Mid-term Review
of
Promoting Dryland Sustainable Landscapes and Biodiversity Conservation in the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia ("Eastern Steppe project")

GCP/MON/018/GFF

GEF ID: 10249

Final Report

MTR conducted in August 2023

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
MONGOLIA – DECEMBER 2023

Table of Contents

List of boxes, figures and tables

Boxes

Figures

Tables

Acknowledgements

The MTR team was comprised of two independent consultants, Dilli Joshi as the lead international consultant and Narangerel Yansanjav as national consultant.

The MTR was carried out with the invaluable assistance of the FAO staff of the Mongolia Country Office. The MTR team benefitted from interactions with government officials of Mongolia at all three levels, FAO, WWF, and PMU staff. Their insight, knowledge, advice and comments made this MTR possible. The MTR team would like to thank all those who contributed to this MTR.

The MTR also benefited from the inputs of many other stakeholders, including implementing partners, *soum* governors, *aimag* government officers, private company representatives, local communities, and project beneficiaries. Their contributions were critical to the MTR team's work and are deeply appreciated.

MTR team
- Dilli Joshi
- Narangerel Yansanjav

MTR Manager
- Nyamjargal Gombo

Acronyms and abbreviations

ALAMGaC	Agency for Land Administration and Management, Geodesy and Cartography of Mongolia
AWP/B	Annual Work Plan/Budget
BH	Budget holder
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CO_2e	Carbon di-oxide equivalent
DSL - IP	Dryland sustainable landscape impact program
ESMF	Environment and social management framework
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FGD	Focus group discussion
FPMIS	Field Programme Management Information System
GCU	GEF Coordination Unit
GEF	Global Environment Facility
Ha	Hectare
IFAD	International Fund for Agriculture Development of the United Nations
I/NGO	International/non-governmental organization
KII	Key informant interview
LDN	Land degradation neutrality
LMP	Land management plan
LPA	Locally protected area
LTO	Lead Technical Officer
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MET	Ministry of Environment and Tourism of the Government of Mongolia
MED	Ministry of Economy and Development of the Government of Mongolia
METT	Management effectiveness tracking tool
MoFALI	Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry of the Government of Mongolia
MTR	Mid-term review
NAMAC	National Association of Mongolian Agriculture Cooperatives
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NPD/M	National Project Director/Manager
NR	Natural reserve
NRM	Natural resource management
NUM	National University of Mongolia
PA	Protected area
PIR	Project implementation report
PMU	Project management unit
PPR	Project progress report
PSC	Project Steering Committee
PTF	Project Task Force
SFA	Sustainable fibre alliance
SFM	Sustainable forest management
SOP	Standard operating procedure
ToR	Terms of reference
ToC	Theory of change

UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
USD	United States dollar
WWF	World Wildlife Fund for Nature

ProDoc – Project document

Aimag – The first-level administrative sub-division in Mongolia. The country has 21 aimags.

Soum - Secondary sub-divisions in Mongolia. There are 331 soums in the country.

Khurals – local parliament in *aimags* and *soums*

Executive summary

Introduction

1. This report presents the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the independent mid-term review (MTR) of the project GCP/MON/018/GFF, *Promoting Dryland Sustainable Landscapes and Biodiversity Conservation in the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia* ("Eastern Steppe project"). The project is part of a global Sustainable Forest Management Impact Program on Dryland Sustainable Landscapes (SFM/Drylands IP). The project is implemented by FAO and WWF and executed by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) between April 2021 and March 2026. The MTR was conducted between May 2023 and September 2023 by a two-member evaluation team comprising an international team leader and a female national NRM/pasture management, conservation, gender sensitive land management expert.

Methodology

2. The MTR used both qualitative and quantitative approaches to capture the tangible and intangible results of all four project components based upon their outcomes. The MTR team reviewed several documents to assess project implementation and the achievements of project outcomes and also examined relevant procedures and strategies used for achieving project results and analysed the potential for achieving the project's mid-term milestones. The information/data gathered was triangulated to ensure the accuracy of the findings, conclusions, and recommended corrective actions.

Main findings

3. The MTR resulted in 21 findings organized according to six GEF criteria summarized below.

MTR Criterion 1. Relevance

4. **Finding 1:** The project's objectives and outcomes are highly coherent with the government's development goals, sectoral policies, strategies, and national priorities for each sector of the country.

5. **Finding 2:** The project is fully aligned with the GEF 7 Focal Area Objectives, and its components and outcomes are also fully aligned with the FAO's country programme framework and the WWF's Mongolia Strategic Plan. The project is highly relevant to addressing the need and priorities of the target of the target communities in the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia.

MTR Criterion 2. Effectiveness: Progress towards outcome

6. **Finding 3:** The project had mixed progress under this outcome. Two of the five mid-term targets were fully met, two were partially met; and one indicator which is also the core indicator 4, has two sub-indicators out of which one is almost achieved whereas there is no progress recorded for the other one. The MTR rates the achievement of Outcome 1.1 as moderately satisfactory.

7. **Finding 4:** The MTR assessed the progress in achieving core sub-indicators - 4.1 and 4.3, both of whose mid-term targets (579,669 ha and 2,826,660.5 ha of the area under improved land management plans respectively) were partially met. There is no progress yet recorded under core sub-indicator 4.1.

8. **Finding 5:** The project had mixed progress under this outcome. Three of the four targets were fully met whereas one was partially met and other has made no progress. The MTR rates the achievement of Outcome 2.1 as moderately satisfactory.

9. **Finding 6:** While the majority of the indicators were achieved, the project has to pay attention to restoring forests and forestland. Noting the mixed results for this outcome, the MTR rated Outcome 2.2 as satisfactory.

10. **Finding 7:** All three targets were fully met or exceeded. The MTR rates Outcome 2.3 as satisfactory.

11. **Finding 8:** Progress in METT scores as compared to the baseline has mixed results: four scores greatly exceeded both the baseline and their mid-term target, one improved from the baseline but did not meet the target, and one declined below the baseline.

12. **Finding 9:** The Project made mixed progress under Outcome 3.1. Since the results for this outcome were mixed, with some targets fully met and some only partially met, the MTR rates it as moderately satisfactory.

13. **Finding 10:** The project made good progress under this outcome; it reached many stakeholders through its communication and knowledge management materials, which included videos, TV programs, newsletters, social media and the sharing of best practices in international fora. It met all three of its mid-term targets. The MTR rates it as highly satisfactory.

MTR Criterion 3. Efficiency

14. **Finding 11:** The project's budget expenditure reached 49.5 percent of the total and it had materialized co-financing well (40 percent at the mid-term point). The project is a good model of in-kind, grant and cash financing from the government, private sector and community. The project mobilized multiple partners including the private sector and communities.

15. **Findings 12: Complementarities and project partnerships --** The project was able to develop synergies with several other projects and initiatives taken by the government, including the President's "billion tree initiative" and the Swiss-funded project. It also built synergy with academia, especially the National University of Mongolia and the State University of Life Sciences. The project also partnered private companies which mobilized investments and provided co-financing for a number of initiatives. The project was successful in building synergy and mobilizing multi-stakeholder partnerships.

MTR Criterion 4: Sustainability

16. **Finding 13:** The project's results and benefits are likely to be sustained because of the work that went into participatory planning, intensive capacity-building of local-level technical officers, especially land and livestock officers, the private-sector, and volunteer rangers in participatory land-use planning, protected area management and mainstreaming biodiversity, all the while taking into consideration wildlife connectivity and habitat management issues and different land-use practices.

MTR Criterion 5: Factors Affecting Performance

17. **Finding 14:** *Project design*. The project design and its results framework interlink different themes related to reversing the degradation of dryland and dryland ecosystems. Since there were no output-level indicators or targets in the results framework, the project reported on indictors and targets randomly, which were not followed up on in subsequent PIRs and PPRs. In addition, the results matrix is inconsistent. For example, the targets for Core Indicator - 1 and its sub-indicator are given separately but no targets are mentioned for core indicators - 3 and 4.

18. **Finding 15:** *Project execution and management*. The project faced some challenges during implementation.

19. **Finding 16:** *Financial management and co-financing.* The overall financial management of the project seems to be in good order with timely release and payment. The overall total project expenditure (the combined expenditures of FAO and WWF) is on track, with 49.5 percent have been spent by the end of June 2023.

20. **Finding 17:** *Project oversight and implementation roles.* The PMU received regular support from RAP, HQ, BHs and WWF (US) to implement the project and provide quality assurance.

21. **Finding 18:** *Partnerships and stakeholder engagement.* Country ownership was high during the design phase and remained high during implementation as well. The project collaborated well with the executing agencies at the national, aimag and soum level.

22. **Finding 19:** *Communication and knowledge management.* The project developed and followed a communication and knowledge management strategy to implement its outreach activities. The project is active on social media (Facebook) and project activities attracted a lot of media coverage on local television channels. The materials produced were both of satisfactory quality and very useful.

23. **Finding 20:** *M&E design and implementation.* The project did not fully follow the M&E requirements and lacks a robust M&E system and adaptive results management. In addition, a detailed M&E framework is missing, and the project does not compile achievements or maintain output- or activity-level data systematically.

MTR Criterion 6: Cross-cutting priorities

24. **Finding 21:** *Consideration of gender and minority group issues.* Gender aspects are integrated into the indicators and targets. The project has a gender action plan and is integrated into the AWP/B. Gender modules are well incorporated into the project's training programmes.

25. **Finding 22:** *Environmental and social safeguards*. Environmental benefits are highly certain because of the project's interventions and none of the project's activities seem to have any negative impact on the environment and nearby communities.

Conclusions

26. **Conclusion 1 - relevance:** The project's objective, components, outcomes, outputs, activities, and entire intervention logic aligns well with Mongolia's sector priorities, GEF's focal areas, and FAO's global strategic objective. The project is highly relevant due to the global, national and local significance of halting the degradation of Mongolia's dryland and terrestrial ecosystems in the global reversal of land degradation and preservation of dryland biodiversity, restoration of terrestrial ecosystems functioning, and halting of desertification. The project is also highly relevant in terms of its ability to address the needs of beneficiaries. The project has a high degree of ownership by the national, aimag and soum level governments in the project target areas, though being a direct execution (DEX) project.

27. **Conclusion 2 - effectiveness:** The project made good progress in meeting its mid-term targets for sustainable dryland management on the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia. The project employed a strategy to strengthen capacity at three levels (national, aimag, and soum) to ensure the effective delivery and long-term sustainability of the project. While it fully met some targets, it is lagging far behind in some; in particular, the target for forest and forestland restoration requires additional attention for the project to catch up in the remaining project period.

28. **Conclusion 3 - efficiency:** Some of the project's strategies were cost-effective. They included mobilizing pasture groups, establishing lamb feeding revolving funds, building capacities of community members and making them local resource persons, and establishing five nurseries

to supply saplings for afforestation. The project launched initiatives and build synergies with similar projects, taking advantage of opportunities for collaboration, coordination, and potential co-financing. At the mid-term, budget expenditure was on track: 44 percent of the budget had been spent and 40 percent of the promised co-financing had materialized. Some planned activities, however, were not achieved on time. Delays and disruptions caused by various factors, including a delay in securing cabinet approval, impeded the delivery of the project.

29. **Conclusion 4 - sustainability:** Mobilizing multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder partners in the planning and delivery of interventions and building the capacities of communities and governments at the national, aimag and soum levels provides a good foundation for enhancing the sustainability of the project's results and benefits. The high degree of ownership assumed by the government (including aimag and soum) and communities is likely to help increase the sustainability of the project's initiatives.

30. **Conclusion 5 - factors affecting progress:** The project's result framework does not include outputs and their indicators and targets while they are mentioned in the annual workplan only. In the absence of output-level indicators or targets, the PIRs and PPRs have reported randomly. Delay in securing approval from the Cabinet for the remaining three NR boundaries has substantially delayed the achievement of project targets.

Recommendations

31. **Recommendations: Effectiveness**

- Noting the low progress in the restoration of forestland, the MTR recommends hiring a short-term specialist to achieve the target on time.
- Develop pre- and post-training assessment and training evaluation formats and use them to assess the effectiveness of trainings conducted under different components and at different levels, including community, *sou*m, *aimag*, and national.
- Conduct outcome surveys for wool, vegetable, and other cooperatives to assess the increase in income levels for reporting in the PIR.

32. **Recommendations: Efficiency**

- Develop an exit strategy through multi-sectoral and multi-sector consultation including with the private sector. After finalizing that strategy, organize an orientation workshop for stakeholders to discuss how project results will be carried forward to generate a wide impact on dryland ecosystem restoration at the national and global levels.

33. **Recommendations: Factors affecting performance**

- Revise the results matrix to include output-level indicators to help guide implementation as they are directly linked to the hierarchy of activities and can provide a better perspective during both monitoring and evaluation.
- Develop and implement a robust and practical M&E system with inputs from an experienced M&E specialist (take help from RAP/HQ) to strengthen adaptive results-based project management and progress reporting. The M&E system should capture progress systematically. It should also be integrated with project learning and knowledge management systems and contribute to improved progress reporting in PIRs and PPRs.
- Formulate a clear and detailed M&E plan, set up a database aligned with indicators, and maintain indicator-based data. In addition, develop a participatory M&E framework for sustainable dryland management and link it with the soum-level monitoring mechanism.

- Generate baseline data for wool cooperative and herder activities, including a beneficiary income survey to determine the degree change at the terminal evaluation. Link this with the M&E framework.
- The budget for M&E is not sufficient to capture and document best practices and share them in an international forum as the project is part of the global IP and has been scaled up in the region.
- Discuss the issue of Cabinet approval on boundary delineation of the remaining the NRs in the next PSC meeting. If the members agree that the delineation process is likely to take more time, exclude the area covered by the three NRs and set up new targets.

34. **Recommendations - Sustainability**

- Design participatory governance assessment (PGA) tools in a simple format and conduct participatory assessments to assess the internal governance of pasture groups/different cooperatives in the project target areas. Develop PGA tools and train field teams to conduct assessments and document findings. File the documentation in the M&E database to inform AWPs.
- As the project is part of the global IP, it should build synergies with global program instead of just participating in workshops. The project needs to build synergies with other child projects in the region (Kazakhstan) or other countries in Africa. The countries need to build a knowledge hub platform for sharing their best practices for which continuous efforts and collaboration is needed among them.

GEF criteria/sub-criteria	Rating[1]	Summary comments
A. STRATEGIC RELEVANCE		
A1. Overall strategic relevance	HS	The project demonstrates a high degree of strategic relevance at the global, country, and community levels.
A1 Alignment with GEF and FAO strategic priorities	HS	The project's concept for and strategy in improving and restoring the dryland ecosystems and promoting biodiversity conservation in the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia is well aligned with the strategic priorities of GEF, FAO, and WWF. The project focuses on multi-focal areas of GEF-7 and includes five out of its 11 core indicators. The project is strongly aligned to the land degradation, biodiversity and climate change focal areas as well as FAO's SO-2, to outcome 2 and outputs 2.1.1, 3.5.1, and 3.5.2 of the country programming frameworks, and WWF's strategy priority 3 and 4.
A1.2 Relevance to national, regional and global priorities	HS	The project is unquestionably relevant. The project's development objective and its strategies, outcomes, and outputs area are fully aligned with the country's priorities. The project's objectives, components, and outcomes are well aligned with the country's LDN target, NDC priorities, national program and action plan on protected areas, national action program on climate change, green development policy, the Sustainable Development Vision of Mongolia, and the national bio-diversity program and action plan for sustainable livestock. The project is strongly aligned with regional and global priorities (reduction in GHG emissions) and reversing dryland degradation and restoring dryland ecosystems.
A1.3 Relevance to beneficiaries' needs	HS	The project is primarily framed in terms of increasing the resilience and diversifying the incomes of locals, especially herders and farmers, contributing to sustainable pasture management, and promoting climate-resilient crop production, livestock value chains, and market linkages. All these interventions have a high degree of relevance to beneficiaries in addressing their needs.
A1.4 Complementarity with existing interventions	S	The project followed a multi-sectoral and multi-partner approach and maintained good coordination and collaboration with on-going projects in the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia. It made satisfactory progress in building synergy with GCF- and EU-funded projects, universities, and other academics. It even managed several activities with co-financing from *soum* governments, the private sector, and production groups.
B. EFFECTIVENESS		
B1. Overall assessment of project results	MS	The project made good progress in mobilizing multi-sectoral and multiple partners, including the private sector. It had mixed progress in terms of achieving its objective and outcomes. It established NRs, developed protected area management plans, raised awareness about dryland ecosystem restoration and biodiversity conservation, initiated participatory biodiversity monitoring, restored forests and pasture, promoted climate-smart crop production, and introduced income diversification to increase the resilience of the livelihoods of herders and farmers. Progress was slowed slightly by the Covid-19 pandemic as well as by delays in obtaining the Cabinet's approval for the remaining three NRs. The project has mixed success in meeting

1 See rating scheme at the end of the document.

		the mid-term targets as some were met and others are only under way.
B1.1 Delivery of project outputs	MS	The MTR could not assess the delivery of the project's outputs since there were no indicators or targets in the results matrix in the ProDoc.
B1.2 Progress towards outcomes[2] and objectives	MS	Overall, progress towards the outcomes is mixed. Out of the six outcomes, two met their mid-term targets well but the other four did so only partially. The outcomes are achievable, however, and the project should meet its final targets. Overall progress towards achieving the objective of the project was mixed. The majority of the five core indicators and their sub-indicators were partially met.
Outcome 1.1	MS	The project had mixed progress under this outcome. Two of the five mid-term targets are fully met, two are partially met and one indicator does not have a target so it could not be assessed.
Outcome 2.1	MS	The project had mixed progress under this outcome. Only one of four targets was fully met; the other three were only partially met.
Outcome 2.2	MS	The project had mixed progress under this outcome. Two of four targets were fully met and two were partially met.
Outcome 2.3	S	The project made promising progress under this outcome. All three targets were fully met or exceeded.
Outcome 3.1	MS	The project made mixed progress under this outcome. Only one of three targets was fully met but the other two are on the way to being achieved.
Outcome 4.1	S	The project made good progress under this outcome: it reached many stakeholders through its communication and knowledge management materials, which included video, TV programs, newsletters, social media and the sharing of best practices in international fora. It met all three of its mid-term targets.
Overall rating of progress towards achieving objectives and outcomes	MS	As a whole, the project attempts to reverse land degradation by mobilizing multi-sectoral and multiple stakeholders, including the private sector and members of local communities, including women and men, farmers and herders. It also took initiatives in fostering participatory integrated land management planning and integrating protected area management plans into land-use planning, protecting critical habitats for Mongolian gazelles and white-nape cranes, and sequestering carbon from the AFLOU sector. The project made mixed progress in integrated land use planning, climate-smart agriculture practices, and restoring riparian forest and pastureland. It made good progress in promoting livestock value chains, especially in terms of capacity-building, equipment support, and market linkages for the wool and lamb meat value chains.
B1.3 Likelihood of impact	Not rated at MTR	The project is on the way to delivering major impacts in terms of reversing land degradation through integrated land-use planning, reducing GHG emissions, and improving livelihoods through promoting livestock value chains in Eastern Mongolia. Its planned global benefits also materialized through carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation and contributions to the global IP for dryland.
C. EFFICIENCY		
C1. Efficiency[3]	MS	The efficiency of the project was good despite a very slight delay due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The project made good use of its time

[2] Assessment and ratings by individual outcomes may be undertaken if there is added value.

[3] Includes cost efficiency and timeliness.

		during the inception period, a fact that contributed to smooth implementation. The project materialized co-financing well (40 percent at the mid-term point). The GEF trust fund budget burn rate is approximately 50 percent.
D. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES		
D1. Overall likelihood of risks to sustainability	ML	The project is following a multi-sector and multi-stakeholder participatory approach to reversing dryland degradation and restoring dryland ecosystems. This approach will contribute to the sustainability of the project's results and benefits. The ownership assumed by both the government and the community will contribute to the sustainability of the project's result.
D1.1. Financial risks	ML	The project facilitated the strengthening of market linkages and access to markets through agreements with private companies can be considered a good indication of the likely sustainability of the project's results. Promoting value chains and marketing could contribute to the financial sustainability of the project's interventions. Beneficiaries got support for diversifying their livelihood options, a measure that might complement their engagement.
D1.2. Socio-political risks	ML	Commercial-scale collective farming on 1-8 ha of abandoned land by mobilizing a group or cooperative and subsidies provided by the project are examples of measures ensuring the sustainability of the project's result.
D1.3. Institutional and governance risks	ML	The project has not conducted any participatory governance assessments to find out the status of or level at which pasture user groups and cooperatives are functioning. A strong monitoring mechanism needs to be established for sustainability. Without such a mechanism, institutional capacity will erode. There is a moderate chance of sustaining the project's initiatives.
D1.4. Environmental risks	L	The project has conducted ESS assessment annually to identify environmental and social safeguard vulnerability and made recommendations for mitigation measures. It has developed GRM and trained project team, local authorities, and private companies. .
D2. Catalysis and replication	MS	The probability of replication is likely to be high once the project shares its best practices and lessons learnt with a wide group of stakeholders. Some activities, especially vegetable production in greenhouses, have been replicated in neighbouring communities.
E. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE		
E1. Project design and readiness[4]	MS	The project tried to link multiple focal thematic areas, but those links were not free of shortcomings, some of which posed challenges during implementation. Those shortcomings included lack of sufficient targets for some outcomes, and lack of indicators and targets at the output level.
E2. Quality of project implementation	MS	In general, oversight and good-quality implementation ensured that the AWPBs were prepared though stakeholder participation. PIRs PPRs, and reports were completed on time. Quality assurance and adaptive management aspects could be improved.
E2.1 Quality of project implementation by FAO (BH, LTO, PTF, etc.)	S	FAO and WWF's oversight is good and a good number of PTF meetings were held. In addition, support received from FAO-HQ forest specialist, especially on Outcome 2.1.

