2010, Completion Report of PPG Phase of RFLDL

_____, FAO Project Cycle and Strategic Framework: Basic principles and guidelines

_____, General policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran about "natural resources"

_____, Iran Vision 2025

_____, Sixth Development Plan

_____, Social mobilization and empowerment in the local communities

_____, The Strategies, Goals, Policies, opportunities & obligations for combating desertification in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Annex 4 Discussion Guide

Note: This was only a discussion guide for the Interviewer; it is a simplified version of the review matrix presented in Annex 3 above. All questions were not asked to each meeting/interview; it was a reminder for the Reviewer on the type of information required to complete the review exercise and a guide to prepare the semi-structured interviews.

I. RELEVANCE - *How does the Project relate to the main objectives of the GEF, FAO and to the environment and development priorities of Iran?*

- I.1. Is the project relevant to the GEF and UNCCD objectives?
- I.2. Is the project relevant to FAO objectives?
- I.3. Is the project relevant to national priorities and development objectives of Iran?
- I.4. Does the project address the needs of target beneficiaries?
- I.5. Is the project internally coherent in its design?
- I.6. How is the project relevant in light of other donors?

Future directions for similar projects

- I.7. What lessons have been learnt and what changes could have been made to the project in order to strengthen the alignment between the project and the Partners' priorities and areas of focus?
- I.8. How could the project better target and address priorities and development challenges of targeted beneficiaries?

II. EFFECTIVENESS – *To what extent are the expected outcomes of the project being achieved?*

- II.1. How is the Project effective in achieving its expected outcomes?
 - Strengthened capacity of local communities in 45 pilot villages, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives;
 - Status of forests and range improved severity of wind erosion decreased and natural resources managed sustainably on 75,000ha of land;
 - Enhanced capacity at local and national levels to integrate SLFM across different institutions and sectors;
 - Project managed, monitored and evaluated effectively and best practices and lessons learnt disseminated widely with a view to their replication in other areas.
- II.2. How is risk and risk mitigation being managed?

Future directions for similar projects

- II.3. What lessons have been learnt for the project to achieve its outcomes?
- II.4. What changes could have been made (if any) to the design of the project in order to improve the achievement of project' expected results?
- II.5. How could the project be more effective in achieving its results?

III. EFFICIENCY - *How efficiently is the project implemented?*

- III.1. Is adaptive management used or needed to ensure efficient resource use?
- III.2. Are the project logical framework and work plans and any changes made to them used as management tools during implementation?
- III.3. Are accounting and financial systems in place adequate for project management and be able to produce accurate and timely financial information?
- III.4. What is the quality and realism of work plans?
- III.5. What is the quality and efficiency of the M&E system in place to monitor the progress of the project?
- III.6. Are progress reports produced accurately, timely and responded to reporting requirements including adaptive management changes?
- III.7. Is project implementation as cost effective as originally proposed (planned vs. actual)
- III.8. Is the leveraging of funds (co-financing) happening as planned?
- III.9. Are financial resources utilized efficiently? Could financial resources be used more efficiently?
- III.10. What is the rate of delivery and budget balance?
- III.11. How is RBM used during project implementation?
- III.12. Are there an institutionalized or informal feedback or dissemination mechanisms to ensure that findings, lessons learned and recommendations pertaining to project design and implementation

effectiveness are shared among project stakeholders, FAO and GEF Staff and other relevant organizations for ongoing project adjustment and improvement?

- III.13. Does the project mainstream gender considerations into its implementation?
- III.14. To what extent partnerships/linkages between institutions/organizations are encouraged and supported?
- III.15. Which partnerships/linkages are facilitated? Which one can be considered sustainable?
- III.16. What is the level of efficiency of cooperation and collaboration arrangements? (between local actors, FAO/GEF and relevant government entities)
- III.17. Which methods are successful or not and why?
- III.18. Is an appropriate balance struck between utilization of international expertise as well as local capacity?
- III.19. Does the Project take into account local capacity in design and implementation of the project?
- III.20. Is there an effective collaboration with scientific institutions with competence in SLFM?

Future directions for the project

- III.21. What lessons can be learnt from the project on efficiency?
- III.22. How could the project have more efficiently addressed its key priorities (in terms of management structures and procedures, partnerships arrangements etc...)?
- III.23. What changes could have been made (if any) to the project in order to improve its efficiency?