[4] This refers to factors affecting the project's ability to start as expected, such as the presence of sufficient capacity among executing partners at the project's launch.

E2.1 Project oversight (PSC, project working group, etc.)	S	The project was guided by the PSC. Four PSC meetings had been held by the time of the MTR.
E3. Quality of project execution	S	The quality of project execution was good. Generally, coordination with multiple sectors and multiple stakeholders, including the private sector, had no issues, or at least none reflected in implementation
E3.1 Project execution and management (PMU and executing partner performance, administration, staffing, etc.)	MS	The project faced a few challenges in finding appropriate human resources, dealing with the frequent turnover of government staff both at the national and *aimag* and *soum* levels; address the excessive workload of sub-national staff; and the ambitions of sectoral governments to coordinate.
E4. Financial management and co-financing	S	No major financial management issues were detected, and budget expenditure is on track. The 40 percent materialization of co-financing at the mid-term was deemed satisfactory.
E5. Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement	S	Stakeholders contribute well to achieving project results. The nature of the project worked in its favour as it was the first ever project in the Eastern Steppe, applied integrated strategies and was embraced by the government at all three levels.
E6. Communication, knowledge management and knowledge products	S	A communication strategy and action plan exist and progress in communication is good. The project mobilized television and social media well to raise awareness and reach a large audience and establish and maintain good visibility. Knowledge management is good, substantial amount of documentation as well as several documentaries, newsletters, and videos were produced and best practices were shared in international forums, including at UNCDD COP 15.
E7. Overall quality of M&E	MU	The project did not prepare a detailed M&E plan or M&E framework. The project lacks a robust M&E system and mechanism to incorporate adaptive results-based management. Overall, M&E at the implementation level is weak.
E7.1 M&E design	MS	The ProDoc includes a basic M&E plan with different milestones and a budget however, budget for sharing best practices, getting support from global IP hub is lacking.
E7.2 M&E plan implementation (including financial and human resources)	MU	Project's detailed M&E plan is not prepared, and data reporting is inconsistent. M&E needs to be strengthened.
E8. Overall assessment of factors affecting performance	MS	The project faced a few challenges, including the fact that some activities proposed in the AWP were not achieved on time due to delays in administrative decisions (cabinet) of delineating boundaries for the remaining three NRs which were beyond the project's ability to control. These challenges were exacerbated by Covid-19 and an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease.
F. CROSS-CUTTING CONCERNS		
F1. Gender and other equity dimensions	S	The gender aspect is well integrated in the ProDoc and well reflected in the results matrix. Gender assessment was conducted to identify the current situation, challenges, opportunities, and potential interventions and included in GAP. Outcome-level indicators (where applicable) and their targets are gender-responsive, gender modules are well incorporated into training programmes, especially participatory land management planning and biodiversity conservation, and women are represented in technical groups at the national, *aimag* and *soum* levels. Single women-headed households and differently abled people are given priority in vegetable

		production and eco street groups. Women's representation in technical working groups and on the PMU, team is remarkable
F2. Human rights issues	NA	Not evaluated.
F2. Environmental and social safeguards	S	Project interventions do not seem to have impacted the environment or social issues negatively.
Overall project rating	**MS**	

1. Introduction

35. This report presents the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the independent mid-term review (MTR) of the project GCP/MON/018/GFF - *Promoting Dryland Sustainable Landscapes and Biodiversity Conservation in the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia* ("Eastern Steppe project"). The project is part of a global program led by FAO, the GEF-7 Sustainable Forest Management Impact Program on Dryland Sustainable Landscapes (SFM/Drylands IP). This five-year (April 2021– March 2026) project funded through the Global Environmental Facility (GEF-7) is led by Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in partnership with World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) and is executed by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) in collaboration with other government agencies and stakeholders.

36. The project's total budget is USD 56,299,586 of which USD 5,345,586 is through GEF trust fund financing and USD 50,945,000 is co-financing from Government of Mongolia, private companies, and other organizations. The MTR took place from May to September 2023 by a two-member evaluation team comprised of an international lead evaluator and a national expert.

1.1. *Purpose and scope of the MTR*

2. The mid-term review (MTR) is conducted with an objective of assessing progress towards expected outcomes and identifying areas for improvement and/or corrective actions in order to achieve its target results. The main purpose of the MTR is to assess progress and identify success, challenges, adaptation/innovation and opportunities in key project focus areas and to provide inputs in better orienting the project to its objective and intended transformational change and making it more relevant to the needs of its main stakeholders. It also draws lessons and makes recommendations for enhance implementation and effectiveness of the project that could be useful to stakeholders. Moreover, it is expected to provide opportunity for the national, regional and thematic hubs to learn together, and share their experiences. The MTR tried to provide, as appropriate, strategic, programmatic and management recommendations for corrective actions to streamline and improve the project delivery towards its objectives.

37. The MTR considers the project implementation period from March 2021 to June 2023, bearing in mind that the actual commencement was from June 2021. The terms of reference (ToR, see Annex 1) for this MTR follows the FAO-GEF's 2020 guide for planning and conducting mid-term reviews of FAO-GEF projects and programmes. The MTR provides an independent, external assessment of the project's progress towards expected outputs, outcomes, and objectives and identifies areas for improvement and corrective measures. It also includes recommendations to enhance the delivery of the project's intended results.

38. The project is being implemented in three *aimags* -- Dornod, Sukhbaatar, and Khentii; and nine *soums* -- Khulunbuir, Bulgan, Matad, Tumentsogt, Sukhbaatar, Munkhkhaan, Bayan-Ovoo, Norovlin, and Bayan-Adraga. The MTR team conducted field visits to six *soums* of Shukhbaatar and Khintii *aimags*. Dornod Aimag and its three project *soums* were not included in the field mission mainly due to their farness. The MTR team engaged several stakeholders as detailed in the project document and project progress/implementation reports to contribute to this mid-term review, namely, main project stakeholders, decision-makers, and implementers at both *aimag* and *soum* levels. Prior to the field mission, the MTR team reviewed a series of documents in the context of project implementation and achievement of project outcomes. It also examined the strategy it took to achieve the project's results, measured in terms of its outcomes and outputs and analysed the potential for achieving its mid-term milestones. The MTR team also observed developments made in the context of the

project's implementation, including relevant partner strategies since the design of the project. All four project components as well as outcomes, outputs, and activities were assessed to identify findings, draw conclusions, and make recommendations for corrective actions.

2.1. *Objective of the MTR*

39. The primary objectives of the MTR are:

    a. To assess progress made towards achievement of a project's planned results in terms of its relevance, effectiveness and efficiency, sustainability and impact in order to understand why, how, and the extent to which intended and unintended results are accrued, and their impact on stakeholders.

    b. To identify any problems or challenges if the project is encountering, and understand the causes of any underperformance, provide feasible recommendations to course-correct and leverage project strengths and good practices to overcome them.

    c. To overcome challenges and ensure the expected results, the corrective measures should be identified and included in the recommendations.

    d. To identify the main contributions, good practices and areas with the potential for upscaling and replication, and to promote knowledge-sharing and learning and identify lessons to improve future project formulation and implementation.

Box 1: MTR review questions

A. Relevance

1. Are the project outcomes congruent with country priorities, GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework, United Nations Transitional Engagement Framework for Afghanistan and the needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries (local communities, men and women, and indigenous peoples, if relevant)?
2. Has there been any change in the relevance of the project since its formulation, such as the adoption of new national policies, plans or programmes that affect the relevance of the project's objectives and goals? If so, are there any changes that need to be made to the project to make it more relevant?

B. Effectiveness of project results

3. To what extent has the project delivered on its outputs, outcomes and objectives? What broader results (if any) has the project had at regional and global level to date? Were there any unintended consequences? Is there any evidence of environmental stress reduction (for example, in direct threats to biodiversity) or environmental status change (such as an improvement in the populations of target species), reflecting global environmental benefits or any change in policy, legal or regulatory frameworks? To what extent can the achievement of results be attributed to the GEF-funded component? *(Delivery of results)*
4. Are there any barriers or other risks that may prevent future progress towards and the achievement of the project's longer-term objectives? What can be done to increase the likelihood of positive impacts from the project? To what extent can the progress towards long-term impacts be attributed to the project? Are there any barriers or other risks that may prevent future progress towards and the achievement of the project's longer-term objectives? What can be done to increase the likelihood of positive impacts from the project? To what extent can the progress towards long-term impacts be attributed to the project? *(Likelihood of impact)*

C. Efficiency

5. To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently and cost effectively? To what extent has project management been able to adapt to any changing conditions to improve the efficiency of project implementation?
6. To what extent has the project built on existing agreements, initiatives, data sources, synergies and complementarities with other projects, partnerships, etc. and avoided duplication of similar activities by other groups and initiatives?

D. Sustainability

7. What is the likelihood that the project results will be useful or persist after the end of the project? What are the key risks that may affect the sustainability of the project results and its benefits (consider financial, socioeconomic, institutional and governance, and environmental aspects)? *(Sustainability)*
8. What project results, lessons or experiences have been replicated (in different geographic areas) or scaled up (in the same geographic area, but on a much larger scale and funded by other sources)? What results, lessons or experiences are likely to be replicated or scaled up in the near future? *(Replication and catalysis)*

E. Factors affecting progress

9. Is the project design suited to delivering the expected outcomes? Is the project's causal logic (per its theory of change) coherent and clear? To what extent are the project's objectives and components clear, practical and feasible within the timeframe allowed? To what extent was gender integrated into the project's objectives and results framework? Were other actors – civil society, indigenous peoples or private sector – involved in project design or implementation and what was the effect on project results? *(Project design)*
10. To what extent did the executing agency effectively discharge its role and responsibilities in managing and administering the project? What have been the main challenges in terms of project management and administration? How well have risks been identified and managed? What changes are needed to improve delivery in the latter half of the project? *(Project execution and management)*
11. What have been the financial-management challenges of the project? To what extent has pledged co-financing been delivered? Has any additional leveraged co-financing been provided since implementation? How has any shortfall in co-financing or unexpected additional funding affected project results? *(Financial management and co-financing)*
12. To what extent have FAO and WWF delivered oversight and supervision and backstopping (technical, administrative, and operational) during project identification, formulation, approval, start-up and execution? *(Project oversight, implementation role)*
13. To what extent have stakeholders, such as government agencies, civil society, indigenous populations, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, people with disabilities and the private sector, been involved in project formulation and implementation? What has been the effect of their involvement or non-involvement on project results? How do the various stakeholder groups see their own engagement with the project? What are the mechanisms of their involvement and how could these be improved? What are the strengths and challenges of the project's partnerships? Has the stakeholder engagement plan been adhered to and documented? Have all stakeholders been made aware of the ESS plan and the grievance complaint mechanism? *(Partnerships and stakeholder engagement)*
14. How effective has the project been in communicating and promoting its key messages and results to partners, stakeholders, and a general audience? How can this be improved? How is the project assessing, documenting, and sharing its results and lessons learned and experiences? To what extent are communication products and activities likely to support the sustainability and scaling up of project results? *(Communication and knowledge management)*
15. Is the project's M&E system practical and sufficient? How has stakeholder engagement and gender assessment been integrated into the M&E system? How could this be improved? *(M&E design)*
16. Does the M&E system operate per the M&E plan? Has information been gathered in a systematic manner, using appropriate methodologies? To what extent has information generated by the M&E system during project implementation been used to adapt and improve project planning and execution, achieve outcomes and ensure sustainability? Is there gender-disaggregated targets and indicators? How can the M&E system be improved? *(M&E implementation)*

F. Cross-cutting priorities

17. To what extent were gender considerations taken into account in designing and implementing the project? Has the project been designed and implemented in a manner that ensures gender-equitable participation and benefits? Was a gender analysis done? *(Gender and minority groups, including indigenous peoples, disadvantaged, vulnerable and people with disabilities)*
18. To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project? Has the project been implemented in a manner that ensures the ESS Mitigation Plan (if one exists) has been adhered to? *(ESS)*

G. Link to the DSL-IP

19. To what extent is the Global Child project providing the necessary coordination and technical support?
20. What are the tools brought by the global child project that have been used at national, provincial and local level?
21. What is the expected impact of the tools and resources brought by the Global child project at national level?
22. How did the child project contribute to the global project (communication activities, etc.)? How have these activities been perceived at national level? What did these activities bring to the national project?

Synergies between child projects?

23. To what extend the global child project activities were efficient in capturing synergies among child projects? Did the child project, through the global project activities, had any synergies and exchanges with other child project? What type of exchanges? How have these exchanges been useful at all stakeholders' level? What are the expected impacts of these exchanges at national, provincial and local levels?
24. To what extend the global child project has contributed to costs savings through leveraging key partnerships across child projects?

2.2. *Intended users.*

40. The main intended users of the MTR report are the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) and other national project partners, members of the PTF, NPD, PMO, the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (RAP), and units at FAO HQ, WWF US and Mongolia, and GEF. These organizations will benefit from the MTR findings and recommendations for improving future project design as well as from the implementation of activities for the remaining period.

Table 1: Intended MTR users.

Primary user of the MTR	**What they want to learn from the MTR**	**Why and how they expect to use the MTR**
International level – FAO- HQ OCB-GEF CU and Forestry Division FAO – RAP (including LTO), WWF US	▪ Was the design suitable, does it need change? ▪ What is the progress towards objective/indicators/mid-term milestones? ▪ Is the project approach suitable, what needs to be improved? ▪ What lessons can be learned	▪ Adjustments to be made in the project design. ▪ Timeframe for the project and case for extension ▪ Assess theory of change ▪ Share and build lessons learned and advice on implementing recommendations
National level – FAO Com WWF CO, (Budget holders), PMU, MET, MOFALI ALAMGAC, IRIMHE, NAMAC, UNDP, SFA, NFPUG, TNC, NUM,	▪ Is the project contributing to WWF and FAO CCF, national policies and priorities? ▪ What is the progress towards agreed goals? ▪ Was mid-term target achieved? ▪ Impact of the capacity building activities ▪ What is the progress fund disbursement	▪ Review the project progress. ▪ Agree on adjustment, taking corrective measures to achieve the targets on time. ▪ Share and disseminate best practices and lessons learned. ▪ Take early actions in case of project extension. ▪ Advice province team to take timely actions

Sub-national level –*Aimag* and *soum* governments (including governors), *bagh* governors	▪ How effective was the project support. ▪ What could be improved to achieve the agreed targets? ▪ Is the project on track or alternative approach required to achieve targets? ▪ Impact of the capacity building activities at community level	▪ Help PMU to take adaptive measures based on field scenario. ▪ Better plan activities for remaining project period
Community level – Local farmers and herders, user groups, women group and cooperatives, local PA volunteers, cooperatives, private companies -- wool, dairy and cashmere processing plants, crop production companies and individuals	▪ How effective was project support. ▪ What went well and what did not work out? ▪ What is the impact of capacity building on institutional and personnel level? ▪ How is internal governance and functioning of cooperatives, groups, and user's associations	▪ Enhance community capacity on DSL. ▪ Support existing groups and cooperatives in maintaining internal governance, participatory decision making, maintaining transparency. ▪ Strengthen value chain

2.3. *Methodology*

41. **Overall methodological approach**: The MTR made a balanced, consultative, transparent and evidence-based review of the project's outcomes, outputs, activities, and performance to June 2023, drawing upon a review of the available reports and compiling quantitative and qualitative information from internal and external stakeholders through reviews, focus group discussions (FDGs), key informant interviews (KIIs), and field observations. It compared baseline data with achieved mid-term milestones. To assess the contribution of the project towards its stated outcomes and outputs, specifically its mid-term milestones, as stated in the result framework given in the project document (ProDoc), the MTR team visited project sites, observed changes in forest and rangeland as well as livestock-rearing practices, and interacted with herders; cooperatives members; vegetable production groups; aimag and soum government officials of aimag level Department of Environment and Tourism, Kherlen River Basin Authority, Land Affairs and Urban Development Policy Planning and Development Division, Department of Food and Agriculture, volunteer rangers; representatives of private companies (crop production, animal breeding, and ecotourism camp); and other stakeholders.

42. The MTR used a mixed method (qualitative and quantitative) to capture the visible and invisible results of the project and provide a complete and holistic picture of the project's progress, challenges it faces, and areas for improvement in the remaining project period. A mixed-method approach triangulates and utilizes data better than do separate collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. Triangulation was carried out by a review of project documents and secondary sources of information; direct field observations; and interviews with MET Vice Minister and PSC Chair; National Project Director, government officials from MET, MOFALI, ALAMGAC, MED; Budget Holders (both FAOR and WWF CD); PMU team, PTF members; *soum* project coordinators; *aimag* and *soum* government officials; *soum* governors, communities, and other stakeholders engaged in the project's implementation and design. Evidence and information gathered underpinned its validation and analysis and aided in the drafting of conclusions and recommendations. The MTR followed the FAO-GEF's mid-term review guidelines in its evaluation approaches and methods as specified in the ToR of the MTR.

43. **Sample and sampling frame**: The MTR used purposive sampling while selecting soums. The MTR team visited six soums -- Tumentsogt, Sukhbaatar, and Munkhkhaan of Khentii Aimag; and Bayan-Ovoo, Norovlin, and Bayan-Adraga of Sukhbaatar Aimag. Field visit to Dornod Aimag and its three project *soums* Khulunbuir, Bulgan, and Matad was not possible because of farness and corresponding logistical issues. The MTR team, however, conducted virtual interviews with the *soum* project coordinators.

44. The MTR team conducted key informant interviews with 69 people, out of whom three in FAO HQ, two in FAO RAP, four in FAO Mongolia country office, seven in PMU, nine *soum* coordinators, one in WWF US, two in WWF Mongolia, and 41 in the government (national, aimag, and soum) levels. In addition, the MTR team conducted six FGDs.

45. **Data collection methods and sources:** The review provides evidence-based information that is credible, realizable and useful. The findings were triangulated with reference to multiple lines of evidence collected using numerous evaluation tools and gathering information from different types of stakeholders and different levels of management. The MTR took into consideration the following evaluation instruments.

46. **Project Result Framework**: The project's results framework was used as a tool to assess project progress-based indicators and mid-term milestones. While reviewing the project's achievements, the MTR adhered to FAO-GEF's evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, factors affecting performances, cross-cutting dimension including gender and equity concerns, and environmental and social safeguards.

47. **Evaluation Matrix**: As part of the inception report, the MTR team developed an evaluation matrix with evaluation indicators, data collection methods and sources based on the ProDoc, results framework and reviews of PPRs and PIRs, all aligning with the evaluation questions given in the ToR. Feedback provided by the FAO GEF CU Focal point were incorporated in the inception report. The evaluation matrix provides overall directions for the evaluation and was used as a basis for developing interview tools and guides. It also helped in reviewing project documents in a structured manner and provided a basis for structuring reporting on the project's progress.

48. **Achievement rating**: The MTR rated project achievements according to the GEF's project review criteria, using the ratings highly satisfactory (HS), satisfactory (S), moderately satisfactory (MS), moderately unsatisfactory (MU), unsatisfactory (U), highly unsatisfactory (HU) and not applicable (NA). All evaluation criteria mentioned in the ToR were rated accordingly, including the completion of an overall ratings table as per Annex 11 of the FAO-GEF MTR guide.

49. **Semi-structured questions and FGD guide**: The MTR team, prepared a set of semi-structured questions and FGD guides for administering interviews and conducting FGDs. The MTR team conducted semi-structured interviews at the national level implementing team including budget holders (both FAO and WWF); PSC chair (MET Deputy Minister); NPD; MET, MoFALI, MED, ALAMGaC, and NAMAC officials; AFAOR; FAO-CO Operations Officer; FAO-CO Finance Officer, WWF staff, PMU team, *aimag* and *soum* level government officers, *soum* and *bagh* governors, and soum project coordinators of all nine project soums. In addition, the MTR team interacted with RAP and HQ FAO staff including, LTO, technical officer, DSL-IP officers, FAO-GEF funding liaison officer, and WWF US. A FGD guide was used to conduct FGDs at the community level.

50. **Stakeholder engagement matrix**: The stakeholder engagement matrix was used as a tool to collect data for the MTR. Stakeholders were selected based on their involvement as listed in the ProDoc as well as their relationship to the project and their contributions.

51. **Data source**: The MTR reviewed project documents made available by the project, including project implementation reports (PIRs), project progress reports (PPRs), capacity-development materials, communications and awareness-raising materials, knowledge management products were systematically reviewed focusing on content and alignment as expected by the Component - 4 of the project. The list of documents reviewed is presented in Annex 5.

52. Information collected through the review of documents and field-level consultations were triangulated and verified. A list of people met or interacted is provided in Annex 3.

53. **Composition of the MTR team**: A two-member evaluation team comprising an international team leader and a national expert (female). The specific roles and responsibilities of each member are given in their respective ToRs.

2.4. *Limitations*

54. The constraints and challenges faced by the MTR can be summarized in four broad categories-- (i) busy working season, (ii) lack of institutional memory, (iii) farness of the project's intervention locations, and (iv). Long travel duration for field observations and interactions. Each category is discussed below.

55. **Working season:** The filed mission was planned considering the weather, which supported in smooth completion for field observations. However, June to August is the main working season, which somehow limited the planned interactions with herders and other stakeholders including government officials.