IV. SUSTAINABILITY - *Are the initiatives and results of the project allowing for continued benefits?*

- IV.1. Are sustainability issues adequately integrated in project design?
- IV.2. Does the project adequately address financial and economic sustainability issues?
- IV.3. Is there evidence that project partners will continue their activities beyond project support?
- IV.4. Are laws, policies and frameworks being addressed through the project, in order to address sustainability of key initiatives and reforms?
- IV.5. Is the capacity in place at the national and local levels adequate to ensure sustainability of results achieved to date?
- IV.6. Does the project contribute to key building blocks for social and political sustainability?
- IV.7. Are project activities and results being replicated elsewhere and/or scaled up?
- IV.8. What are the main challenges that may hinder sustainability of efforts?

Future directions for the project

- IV.9. Which areas/arrangements under the project show the strongest potential for lasting long-term results?
- IV.10. What are the key challenges and obstacles to the sustainability of results of project initiatives that must be directly and quickly addressed?

----- **End** -----

Annex 5 Mission Agenda

Mission Agenda
GCP/IRA/064/GFF – MTR Mission
29th Jan to 11th Feb 2016

Arrival	Date/Time: Saturday, 30 January 2016 - 00:50
Departure	Date/Time: Thursday 11 Feb 2016 – 06:20
Hotel	Name, Address, Contact details to be certified by FAOIR
Focal Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ FAO: Soheil Saemian(Mr), Project Operation Officer Cell Phone: +989123809829 ➤ National counterpart: Mohsen Abdolhoseini /Senior expert of RFLDL project
Airport pick up	FAOIR Driver

Purpose of Mission	Mid Term Review – GEF Project
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Programme/Agenda				
Time	Agenda Item	Participants	Venue	Remarks
1st day - Saturday, 30 Jan 2016				
10:00 – 11:00	Briefing Meeting with FAOR	Mr. Serge Nakouzi, FAOR	FAO Office	To be coordinated with FAO
11:00 – 12:00	FAO PMU meeting	Ms. Firouzeh Radmehr Ms. Melina Seyfollahzadeh Mr. Soheil Saemian	FAO Office	To be coordinated with FAO
12:00 – 12:30	Meeting with FAOIR M&E Consultant	Melina Seyfollahzadeh	FAO Office	To be coordinated with FAO
12:30- 1300	Lunch & moving to the FRWO office		FAO Office	To be coordinated with FRWO
13:30 – 14:30	Introduction meeting with NPD	Mr. Kargar /NPD Mr. Pouyafar	FRWO Office	To be coordinated with FRWO
14:30 – 15:30	Introduction meeting with NPC	Mr. Abdolhosseini	FRWO Office	To be coordinated with FRWO
2nd day - Sunday, 31 Jan 2016				
9:00-12:00	The head of IWM in FRWO	Mr. Kouchpide		

Programme/Agenda				
Time	Agenda Item	Participants	Venue	Remarks
12:00- 13:00	UNLSA	Mr. Vakilbahrami		
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch		FRWO	
13:30 – 14:00	Meeting with RFLDL Team (MTR methodology to be introduced to the Team)	Mr. Pouyafar, Mr. Yousefi, Mr. Fasihzadeh, Mr. Habili, Mr. Abdolhosseini, Ms. Ebrahimi	FRWO	To be coordinated with FRWO
14:00 – 14:45	Presentation by Provincial Project Manager of South Khorasan (PPM)/RFLDL Team	Mr. Yousefi	FRWO	To be coordinated with FRWO
14:45 – 16:30	Presentation by Provincial Project Manager of Kerman (PPM)/RFLDL Team	Mr. Fasihzadeh	FRWO	To be coordinated with FRWO
3rd day - Monday, 1 Feb 2016				
11:00 – 13:00	Director General, Planning and Budgeting Bureau of FRWO	Mr. Koroush Ghanbari	FRWO	To be coordinated with FRWO
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch			
14:00 – 14:30	Meeting with National Consultant interview(Social Mobilization)	Mr. Shafiee	FRWO	To be coordinated with FRWO
14:30-15:15	Meeting with Monitoring of Wind Erosion	Dr. Azimzadeh	FRWO	To be coordinated with FRWO
15:15 – 16:00	Meeting with National Consultant interview(Biodiversity)	Mr. Fahimi	FRWO	To be coordinated with FRWO
4th day - Tuesday, 2 Feb 2016				
9:00 – 10:00	Meeting with UNDP – GEF	Mr. Mehdi Kamyab Mr. Saeid Ferdowsi Mr. Ali Nazaridoust Mr. Ali Farzin	UNDP	To be coordinated by FAO
11:00- 11:30	Meeting with Director General - Bureau of International Affairs and Specialized Organizations Ministry of Jihad-e-	Mr. Fathi	BIASO	To be coordinated with FRWO

Programme/Agenda				
Time	Agenda Item	Participants	Venue	Remarks
	Agriculture (BIASO)			
12:30 - 13:30	Lunch		FRWO Office	
18:30	Flight to Kerman			
22:30	Traveling by road to Bam and check in the Hotel			
5th day - Wednesday, 3 Feb 2016				
6:30	Breakfast			
7:45	Traveling by road to Rigan			
8:45	Meeting with governor and provincial officials	Mr. Baqery: Governor Mr. Barany: The head of Natural Resources and watershed management organization of Rigan		
10:00	Site visit of plantation site of Hamid Abad			
10:50	Traveling to Dehreza by road- site visit of school inaugurated by Mr. Nakuzi, Wind Erosion Monitoring and Evaluation Station, Rural garden, watershed management activities, artificial forest,	Dehreza village		
12:20	Traveling to Mohammad Abad Chah Malek by road and meeting with local communities and VRMDCs members, and also visit of windbreakers established around the gardens	Mohammad Abad Chah MAlek village		
13:40	Traveling to RostamAbad by road and visit of alternative livelihood activities, date palm farm threatening by shifting sand, seedling production	Rostam Abad Village		
16:30	Traveling to Bam - Lunch			
20:00	Traveling to Kerman			
6th day – Thursday, 4 Feb 2016				
7:30	Breakfast			
8:35	Meeting with General Director of Natural	Mr. Rajabi zadeh		

Programme/Agenda				
Time	Agenda Item	Participants	Venue	Remarks
	Resources and watershed management organization- Kerman Province			
9:35	Meeting with trade chamber- Kerman Province on New energy technologies and school established by charity activities	Mr. JalalPour		
10:20	Meeting with DOE General Director	Mr. Safarzadeh		
11:05	Meeting with raining Deputy of vocational and technical organization- Kerman province	Mr. Jahangiri		
12:00	Visit of GanjALiKhan historical monument			
13:35	Lunch			
7th day Friday, 5 Feb 2016				
	Traveling to Birjand by Road		Birjand	To be coordinated with FRWO
	Check in Jahangardi Hotel- Birjand		Birjand	
Weekend				
8th day - Saturday, 6 Feb 2016				
9:00 – 10:00	Meeting with PPM	Mr. Yusefi	Birjand	To be coordinated with FRWO
10:00 – 11:00	Meeting with General Director of Natural Resources and Watershed Management Organization of South Khorasan	Mr. Sharifi	Birjand	To be coordinated with FRWO
11:30 – 12:15	Meeting with General Director of Rural Development of Province	Mr. Shafiee	Birjand	To be coordinated with FRWO
12:30-13:15	Meeting with Deputy of Development of Province	Mr. Nakhaee Nejad		
13:30 – 14:30	Lunch		Birjand	
15:00 – 16:30	Traveling by road to Sarayan		Sarayan	To be coordinated with FRWO
18:00 – 19:00	Meeting with locals		Sarayan	To be coordinated with FRWO