56. **Institutional memory**: High turnover of government officials, mainly PSC chair (Deputy Minister of MET) and NPD caused difficulty in institutional memory of project activities and were not able to provide as much information as the MTR team had expected for.

57. **Farness of project intervention locations:** Field interactions and observations of ground activities in all nine soums were not possible to cover due to farness. Even in other six soums where field observations were made, were limited to accessible areas. Only representative areas were visited, and interactions were conducted. The farness of the project intervention sites also limited the team's ability to capture field-level progress through independent observations. Long

58. **Long travel duration for field observations and interactions:** Reaching out to most of the project area required a long drive hour. This forced the MTR team to shorten the interactions.

2. Project background and context

Project title: Promoting Dryland Sustainable Landscapes and Biodiversity Conservation in the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia ("Eastern Steppe project") GCP/MON/018/GFF.

59. **Context**: In Mongolia, land degradation severely influences livelihoods in the steppes, limiting availability of vital functioning ecosystem services and driving local poverty, migration and conflict. One of the major root causes of land degradation and biodiversity loss in Eastern Mongolia is the increasing number of livestock, surpassing pasture carrying capacity, leading to overgrazing. Overgrazing is affecting plant cover and palatable or livestock-preferred plant abundance. Degradation of pastureland in the western areas of Mongolia due to overgrazing and climate change leads to increasing permanent migration to the Eastern Steppe. Hence, conflicts between herders, and with other land users such as mining companies, are becoming more frequent.

60. Despite providing multiple ecosystem services and benefits, the Eastern Steppe dryland soils are highly prone to wind, soil and water erosion, and vegetative cover change is caused by anthropogenic and climate impacts. This project is part of a global program led by FAO, the GEF-7 Sustainable Forest Management Impact Program on Dryland Sustainable Landscapes (SFM/Drylands IP).

61. **Threats and barriers addressed by the project**: The project faces threats such as land degradation and biodiversity loss in Eastern Mongolia, increasing numbers of livestock, and the surpassing of the carrying capacities of landscapes. Overpopulation of livestock, in turn, leads to overgrazing, which deteriorates plant cover, especially of the species livestock find most palatable. In addition, the degradation of pastureland in the western areas due to overgrazing and climate change has led to increase in the permanent migration of western herders to the Eastern Steppe. Conflicts among herders and with other land users such as mining companies are becoming more frequent. Conflicting sectoral interests and policies can result in investment decisions that sometimes undermine environmental and socio-economic goals. Unsustainable crop production methods, such as unsuitable and outdate dryland tillage technologies, and negligence of soil and water conservation, are still widespread.

62. For effectively combating land degradation and biodiversity loss, the project addresses the following key barriers:

Box 2: Barriers and underlying issues

Barrier	Underling issues
Barrier 1: Inadequate conditions of dryland governance, unregulated and overuse of natural resources (Component 1)	▪ Insufficient regulation regarding the use of natural resources at the local level. ▪ Lack of cross-sectoral coordinated efforts for integrated planning and monitoring at the national and local levels. ▪ Insufficient policy support for inclusive, sustainable dryland governance. In particular, the absence of an appropriate legal framework regulating the use of pastureland, and the absence of a livestock tax
Barrier 2: Inadequate capacities and incentives at local level for managing drylands sustainably (Component 2)	▪ Limited understanding of the critical ecological processes underpinning dryland ago-ecosystems, the complex dynamics of ecosystems, and their values ▪ Lack of financial and market incentives for sustainable practices in land management, grassland stewardship and animal welfare, and limited tailored business support services

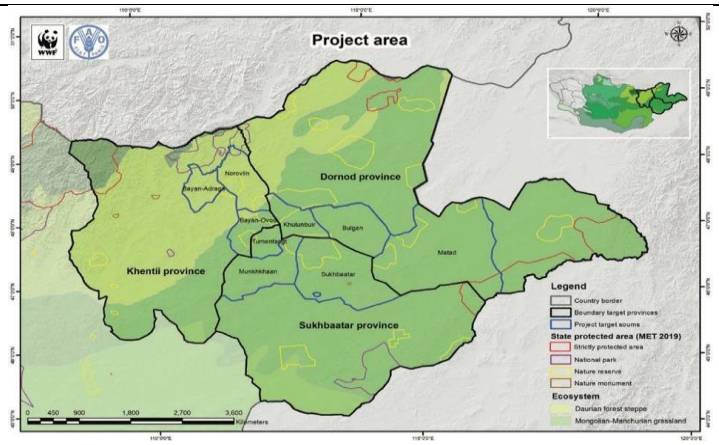
	▪ Limited involvement of women and vulnerable groups in decision-making to support inclusive and sustainable dryland governance.
Barrier 3: Limited experience and knowledge in protected area management and monitoring, and limited understanding of PA interactions/connectivity/benefits to wider landscape management (Component 3)	▪ -Limited law enforcement due to a lack of monitoring systems in the environmental sector and lack of institutional capacity of the state and civil society organizations in the ground. ▪ -Governments generally lack the experience and knowledge about PA management tools and approaches ▪ -Limited awareness of the role that NRs and LPAs play in biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and local livelihoods
Barrier 4: Lack of systematic sharing of knowledge and best practices in sustainable dryland management and biodiversity conservation (Component 4)	▪ Limited platforms and mechanisms at the aimag and national level to share knowledge, lessons learned and best practices in sustainable dryland management and biodiversity conservation. ▪ Dryland issues are dealt with separately, without taking into account interactions between plants, animals, humans, and the environment ▪ Limited regional cooperation and knowledge exchange for addressing dryland management challenges

Source: ProDoc, pp 29-32.

Box 3: Project description

Project title	Promoting Dryland Sustainable Landscapes and Biodiversity Conservation in the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia
GEF Agencies	FAO, WWF-US
Project Executing Entity	Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET)
GEF Project ID	10249
GEF Agency Project ID (FAO/ WWF entity number)	658821 G0018
Alignment with GEF Focal Area	▪ Aligns with the Sustainable Forest Management Impact Program on Dryland Sustainable Landscapes. ▪ Directly contributes to the IP objective of avoiding, reducing, and reversing further degradation, desertification, and deforestation of land and ecosystems in drylands through the sustainable management. ▪ Land Degradation of Climate Change.
Name of Parent Program/ID	Sustainable Forest Management Impact Program on Dryland Sustainable Landscapes/10206
Contribution to FAO's Strategic Framework/Country outcome WWF Mongolia Strategy	Regional Initiative on climate change and enhancement of sustainable management and use of natural resources FAO Country Outcomes 4.3 WWF Mongolia Strategic Plan 2021-2025
Contribution to SDGs	SDG2 Zero hunger and SDG5 Life on land SDG1 No poverty, SDG 5 Gender equality, SDG 10 Reduced inequalities, SDG13 Climate action and SDG 17 Partnerships

GEF CEO endorsement date	26 January 2021
Project implementation start date	1 April 2021
Project implementation end date	31 March 2026
Project duration	5 years
GEF project ID number	10249
FAO entity number WWF entity number	658821 G0018
Project country	Mongolia
Project location	Khulunbuir, Bulgan, Matad, Tumentsogt, Sukhbaatar, Munkhkhaan, Bayan-Ovoo, Norovlin, and Bayan-Adraga of Dornod, Khentii and Sukhbaatar of the Eastern Mongolian Steppe

Project map	
Contribution to GEF TF focal area strategic objectives and program	● Aligns with the Sustainable Forest Management Impact Program on Dryland Sustainable Landscapes ● Directly contributes to the IP objective of avoiding, reducing, and reversing further degradation, desertification, and deforestation of land and ecosystems in drylands through the sustainable management; and land degradation of climate change
GEF Trust Fund financing Co-financing (in-kind)	US$10,495,873 US$ 54,257,233 (government)
Executing partners	Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) and it's *aimag* and *soum* offices Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry (MoFALI) and it's *aimag* and *soum* offices Agency for Land Administration and Management, Geodesy and Cartography (ALAMGaC)

Source: ProDoc

63. **Project strategy and expected results**: The project was initiated in order to tackle problems by supporting the transformation of Mongolia's Eastern Steppe ecosystems to a resilient dryland landscape and ecosystem sustaining inclusive, resilient and sustainable livelihoods and securing multiple environment benefits. The Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs) of the project are as follows:

    - *1.19 million hectares of terrestrial protected areas under improved management for conservation and sustainable use.*
    - *0.25 million hectares of land restored.*
    - *5.64 million hectares of landscapes under improved practices.*
    - *10.3 million metric tons of CO_2e greenhouse gas emissions mitigated.*

64. **Project objective:** The objective of the project is to reverse and prevent dryland ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss through an inclusive, integrated landscape and value chain approach securing multiple environment benefits and sustainable, resilient livelihoods in the Eastern Mongolia.

65. Project components, outcomes, and outputs: According to the ProDoc, the project has four components, five outcomes and 21 outputs presented in Box 4 below.

Box 4: Project components, outcomes, and outputs

Component 1: *Component 1: Strengthening the enabling environment for the sustainable management of drylands in Mongolia*

Outcome 1.1: Strengthened policies and planning mechanisms for the sustainable management of drylands at national, aimag and soum levels.
Output: Cross-sectoral, multi-stakeholder working groups established at national and local levels to facilitate participatory, adaptive landscape planning and management in the existing land-use planning process.
Output: Guidelines for science-based, integrated land management planning, assessment and monitoring developed and stakeholders trained.
Output: Aimag- and soum-level land management plans developed incorporating ecologically sensitive, participatory landscape management (grazing, forest and other natural resources), through local consultations and ensuring gender equality and inclusiveness.
Output: Regular monitoring of land use, land degradation and biodiversity in target soums conducted by local government officers and/or local volunteers.
Output: National and/or aimag-level policies/laws and resolutions developed (or strengthened) to support sustainable land use and biodiversity conservation.
Component 2: *Scaling up sustainable dryland management in the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia*
Outcome 2.1: Farmers/crop producers in target areas are applying more sustainable crop and fodder production practices through the introduction of improved/climate-smart technologies
Output: Farmers (women and men), private companies and local government officers in target areas are trained in environmentally friendly, climate-smart crop and fodder production techniques.

Output: Support provided to farmers (women and men) in target areas to apply environmentally friendly, climate-smart crop and fodder production practices within overall landscape management.
Outcome 2.2: Local communities are applying sustainable management and restoration of rangelands and forest patches in the target area
Output: Guidelines and training program for local decision makers and stakeholders (herders, private sector, CBOs[5]) on sustainable pasture management and the conservation/restoration of critical ecosystems developed and implemented.
Output: Local pasture management and restoration plans and/or agreements established by local herder groups/institutions and implementation started as a part of landscape management.
Output: Support mechanisms for climate resilient pasture and livestock management that secures sustainable livelihoods implemented as a part of landscape management.
Output: Conservation and sustainable management of forest patches and riparian forests implemented as a part of landscape management.
Outcome 2.3: Local communities benefit from enhanced value chains, public-private partnerships and access to markets in support of sustainable grazing practices
Output: Partnerships established and implemented between herder groups/ farmers/cooperatives, local government and private sector to develop value chains for sustainably produced agricultural products.
Component 3: *Strengthening biodiversity conservation and landscape connectivity*
Outcome 3.1: Management capacity of Nature Reserves (NRs)[6] and Local Protected Areas (LPAs) in connectivity areas is increased to support survival of Mongolian gazelle and other iconic species
Output: Assessment to enhance landscape connectivity and management of globally important biodiversity in the target landscape conducted and incorporated into local plans.
Output: Management plans for NRs developed or updated in a participatory process involving local governments and stakeholders ensuring landscape level management.
Output: Priority interventions implemented in target NRs in line with management plans.

5 Community-based organizations, such as Herder Groups/Organizations, Pasture User Groups (PUGs), and Forest User Groups (FUGs).
6 Toson Khulstai, Khar Yamaat, Bayantsagaani tal, Ulziin ekh, Jaran togoony tal A&B and Menengiin tsagaan khooloi NRs.

Output: Community-centred conservation interventions implemented in LPAs in connectivity areas and other critical patch ecosystems to secure connectivity of ecosystems and key migratory species.
Output: Sustainable financing mechanisms for the implementation of the management plans developed and implemented.
Component 4: *Project coordination, knowledge management and monitoring and evaluation*
Outcome 4.1: Project coordination, knowledge management and monitoring and evaluation for the sustainable management of drylands in Mongolia
Output: Effective project coordination and monitoring and evaluation.
Output: Systematic creation, documentation and sharing of knowledge on sustainable dryland management and biodiversity conservation through national and global IP platforms.
Output: LDN target monitoring and reporting mechanism strengthened and relevant information shared through national and global IP platforms.

Source: ProDoc

66. **Groups and beneficiaries**: The ProDoc does not explicitly state the total numbers of the project's direct and indirect beneficiaries. Notwithstanding, the project clearly mentions targets for different outcomes.

67. **Key partners involved in the project**: FAO and WWF are the GEF agencies responsible for the operational execution of the project, including supervision and financial operations. The main executing partners are MET, MoFALI, ALAMGAC, and NAMAC with their aimag and soum level offices. The project is supported by a project management unit (PMU) which holds the executing responsibility for the delivery of the project's outputs and achievement and day-to-day operations.

3. Theory of change

68. The project's theory of change implies that if stakeholders, both women and men, participate in adaptive and participatory sustainable dryland management, sector institutions in Mongolia coordinate and collaborate on sustainable dryland management actions, and policies and laws that support sustainable dryland management and biodiversity conservation are in place, effective dryland governance will be achieved. Furthermore, it is anticipated that if farmers, both women and men, have the capacities to reverse soil erosion and sustainably increase crop productivity, local communities, both women and men, practice sustainable rangeland and forest management and restoration, and local protected area (PA) managers and communities have increased capacity and incentives to protect biodiversity, then the results will be an increase in the area under sustainable land and water use, restoration and conservation of critical biodiversity and ecosystems, which, in turn, will lead to increases in livelihood resilience, biodiversity, sustainable land management, climate change mitigation benefits, and land degradation neutrality. For these results to be achieved, the project must (a) strengthen access to technologies and investments, (b) prepare guidelines, provide training and extension services that support improved crop production systems and pasture management, (c) enhance value chains and access to markets through public-private partnerships, (d) introduce sustainable financing mechanisms for protected areas, and (e) develop and implement participatory PA management plans to ensure the habitat connectivity of migratory species. It is also necessary for the project to create and share knowledge on (a) sustainable drylands management, (b) LDN and biodiversity monitoring systems, and (c) its own experiences with other drylands countries in Asia and globally.

69. The ToC was well developed at the design stage. It calls for an integrated approach to tackling the complex drivers of land degradation and biodiversity by addressing key barriers in the target landscape. The theory clearly illustrates interlinks and interfaces between and among the different component, outcomes and outputs. It was developed based on a number of assumptions. The foremost assumption was that despite their individual mandates and needs, sectoral institutions, and multiple stakeholders share plenty of united attention to the sustainable management of dryland ecosystems. The theory also clearly elaborates its assumption that improvements in livestock management and health and market incentives will provide ample motivation to herders to improve the quality of their livestock rather than increase its quantity. Furthermore, it is assumed that sustainable dryland management, restoration, and conservation will lead to measurable and sustainable biodiversity, land degradation neutrality, climate change management, and livelihood benefits during the lifetime of the project and beyond. The project also assumes continued commitment to national, regional and global exchanged on sustainable drylands management in line with current national commitments under international conventions. The theory of change is a living document that will be revisited regularly, as will its assumptions, as part of the project's adaptive management.

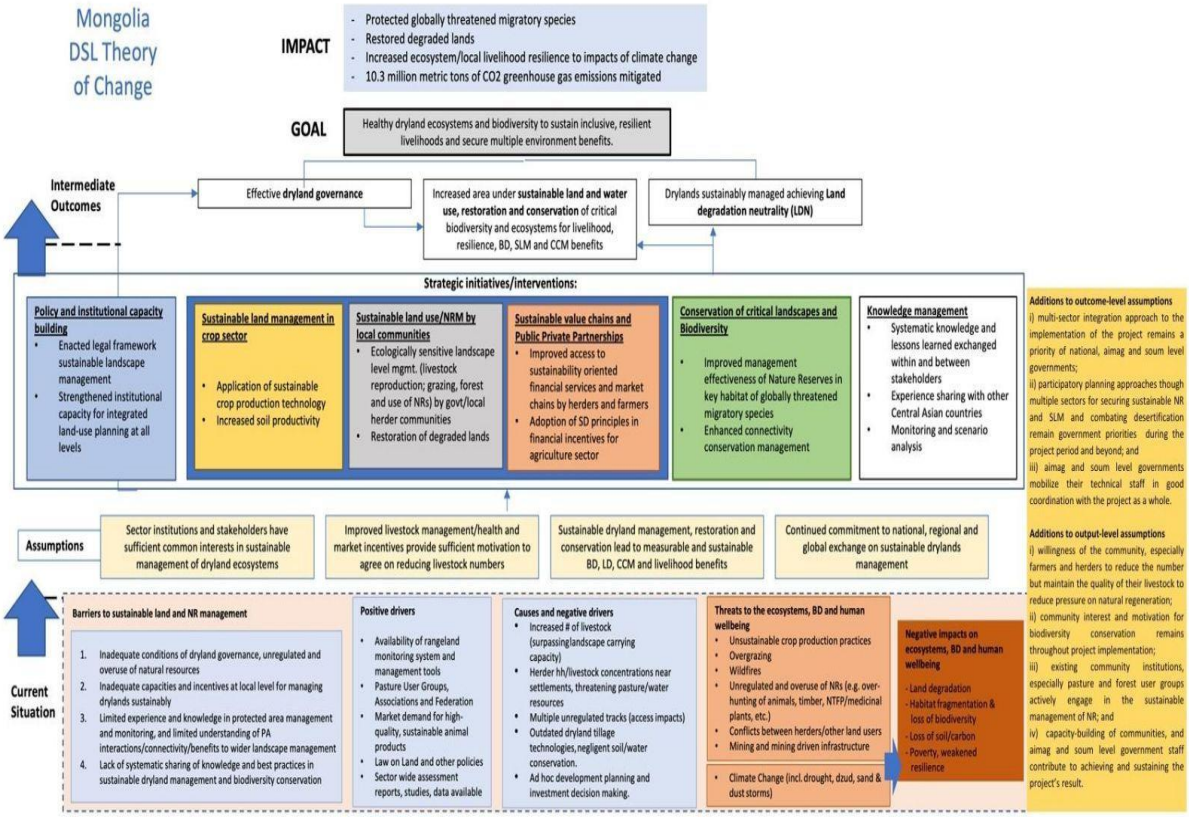
70. The MTR added a few assumptions to the outcome and output levels. The additions at the outcome level are i) multi-sector integration approach to the implementation of the project remains a priority of national, aimag and soum level governments; ii) participatory planning approaches though multiple sectors for securing sustainable NR and SLM, and combating desertification remain government priorities during the project period and beyond; and iii) aimag and soum level governments mobilize their technical staff in good coordination with the project as a whole.

71. **Additions to output-level assumptions**: i) willingness of the community, especially farmers and herders to reduce the number but maintain the quality of their livestock to reduce

pressure on natural regeneration; ii) community interest and motivation for biodiversity conservation remains throughout project implementation; iii) existing community institutions, especially pasture and forest user groups actively engage in the sustainable management of NR; and iv) capacity-building of communities, and aimag and soum level government staff contribute to achieving and sustaining the project's result.

72. The ToC is summarized in the figure below (next page).

Figure 1: Theory of Change



4. Key findings and MTR questions

73. The MTR findings on each evaluation criteria and its questions are presented in the sections below.

MTR Criterion 1: Relevance

Finding: Congruent with country priorities

74. Following desk review of available documents and interviews with stakeholders, specifically with government officials at the national, *aimag*, and *soum* levels, the MTR concluded that the project's objectives and outcomes are highly coherent with the government's development goals, sectoral policies, strategies, and national priorities for the NRM sector of the country. The project contributed toward achieving the government's priorities and targets.

Box 5: Alignment of the project's objective and outcomes with country priorities

Document	Alignment
Voluntary Target Setting to Achieve LDN in Mongolia	The project is well aligned with Mongolia's Voluntary LDN targets under the UNCCD. Project outcomes 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 3.1 are well aligned with the LDN targets[7]
National Biodiversity Program (2015-2025) under CBD	The project supports strategies[8] (goals 5, 6, and 7) and 3 (goals 8 and 9) of this program. Project outcomes 1.1 and 3.1 and core indicator 1 and its sub-indicators contribute to the NBP and Aichi targets.
Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under UNFCCC	NDC highlights mitigation and adaptation priorities and targets in the AFOLU sector. Project outcomes 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and the project's objective-level indicators as well as core indicators and their sub-indicators 3, 4, and 6 contribute to the priorities of Mongolia's NDC.
National Program on Protected Areas and its Action Plan	This program emphasizes expanding the PA network by including ecologically important areas that represent different natural zones. The project's objective and outcomes 1.1 and 1.3 directly contribute to achieving the targets of this program and plan.
National Action Program on Climate Change (2011-2021)	This program identifies six priority adaptation measures[9]. Project outcomes 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 and their activities are well aligned with the six priorities.
Sustainable Development Vision 2030	This Sustainable Development Vision addresses key legal frameworks for agriculture and the environment, promotes green growth, encourages sustainable land and forest management, and initiates fiscal incentives for biodiversity and the sustainable management of rangeland. The project contributes to the objectives of the vision.