Programme/Agenda				
Time	Agenda Item	Participants	Venue	Remarks
9th day - Sunday , 7 Feb 2016				
8:00 – 20:00	Field Visit and meeting with VRMDC s and distric governor	Alternative livelihoods activities, training activities, and rural developmental activities	Sarayan	To be coordinated with FRWO
10th day - Monday , 8 Feb 2016				
07:30 – 10:00	Meeting with project stakeholder	Governor, NRWM , Agriculture Jihad, Technical and Vocational Training organization, etc.	Birjand	To be coordinated with FRWO
10:00 – 11:00	Site visit of rehabilitation activities		Birjand	To be coordinated with FRWO
11:15 – 13:00	Traveling to Birjand by road		Birjand	To be coordinated with FRWO
13:30 – 14:30	Lunch		Birjand	
			Birjand	To be coordinated with FRWO
17:00 – 19:00	Flying back to Tehran from Birjand		Birjand Tehran	No flight available on Sunday afternoon
11th day - Tuesday, 9 Feb 2016				
09:00 – 12:00	Meeting and interviewing with Consultant	Dr. Ghorbani (Participatory Natural Recourse Management Researcher)	DAB	To be coordinated with FRWO
12:30 - 13:30	Lunch		FRWO Office	To be coordinated with FRWO
12th day - Wednesday, 10 Feb 2016				
13:30 – 17:00	Debriefing Workshop with, FRWO-DAB, key partners , FAO and other relevant Stakeholders RFLDL Project team	FRWO FAO Key Partners	To be coordinated with FRWO	To be coordinated with FRWO
13:00 – 16:00	Reviewing the collected Data and information		FAO Office	with FRWO
13th day - Thursday, 11 Feb 2016				

Programme/Agenda				
Time	Agenda Item	Participants	Venue	Remarks
Departure: 06:20 am				

Annex 6 List of Stakeholders and Institutions Interviewed

Title	Name	Position / Institution
Mr.	Serge Nakouzi	FAO Representative in Iran
Ms.	Firouzeh Radmehr	Assistant FAO Representative
Ms.	Melina Seyfollahzadeh	M&E Consultant, FAO
Mr.	Soheil Saemian	Project Operations Officer
Mr.	Mehdi Ansari	Communication Expert
Mr.	Abbas Kargar	National Project Director (NPD), Desert Affaires Bureau (DAB), FRWO
Mr.	Amir Masoud Pouyafar	Deputy National Project Director
Mr.	Mohsen Abdolhosseini	Senior Expert
Mr.	Noorollah Kouchpide	Head of IWM Project, FRWO
Mr.	Sina Vakilbahrani	UNLSA
Mr.	Amin Fasihzadeh	Provincial Project Manager (PPM)
Mr.	Ramazan Samare Habili	EX- PPM and current Senior Technical Expert
Ms.	Mahshid Ebrahimi	Project Assistant
Mr.	Mohsen Yusefi	Provincial Project Manager (PPM), South Khorasan
Mr.	Koroush Ghanbari	Director General, Planning and Budgeting Bureau, FRWO
Mr.	Mehdi Shafiee	Social Mobilization Expert
Dr.	H. R. Azimzadeh	Wind Erosion Expert, Yazd University
Mr.	Hadi Fahimi	National Consultant (Biodiversity)
Mr.	Saeid Ferdowsi	Head, Health and Development Cluster, UNDP
Mr.	Mohammad Ali Farzin	Head, Inclusive Growth and Development Cluster, UNDP
Mr.	Hooman Fathi	Director General, Bureau of International Affairs and Specialized Organizations, Ministry of Jihad-e-Agriculture (BIASO)

Title	Name	Position / Institution
Mr.	Amin Baqery	Governor of Rigan
Mr.	Mohammad Motahhari Nia	Deputy Governor, Planning and Construction, Rigan
Mr.	Behzad Barany	Head, Natural Resources and Watershed Management Organization, Rigan
	Communities	Hamid Abad village
	Communities	Dehreza village
	Communities	Mohammad Abad Chah MAlek village
	Communities	Rostam Abad Village
Mr.	Mehdi Rajabi zadeh	General Director, Natural Resources and Watershed Management Organization, Kerman Province
Mr.	Mehdi Irani Kermani	Trade Chamber of Commerce, Kerman Province Charity activities (school)
Mr.	Masoud Rashidinejad	Trade Chamber of Commerce, Kerman Province Charity activities (school)
Mr.	Mahmoud Safarzadeh	General Director, DOE, Kerman Province
Mr.	Moitaba Nik Tabe	Technical Deputy, DOE, Kerman Province
Mr.	Afshin Shahraki	Deputy, Vocational and Technical Organization, Kerman Province
Ms.	Mahnaz Najib zadeh	Educational Deputy, Vocational and Technical Organization, Kerman Province
Mr.	Habibollah Sharifi	General Director, Natural Resources and Watershed Management Organization, South Khorasan Province
Mr.	Mohammad Shafiee	General Director, Rural Development, South Khorasan Province
Mr.	Ahmad Kharazmi	Advisor in Community Involvement , General Director, Rural Development, South Khorasan Province
Mr.	Homayoon Nakhaee Nejad	Urban Development Deputy Provincial Governor, South Khorasan Province
Mr.	Majid Bastanifar	Governor, Se Qale District
Mr.	Ali Khatib	Mayor of Se Qale
Mr.	Hadi Kafshi	Religious Leader of Se Qale
Mr.	Mohammad Karimi	Governor, Sarayan
Mr.	Amanollah Moradi	Head, Natural Resources and Watershed Management Organization, Sarayan

Title	Name	Position / Institution
Mr.	Hossein Khoshayand	Director General, Technical and Vocational Training Organization, South Khorasan Province
Mr.	Abolfazl Hagh Parast	Educational Deputy, Technical and Vocational Training Organization South Khorasan
Dr.	Mehdi Ghorbani	Participatory Natural Recourse Management Researcher, Tehran University
Mr.	Majid Bizmark	Director General, Multilateral Economic Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, GEF focal point
Mr.	Reza Joneidi	Third Secretary, Division of International Environmental and Energy Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Mr.	Mohammad Ali Zarie Zare	Director, Division of International Environmental and Energy Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Ms.	Geneviève Braun	Programme Officer, GEF Coordination Unit, FAO Headquarters
Mr.	Jeffrey Griffin	Senior Coordinator, GEF Coordination Unit, FAO Headquarters
Ms.	Nora Berrahmouni	Forestry Officer (arid zones), Project Lead Technical Officer (LTO), Forestry Department, FAO Headquarters
Mr.	Chris Dirkmaat	Executive Officer, Investment Center, FAO Headquarters
Mr.	William Marvin	Senior Finance Officer, Finance Division, FAO Headquarters
Mr.	Rodrigue Vinet	Senior Programme Officer, South-South Cooperation and Resource Mobilization Division, FAO Headquarters

Communities and Alternative Livelihood Visits in South Khorasan

Visit to concrete block production workroom	Mr. Taheri	Dustabad
Visit to cultivation of Mushroom workroom	Mr. Norouzi	Dustabad
Field Visit to road bridge to Zangooi village		Zangooi
Field Visit to Zangooi village committee's Bureau and review SCDF's accounting software		Zangooi
Site visit mushroom cultivation	Mr. Enayati	Zangooi
Visit to bakery workroom	Mr. Barati	Zangooi
Visit to Vermi Compost workroom	Mr. Ebrahimi	Zangooi
Visit to Farming (ostrich)	Mr. Hasani	Zangooi
Visit to carpet weaving and kilim workroom		Bostaq
Visit to Barber shop	Mr. Taheri	Bostaq
Visit to seedling production and fence weaving workroom	Mr. Izadxah	Bostaq
Visit to native chicken raising	Mr. Jafarzadeh	Se Qale
Visit to tailoring workroom	Ms. Jalal Pour	Se Qale