[7] (i) Reduce deforestation and forest degradation to maintain and even grow the forest area to reach 9 percent of the nation's total area by 2030 compared to 7.85 percent in 2015
(ii) Promote sustainable grassland management and stop further grassland degradation
(iii) Increase agricultural yields by 2.5 t/ha per annum by 2030 compared to 1.6 t/ha in 2015
(iv) Ensure no net loss of wetlands by 2030 compared to 2015 (3963.3 sq. km).

[8] Strategy 2: develop and implement a science-based policy on the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources (goals 5, 6, and 7)
Strategy 3: Sustainable use of biodiversity - Goals 8 (introducing management) and 9 (taking into account grazing capacity and livestock population size, utilize legislative and economic leverages to reduce pasture degradation by up to 70 percent and increase the quality of existing pastures)

[9] i) Conserving natural resources, especially natural pasturelands; (ii) strengthening the bio-capacity of domestic animals; (iii) enhancing the capacities and livelihood opportunities of rural communities; (iv) increasing food security and supply; (v) improving understanding of climate extremes, and strengthening disaster risk capabilities; and (vi) introducing new and reliable insurance systems.

Green Development Policy and national legislations related to NRM/land use	Green development is related to natural resource management and land use. This legislation provides enabling frameworks for sustainable land and forest management, productive sectors, biodiversity protection, and reversal of land degradation. The project contributes to strategic objectives 1 and 2 of the Green Development Policy.
Action Plan of the Mongolian Agenda for Sustainable Livestock (2018)	The goal of the action plan is to support sustainable development of the Mongolian livestock sector, ensuring it is economically efficient while implementing sustainable pastureland management, enhancing food security and safety and social inclusiveness, and strengthening stakeholder partnerships and participation. Project components 1, 2, and 3 and outcomes 1.1, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 3.1 contribute in achieving this goal. The project's activities are closely aligned with the activities of the action plan, which include, for example, restoration, rehabilitation, sustainable utilization of pastureland and the establishment and activation of livestock revolving funds.

Finding: Congruent with the GEF's focal areas and operational programme strategies

75. The project was designed incorporating GEF's multi-focal areas, including sustainable dryland management, biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and sustainable forest and rangeland management. As shown in Box 6 below, the project is fully aligned with the GEF's focal areas objective.

Box 6: The GEF's focal areas and aligned project outcome/component

GEF focal area	Project outcome and components aligned with
Land degradation focal area objective 1	Project's outcome 2.1
Biodiversity focal area objective 2	Project's core indicator 1 and its sub-indicator 1.2 and outcomes 1.1 and 3.1
Climate change and its objective 2	Project's core indicators 3, 4 and 6 and their sub-indicators 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.3, and 6.1; and outcomes 2.2 and 2.3 and their outputs and activities

Finding: FAO and WWF Country Programming Framework

76. The project demonstrates climate-smart agriculture practices and participatory land-use planning by mobilizing multi-sector, participatory protected area management and biodiversity conservation. Box 7 summarizes the alignment of the FAO's country programme framework and the WWF's Mongolia strategic plan with the project's components and outcomes.

Box 7: Alignment of the FAO's country programme and the WWF's Mongolia strategic plan with the project's components and outcomes

FAO country programme framework	Project outcomes aligned
Output 2.1.1: Strengthened capacity to assess current levels of cropland degradation, with recommendations on the efficient use of forest strips, machinery, and wind breaks to maintain soil fertility	Project outcomes 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 with their corresponding activities
Output 3.5.1: Strengthened capacity of herders to adapt to climate change	Outcomes 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3
Output 3.5.2: Support and evidence-based recommendations for advanced methods of fodder production at the local levels provided (through scaling up of the FAO-pilot project)	Outcome 2.1 with its outputs and activities
WWF Mongolia Strategic Plan	**Project outcomes aligned**

Strategy 3: Promoting climate-smart integrated land use planning and management using the integrated water resource management approach	Outcomes 1.1 and 3.1 and their outputs and activities
Strategy 4: Ensuring the expansion, effectiveness and good connectedness of systems in protected areas	Outcome 1.1 and its outputs and activities

Finding: Needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries

77. The project focuses on promoting biodiversity conservation through participatory integrated land use planning, capacity-building of stakeholders, reversing land degradation through climate-smart production practices, livestock value chains, sustainable management of pastureland, and restoration of forestland. The interface between herders and pasture, forest, and water resources provides ample opportunities to reverse land degradation through sustainable practices. FGDs with herders in the project target areas revealed that support for capacity-building and livestock value chains, especially the wool value chain, was very helpful.

78. KIIs with *soum* and *bagh* governors revealed that the project does address multiple community needs. In particular, it supported value chains and restored pasturelands so that livestock herders can grow good-quality fodder. Further, the project supported participatory integrated land use planning, which stakeholders believe is crucial to addressing the dire need for reversing land degradation and promoting biodiversity conservation as well as agriculture. As one of the first projects to ever be implemented in some of the communities, the project proved to be useful.

79. Members of vegetable production groups shared their delight that this project attempted to address the real needs of local people. They added that commercial-scale vegetable production through collective farming is happening for the first time in their communities.

80. *Soum* governors, land management officers, and rangers highly appreciated the project's approach to the conservation of Mongolian gazelles and white-nape cranes. They said that identifying connectivity areas and including them in protected area management plan and land management plans were some of the major needs for improving biodiversity and mitigating land degradation. The rangers during separate interviews expressed their happiness in receiving capacity- building training in fire management and support for equipment essential restoring and managing forests in on the Eastern Steppe.

81. The MTR, based on interactions with communities and government officials, confirmed that the project was highly relevant for the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia.

Finding: Links between global coordination and synergies with national child project

82. The project is aligned with the Sustainable Forest Management Impact Programme on Dryland Sustainable Landscapes Impact Programme (DSL-IP). It directly contributes to the impact programme's objective of avoiding, reducing, and reversing further degradation, desertification, and deforestation of land and ecosystems in drylands through sustainable management in the Mongolian Eastern steppe. The project will generate multiple environmental and social benefits and enhance resilience of ecosystems and livelihoods by focusing on addressing the barriers to sustainable dryland management and biodiversity conservation in Eastern Mongolia.

83. The interview with Global IP coordination unit shared that they help in standardizing communication material, leveraging the communication materials in social media, and e-learnings. They also support through knowledge hubs, global platform collaboration to bring in best practices, identify with the country on scenes to help (sustainable pasture management in Mongolia), identified themes, establish working groups; and needed capacity development.

The MTR observed that the project is actively engaged in coordination and has made good use of different the DSL-IP platforms to showcase the project's best practices to international audience as well as received capacity building activities. For example, shared best practices on land use management planning and pasture management. The project participated in Making Every Voice Count for Adaptive Management initiative and participatory video training and WOCAT DSL-IP Communities of Practice. One of the issues the MTR noted was on sharing resources with the DSL-IP. For example, the project needs to allocate funds if it needs support from the IP.

MTR Criterion 2: Effectiveness

84. In line with the GEF, FAO, and WWF's various MTR requirements, progress towards outcomes were assessed against indicators and mid-term targets using the template presented in Annex 6.

Component 1: Strengthening the enabling environment for the sustainable management of drylands in Mongolia

85. Component 1 focuses on policies and planning for sustainable dryland management at the national, *aimag* and *soum* levels by establishing multi-stakeholder groups at different levels. The outcome, outputs, and activities under this component focus on strengthening cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder collaboration for integrated land management planning and monitoring. To operationalize this component; the project has proposed one outcome, five outputs, and 19 activities. Details on the progress made in each outcome are presented below.

86. **Outcome 1.1**: *Strengthened policies and planning mechanisms for the sustainable management of drylands at the national, 'aimag,' and 'soum' levels.* This outcome will be achieved through five indicators with explicit mid-term targets. The first indicator—*number of multi-stakeholder working groups established and operational*—calls for establishing and operationalizing 13 multi-stakeholder working groups at the national, *aimag*, and *soum* levels. The project met 92.3 percent of its mid-term target by establishing 12 such working groups. These groups have cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder representation and have become operational through integrated land management planning and monitoring. The groups facilitate participatory and adaptive land use- planning and management. The working groups and their ToRs were established by the orders of three *aimag* governors. The chairs of the *aimag* and *soum* working groups were mandated to ensure citizens' engagement and gender equality throughout the entire process of developing land management plans. The compositions of the working groups were unconventional, in that they included representatives of community-based organizations such as the unions of agriculture cooperatives and natural resource management groups and protected area (PA) administrators.

87. The MTR was informed that the national level technical group is in the process of being established. During interactions, the PMU team shared that the project has contributed to policy support at the national level. Several rounds of discussions were held with concerned ministries on the land law, especially on the approval process delays and pasture regulation and management issues which would be integrated into the land law. Besides, the project supported in promulgating the land cadastral law. The MTR notes that land is a political issue in Mongolia as it is associated to mining, thus the land law is unlikely to be in effect before the 2024 general elections. The project developed seven aimag and soum land management plans incorporating sustainable land use. It also succeeded in establishing nine soum-level photo monitoring systems and developing two soum-level pasture-use regulations using a participatory process.

88. To ensure that the multiple stakeholders were all engaged, the working groups were evaluated on the basis of four criteria: ability to meet the objectives of the working group; compliance with the functions of the state organization specified by law; compliance with the project's Stakeholder Engagement Plan; and involvement of stakeholders with related interests.

89. Along with establishing working groups, the project organized trainings on participatory and gender-sensitive land management planning which included topics such as climate change, land degradation neutrality, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable pasture management. All trainings were designed to strengthen the capacity of working groups and ensure the active participation of multiple stakeholders in the land management planning process. Interviews with *soum* governors revealed that, after the training session, members of the working groups started taking the lead, organizing regular meetings, and incorporating environmental aspects in land management plans (LMPs). Members appreciated having been restructured, becoming multiple stakeholders, and updating their ToR to specify their roles and responsibilities.

In terms of the second indictor—*number of 'aimag' and 'soum' land management plans incorporating sustainable land use, management and biodiversity conservation strategies and targets*—the MTR noted that only seven (58.33 percent) of the targeted 12 LMPs, were adopted. In addition, the project developed two draft guidelines and a training programme incorporating environmental and biodiversity considerations, climate change, land degradation neutrality, priority connectivity corridors, and the critical breeding sites of migratory species into existing land management planning process. These guidelines were piloted during integrated land management plans in targeted *aimags* and *soums*. Furthermore, the project also conducted on-the-job training to strengthen the technical capacities of land management entities. The project also organized workshops to update the guidelines using feedback from the piloted LMPs. Besides, a methodology for mapping protect area land use and conducting impact assessments was drafted and tested in 27 PAs in different ecosystems to be incorporated into the PA management plan guideline.

90. The third indicator of this outcome—*number of improved monitoring systems and processes in place*—targeted three *aimag* and nine *soum*. At the mid-term, the project had succeeded in establishing nine *soum*-level photo monitoring systems for monitoring the impacts of grazing in a herder-friendly fashion. Besides, photo-monitoring results were introduced at bagh meetings. To strengthen the national and local capacity of land management, monitoring, and evaluation, capacity building trainings, and technical supports were provided to the MET, ALAMGAC, land officers and meteorologists. A consultation meeting on land monitoring system was organized representing all concerned stakeholders related to land monitoring. As a result a draft methodology for using remote sensing for land monitoring was developed.

91. During the field visit, *soum* governors, land officers, and volunteer rangers shared that they had reached a substantial number of community members to solicit their feedback and thereby make their LMPs more inclusive. The MTR noted that this was substantiated in recent PIR, which reached out to 11,173 community members, 53 percent of whom were women, to incorporate their feedback and comments, thereby ensuring gender equality and inclusiveness in LMPs.

92. The target set for indicator four—*area under improved land management plans* – is the same as core indicator - 4. Please refer to paragraph 175, page 27 for the analysis of the core indicator 4. The fifth indicator—*number of revised policies, laws or resolutions drafted and submitted to the Cabinet or local 'khurals*." The mid-term target for this indicator is -- progress towards the final target (at least three revised policies, laws or resolutions drafted and submitted to Cabinet/ local Khural) will be monitored annually. The project exceeded this mid-term target as Munkhkhaan Sukhbaatar and Tumentsogt soums developed their pasture use

regulations using a participatory process. These regulations were approved by the respective *soum* parliaments and endorsed by the Ministry of Justice, thereby creating a legal environment for introducing sustainable rangeland management. In addition, Khar Yamaat developed a nature reserve (NR) protection regime and submitted it to the local parliament for approval.

93. The MTR observed mixed achievements on this outcome/component; three mid-term targets were achieved whereas two others were only partially met. The MTR rates the achievement of Outcome 1.1 as moderately satisfactory.

Component 2: Scaling up sustainable dryland management in the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia

94. This component focuses on building the capacity of local communities, including women and men, local government officials and private companies in environmentally friendly climate-smart crop and fodder techniques, supplying agriculture inputs to local beneficiaries, promoting value chains, and building the capacity of herders. Furthermore, the component focuses on the sustainable management of forest and pasture, restoration of critical ecosystems, and a mechanism for climate-resilient rangeland and livestock management. This component is achieved through three outcomes, seven outputs, and 24 activities.

95. Outcome 2.1: *Farmers/crop producers in target areas are applying more sustainable crop and fodder production practices through the introduction of improved/climate-smart technologies*. Outputs under this outcome include capacity building of farmers (both men and women), private companies, and local government officials; and support provided to farmers to practice environmentally friendly climate-smart crop production. The major interventions included -- holding consultations with farmers (women and men), crop companies and government officials; conducting agro-chemical and soil erosion analysis; developing technical guideline/handbook for environmentally friendly, gender-sensitive and climate-smart crop and fodder production; developing gender-sensitive and socially inclusive training and extension programs for farmers; organizing capacity-building programs; providing technical assistance to local governments and crop companies/farmers to enable them to provide the required technological inputs; and establishing mechanisms for resolving conflicts between herders and crop farmers. To implement activities under this outcome, the project collaborated with two private companies (Ider Onon LLC and Munkhiin Duurlig LLC) to promote climate-smart and environmentally friendly agricultural practices.

96. These interventions will be monitored using four indicators with explicit mid-term targets. The first indicator of outcome 2.1 —*area under improved practices*— is the same as core indictor 4. Please refer to 148, page 27 on analysis of core indicator 4.

97. The second indicator of outcome 2.*1—quantity of crop and fodder produced using sustainable and climate-smart practices*— has a target of 375 tons of total food crops and 104 tons of fodder produced with sustainable practices The major interventions under this outcome include, consultative meetings among the project team, WWF Mongolia, the Plant and Crop Science Research Institute, the Agriculture Department of Khentii Aimag, and crop farming companies to discuss the application of sustainable crop farming technologies at the beginning of the project. These meetings finalized the locations of and co-financing support for the interventions and ensured their compliance with environmental code of practice (ECOP) and environment and social management framework (ESMF), especially so that they use standard pesticides and only in legally permitted amounts and adopt fencing designs that allow for the free migration of Mongolian gazelles. The stakeholders agreed to regularly monitor their use of pesticides and fertilizers to see that they did not use too much. Among other activities, the project organized training programs, fenced cropping areas, and shared

best practices with 133 crop farmers. The number of private crop production companies that adopted environmentally friendly practices increased substantially in the Eastern *aimags*, from two to 11. With co-financing from beneficiaries, project-supported activities related to intercropping and improved rotational systems were scaled up from 239 ha to 1340 ha. The MTR considers this as a good example of community commitment and interest in the project's activities.

98. The MTR observed that herders and private companies practice sustainable and climate-smart fodder production in the project's target areas. During the first year of the project, only one company cultivated green fodder and that also just on 40 ha. Then the project demonstrated to herders how to cultivate fodder on small-scale campaigning sites. The famers cultivated native fodder species and, in doing so, built their resilience. Ten private companies cultivated fodder in 104 ha. Based on learnings from that harvest, 480 farmers then grew more than 10 ha of green fodder in their winter camps. Such fodder production has multiple benefits; it directly contributes to the livestock value chain and combats land degradation and promotes soil conservation.

99. The project targeted producing 375 tons of food crops and 104 tons of fodder using sustainable and climate smart practices, however, the MTR found that only 237 tons of grain and vegetables, or 63.2 percent of the mid-term target, were actually produced. Fodder production, however, was about double the target (200 tons).

100. The project reached 239 households, 61.9 percent of them were women. Seventy-one households were members of vegetable cooperatives and groups, 28 were 'eco-street' households and 130 households were from the project's nine *soums*. The MTR noted that the participation and engagement of women farmers, differently abled farmers, and women-headed households is significant. During focus group discussions (FGDs) in Sukhbaatar and Bayan-Adraga *soums* of Sukhbaatar Aimag, and Munkhhaan Soum of Khentii Aimag, members of three vegetable groups expressed enthusiasm for the technical and material support provided by the project, including seedlings, greenhouses, irrigation systems, and small tools. They, especially, appreciated the quality of the inputs and revealed that the trainings provided by the project were practical and very useful. They learned several techniques related to vegetable growing, including clearing the land, weeding, and harvesting and now apply the knowledge and skills they acquired. The participants further claimed that the technology they learned through different training sessions had significantly contributed to the reported increase in productivity.

101. During an FDG with members of Bayan Taliin Urgats vegetable production group, who were all female household heads, in Munkhhaan Soum of Sukhbaatar Aaimag, the MTR was told that after receiving a greenhouse and irrigation system the group constructed a water collection tank. The women expressed their excitement at having received greenhouses and being able to work in groups. This, they shared, was their first ever experience as a collective community activity. They also shared with the MTR team that the vegetables they produced were divided among the group members and mostly consumed within households or shared with their neighbours. Only an insignificant portion was sold in markets. The women were happy about how much money they were able to save, expressed confidence that they would be able to increase production and selling their products in the market in the future.

102. In the FDG, most of the members of the eco-street vegetable growers' group in Bayan-Ovoo Soum of Khentii Aimag claimed that they had not been able to grow enough seedlings in the first year but that production had increased enough in the second year and they were able to sell vegetables in nearby tourist camps and local shops. The eco-street group participated in the vegetable grower's exhibition in the *aimag* centre and were awarded first prize. The

members told the MTR team that this activity had been replicated in the locality as non-beneficiaries observed and learned from beneficiaries and bought greenhouses and started growing vegetables.

103. Project data suggests that 415 farmers (59.3 percent of them women) benefited directly from the project intervention and, as a result, harvested 37 tons of vegetables. The farmers sold their harvests at the annual green fall fair organized at the *aimag* level, earning a total of MNT 6,000,000 (equivalent approximately to USD 1733) in two days. This windfall inspired the farmers to continue growing vegetables.

104. In terms of achieving the third indicator—*the number of farmers (men and women), participating in crop management activities*—the project reached out to 239 households, almost 12 times its mid-term target of 20 individual farmers. The project fully met the targets of this outcome, especially those related to gender.

105. The MTR observed mixed achievements for this Outcome 2.1. Out of four mid-term targets, two were fully met whereas two were partially met. The MTR rates this outcome as moderately satisfactory.

106. Outcome 2.2—*local communities are applying sustainable management and restoration of rangelands and forest patches in the target area*—has four outputs: i) guidelines and a training program for local decision-makers and stakeholders (herders, the private sector, CBOs) on sustainable pasture management and the conservation/restoration of critical ecosystems; ii) local pasture management and restoration plans and/or agreements; iii) support mechanisms for climate-resilient pasture and livestock management; and iv) the conservation and sustainable management of forest patches and riparian forests. The major interventions under Outcome 2.2 include developing practical guidelines/handbooks and a training program for local decision-makers and stakeholders; organizing trainings for herders on pasture degradation; holding consultation meetings with herder groups/institutions about designing pasture roles and responsibilities; developing and implementing pasture management plans and agreements; establishing and strengthening financing mechanisms; providing technical assistance to strengthen animal health services; holding consultation meetings with forest user groups (FUGs) and River Basin Authority (RBA) to implement sustainable forest management (SFM) and riparian forest restoration activities; and developing and implementing SFM and riparian forest restoration plans.

107. The first indicator of this outcome—*number of bagh level pasture management and/or pasture use agreements adopted by local stakeholders*—had a mid-term target of six management plans and/or agreements. The MTR noted that the project was able to establish only five such agreements and thus achieved 83.33 percent of the set mid-term target.

108. The project conducted eight virtual and 16 in-person training programs/workshops, and three field-level consultations, reaching a total of 1,236 stakeholders (48 percent of them women), among them *soum* and *bagh* governors, *khural* representatives, rangeland and livestock specialists, land managers, and herders. These consultations contributed in making decision to allow 292,265 ha of critically degraded summer rangeland to lie fallow.

109. The project conducted review of legislation related to the livestock and pasture use and practices of each target *soum* using data form the e-land monitoring systems of ALAMGaC; Information and Research Institute of Meteorology, Hydrology and Environment; national desertification reports; and the reports of the Green gold and Swiss projects. Baseline data on livestock and pasture was compiled and a pasture carrying capacity map of each *bagh* was prepared. This material was then used to develop pasture management guidelines and a training program on sustainable livestock and pasture management.

110. Regulations regarding responsibility for pasture use in Mukhkhaan Soum was approved by the Citizen's Representative Khural and accepted by the Ministry of Justice to be followed by the public. This regulation stipulates that the government can use income from livestock tax to conserve and restore pastures. Furthermore, rangeland use agreements were formulated and approved to ensure pasture management would be sustainable. The PIR reported that five pasture agreements between the *soum* governor and pasture user groups were formalized to see the implementation of 376,907 ha of *bagh*-level rangeland management in Hulunbuir, Tumentsogt and Sukhbaatar soums of Dornod Aimag.