Annex 7 Project Expected Results and Planned Activities

Expected Results	Planned Activities
Outcome 1: Strengthened capacity of local communities in 45 pilot villages, provincial and local institutions to plan, implement and evaluate participatory and integrated SLFM initiatives.	
<p>Output 1.1: At least 200 people of the population in each of the two watersheds and 70% of the provincial staff including men and women trained on SLFM</p> <p>Output 1.2: 6 Participatory Village Resource Management Councils established</p> <p>Output 1.3: 45 village level plans and 2 watershed level plans formulated</p> <p>Output 1.4: Rural Development Funds established for at least 30 pilot villages (1 rural development fund per pilot village)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of Villages and Village clusters to develop and implement VLP and WLP. It is anticipated that by the end of project at least a total 30 villages (20 in Rigan and 10 in Se Galeh) will have implemented the participatory, integrated SLFM plans • Formation of Village Committee (VC) and Participatory Village Resource Management Council (PVRMC). VC's and PVRMCs will be involved in the formulation and implementation of village level SLFM plans (VLP) and watershed level SLFM plans (WLP). These plans are the key tool for mainstreaming SLFM initiatives into economic development at the village level. • Formulation of the plans (VLPs and WLPs). WLP should among other particulars include clear details on activities at the watershed level to address SLFM barriers, present the financial inputs and investments, labor (planting of wind breaks, construction of irrigation canals etc.) required, work out details on integrating participation and institutional mechanisms with reference to impact and sustainability of WLP and identify possibilities of demonstrating PES on a pilot scale. • Establishment of Rural Development Fund. VLP should among other particulars include details on contributions from village and the project towards the formation of Rural Development Fund (RDF), details on sustainability and management of RDF, linkages to markets, possible external finance, linkages of sustainable livelihoods and participation in project activities to PES, linkages to experts, institutions and PPC and explore ways for scaling up of the VLP in the village clusters.
Outcome 2: Status of forests and range improved, severity of wind erosion decreased and natural resources managed sustainably on 75,000 ha of land.	
<p>Output 2.1: At least 30 pilot villages (20 in Rigan and 10 in Se Galeh) implementing the village level and watershed level plans</p> <p>Output 2.2: 30% decrease in erosion in pilot villages (baseline to be established in year 1)</p> <p>Output 2.3: 75% of rangelands rehabilitated of projected 19,100 ha in pilot sites</p> <p>Output 2.4: 2,250 hectares of farm and rangeland in selected villages restored with drought and salinity resistant plants.</p> <p>Output 2.5: 25% recovery in globally important wild species and species of</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rehabilitation of degraded forest/ rangeland and saline soils include planting of multi-use, drought and salinity resistant fodder, fast growing endemic species and planting of hydro-holphytes in selected areas. • Forest and biodiversity conservation will include rehabilitation of native forests with endemic species which will improve the micro-climate and water retention of the watersheds. Forest areas critical for conservation of local and endemic fauna and flora and their habitats will be identified; migratory routes and key species habitat use will be demarcated on map for biodiversity conservation and rehabilitation. Alternative and renewable sources for fuel wood will be introduced on demonstration basis in the project sites. • Control wind erosion and salinity will include participatory establishment and maintenance of biological windbreaks at detachment areas, around selected villages, farmlands and roads. It will also include planting of multi-use species on land susceptible to erosion. Participatory restoration of qanats and restoration of traditional water collection and harvesting systems such as bandsors, crescent embankments, and construction of check dams will bring in traditional knowledge and skills together with technical expertise through the project to ensure sustainable water resources management. Improved water resources management will be supported by planting of drought and salinity resistant crops.

Expected Results	Planned Activities
<p>importance/ used as Non Wood Forest Products (baseline to be established in year 1)</p> <p>Output 2.6: At least 5 sustainable alternative livelihood initiatives are developed with demonstrated benefits to environmental services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable agriculture and alternative livelihoods. Detailed alternative livelihoods options specific to the selected villages will emerge from the baseline and rapid assessments. These findings will be integrated into the WLP and VLPs. Communities will be empowered through increased awareness to avail loans through the Rural Development Funds to be established through the project to encourage adoption of alternative livelihood options.
<p>Outcome 3: Enhanced capacity at local and national levels to integrate SLFM across different institutions and sectors.</p>	
<p>Output 3.1: One SLFM platform/ Inter-sectoral coordination mechanism established and operational at national level.</p> <p>Output 3.2: At least 5 policies revised to mainstream participatory SLFM</p> <p>Output 3.3: At least 5 departments in NRM ministry working with inter- and intra-departmental linkages and at least two linkages established between two ministries (Department of Environment (DOE) and Forest, Rangeland and Watershed Management Organization (FRWO) at provincial levels; at least one such linkage at the national level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate studies to analyze current policies and identify areas of policy harmonization and greater collaboration between different stakeholders and leading toward the establishment of a multi-sectoral SLFM platform with representatives from ministries dealing with natural resource management like DoE, ministry of mining, MoJA, provincial representatives and others as relevant. • The SLFM platform will ensure sustainability of investments and commitments beyond the project lifetime. This national multi-stakeholder platform for mainstreaming SLFM will be established within FRWO focusing on collaborative diagnosis of problems, harmonization of policies and actions, converging SLFM centric investments and collaborate planning and implementation of SLFM interventions
<p>Outcome 4a: Project monitored and evaluated effectively and lessons learnt and best practices disseminated widely with a view to their replication in other areas</p>	
<p>Output 4a.1: Project data collection and Monitoring and Evaluation system established</p> <p>Output 4a.2: Project progress and monitoring reports prepared and mid-term and final evaluations conducted in a timely manner</p> <p>Output 4a.3: Lessons learnt, publications and documentaries prepared and widely distributed</p> <p>Output 4a.4: Stakeholders beyond residents of the 45 pilot villages familiar with project</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis and compilation of best practices and lessons learnt; • Organization of field visits, meetings and workshops to inform the stakeholders on project implementation and results; • Development of a communication strategy targeting dissemination of project best practices targeting different stakeholder segments; • Preparation of adequate communication tools for raising awareness and best practices promotion. The communication tools might include preparation of documentaries, website, brochures, success stories for distribution through the media. Indeed, project results and lessons learnt will be disseminated through publications, technical reports, brochures, posters and launching of a user friendly website which will provide a space for the stakeholders to share stories and experiences directly on the website, etc. • Recruitment of a monitoring and evaluation specialist and provision of training on M&E to the project team; • Definition of specific methods and tools to monitor project indicators;