111. The second indicator of this outcome is the same as core indicator 3 -- *area of land restored (hectares)*, which has two sub-indicators, including sub-indicator 3.2 -- *area of forest and forest land restored* – with a mid-term target of 50 ha. The PIR reported that the project used active and passive restoration strategies to restore 21.05 ha of degraded forest and forestland. In addition, the project reforested 1.1 ha of riparian forest in Tumentsogt Soum, afforested 6 ha in Khar Yamaat NR, created 2.7 ha of greenery in Bayan-Adraga, Munkhkhaan and Matad *soums*, supported natural regeneration in 10 ha of community-managed forest area in Norovlin Soum, and protected 1.25 ha of riparian forest. This progress comprises only 42.1 percent of the mid-term target.

112. The sub-indicator 3.3 -- *area of natural grass and shrublands restored* – had set the mid-term target to restore 49,765 ha of natural grass and shrublands. The project's actual achievement was six times that as it improved 292,265 ha of pastureland of which 231,556 ha in Sukhbaatar and 60,709 ha in Tumentsogt *soums* by leaving the land fallow, a fact verified by national grazing impact photo monitoring.

113. The third indicator of Outcome 2.2 is same as core indicator 4—*area (in hectares) under improved practices, excluding protected areas*—and has two sub-indicators. Sub-indicator 4.1 calls for restoring 579,669 ha of natural grass and shrublands to benefit biodiversity. The PIR reports that a study was conducted to identify connectivity areas for Mongolian gazelles (*Procapra gutturosa*) and 14 critical habitats for white-nape crane (*Antigone vipio*) in project target *soums*. The study identified 6,717,393.75 ha of connectivity area for both Mongolian gazelles and white-nape cranes. These areas are reflected in the *aimag* and in *soum* land management plans. Based on the study and other social criteria; 579,669 ha of priority connectivity area in four project target *soums*, including critical habitat for white-nape cranes, was selected from management improvements to benefit biodiversity. In total 145,838 ha out of 6,717,393.75 ha (2.17 percent) is under local protection. The MTR noted that the mid-term target is fully met.

114. Sub-indicator 4.3 comprises one overall and three thematic targets. The project was successful in identifying 2,804,807 ha for the connectivity and calving areas of Mongolian gazelles and the connectivity and critical habitats of white-nape cranes. The project met 99.23 percent of the set target. Under this sub-indicator are three sub-targets. The first was to see 2,000 ha of cropland under improved management. The project was able to bring 1,696 ha of cropland (84.8 percent of the target) under improved management. Out of this total, 717 ha was allocated for improved no-tillage farming and intercropping, 250 ha for super-elite wheat seed replication, 714 ha oats plantation by crop farmers and herders for fodder, and 12 ha of vegetable/greenhouse production. All areas apply sustainable crop and fodder production practices and have introduced improved, climate-smart technologies. The second sub-target was that 930,652.5 ha of rangeland be under improved rangeland management plans. The project was successful in bringing 711,330 ha (76.43 percent of the target) under improved pasture management plans. This area included pastureland and hay-making areas. The third sub-target was to bring 9,900 ha of forest area under improved management. The PIR reports

that 20,450.4 ha of forest management, more than double the target, is currently being implemented through the capacity building of stakeholders. In addition, orientation training and material support for fire prevention tools was provided to government agencies. Noting the mixed results for this outcome, the MTR rated it as satisfactory. While the majority of the indicators were achieved, the project has to pay attention to restoring forests and forestland.

115. Outcome 2.3—*local communities benefit from enhanced value chains, public-private partnerships, and access to markets in support of sustainable grazing practices*—has three indicators and one output—*partnerships established and implemented between herder groups/ farmers/cooperatives, local governments and the private sector to develop value chains for sustainably produced agricultural products*. The major interventions are i) establishing partnerships to develop value chains; ii) providing technical and business development support to herder groups/cooperatives; iii) providing technical assistance and investment to strengthen herders' access to information, technologies, and traceability platforms; and iv) developing national standards, indicators and approaches for sustainable cashmere and other livestock products.

116. The first indicator—*number of people (men and women) benefiting from enhanced value chains in support of sustainable grazing practices*—has a mid-term target of 180 beneficiaries with at least half of them women and an average of 20 people per *soum*. The project emphasized three major interventions: establishing market linkages and networks, building capacity, and providing material support.

117. In the first year, the project conducted a rapid assessment and mapped dairy, meat, sheep wool, vegetable, and honey value chains in the target *soums*. Besides, the project also examined fruit and berry value chains for their potential as a business able to promote sustainable grazing and non-livestock income opportunities for herders. The assessment revealed that agro-forestry development has high potential in the Dornod and Sukhbaatar *aimags*.

118. To establish and strengthen market linkages, the project organized different meetings, including those with sheep wool value chain stakeholders and a market linkage meeting in collaboration with government's small and medium enterprise (SME) agencies and the private sector. The meetings helped establish direct market linkages with agriculture cooperatives and different private companies in the project target area. As a result, three/five cooperatives directly linked with a private company to supply it with cashmere and signed agreements with another private company to supply sheep wool. The project also supported the organization of an annual Wool Market Day to strengthen market linkages.

119. The MTR noted, according to the PIR, that the project coordinated and mobilized appropriate government agencies and the private sector to create an enabling environment for establishing market linkages and increasing the access of herders and cooperatives to promote sustainable cashmere production and expanding their network. During interviews, *soum* governors appreciated the enabling environment created by establishing multi-stakeholder partnerships and the facilitation role assumed by the project. They further opined that multi-stakeholder partnerships had already gained momentum and that they had observed preliminary positive results. For example, some cooperatives have signed agreements for supplying wool to private companies.

120. The MTR noted that the project organized technical trainings to introduce modern technology related to sheep wool shearing, improvements to cooperative governance, strengthening of production and market-based collective actions, and diversification of income for herders. Six hundred one people (55 percent of whom were women) participated in such trainings. *Soum* governors and *aimag* technical officers opined that the trainings provided by the project

marked a milestone in enhancing their businesses. Cooperative members of Ashid Munkh Bayan Cooperative of Munkhhaan Soum in Khentii Aimag said that training, especially in wool shearing, made their work easier and that training in sustainable lamb feeding enhanced livestock productivity.

121. In addition, the project provided cooperatives with material support such as electric shearing machines and electric tools. The beneficiaries really appreciated the support as wool shearing by hand used to be very time-consuming and there were limited people who used to shear wool. Now the herders themselves can shear wool using an electric shearer. The herders are very satisfied that the project enabled them to use electric shearers themselves. The MTR believes that the above activities are a good indication that the project is growing increasingly effective and will be sustainable in the long run. In total 1,433 people participated in training, eight times the 180-person mid-term target and that the gender ratio of trainees was balanced.

122. The second indicator of outcome 2.3—*number of herder groups/cooperatives that obtain certification on sustainable practices through projects*—had a mid-term target of three herder groups/cooperatives, at least one of which was women-led. The major interventions in achieving this indictor were capacity development, independent skill and capacity assessment of trained cooperative members, and the facilitation of the certification process.

123. The MTR found that 284 members of agriculture cooperatives were trained to apply a sustainable code of practices for cashmere sorting and grading. Altogether, 127 women were certified in cashmere grading and 13 in animal health and welfare. Five agriculture cooperatives, including one women-lead, obtained a sustainable fibre alliance (SFA) cashmere compliance certificate after a third party assessed them. Another 14 young herders including one woman were trained in wool shearing technology and each received a national shearer certificate. The MTR noted that the target was surpassed by two-fold and that the targeted gender ratio was achieved.

124. The third indicator—*additional or new income from value chain activities*—had a target of three or five percent. According to the PIR, four agricultural cooperatives sold 57,600 kg of cashmere worth USD 2,514,500 to domestic primary processors and earned 22.8 percent more income. As a result of wool partnerships, three agriculture cooperatives supplied wool to the producers of organic wool fertilizer, four times the target. However, the MTR did not find evidences of conducting any outcome survey to verify this achievement The MTR rates this outcome as highly satisfactory since all the indicators in this outcome were all fully or over achieved.

Component 3: Strengthening biodiversity conservation and landscape connectivity

125. To translate this component into action, one outcome, five outputs, and 14 activities were planned. The outcome focuses on increasing the capacity to manage nature reserves (NRs) and locally protected areas (LPA) in connectivity areas to improve the survival rate of Mongolian gazelles and other iconic species. The outputs were conducting an assessment to enhance landscape connectivity and manage globally important biodiversity in the target landscape and incorporating it into local plans; developing management plans for NRs using a participatory process; implementing priority interventions in target NRs; implementing community-centred conservation interventions in LPAs in connectivity areas and other critical patch ecosystems; and developing sustainable financing mechanisms for the implementation of management plans.

126. The first indicator of Outcome 3.1—*management capacity of nature reserves and local protected areas in connectivity areas is increased to support the survival of Mongolian gazelles and other iconic migratory species*—is the same as core indicator 1—*terrestrial protected areas*

created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use (hectares) —and the mid-term target was 1,189,866 ha. The project conducted a habitat connectivity analysis for Mongolian gazelles by using circuit theory and the least-cost corridor modelling approach and was able to identify least-cost corridors connecting protected areas and the core habitats of gazelles. The centrality analysis found that Toson Khulstai, Jaran Togoo A and B, Bayartsagaan Tal, and Yakhi Nuur nature reserves are critically important protected areas from the prospective of the interconnectedness and permeability of gazelle movements. The analysis explicitly mentions that the finite land area, increasing human and livestock population, and economic demand for building and expanding mining and associated infrastructures are the major drivers for creating pressure and converting grassland to other land uses.

127. A survey conducted to identify critical habitats for migratory birds found that there were 14 crucial breeding and summering sites for the white-nape crane. That same survey also identified several regions of crucial cropland in the project target area. Conservation measures on five severely degraded crucial sites for white-nape cranes and Asian great bustards were implemented in collaboration with local communities and partners. These measures were incorporated into the land management plans of three *aimags*.

128. The MTR notes that the project conducted a biodiversity monitoring survey on critical habitats for migratory birds, a Mongolian gazelle monitoring survey, a bird habitat connectivity study, a habitat connectivity analysis for Mongolian gazelle, and a KAP survey on the illegal hunting of Mongolian gazelles, among others. The findings and recommendations of the studies were taken seriously and interventions planned accordingly. The MTR considers these studies to be a positive initiative.

129. While assessing progress against the first indicator of Outcome 3.1 (same as core indicator 1) -- *area of terrestrial PAs*[10] *under improved management effectiveness* -- the MTR found that 852,981.3 ha, or 71.7 percent of the mid-term target, was officially designated as state-protected area in the Khar Yamaat, Toson Khulstai, and Bayantsagaanii Tal nature reserves. The remaining 336,884.7 ha of protected area in Jaran Togoony A and B, Menen Tsagaan Khooloi and Ulz Goliin Ekh nature reserves was officially established by the Parliament but the Cabinet has yet to establish the boundaries of the remaining three NRs. The PMU shared that the target was not met because of delays in government decision-making.

130. In terms of achieving sub-indicator 1.2—*terrestrial protected areas under improved management effectiveness*—the six natural reserves and their management effectiveness tracking tool (METT) scores are as follows: Ulz River – 29.3, Toson Khulstai – 54.4, Menen Tsagaan Khooloi – 24.5, Bayantsagaan Tal – 27.2, Jaran Togoon Tal A and B – 20.4, Khar Yamaat – 62.9.

131. The MTR noted that before formulating NR management plans, the project, in collaboration with the Department of Protected Areas and the administration of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET), organized consultation meetings to empower stakeholders in PA management, specifically to clarify the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders in an amendment recently made in PA law. In collaboration with MET and WWF US, the project organized a two-phase conservation coach training on standard designing for government partners.

132. The MTR noted that the project adopted a participatory approach in formulating NR plans. It conducted a series of consultations in all NRs and followed the standard procedure and methodology, which includes land-use planning reflected in the relevant PA management

[10] Protected Areas.

plan. In interviews, *soum* governors, *aimag* MET officials, land officers, and volunteer rangers said they were highly appreciative of the process followed in formulating PA management plans. They believe that holding a multi-stakeholder consultation enabling diverse stakeholders to contribute could ensure the conflict-free implementation of PA management plans. The MTR further noted that the participation of multiple stakeholders, including government agencies and substantial number of women, in a series of consultative processes to identify conservation targets and threats for each NR was a positive indication of ownership-building and contributed to minimising conflict and increasing sustainability. The PIRs have reported that one management plan exists, three are awaiting approval, and two are being formulated. The MTR used the results recorded in the PIR as METT score tracking tool was not made available to the MTR team.

Table 2: METT score

Name of NR	**METT baseline score**	**METT mid-term target score**	**Mid-term score**	**MTR observations**
Ulz river	15.6	29.3	19	Increase by 3.4 from baseline but 9.7 less than MTR target
Toson Khulstai	49.0	54.4	46.1	Reduced by 2.9 from baseline and 8.3 less than MTR target
Menen Tsagaan Khooloi	10.9	24.5	34.7	Increased by 23.8 from baseline and higher by 10.2 from MTR target
Bayantsagaan Tal	15.6	27.2	34.4	Increased by 18.8 from baseline and higher by 7.2 from MTR target
Jaran Togoon Tal A and B	12.2	24.4	33.3	Increased by 21.1 from baseline and higher by 8.9 from MTR target
Khar Yamaat	61.6	62.2	69.6	Increased by 8.0 from baseline and higher by 7.4 from MTR target

133. As the table above indicates, the MTR target was partially met. Out of the six METT scores, four greatly exceeded both the baseline and their mid-term target, one improved from the baseline but did not meet the target, and one declined below the baseline. The reason shared with the MTR for the decline of the METT score compared to it's baseline for Toson Khulstai nature reserve is major portion of this NR falls out of the project soums (out of five soums only two soums are within the project target areas) and change of management responsibility. As this NR is crucial for Mongolian gazelle the project cannot leave this NR.

134. The second indicator of Outcome 3.1—*area under improved practices, excluding protected areas*—is the same as core indicator 4 referring to the sub-indicator, 4.1, whose mid-term target was to restore 579,669 ha of natural grass and shrublands to benefit biodiversity. The PIR reports that the project conducted a study to identify connectivity areas for the Mongolian gazelle (*Procapra gutturosa*) and 14 critical habitats for the white-nape crane (*Antigone vipio*) in project target *soums*. The study identified a total of 6,717,393.75 ha for the connectivity areas of both species. These areas were also incorporated into *aimag* and soum land management plans. A total of 579,669 ha of priority connectivity areas, including critical habitats for white-nape cranes, were selected for improved management to benefit biodiversity in four project target *soums* (Norovlin, Khulunbuir, Bulgan, Bayan-Ovoo). Of that area, 145,838 ha is under local protection. The MTR noted that the mid-term target of this indicator is underway to achieving.

135. The third indicator was the *biodiversity of species* and its sub-indicator, the *number of Mongolian gazelles and number of days on which gazelles are observed in target NRs during the relevant season*. The project conducted monitoring surveys in July and December 2022 in target NRs in collaboration with Baigali NR Administration in Dornod Aimag, the Institute of Biology of Academy of Sciences of Mongolia, and volunteer rangers of Khar Yamaat NR. The results were used to update management and monitoring plans of the selected NRs.

136. Since conducting a baseline survey in 2021, the project has conducted counts every winter and summer, as the table below shows.

Table 3: Mongolian gazelle monitoring

Name of NR	**Counting Season**	**MTR target**	**Baseline**		**Count**	
			Aug 2021	**Dec 2021**	**July 2022**	**Dec 2022**
Bayantsagaanii tal	Summer	961	961	411	6,540	175
Jaran togoonii A	Summer	974	974	916	9,651	1717
Jaran togoonii B	Summer	24,316	24,316	3,890	6,021	11,895
Menen Tsagaan khooloi	Winter	68,027	0	1,257	54	1,460
Toson khulstai	Summer	77,853	77,853	246	35,600	246
Ulz river head	Winter	2,300	120	3,700	12	2,703
Khar Yamaat	Winter	200	200 through the year		67 (in Sep-300)	150 (in Oct-1200)

137. As the table above and the PIR show, more gazelles were seen on more days in Khar Yamaat than in the first-year baseline survey. In the other NRs, however, results were mixed.

138. The second sub-indicator of the third indicator—*number of breeding pairs of white-nape cranes with nesting success in the target area*—has a mid-target of 22 breeding pairs. In December, the project conducted a survey to identify critical habitats for migratory birds and identified 14 crucial breeding and summering sites as well as stop over sites, and the cropland in the project target area. Following the recommendations of the survey, the project, in collaboration with the local community and multiple partners, applied conservation measures in five severely degraded sites crucial for white-nape cranes. To prevent further degradation, those sites were incorporated into land management plans. The survey confirmed that there was no conflict between locals, including farmers, and either the crane or the Asian great bustard. The survey recorded 22 breeding pairs in July 2022 with a breeding success rate of 77.2 percent which serves as the baseline. The results survey carried out to record breeding pairs is expected to be available in October only. Since the results for this outcome were mixed, with some met fully and some partially, the MTR rates this outcome as moderately satisfactory.

Component-4: Project coordination, knowledge management, and M&E

139. This component is critically important for monitoring, evaluation, adaptive learning, knowledge management, and the long-term sustenance of results. The component emphasizes the production of knowledge management materials on biodiversity conservation, sustainable NRM, and the capacity development of multiple sectors and stakeholders through participatory planning. This component also foresees the dissemination of knowledge management products through websites and social and regular media to reach more stakeholders. This component is achieved through one outcome, three outputs, and eight activities.

140. Outcome 4.1—*project coordination, knowledge management, and monitoring and evaluation for the sustainable management of drylands in Mongolia*—includes three outputs focusing on effective project coordination and M&E; documentation and sharing knowledge products on sustainable dryland management and biodiversity conservation through national and global IP platforms; and strengthening monitoring mechanisms and sharing relevant information on land degradation neutrality through national and global IP platforms. The major activities under this outcome were organizing PSC meetings, inception and dissemination workshops; effective project coordination; M&E, including adaptive planning and management, establishing links with global IPs, and monitoring the implementation of GAP, SEP, and ESMF; conducting MTR and TE; developing gender-sensitive/responsive knowledge management and communications strategies; implementing knowledge management and communications activities; developing regular planning, review and monitoring processes for national and subnational LDN targets; and sharing information on LDN targets through national and global platforms.

141. To assess this outcome, targets were set for its three indicators. The first indicator—*number of knowledge products (publications, leaflets, case studies, best-practice documents, videos and other media content, and the like) developed and disseminated*—had a mid-term target of five. That target was more than doubled. The project produced 12 knowledge products, including six videos, two booklets, documentary/educational material, a TV programme in seven episodes, two guidelines, and report. The MTR team reviewed all of them and found them to be of high quality. Some of the educational materials, such as the "big brother trip" are popular among middle and high school students. Interactions with herders revealed that the videos, especially the one on lamb feeding, was extremely useful for them.

142. The second indicator—*number of people (women and men) at national/aimag level reached by communications and knowledge management activities (social media posts, TV clips, workshops, seminars, and the like)*—had a mid-term target of reaching at least 10,000 people. The PIR reported that the project had reached a large number of people through different communication and knowledge management products, specifically 21,700 people reached through communication and knowledge management materials, 18,410 people through promotional printed materials, and 1,107,572 people through social media posts run by FAO and WWF Mongolia. The project shared three best practices: (i) pasture management, during a webinar on the sustainable management of pasture resources in Kazakhstan in April 2023, (ii) Integrated Land Use Planning for Land Degradation Neutrality: Towards a Community of Practice for informed decision-making on LDN, (iii) a dryland IP child program at the GEF Asia Pacific workshop in Bali in January 2023. Besides, the project shared its land management planning guideline during a workshop at the UNCCD COP 15 meeting in December 2022 and the PMU participated in an online GEO-LDN seminar on national approaches to mapping land degradation in April 2023.

143. The MTR concluded that the project closely adhered to the third indicator—*M&E deliverables are submitted on time*. Based on the progress presented above, the MTR rates this outcome as highly satisfactory.

Project objective – achievement of core and sub-indicators

144. The project aims to reverse and prevent dryland ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss through an inclusive, integrated landscape and value chain approach that results in multiple environmental benefits and sustainable, resilient livelihoods in Eastern Mongolia. The project used the strategies of mobilizing multi-sector and multi-stakeholder partnerships and adopting integrated and participatory approaches. It mobilized communities and sectoral government at the all three levels (national, *aimag*, and *soum*) as well as the private sector. To

achieve its goal and generate global benefits, the project taken up the five core indicators and six sub-indicators given in the box below.

Box 8: Project core and sub-indicators

Core indicator	Sub-indicator
Core indicator 1: Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use (hectares)	**Sub-indicator 1.2**: Terrestrial protected areas under improved management effectiveness
Core indicator 3: Area of land restored (hectares)	**Sub-indicator 3.2**: Area of forest and forest land restored
	Sub-indicator 3.3: Area of natural grass and shrublands restored
Core indicator 4: Area of landscapes under improved practices (hectares, excluding protected areas)	**Sub-indicator 4.1**: Area of landscapes under improved management to benefit biodiversity
	Sub-indicator 4.3: Area of landscapes under sustainable land management in production systems
Core indicator 6: Greenhouse gas emissions mitigated (metric tons of CO_2e)	**Sub-indicator 6.1**: Emissions avoided outside the Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use (AFOLU) sector
Core indicator 11: Number of direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as co-benefit of GEF investment	

145. The Core indicator - 1 is -- *terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use* with mid-term target of 1,189,866 ha. The project 852,981.3 ha (71.7 percent its mid-term target) under improved management for conservation and sustainable use by establishing three NRs. The reason for not achieving the remaining 336,884.7 ha of this target is due to administrative delays in the Cabinet approving the boundaries of the three NRs, *viz*. Ulz Jaran Togoony A and B, Menen Tsagaan khooloi NR and Ulz goliin ekh. The MTR has an impression that this target is unlikely to meet as the NRs are located in the mining areas. This requires rigorous high level political lobbying to obtain Cabinet approval.