Expected Results	Planned Activities
<p>approach and results</p> <p>Output 4a.5: Decision makers and ministry professionals aware of project results</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a data collection and M&E system; • Undertaking of strategic planning, and the monitoring and evaluation of project activities (operational progress, outputs, and outcomes); • Development of a systematic supervision system of the contracted agencies for forest data collecting.
<p>Outcome 4b: Project managed effectively</p>	
<p>Output 4b.1: Project management Unit established</p> <p>Output 4b.2: Project Steering Committee (PSC) and Technical Committee (TC) established at the national level</p> <p>Output 4b.3: Two Project Planning Committees (PPC) and Two Project Offices are established at provincial level (one in each province)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointment of National Project Director (NPD) and recruitment of the Chief Technical Advisor (CTA); • Selection and recruitment of the National Project Coordinator (NPC) and formation of the Project Steering Committee (PSC); • Formation of the Technical Committee (TC); • Organization and holding of the inception workshop to review the project work plan, detail the annual project work plan, review the budget in line with the work plans and delineate responsibilities and tasks among the project team members and other partners; • Establishment of two project offices (one in each province).

Annex 8 Site Selection Criteria

Indicators used for project site selection include:

1. General indicators:

- Distance from the pilot site to the provincial capital and the nearest airport
- Presence of key infrastructure such as roads, electricity, telephone, etc
- Existing related studies
- Administrative & institutional capabilities
- Previous experience in carrying out natural resources management activities
- Project acceptance on the part of the local authorities
- Presence of nearby climatology & research stations
- National priority
- Legal situation (land ownership)

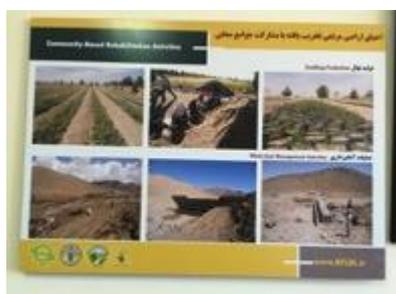
2. Ecological Indicators:

- The area should contain the types of ecosystems and agro ecosystems mentioned in the PIF & the PPG documents
- The area should have potential for the rehabilitation of its degraded natural resources and be capable of achieving the objectives of the project
- The area should be representative of a wider area so that the project's achievements can be replicated elsewhere in Iran.

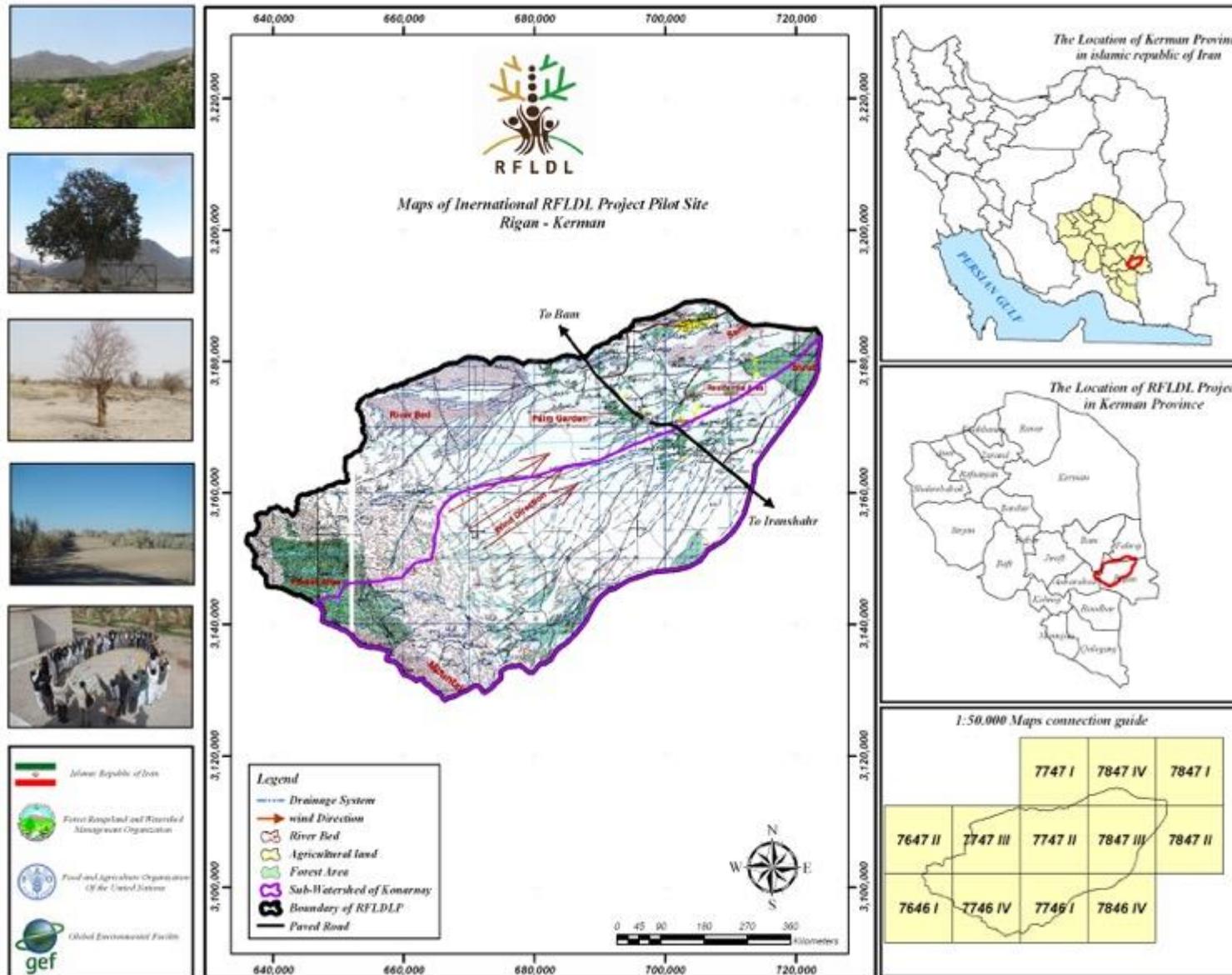
3. Socioeconomic Indicators:

- The existence of NGOs & local communities within the area
- The willingness of the local people to participate as partners in the project activities
- Dependence of the local population on forest lands
- Natural resource based livelihoods
- Age and gender composition (youth & women)
- Existence of credit funds

Annex 9 Visibility of Project Activities (photos)



Annex 10 Maps of Project's Sites





Sarayan Pilot SITE

Location: North West of South Khorasan
Location of Pilot Watershed: North East of Sarayan
Total Area of Pilot Watershed: 163568 ha
Project Pilot Sub- Watershed: Se Qaleh
Total Area of Se Qaleh Sub-Watershed: 51230 ha

S.No	Name of Settlement	No. of H.H Settlement	Population of Settlement		
			F	M	Total
1	Dustabad	462	910	857	1767
2	Bostaq	228	393	397	790
3	Zangooi	166	278	277	555
4	Se Qaleh	1155	2186	2056	4242
Total		2011	3767	3587	7354