146. The mid-term targets for the METT scores of Sub-Indicator 1.2—Ulz River – 29.3, Toson Khulstai – 54.4, Menen Tsagaan Khooloi – 24.5, Bayantsagaan tal – 27.2, Jaran togoon tal A and B – 20.4, Khar Yamaat - 62.9—demonstrate that the mid-term target was partially met. In four of the six NRs, both the baselines and mid-term targets were greatly exceeded, but in one, the mid-term target was not met despite improvement over the baseline, and in the last, neither the baseline nor the mid-term target was surpassed. Please refer to Outcome 3.1 for details.

147. The MTR assessed progress made in sub-indicators 3.2 and 3.3, which had mid-term targets of 50 ha and 49,765 ha respectively. The project restored just 42.1 percent of the target, 21.05 ha of degraded forest and forestland, but surpassed the 3.3 target by almost six-fold, restoring a total of 292,265 ha of grassland and shrublands.

148. Since no target set for Core Indicator - 4 in the results framework, the MRT was unable to assess this indicator. It did, however, assess progress in achieving sub-indicators 4.1 and 4.3. No progress is made in sub-indicator 4.1. The project only identified 6,717,393.75 ha as connectivity areas for Mongolian gazelle and 14 critical habitats for White-nape crane in project target nine soums which is reflected in the aimag and soum land management plans and discussed through bagh meetings. It has fully achieved the mid-term target of sub-Indicator 4.3 which is -- *area of landscapes under sustainable land management in production systems*. The PIR reports of bringing 2,826,660.5 ha of the area under improved land management plans. In terms of the three sub-targets for Sub-Indicator 4.3, progress is noted as follows: (i) of the targeted 2000 ha, the project brought 1,696 ha of crop land (a partial achievement of 84.8 percent of the target) under improved management; (ii) of the mid-term target of 930,652.5 ha, the project brought 711,330 ha (a partial achievement of 76.43 percent) under improved pasture management; and (iii) of the mid-term target of 9,900 ha of forest area under improved management, the PIR reports managing twice the area (20,450.4 ha) through capacity-building of stakeholders, the provision of material support for fire prevention tools to government agencies, and orientation training. However, since proper reporting was lacking, this sub-target was not evaluated.

149. Core Indicator - 6 has a mid-term target of sequestering 3,090,664.5 tons (2,415,664 tons directly and 675,000 tons indirectly) of CO_2e. The project reported of mitigating twice as much, 6,067,548 tons directly and 1,719,904 tons of CO_2e indirectly. Besides, since the results framework did not mention a mid-term target for Sub-Indicator 6.1, the MTR did not evaluate it.

150. Core Indicator - 11 has two mid-term targets. The first is 12,420 people (46.6 percent of them women) receiving targeted support and/or use of resources that the project maintained or enhanced. The PIR reports that 15,220 people (49 percent of them women), or 122.5 percent of the target, benefitted from the project. The second target is 200 national and *aimag* stakeholders trained. The MTR noted that 812 national and *aimag* stakeholders (42 percent of them women) were trained by organizing different capacity development programs on sustainable land management planning, sustainable rangeland management and protected area management. The target was surpassed nearly four-fold.

151. The results framework lays out the capacity score card results and the baseline capacity development scores of 47% (21.1 points) of the project area. The baseline was established by conducting a capacity assessment during the project design phase. The PIR reports that the project's interventions increased capacity development scores both in terms of percentage and points. At the mid-term, the project achieved 60% (with 26.8 points) whereas the target was set for 52.5% (23.6 points). However, the MTR was unable to find any evidence that a capacity development assessment had been conducted to substantiate this score.

152. Based on the progress made in meeting the mid-term targets of the core and sub-indicators of this component, the MTR concludes that the project made mixed progress. The majority of core indicators (1, 3, and 4), along with their sub-indictors, are close to achieving their mid-term targets, so they were rated moderately satisfactory. The remaining two core indicators (6 and 11), along with their sub-indicators, fully met or exceeded their mid-term targets and were rated as highly satisfactory. The capacity-building score was rated satisfactory.

MTR Criterion 3: Efficiency

Finding: Timeliness, cost, and efficiency

153. The GEF endorsed the project in January 2021 and implementation began on 1 April 2021. To kick start it, an inception workshop was conducted in Ulanbaatar on 1 July 2021 which was attended by 280 people, including officials from the government agencies MET, MOFALI, and ALAMGaC and representatives from provincial and soum governments, I/NGOs, local herder groups, and other donor-funded projects operating in the target area.

154. The MTR noted that the project made good use of the time available during the inception phase. The project established a project management unit (PMU) at the MET premises by hiring some staff members and advertising the remaining positions; drafted an AWP/B and procurement plan for 2021; developed standard operating procedures regarding the joint implementation of the project as well as a joint communication guide; established a joint taskforce of FAO and WWF to provide technical support to the PMU for ensuring effective project implementation; set up the Project Steering Committee (PSC); appointed the National Project Director; conducted training in operations, procurement, finance, communication guidelines and SOPs for PMU staff; shared a brief introduction to the project via the social media pages and websites of FAO and WWF Mongolia.

155. The MTR also noted that the project took initiatives and build synergies with similar projects, including ENSURE/GEF/UNDP; STREAM/EU/FAO; and Livestock Commercialization Project/ World Bank. Together they discussed collaboration, coordination and potential co-financing opportunities. The project also held meetings with MET, MOFALI, and ALAMGaC to assign a focal point and discuss co-funding opportunities

GEF funding and co-financing

156. In its review of the financial status of the project at the end of June 2023, the MTR noted that the project's expenditure is on track. It had utilized USD 2,650,370.81 with a burn rate of 49.5 percent. In analysing agency-wise budget disbursement, the MTR noted that FAO had spent 26.22 percent and WWF 23.28 percent of their respective budgets. The MTR believes that the project is expected to maintain the expected burning rate in the remaining project period. Refer to Table 5 for details.

157. The MTR noted that the project was able to mobilize co-financing in kind, grant, and cash. At the end of June 2023, the project had materialized USD 20,380,067 (40 percent) of the committed co-financing from the government and the private sector. The MTR was told that the project had experienced no challenges in mobilizing co-financing at any stage of the project. One good example of both multi-sector partnership and motivation to support the project that the MTR noted was co-financing by the *soum* governments, even at the activity level. Table 4 below illustrates the project's co-financing status.

Table 4: Co-financing table

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financer	Type of Co-financing	Amount confirmed at CEO Endorsement	Actual amount materialized on 30 June 2023	Actual amount materialized at mid-term (confirmed by the review/evaluation team)
Recipient country Government	Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET)	In-kind	10,000,000	3,593,797	3,593,797
Recipient country Government	Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry (MOFALI), including USD 6 million in World Bank / IFAD financing	In-kind	13,000,000	10,294,209	10,294,209

Recipient country Government	Agency for Land Administration and Management, Geodesy and Cartography (ALAMGAC)	In-kind	3,000,000	3,188,031	3,188,031
Recipient country Government	Sukhbaatar aimag and Tumentsogt, Sukhbaatar, Munkhkhaan soum Governor's office	In-kind	5,000,000	92,637	92,637
Recipient country Government	Khentii aimag and Bayan-Adraga, Bayan-Ovoo, Norovlin soum Governor's office	In-kind	5,000,000	100,932	100,932
Recipient country Government	Dornod aimag and Bulgan, Matad, Khulunbuir soum Governor's office	In-kind	5,000,000	95,946	95,946
UNDP/GCF	ADAPT project	In-kind		2,217,538	2,217,538
UN-FAO/EU	STREAM project	In-kind		472,905	472,905
Civil society organization	WWF Mongolia	In-kind	1,300,000	355,000	355,000
Civil society organization	TNC Mongolia (for Toson Khulstai Nature Reserve)	In-kind	300,000	30,000	30,000
GEF agency	Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)	In-kind	1,600,000		
GEF agency	World Wildlife Fund, Inc. (WWF)	In-kind	345,000		
Private sector	Crop production company (Ider Onon LLC)	Grant	500,000	162,800	162,800
Private sector	Crop production company (Munkhiin Duurlig LLC)	Grant	500,000	162,800	162,800
Private sector	Others include vegetable farmers and herders	Cash		114,908	114,908
NGO	Sustainable Fibre Alliance (SFA)	Grant	5,400,000		
		Total	**50,945,000**	**20,881,503**	**20,881,503**

Cost effectiveness

158. The MTR did not assess cost effectiveness in monetary terms, as it was not provided with information on the unit costs of any activity. The MTR noted that, in some of its activities, the project took good initiatives in building the capacity of community members and making them local resource persons to minimize the cost of hiring external experts. For example, the project trained local youths to shear wool and provided them with certificates and tools. These youths now provide shearing services in their communities for less cost than other shearers charged in the past. The training on castration is also proving to be cost-effective. Earlier, herders had to pay 3,000 MNT (slightly less than one USD) for each castration as there were no or very limited people who could provide this service. Now, for bloodless castration, local resource people do not charge but simply ask for lunch. The project facilitated the drafting of the regulations for the fund mechanism and the establishment of cooperative-level lamb feed revolving funds, a measure which the MTR considers to be one of the most cost-effective strategies the project has adopted. The cooperatives bought pallets and distributed them to

herders free of charge with the condition that once they sold their animals in autumn they would pay back the amount for use again in the next season.

Table 5: GEF proposed budget and expenditure

Component	2021 (April - Dec)				2022				2023 (till June end)			
	WWF		FAO		WWF		FAO		WWF		FAO	
	Target	Expenditure	Target	Expenditure	Target	Expenditure	Target	Expenditure	Target	Expenditure	Target	Expenditure
Component 1: Strengthening the enabling environment for the sustainable management of drylands in Mongolia	81,625.00	46,563.00	115,125.00	120,254.00	193,721.00	192,895.00	309,214.00	219,402.80	127,792.00	33,312.00	158,306.00	61,023.00
Component 2: Scaling up sustainable dryland management in the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia	52,595.00	14,227.00	89,375.00	75,162.00	142,452.00	118,630.00	500,480.00	434,515.20	142,781.00	50,443.00	694,700.00	373,054.00
Component 3: Strengthening biodiversity conservation and landscape connectivity	261,025.00	130,468.00	4,725.00	3,225.00	387,300.00	279,292.00	10,000.00	10,630.60	425,900.00	236,320.00	5,000.00	-
Component 4: Project coordination, knowledge management and monitoring and evaluation	37,725.00	35,429.00	76,425.00	24,577.00	31,556.00	45,316.00	32,450.00	16,978.80	63,556.00	27,115.00	44,450.00	32,062.00
General Operating expense	19,400.00	16,254.00	16,850.00	11,035.00	28,800.00	14,199.00	29,865.00	13,993.30	24,000.00	6,127.00	29,865.00	7,879.00
Total	**452,370.00**	**242,941.00**	**302,500.00**	**234,253.00**	**783,829.00**	**650,332.00**	**882,009.00**	**695,520.70**	**784,029.00**	**353,317.00**	**932,321.00**	**474,018.00**

Finding: Complementarities and project partnerships

159. The project was able to develop synergies with several other projects and initiatives taken by the government, including the President's "billion tree initiative" and the Swiss-funded green-gold project. The MRT's interviews with rangers revealed, and the PIR confirmed, that the project had strengthened the pasture users' group created by the IFAD and had reviewed and updated its pasture management plan. The MTR noted that the project had worked very closely with the GCF-funded ADAPT project, jointly organizing capacity-building activities and complementing each other's activities. They had also consulted each other during the initial stages to avoid the overlapping of their interventions. According to the PIR, the project, in coordination with the ADAPT project, introduced the 'responsible herder' national standard to herder communities in project target *soums*. The MTR noted that the project had built good synergies with government stakeholders, specifically with multi-sector agencies, as expected by the project and that it maintained good coordination with them by organizing a series of coordination meetings.

160. The MTR also noted that the project had built synergy with academia, especially the National University of Mongolia (NUM) and the State University of Life Sciences. In coordination with NUM, the project offered students the opportunity to conduct research at a student conference.

161. The project also partnered private companies which mobilized investments and provided co-financing for a number of initiatives. These findings led the MTR to conclude that the project was successful in building synergy and mobilizing multi-stakeholder partnerships.

MTR Criterion 4: Sustainability

Finding: Sustainability of the project results

162. A number of factors will enhance the prospects that the results so far achieved by the project will be sustained after the project ends. These include strengthening government capacity through capacity development and exposure visits and engaging authorities in the design, assessment and implementation of projects; increasing awareness; enhancing the skills of locals, especially herders, women, and youths, in identifying livelihood diversification opportunities; engaging forest users, herders and local community in the protection, conservation, and management of natural resources and having them adopt bio-diversity conservation and climate-smart agriculture practices in an integrated way. The MTR also believes that the intensive capacity-building of local-level technical officers, especially land and livestock officers, private-sector, and volunteer rangers in participatory land-use planning, protected area management planning and mainstreaming biodiversity, all the while taking into consideration wildlife connectivity and habitat management issues and different land-use practices, will contribute toward reducing conflict among different sectoral government agencies and local communities and, in the long run, help ensure sustainability. Achieving durable change requires time, and the extension services provided by land management and livestock officers, *soum* governors, technical officers and volunteer rangers play an important role in supporting protected area and sustainable land and other natural resource and management. The capacity building of those officials can help sustain the results of the project and replicate its learnings in other regions of the country. Multi-stakeholder collaboration, partnerships with the private sector and their involvement in climate-smart crop production may also increase the likelihood that results will be sustained. However, pre-emptive steps should be taken against the possibility that companies could discontinue climate-smart crop

production because of conflicts arising between herders and private companies on cropland fencing which hinders free movement of livestock.

163. Externalities also affect sustainability. For example, socio-ecological resilience could be undermined by the unpredictable impacts of climate change. For example, a long drought could negatively impact the production and supply chains of livestock unless quality fodder is available. An outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease among livestock in an NR could also undermine sustainability, as could a resurgence of Covid-19, a prolonged economic downturn, or disruptions in supply chains, whether associated with the pandemic or the result of other factors. The MTR rates this possibility as moderately likely.

Finding: Risks likely to affect the sustainability of results

164. **Socio-economic sustainability**: The project adopted multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral partnerships and participatory natural resource management as key working strategies and encouraged community-based approaches to protected area management and biodiversity conservation. Furthermore, the project also engaged the private sector in the co-financing of and investment in livestock value chains and climate-smart crop production through zero tillage. The MTR believes that all these strategies were very effective as, during the FDGs, local community members expressed a high level of commitment to continuing project activities even after the project comes to end. Interviews with *soum* governors and *aimag* MET officials also substantiate that the commitment and ownership taken by the government is immoderate and the interventions are likely to be continued. Informants opined that co-financing from private companies, SFAs, and others will contribute positively toward achieving sustainability. The MTR got the impression that collective farming on 1-8 ha of abandoned land by mobilizing a group or cooperative for commercial-scale production rather than subsistence-level farming and subsidies provided by the project are other examples of sustainability-promoting activities. A conflict among the members of group practicing collective farming, however, could jeopardise the sustainability of this intervention, which the MTR rated as moderately likely to be sustainable.

165. The MTR got the impression that the risks associated with sustainability were mainly due to poverty and a negative economic downturn, both of which would have a negative long-term impact on the protection of natural resources and biodiversity conservation because the project supports beneficiaries though alternative livelihood opportunities. Socio-political sustainability is therefore rated as moderately likely.

166. **Financial sustainability**: The project's strengthening of market linkages and access to markets by signing agreement with private companies is a good indication of the likely sustainability of the project's results. The MTR believes that after the project ends, private companies are very likely to support livestock value chains and marketing and could therefore contribute to sustaining the project's interventions. During FGDs, wool suppliers, cashmere producer groups, and cooperatives shared that some members had received training and certification in wool shearing and had been applying new technology that would help them get high prices now and earn more in the future. Agreements with companies ensure that both individual and group earnings are high. The MTR believes that this initiative is likely to contribute to financial sustainability. On the other hand, it is equally possible that buyers collaborate and reduce market prices. For example, herders complained that the buyers offered a much lower price for lamb at the time of supply than they had earlier committed to. Herder also shared that while they invested in additional feed to speed the growth of their sheep, in the end they did not end up selling it.

167. The MTR also noted that citizens pay nominal rates for using pastureland for grazing, a bargain which will promote sustainability. During FGDs, vegetable production groups expressed a high

level of commitment to mobilizing their own financial resources to continue producing vegetables. The financial sustainability of the project's results can therefore be rated moderately likely.

168. **Environmental sustainability**: The project was designed to reduce pressure on natural resources and promote sustainable NRM that aimed to reduce environmental stress through sustainable land and forest management and protected area management and climate-smart crop production by mobilizing communities and multi-stakeholder partners at different levels. One of the main reasons for the project was to generate global environmental benefits. The FGDs and KIIs confirmed that the project's interventions, such as building capacity in livestock value chains, promoting participatory planning in protected area management, improving goods and services from forests and ecosystems, building resilience through bio-diversity conservation and wildlife connectivity and habitat management, and reducing carbon emissions, were successful. However, with the increasing impacts of climate change (for instance, harsh winters and long droughts), the risks to sustainable forest and rangeland management, such as the impact of fires on natural regeneration in restored and natural forest, are increasing. The incidence of foot-and-mouth disease in Mongolian gazelles is also increasing. With increasingly complex climate phenomena and uncertainty in ecosystems, the risks to the sustainability of what the project has achieved will also increase.

169. The project trained government officials and volunteer rangers in fire suspension and provided fire-fighting equipment to local communities and user groups. The project also encouraged the application of bio-fertilizer to climate-smart farms and encouraged herders and private companies to use standard pesticides in legally permitted amounts. Making these behavioural changes will contribute toward maintaining environmental sustainability.

170. The project does not have any plans for constructing structures such as big reservoirs or check dams; instead, it prioritizes low-cost soil conservation and encourages zero tillage crop production technology as climate-smart cropping strategies. In short, the risks can mitigate, so the MRT considers environmental sustainability to be likely.

Finding: Replication and catalysis

171. It is a bit too early to look for evidence of the replication of interventions, however, FGDs with eco-street (vegetable production) groups revealed that non-member households in the neighbourhood were also, having learned what to do from eco-street members, bought greenhouses themselves and started producing vegetables. FGDs with *soum* officials and land officers from eastern *aimag*s revealed that only a few companies practiced climate-smart crop production in the first year but that that number had increased substantially. The PIR substantiates this finding, citing that the number of such companies had increased from 2 to 11. The probability of replication is likely to be high because the project encouraged behavioural changes among farmers through awareness raising and promoting the collective commercial-scale cultivation of green vegetables. The MTR rates the chances of replication as satisfactory.

MTR Criterion 5: Factors affecting progress

Finding: Project design

172. The project outputs, neither indicators nor targets, are not included in the results matrix while it is mentioned in the annual workplan only. The MTR noted that Component 4, which is linked to M&E and knowledge management, lacks an outcome and outputs with which to design a detailed M&E framework. The MTR feels that an integrated project such as this one, especially because it mobilizes multiple partners and has more than 22 outputs and 65 activities, should create a comprehensive M&E framework at the initial year of its implementation, where its

progress can be reported systematically. However, the possibility that this will happen is very low as Component 4 lacks a mandatory M&E framework in the results matrix. This lack may negatively impact the sustainability of the project. The MTR noted that while outputs are not mentioned in the results framework, they are separately presented in the project workplan without indicators. Without targets and indicators, the MTR believes, progress cannot be assessed. Since there were no output-level indicators or targets, the project reported on random indictors and targets which were not followed up on in subsequent PIRs and PPRs. Outcome surveys were not provisioned for in the ProDoc though several groups, such pasture groups, vegetable production groups/cooperatives, and saving cooperatives are associated with the project.

173. The results matrix is inconsistent. For example, the targets for Core Indicator 1 and its sub-indicator are separately given whereas targets are not provided for core indicators 3 or 4. Instead, targets are provided only for some of their sub-indicators, specifically 3.2, 3.3, 4.1 and 4.3. This inconsistency makes it difficult to assess the core indicators.

Finding: Project execution and management

174. The project employed a direct execution (DEX) modality on which the FAO was the lead execution agency and WWF the co-execution agency. Both agencies have equal responsibility for the budget. The other executing partners are MET, MOFALI, ALAMGaC, and NAMAC. The project established a PMU on the MET premises. It is led by National Project Manager supported by thematic, knowledge management and M&E specialists and a project assistant. The National Project Director (NPD) was designated by MET as the lead person responsible for ensuring the smooth execution of the project on behalf of the government. To deliver project interventions at the *soum* and *bagh* levels, nine *soum* coordinators were mobilized. They were provided with office space by *soum* governments. The MTR noted that the project was quick in execution as it was through a DEX modality, and was able to address key issues on the ground.

175. The project was guided by the Project Steering Committee (PSC) chaired by the Deputy Minister of Ministry of Environment and Tourism and with other executing partners as members. Since its establishment, the PSC has held four meetings. Its minutes were well maintained. The MTR noted, however, that while the ProDoc calls for at least biannual meetings, only one was held in 2022. A review of the minutes of PSC meetings revealed that the committee is actively engaged in approving annual work plans, budgets, procurement requests, and consultancy reports. In short, the PSC has assumed its role and responsibilities as laid out in its ToR. The MTR observed there was a slight difference between the planned and actual composition of the PSC. The ProDoc states that is comprises representatives from MET, MOFALI, the Ministry of Construction and Urban Development (MCUD), the National Committee on Gender Equality (NCGE), FAO Mongolia, WWF Mongolia, the three *aimag* governments, as well as the private sector and civil society. In actual fact, however, the MTR did not find representatives of the MCUD, NCGE, private sector or civil society in the PSC. The MTRs recommends that all the representatives mentioned in the ProDoc be included.

176. According to the PIR and supplemented by the KIIs, the challenges faced by the project during implementation were the following: (i) delays due to elections; (ii) the lack of appropriate human resources, and frequent turnover of government staff both at the national and sub-national (*aimag* and *soum*) levels; (iii) the excessive workload of sub-national government staff; (iv) lack of sufficient support due to *ad-hoc* decision making and the political inclinations of *soum* governors; (v) sectoral ambition on coordination; (vi) the Covid-19 outbreak; and (vii) the outbreak of foot-and-mouth diseases.

177. The KIIs revealed that legislative election of June 2021 slightly delayed project activities due to the appointment of new governors at both the *aimag* and *soum* levels after the election. This delay was exacerbated when the newly elected governors belonged to political parties other than those of the previous governors who initially decided on the activities. Another challenge the project faced was the absence of appropriate human resources within the *soum* and *aimag* levels of government with extensive experience in sustainable land, forest and pasture management, protected area management, and handling integrated and multi-sectoral management. Frequent staff turnover at the *aimag* and *soum* levels also posed a challenge as it was time-consuming to repeatedly provide orientation and capacity building. The PIR reports that *soum*-level land managers, for example, were trained by the project and supported with equipment but then they would leave the job, meaning that the investment would go to waste. The project had to invest time and resources again and again to build the capacity of new staff. At the central level, the frequent transfer of the PSC chair and NPD also forced the project team to frequently brief the new appointees to the project activities.

178. There are limited government staffs at the *aimag* and *soum* levels and they are at times overloaded with work, as they have to support multiple projects. Interviewed *aimag* and *soum* land management offices and volunteer rangers shared that since they are engaged in multiple projects being implemented in the Eastern steppe, they could not provide the support the project expected when it expected it. Interviewed officials also shared that, at times, the project did not inform them about programmes/trainings/meetings early enough and that they were unable to attend due prior commitments. *Bagh* governors confirmed that they were sometimes requested to notify communities to participate in activities (meeting/trainings) at the last moment.

179. Some activities proposed in the AWP were not achieved on time due to delays in administrative decisions. One prominent case shared with the MTR was the decision of the Parliament of Mongolia to establish three NRs whose area is yet to be delineated by the Cabinet. Since the decision about the boundaries of the three NRs is still pending, the project could not achieve its target. This and other challenge is beyond the ability of the project to address. These administrative challenges were exacerbated by Covid-19 and an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease among livestock. The MTR rates the project's management execution as moderately satisfactory.

Finding: Financial management and co-financing

180. The GEF Trust Fund is managed equally by FAO and WWF, and the total amount is equally split between the two agencies. The MTR reviewed the AWP/B and overall financial status of the project till 30 June 2023. This review confirmed that total project expenditure (the combined expenditures of FAO and WWF) is on track with 49.5 percent spent by the end of June 2023. FAO's expenditure (23.28 percent) was slightly less than that of WWF (26.22 percent). In Year 1, the project spent 8.91 percent and in Year 2 it spent 25.13 percent. Expenditure up to the middle of Year 3 was 15.45 percent. The MTR was told that the reason for the low budget-burning rate for Year 1 was that the project kicked off only mid-year and that the Covid-19 pandemic had a negative impact. The MTR notes that the project is expected to maintain the burning rate in the remaining project period.

181. The MTR noted that 14 agencies at the time of CEO endorsement had confirmed of providing USD 50,945,000 in co-financing. Twelve of them committed resources in kind (87.44 percent) and two as grants (12.56 percent). In addition, private-sector vegetable farmers and herders provided cash support as co-financing during implementation. The MTR noted that co-financing materialized even at the activity level. Interviewed *soum* governors shared that they had co-financed most activities, including land management plan preparation, digging wells

in pasture areas, and protecting wetland. The MTR found that the actual amount of co-financing that had materialised as of 30 June 2023 is 40 percent. Table 4 above provides details on co-financing.

182. The MTR was told that there were no major disputes while mobilizing co-financing from multiple partners including the private sector and groups. Two private crop production companies provided co-financing as grants and vegetable farmers contributed cash. The MTR inferred from these facts that this project can be considered a good example of securing co-financing from multiple partners and rates this component as satisfactory.

Finding: Project oversight and implementation roles

183. Interviews revealed that the PMU has been receiving regular support from FAO CO, RAP, HQ, and WWF Mongolia and US. The global IP, FLO and technical officer from HQ and LTO from RAP have been providing the support needed to implement the project and provide an assurance of its quality. Oversight by the FAO and WWF involves strict procedures which provide a high degree of accountability. Besides, the project task force regularly provides support to the project team. Since the formation of the PTF, four meetings have been held to guide project implementation. The MTR rates project oversights and implementation as satisfactory.

Finding: Partnerships and stakeholder engagement

184. Reviewing the ProDoc, the MTR found that 31 stakeholders, of which 22 key and nine secondary, are engaged in this project. These stakeholders are engaged in project implementation and are contributing well to achieving results. In consultations, multi-sector and multi-stakeholders attributed their high levels of engagement to the very nature of the project itself, to the fact that it was the first-ever project in the Eastern steppes, to its applying integrated strategies, and to the high level of ownership assumed by the governments of all three levels.

185. Country ownership was high during both the design and the implementation stages of the project. The project maintained good collaboration with the executing partners at national, *aimag*, *soum*, and *bagh* levels. The project maintained excellent relationships with multi-sector stakeholders, including relevant government agencies, the private sector, UN agencies, INGOs, academia, research institutes, and others. Interviews with government counterparts also substantiated that the project maintained good coordination and collaboration with multi-sectoral agencies and the private sector.

Finding: Communication and knowledge management

186. The project has a communication and knowledge management strategy and implements out-reach activities as it calls for. The MTR team's review of PIRs revealed that the project produced different communication and knowledge management materials, including TV programmes. The TV programmes focused on forest campaigns and were broadcast on Mongolian national and local channels. Several visibility-related materials with the logo of the government, donor (GEF), FAO, and WWF were produced and distributed to stakeholders and communities. They included t-shirts, water bottles, tea mugs, notebooks, brochures, posters, and newsletters. The project produced 14 videos and 10 guidelines, handbooks, and booklets in local languages. Another 15 handbooks and guidelines are in progress.

187. An interview with the project team revealed that herders 'indigenous knowledge and practices were well documented and published in a newsletter with a dedicated column. Thanks to their high literacy rate, young herders make good use of such information. An article on handling weak newborn animals during the spring was said to have helped maintaining the good health

of newborns. The MTR considers this a good strategy for retaining indigenous knowledge and practices and transferring them to young people.

188. The MTR reviewed the materials produced and found the content to be both satisfactory and very useful. The materials were shared on the social media pages of FAO and WWF and with stakeholders. Furthermore, signboards are displayed in vegetable production and nursery sites. These positive measures are countered by the fact that the project does not have a communications officer. The project celebrated World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought in collaboration with MET. The MTR rates this as satisfactory

Finding: M&E design

189. A well-developed M&E plan that explicitly mentions requirements is provided in the ProDoc. It lays out the budgets and timelines for the submission of PPRs, PIRs, the MTR, and the final evaluation. Since the M&E design lacks a detailed M&E framework for the project, the project has not compiled project achievements in a systematic manner. The MTR observed that the M&E plan mentions nothing about collecting best practices or success stories or sharing them in different national and international fora. In point of fact, the project has ample opportunities to share best practice because, for the first time ever on the Eastern Steppe, the project promoting collective commercial-scale vegetable production, a technique which has high replication potential in the region. It has also mobilized private companies to invest in climate-smart crop production and, at the same time, the reduction of land degradation and promotion of sustainable land management practices using zero tillage. The MTR, however, observed that the budget allotted in the M&E plan is not sufficient for sharing lessons learned and best practices. The MTR was also told that project team members could not participate in a conference due to budgetary constraints. Interviews with the IP global team and the PPRs confirmed that this was indeed the case. The MTR rates the M&E design of the project moderately satisfactory.

Finding: M&E implementation

190. The ProDoc clearly states that an M&E plan to track project progress in the core and sub-indicators and outcome and output levels should be developed and GEF tracking tools used. The GEF tracking tools for core indicators 1 (METT) and 6 (carbon sequestration) were not made available for MTR's review. The M&E tracking sheet was also not shared with the MTR team. The MTR's interview with the PMU revealed that the project progress tracking sheet was developed by WWF based on the annual workplan and budget and that the project was using it without modification. However, the MTR noted that the tracking sheet does not properly capture progress against either the core or the outcome level indicators and is incomplete. The MTR has the impression that the project has yet to develop the M&E framework.

191. The project has not maintained output or activity level data systematically. The interview with the PMU revealed that soum coordinators report data and is supplemented by back-to-office reports (BTOR) submitted by thematic experts who visit project sites. Since a comprehensive progress tracking sheet is lacking, data is reported inconsistently in PPRs and PIRs, making it difficult for outside readers to make sense of it. The MTR noted that even the PPRs and PIRs are based on BTORs and are considered to be primary sources of data. Similarly, output-level targets are not mentioned at all in the AWPs and are only randomly and inconsistently reported in the PIRs for years 2022 and 2023. In addition, the PIRs reported on targets differently than is mentioned in the results matrix. For example, the mid-term target for the first indicator of Outcome 4 mentions reaching 10,000 people through different communication and knowledge management channels whereas the PIR reports that the target was to reach 25,000 people.

192. The project conducted several trainings and built the capacity of a substantial number of government officials, communities and members of the private sector. The MTR, however, did not find any evidence that pre- and post-training assessments, a crucial requirement for judging effectiveness, had been conducted at any of these levels of training. The project could conduct a KAP survey for different categories such as integrated land management planning, nursery establishment, biodiversity conservation, and photo monitoring to assess the enhancement of knowledge and application of skills acquired through its training. The MTR noted that while the PPRs and PIRs do report on the trainings conducted, they do not present data thematically (say on biodiversity conservation, forest fire fighting and monitoring) or categorically (say government staff at the national, *aimag* and *soum* levels, community members, and representatives of the private sector). The project could use 'Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Training Evaluation[11] to find out how well has capacity being built. Doing so, the MTR believes, would add value to maintaining the high quality of M&E implementation. The MTR rates this criterion as moderately unsatisfactory.

MTR Criterion 6: Cross-cutting priorities

Finding: Consideration of gender and minority group issues

193. The gender aspect is well integrated in the ProDoc and well reflected in the results matrix. As part of the project preparation grant (PPG) phase, gender assessment was conducted to identify the current situation, challenges, opportunities, and potential interventions as part of PPG work. The findings of the assessment were incorporated in the gender action plan. Where applicable, outcome-level indicators and their targets are gender-responsive. For example, indicators for outcomes 2.1, 2.3, and 4.1 specifically mentioned a number or percentage of women. The MTR's review of PIRs and interviews show that gender modules are well incorporated into the training programmes, especially participatory land management planning and biodiversity conservation and that women are represented in technical groups at the national, *aimag* and *soum* level. During field observations, the MTR team noted that female-headed households are given priority in vegetable production group. The project included women-headed households as well as five differently abled people in its eco-street groups.

194. The MTR noted that the project is well balanced in that several women are project leaders or hold specialist positions. Interviews with *aimag* and *soum* officials revealed that there are substantial numbers of women in decision-making roles, that there are no restrictions on women's attendance at meetings, and that a substantial number of women are members of working groups.

195. To address the issues of indigenous communities, the project developed a grievance redress mechanism. A section on indigenous people is included in the ProDoc which calls for conducting awareness-raising activities focused on indigenous people where relevant and for ensuring their engagement in the project. The MTR did not notice any concerns related to indigenous groups; thus, it rates the project's consideration of gender and minority group issues satisfactory.

Finding: Environmental and social safeguards

196. The project focuses on participatory approaches to NRM, reversing land degradation, and promoting biodiversity conservation. During the PPG phase, the project analysed risk-safeguarding issues by conducting an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment (ESIA).

[11] https://www.changethegameacademy.org/shortmodulepage/monitoring-and-evaluation/tool-evaluating-capacity-building-on-four-levels-kirckpatrick/

The project hired a consulting firm to look into social safeguard issues besides preparing the Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF). The ESMF predicted adverse environmental and social impacts, if occur, could be as a result of project activities and were expected to be site-specific, negligible and easily mitigated. The MTR, however, did not note any major impacts, except herders objecting on fencing farmland.

197. Interviews with private crop companies revealed that initially herders had objected to their fencing off the cropland, complaining that fences impeded livestock movements. They further shared that to avoid conflicts with herders, they offered the herders to cultivate within the fenced area and provide farming equipment free of cost. Another evidence shared with the MTR was the project consulted with local communities and got their written approval for fencing springs and riparian forests. The MTR also noted that ESS issues are considered in the ToRs of all the thematic specialists. The interview with PMU team revealed that ESS recommendations are seriously taken up during implementation of the project activities, especially while preparing the LMP. The interviewed aimag government officials opined that in ensuring social and environmental safeguards they have conducted series of consultation with local herders, pasture groups, youth groups, etc while developing LMPs. Interview with the ESS consultants revealed that they work in close collaboration with PMU to support the implementation of ESS through assessing the risks, recommending mitigation measures, conducting training to the project stakeholders including soum coordinators, local authorities, and companies assigned to develop land management plans. They further support in developing grievance redress mechanisms to handle complaints in an effective manner.

198. The MTR noted that the project conducted two ESS assessments 2022 and 2023 through external consultants. The main objective of the assessments was to assess ESS vulnerabilities and propose mitigation measure to take corrective measures for sustainability of the project results. The ESS consultants delivered trainings to the project team and professional companies assigned to prepare land management plans. Based on the recommendations, the PMU updated the grievance redress mechanism and information sharing process.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

(a) Progress towards the achievement of the project's development objectives

Conclusion: Reverse and prevent dryland ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss

199. The project adopted multi-partner and multi-sector engagement and participatory planning and decision-making as its central strategies for and approaches to reversing and preventing dry land ecosystem and biodiversity loss. This strategy is supported by the government's priorities and programs for integrated dryland management and livestock value chains. The project has been able to successfully mobilize communities and the private sector to engage in climate-smart crop production.

200. The project made good progress in reversing dryland degradation and reducing pressure on dryland ecosystems by restoring forest and pastureland and protection of water sources and identifying critical habitat connectivity for the Mongolian gazelle and migratory birds. It also developed integrated protected area management plans and extended protected areas to promote biodiversity conservation and restore dryland ecosystems through participatory approaches.

Conclusion: Resilient livelihoods in the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia

201. In pursuit of its development objective to boost resilient livelihoods in the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia, the project implemented income diversification activities, including improving livestock value chains, strengthening market linkages, promoting climate-smart crop production technology and wool production, diversifying income, and establishing eco-street and vegetable production groups. All these activities provided ample opportunities for women, including female-headed households, as well as differently abled people and youths. The MTR concluded that the project had strengthened the capacity of local community members, including herders, men and women, farmers, and cooperative members, by organizing a series of training and capacity-development activities that supported the achievement of resilient livelihoods.

(b) Overall progress on implementation

Relevance

Conclusion: Relevance of the project

202. The project is highly relevant due to the global, national and local significance of Mongolia's dryland degradation and terrestrial ecosystems in reversing land degradation and preserving dryland biodiversity, restoring terrestrial ecosystem functioning, and halting desertification. The project is also highly relevant in addressing the needs of beneficiaries: it increased the resilience of local communities by reversing land degradation, initiating climate-smart farming and forest and sustainable pasture management practices, and promoting the diversification of income and livelihood opportunities for herders and local communities all the while respecting traditional knowledge, innovations and practices to remove pressure from the resource base.

203. The project is a good model of the multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approach as well as of advancing interlinkages and synergies in the conservation and protection of terrestrial biodiversity and implementing the international dryland agenda. Based on the findings above (see 4.1), the MTR concludes that the project's objective, components, outcomes, outputs,

activities, and intervention logic align well with Mongolia's voluntary target for LDN, its national biodiversity program, NDC, its national program and action plan for protected areas, the national action program on climate change, Mongolia Sustainable Development Vision 2030, the nation's Green Development Policy and its action plan for sustainable livestock. The project incorporated multiple focal areas of the GEF, including biodiversity, land degradation, and climate change mitigation. It is fully aligned with all three core themes and all five core indicators of GEF. The project's objectives and outcomes also fully align with FAO's Global Strategic Objective 2 and UNCCD LDN target at the global level for Mongolia, and objectives 2 and 3 of WWF Mongolia's Strategic Plan.

Conclusion: Ownership of the project

204. The project has a high degree of ownership by the national, *aimag* and *soum* level governments in the project target areas, though this project is implemented using a DEX (direct execution) modality. The sense of ownership among community members, especially herders' groups, saving cooperatives, and vegetable farmers, is also very high. The MTR concludes that the project is highly relevant and highly satisfactory.

Effectiveness

Conclusion: Overall achievement

205. Adhering to GEF, FAO, and WWF requirements, the MTR assessed progress toward outcomes against indictors and targets. The MTR 's impression of the strengths and weaknesses of the results framework, indicators, and targets are discussed in the project design section of MTR Criterion 5: Factors affecting project.

206. Based on the findings presented in the progress and achievement section, which examined all five core indicators, their sub-indicators, and mid-term targets; the project had mixed results. The majority of indicators (1, 3, and 4) and their sub-indicators are on the way toward meeting the mid-term targets and some indicators (6 and 11) met or surpassed their midterm targets.

Conclusion: Strengthening enabling environment for sustainable dryland managing in Mongolia

207. The MTR got the impression that the project focused on establishing multi-sector working groups, conducting participatory land-use planning, promoting the multi-sectoral engagement of the government at the national, *aimag* and *soum* levels, establishing monitoring systems at the *soum* level, bringing areas under integrated land management plans, and developing laws and policies related to rangeland management. The project made promising progress in achieving the indicators and targets under this component. From the findings presented in 4.2, the MTR concludes that the results were mixed: the majority of targets were fully met and some were on the way to being achieved.

Conclusion: Capacity strengthening of project partners and community

208. The project's strategy was to strengthen capacity at the national, *aimag* and *soum* government levels to ensure the effective delivery and long-term sustainability of the project. This seems like a good strategy for making project interventions a success. The project conducted several sustainability-promoting trainings, primarily participatory integrated land management planning, biodiversity monitoring, and photo monitoring. The midterm target for capacity-building was surpassed and judged to be moderately satisfactory.

Conclusion: Sustainable dryland management

209. The project made good progress in meeting its mid-term targets for sustainable dryland management on the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia. It focuses on strengthening the capacity of

local communities, government officials, and private companies; supplying agriculture inputs; restoring critical ecosystems; promoting the sustainable management of forests and pastures; and establishing climate-smart livestock management practices; and strengthening market linkages. The MTR concluded that the project had made good progress in meeting some indicators and targets but lagged far below the target in other cases. In particular, the target for forest and forestland restoration is far behind and needs attention. Progress in benefiting local communities with enhanced value chains and market linkages is satisfactory.

Conclusion: Climate-smart crop production technology

210. The project collaborates with two private companies to apply climate-smart crop production technology and community interest is very high. The project is progressing well in this area: it is on the way toward achieving its target for crop production and surpassed its mid-term target for fodder production. The fact that this activity was scaled from 239 ha to 1340 ha through high levels of community commitment and interest is commendable.

Conclusion: Strengthening biodiversity conservation and landscape connectivity

211. The project focused on analysing habitat connectivity, identifying critical habitat for migratory birds, conducting a bird habitat connectivity study, and preparing protected area management plans which accurately reflected the findings of the studies. The NR plans were formulated using a participatory approach and ensuring participation of multi-sectoral stakeholders, including a substantial number of women in identifying conservation targets. This approach, the MTR feels, is a good approach. Since some targets were fully met and others are on the way to being met, the MTR considers this indicator to be moderately satisfactory.

Conclusion: Knowledge management and M&E

212. The project produced a substantial number of knowledge products, all of which were highly appreciated by stakeholders for their usefulness. The project reached a large number of people through different communication and knowledge management products. The MTR noted that the project had made good progress in this area.

Efficiency

Conclusion: Project efficiency

213. The project took initiatives and build synergies with similar projects, taking advantage of opportunities for collaboration, coordination, and potential co-financing. It also made good use of the time available during the inception phase and completed most of the necessary administrative arrangements, including establishing PMU, PSC, and PTF team and holding multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder meetings. Once the inception phase was over, the project launched implementation on the ground with great momentum. At the mid-term point, budget expenditure was on track with a 49. 5 percent rate of budget burn.

214. Some planned activities were not achieved on time. Delays and disruptions caused by different factors impeded the delivery of the project. They included delayed in obtaining parliamentary approval, the lack of dedicated experts on handling riparian forest management activities, and the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite these impediments, the project achieved a moderately satisfactory level of efficiency, specifically concerning the delivery of outcomes and outputs.

215. Some of the project's strategies were cost-effective. In particular, the project's initiatives in building the capacity of community members and making them local resource persons to minimise costs associated with external experts were commendable. For example, locals trained to shear wool were provided with tools and now they are able to meet the demands of their communities for shearing. The lamb feeding revolving fund adopted by the project

was another example of a cost-effective strategy, as was the establishment of five nurseries to supply saplings for afforestation.

Sustainability

Conclusion: Sustainability of project results

216. The fact that the project mobilizes multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder partners in the planning and delivery of interventions provides a good foundation for enhancing the sustainability of the project's results and benefits. Developing the capacity of communities and governments at the national, *aimag* and *soum* levels was another good strategy for promoting sustainability. Means of financial sustainability may include generating income from collective commercial-scale vegetable farming, sales on the wool and livestock value chain, and strengthening market linkages for livestock product. The increase of fodder on pastureland will also contribute toward the rearing of good-quality livestock, which, in turn, may improve the livelihoods of pasture users and herders.

217. The high degree of ownership assumed by the government and communities and the enthusiastic engagement of the private sector both are likely to help increase the sustainability of the project's initiatives.

218. Strong internal governance of pasture groups, savings and cooperative groups, and collective, commercial-scale vegetable farming groups will also play a vital role in their sustenance. The fact that these groups document the minutes of their meetings and other material well and are transparent regarding their internal actions are good signs of future sustainability. Good governance will also reduce conflict among group members if it is taken into consideration. The MTR concludes that the project is likely to be sustainable.

Conclusion: Factors affecting progress

219. The project tried to link multiple thematic areas but was not entirely successful in doing so, a fact that posed challenges during implementation. Specifically, the lack of some output-level indicators and mid-term and final targets and overly ambitious outputs and activities may cause confusion in implementing the project.

220. The MTR noted that the project paid little attention to M&E during implementation and did not prepare a detailed M&E plan. The project's Excel database seems weak and reports are not cumulative. In particular, progress in capacity-building is not maintained systematically, whether by theme or by category. Reporting on progress in the PIRs is not consistent and does not fully adhere to either indicators or targets. Overall, M&E at the implementation level could be strengthened.

Conclusion: Project execution and management

221. The project gets support from the PSC which besides other decisions approves the AWPs, budget, and procurement plans. While the PSC has played the role ascribed to it in its ToR, the high rates of transfer of officials and the time taken on briefing new appointments has had a negative impact. The delay in securing approval from the Cabinet for NR boundaries delayed the achievement of project targets under Outcome 1.1. The major challenges faced by the project in meeting its targets are as follows: (i) delays due to legislative elections; (ii) lack of appropriate human resources and the frequent turnover of government staff both at the national and sub-national (*aimag* and *soum*) levels; (iii) excessive workloads of sub-national government staff; (iv) lack of sufficient support due to the political affiliations of *soum* governors; (v) sectoral ambitions to coordinate; (vi) the Covid-19 outbreak; and (vii) the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease.

Conclusion: Project oversight and implementation

222. The project regularly got support in oversight and implementation support from FAO and WWF and the HQ technical officer helped implement Outcome 2.1. The PTF also provided regular support in improving the quality of implementation.

Conclusion: Financial management and co-financing

223. The GEF Trust Fund is managed equally by FAO and WWF and they split the total amount. After reviewing the AWP/B and the overall financial status of the project till 30 June 2023, the MTR concluded that the project expenditure rate is on track. No major disputes arose while mobilizing co-financing from multiple partners, including the private sector and groups. The project, with the endorsement of CEO, has seen 40 percent of its committed co-financing materialize. The MTR believes that this project can be considered a good example of encouraging co-financing from multiple partners and rates this component as satisfactory.

Conclusion: Communication and knowledge management

224. The project implements out-reach activities using its communication and knowledge management strategy. It maintained good communication and visibility in part by ensuring high media coverage using different means. The project also produced a lot of visibility materials and reached out to a significantly large number of stakeholders and communities. The project also documented indigenous knowledge and shared it in a newsletter. The MTR considers this to be a good strategy to retain indigenous knowledge and practices and transfer them to youths.

Conclusion: Partnership and stakeholder engagement

225. The project made promising progress in building partnerships and engaging multiple stakeholders in all stages, from design to implementation, and has maintained excellent relations with multi-sector stakeholders, including relevant government agencies, the private sector, UN agencies, INGOs, academia, research institutes, and others.

Cross-cutting priorities

Conclusion: Inclusion of gender and minority groups

226. The project explicitly integrated gender into its indicators and targets and also implemented its gender action plan by integrated it in the AWP/B. Women's participation in some activities was higher than envisioned in the results framework. The MTR concluded that the project satisfactorily considers gender issues, including in its staffing. The project has a grievance redressal mechanism in place and no major issues concerning indigenous people arose.

227. The main thrust of the project is addressing land degradation and generating socio-economic and environmental benefits through the restoration of dryland ecosystems and the conservation of biodiversity. As discussed in the findings section, the interventions carried out by the project did not seem to impact the environment negatively.

c) Overall risk rating for the project

Conclusion: Risk assessment

228. There is considerable risk that the project may not be able to achieve its objectives. The key risk is associated with sustainability, which is associated with poverty and externalities such as long-term drought, which could reduce the productivity of the rangeland herder populations rely on. Another risk is the spread of disease among livestock.

5.2. Recommendations

Table 6: MTR recommendations

Rec. No.	Rationale for recommendation	Recommendation	Responsibility	Timing	Prioritization
Strategic relevance					
A.1	Highly satisfactory	No recommendation made			
Effectiveness					
B.1	The progress made is far behind that of the mid-term target.	Progress in the restoration of forestland is much lower than progress in other outputs and outcomes. While HQ team has supported the project in this area, progress could be speeded by having a forestry specialist in the PMU. The MTR team recommends hiring a short-term specialist to achieve the target on time.	PMU	Completed by 4th quarter by 2023	P 1
B.2	The progress made for core indicator 1 is far behind that of the mid-term target.	Progress in achieving mid-term target of core indicator 1 is substantially low. Delays in Cabinet decision in delineating boundaries for the remaining three NRs is the reason for not achieving the target. The critical factor noted for delay in obtaining Cabinet approval could be some mining fall with the NRs and seems unlikely to be achieved. It is recommended either to lobby at a high level government for approval or discuss this issue at the upcoming PSC meeting and set up a new target.			
B.3	Project has not conducted the pre and post training assessment.	Develop pre- and post-training assessment and training evaluation formats and use them to assess the effectiveness of trainings conducted under different components and at different levels, including community, soum, aimag and national.	PMU	Completed by 4th quarter of 2023	P 1
B.4	Till the Mid-term project has not conducted any outcome survey but reported income increased.	Conduct outcome surveys for wool, vegetable, and other cooperatives to assess the increase in income levels for reporting in the PIR.	PMU	Completed by 2nd quarter of 2024	P 2
Efficiency					
C.1	To handover the project progress and taking ownership on time	Develop an exit strategy through multi-sectoral and multi-sector consultation including with the private sector. After finalizing that strategy, organize an orientation workshop for stakeholders to discuss how project results will be carried forward to generate a wide impact on dryland ecosystem restoration at the national and global levels.	PMU	Post MTR	P 1
Sustainability and catalysis/replication					

D.1	PGA not conducted which is very crucial to enhance institutional sustainability of project results, especially in assessing how the cooperatives and pasture groups and other groups are functioning and provide requires support on time	Design participatory governance assessment (PGA) tools in a simple format and conduct participatory assessments to assess the internal governance of pasture groups/different cooperatives in the project target areas. It is crucial to conduct such assessments as they can help the PMU identify the level of support needed to strengthen the capacity of each cooperative and pasture user group to sustain the project's benefits. Develop PGA tools and train field teams to conduct assessments and document findings. File the documentation in the M&E database to inform AWPs.	PMU and soum coordinators	Start immediately and complete within 1st quarter of 2024	P 2
D.2	Nominal collaborations made	As the project is part of the global IP, it should build synergies with the global program instead of just participating in workshops. The project needs to build synergies with other child projects in the region (Kazakhstan) or other countries in Africa. The countries need to build a knowledge hub platform for sharing their best practices for which continuous efforts and collaboration is needed among them.	PMU	Post MTR	P 2
Factors affecting performance					
E.1	Addressing shortcomings in results matrix	Revise the results matrix to include output-level indicators to help guide implementation. There is need to have output-level indicators as they are directly linked to the hierarchy of activities and can provide a better perspective during both monitoring and evaluation. In absence of such indicators, currently targets are only randomly included in PIR.	PMU with support from LTO, FAO Operations	Post MTR	P 1
E.2	Absence of robust M&E system and to support quality implementation.	Develop and implement a robust and practical M&E system with inputs from an experienced M&E specialist (take help from RAP/HQ) to strengthen adaptive results-based project management and progress reporting. The M&E system should enable tracking of both progress in implementation as well as progress towards the project's objective, outcomes and outputs using a results matrix. The M&E system should capture progress systematically. It should also be integrated with project learning and knowledge management systems and contribute to improved progress reporting in PIRs and PPRs Formulate a clear and detailed M&E plan, set up a database aligned with indicators, and maintain indicator-based data. In addition, develop a participatory M&E framework for sustainable dryland management and link it with the soum-level monitoring mechanism.	PMU with support from BHs	Post MTR	P 1

E.3	In absence of some of the baseline data in the existing result matrix	Generate baseline data for wool cooperative and herder activities, including a beneficiary income survey to determine the degree change at the terminal evaluation. Link this with the M&E framework.	PMU	Post MTR	P 2
Cross-cutting dimensions					
F.1	No recommendation made				

Appendices

Appendix 1. Terms of reference for the MTR

ToRs for MTR

MON-018 - MTR TORs_Final.docx

Appendix 2. MTR itinerary, including field missions (agenda)

Deliverable	Proposed timeline	Notes
Inception meeting	24-May-23	Virtual meeting with MTR Manager, FLO, GEF CU Focal point, NPM, AHEC Program Manager (WWF), MTR consultants
Document review	25 May – 9 June 2023	Review shared documents
Draft Inception report, including MTR questions	12-Jun-23	Scheduled for 15 June
MTR field mission	17 – 30 June 2023	
Submission of final inception report	19-Jun-23	Incorporating feedback
Project briefing by PMU	19-Jun-23	
Courtesy meetings with FAOR, WWF CD, PSC Chair	19-Jun-23	
Interviews with Ulaanbaatar based project stakeholders	19 – 20 June 2023	
Field observations and interactions	21 – 25 June 2023	
Interviews (continued)	26 – 27 June 2023	
Briefing on preliminary findings of the MTR following field mission	28-Jun-23	FAO team and stakeholders
First draft of the report	21-Jul-23	Agreed for 31 July
Second draft of the report final MTR report, including comments matrix/audit trail	14-Aug-23	Incorporating feedback
Final MTR report, including comments matrix/audit trail	1-Sep-23	Incorporating feedback
Two pages summary on main findings and recommendations	1-Sep-23	

Field Mission Itinerary

Time	Agenda item	Remarks
June 19, 2023 Monday	**Ulaanbaatar**	
9:00-10:00	Courtesy meeting with FAOR - Vinod Ahuja Country Director (FAO)	UN House

10:00-10:30	Courtesy meeting with WWF Mongolia CD - Batbold. D, Director, WWF-Mongolia - Purevdorj, Fresh water expert, WWF-Mongolia	WWF Mongolia office
10:30-11:00	Meeting with Khar yamaat PAA – PTF Member - Munkhchuluun.B, AHEC Program Manager	WWF Mongolia office
11:00-13:00	Meeting with PMU	NUM
14:00-15:00	Meeting with ALAMGAC: - Batsaikhan.J, Acting director of ALAMGAC	ALAMGaC office
16:00- 17:00	Meeting with MOFALI: - Bolorchuluun.Ts, Director of Policy Coordination Department, - Yesun-Erdene, Director of Crop production policy coordination department,	MOFALI
17:00- 18:00	Meeting with NAMAC: - Byambaa, Director of NAMAC	NAMAC
June 20, 2023 Tuesday	**Ulaanbaatar**	
09:00-12:00	Interview with PMU team	PMU Office
14:00-15:00	Courtesy meeting and KII with: - Ganbaatar.M, Vice minister, MET - Baatartsogt.N, National Project Director and Director of Protected Areas Management, MET	MET
15:00-16:00	Meeting with PSC member: - Tserendulam. Sh, Director of Climate Change and Planning Department, MET, GEF focal point - Boldbaatar.T, Specialist, of Climate change and Planning department, MET	MET
June 21, 2023 Wednesday	Ulaanbaatar-Chinggis-Munkhkhaan-Baruun-Urt	
07:00-12:00	Ulaanbaatar to Chinggis	
13:30-15:00	Meetings and interviews with stakeholders and beneficiaries - Munkh-Erdene, Acting director of Environment and Tourism Department of Khentii aimag (confirmed) - Director of Kherlen river basin authority	Facilitated by Javzansuren, project specialist
15:00-17:00	Leave for Munkhkhaan soum	
17:00-18:00	Munkhkhaan soum: - Focus group meeting with Ashid Bayanmunkh Agriculture cooperative leader - Erdenebat, Bagh leader for Pasture regulation - Field visit – vegetable farming group, tree nursery (vulnerable group)	Facilitated Zoljargal, Soum Coordinator
June 22, 2023, Thursday	**Baruun-Urt-Sukhbaatar - Tumentsogt-Bayan-Ovoo, Khentii aimag**	
08:00-09:00	Meeting with Soum Governor	
09:00-10:30	Sukhbaatar Aimag: Meetings with members of Aimag level cross- sectoral and multistakeholder working group of Sukhbaatar aimag - Ms Enkhtsestseg, Director of Development policy Planning and Development Division (confirmed) - Tuguldur, Director of Land Affairs and Urban Development (confirmed) - Khadbaatar, Specialist of Food and Agriculture Department (confirmed)	

10:30-12:30	Sukhbaatar Soum: - Field visit - Fruit tree extension site - Focus group meeting with Vegetable cooperative members - Focus group meeting with dairy farm	
13:30-16:00	Leave for Tumentsogt Soum, Sukhbaatar Aimag	
16:00-17:00	Tumentsogt Soum: - Field visit to eco school - Focus group meeting with Vegetable cooperative members (women's group) - /Erkhembayar, Khar yamaat PA volunteer ranger/	
17:00-18:00	Leave for Bayan-Ovoo, Khentii	
June 23, 2023 Friday	**Bayan-Ovoo, Khentii aimag**	
09:00-18:00	Bayan-Ovoo soum: Meeting with Governor of Bayan-Ovoo soum to learn about co-financed activities. - Field visit to Khar-Yamaat NR information centre, Beekeeping, Khulstai lake restoration sites, pasture fenced areas and tree nursery, school and kindergarten. - Focus group discussion with eco-street residents and meeting with beekeeper, /PA volunteer ranger/, herder group	Guided by Erdenechimeg, Agriculture specialist. Tsolmonbayar, soum coordinator Kherlenbaatar, ranger
June 24, 2023 Saturday	**Bayan-Ovoo-Norovlin-Bayan-Adraga, Khentii aimag**	
11:00-12:00	Norovlin soum: - Field visit to protection of Ulz river water generating site - Focus group discussion with herders involved in the protection Norovlin soum	Facilitated by Davaajargal, Soum coordinator
13:00-18:00	Bayan-Adarga soum, - Meeting with Oyun-Erdene, Khentii aimag agronomist to discuss about crop related activities. - Field visit to crop farming site to witness with interventions of Ider Onon LLC - Field visit to animal breeding unit farm site and dairy farm	Facilitated by Bayasgalan, Soum coordinator
19:00-20:00	Interview with Ecotourism camp owner, grant recipient of Eco-business	
June 25, 2023 Sunday	**Bayan-Adraga-Umnudelger-Ulaanbaatar**	
09:00- 12:00	Bayan-Adarga soum: Meeting and interview with - Soum Governor to discuss project interventions and co-financed activities. - Savings and Cooperative members - Stop by dairy farming site	Bayan-Adraga soum Facilitated by Bayasgalan, soum coordinator
13:00-20:00	Leave for UB	
June 26, 2023 Monday	**Ulaanbaatar**	
09:00- 10:00	KII with WWF Mongolia CD (BH) - Batbold, Director, WWF-Mongolia	WWF-Mongolia office
10:00- 11:00	Meeting with NUM - Bayarsaikhan, Professor, lecturer of NUM and research students (confirmed)	NUM

11.30-12.30	Meeting with MED: - Erdenebayar, Director of Regional development policy Department, MED (confirmed)	MED
14:00-18:00	KII with PMU	NUM
June 27, 2023 Tuesday	**Ulaanbaatar**	
09:00- 10:00	Meeting with TNC	TNC
10:00-11:00	Meeting with land management planning company - Naran-Ochir, Director of Vector map LLC	WWF-Mongolia office
11:00-12:00	Meeting with National Federation of Pasture User Groups - done	WWF-Mongolia office
14:00-15:30	Debriefing and wrap up	Zoom meeting
16:00-18:00	Internal discussion	WWF-Mongolia office
June 28, 2023 Wednesday	**Ulaanbaatar**	
09:00- 10:00	Interview with Vinod Ahuja, FAOR (BH)	UN house
10:00-11:45	Interview AFAOR – Ms Nyamjargal Gombo	UN House
11:45 – 13:00	Interview with FAO Operations	UN House
International stakeholders		
28 June 2023	Interview with Mr Aaron Becker, LTO	FAO - RAP
28 June 2023	Interview with PTF member Mr Kenichi Shono, Technical Officer	FAO - HQ
5 July 2023	Interview with Ms Yurie Naito, FLO	FAO - RAP
12 July 2023	Interview with DSL IP team Fritjof Boerstler and Marcelo Rezende	FAO - HQ
7 August 2023	Interview with PTF member Ms Heike Lingertat	WWF US

Appendix 3. Stakeholders interviewed during the MTR

List of stakeholders interviewed (KII and FGD participants)

S No	Name	Position	Organization	Soum/Aimag	Gender
Central level stakeholders					
1	Vinod Ahuja	FAOR	FAO Mongolia	UB	Male
2	D. Batbold	Country Director	WWF Mongolia	UB	Male
3	B. Munkhchuluun	AHEC Programme Manager	WWF Mongolia	UB	Female
4	Ikhbayar	Director of Land Management Department	ALAMGaC	UB	Male
5	Enkhgerel	Director of Monitoring and Evaluation Department	ALAMGaC	UB	Female
6	Bolorchuluun	Director of Policy Coordination Department	MoFALI	UB	Male
7	Indra	Director of Cooperative Development Department	NAMAC	UB	Female
8	Byambasuren	Foreign Relation Officer	NAMAC	UB	Female
9	Otgonbolor	Cooperative Development Officer	NAMAC	UB	Female
10	Ganbaatar	Vice Minister	MET	UB	Male
11	Baatartsogt	Director of DPAM	MET	UB	Male
12	Munkhzaya	Senior expert of DPAM	MET	UB	Female
13	Bayarmaa	Officer In-charge of Data of DPAM	MET	UB	Female
14	Boldbaatar	Officer of Policy and Planning Department	MET	UB	Male
15	Bulgamaa	PUG expert	NFPUG	UB	Female
16	Bayarsaikhan	Associate Professor	NUM	UB	Male
17	Erdenenbayar	Director of Regional and Local Development Department	MED	UB	Male
18	Munkhjargal	Senior Expert of Regional and Local Development Department	MED	UB	Male
19	Chuluunchimeg	Officer of Regional and Local Development Department	MED	UB	Female

20	Nyamjargal Gombo	Assistant FAOR	FAO Mongolia	UB	Female
21	Ganzorig	Officer	Victor Map Ltd	UB	Male
22	Erdenejargal	Project Manager	PMU	UB	Female
23	Gerlee	Land management specialist	PMU	UB	Female
24	Oyungerel	Agriculture (crop) specialist	PMU	UB	Female
25	Bat-Erdene	Livestock specialist	PMU	UB	Male
26	Uuganbayar	Biodiversity specialist	PMU	UB	Male
27	Javzansuren	Knowledge Management and M&E specialist	PMU	UB	Female
28	Narantsetseg	Finance Officer	FAO Mongolia	UB	Female
Local level stakeholders					
29	Munkh-Erdene	Director of Department of Environment and Tourism	MET	Khentii Aimag	Male
30	Nandintsetseg	Director	Kherlen River Basin Authority	Khentii Aimag	Female
31	Batsaikhan	Director	Forest Unit	Khentii Aimag	Male
32	Munkh-Erdene	Cooperative member	Ashid Munkh Bayan cooperative	Munkh-khaan Soum, Khentii Aimag	Male
33	Amgalanbaatar	Cooperative member	Ashid Munkh Bayan cooperative	Munkh-khaan Soum, Khentii Aimag	Male
33	Battur	Cooperative member	Ashid Munkh Bayan cooperative	Munkh-khaan Soum, Khentii Aimag	Male
34	Zoljargal	Soum Coordinator		Munkh-khaan Soum, Khentii Aimag	Male
35	Batkhurel	Soum Governor	Sukhbaatar Soum	Sukhbaatar Aimag	Male

36	Enkhtsetseg	Director	Development, Policy and Planning of aimag	Sukhbaatar Aimag	Female
37	Tuguldur	Director	Land Management Department	Sukhbaatar Aimag	Male
38	Enkhjin	Director	Land Management Department	Sukhbaatar Aimag	Female
39	Nyamkhuu	Director	Department of Environment and Tourism	Sukhbaatar Aimag	Male
40	Batbaatar	Officer	Department of Agriculture	Sukhbaatar Aimag	Male
41	Gerelmaa	Cooperative head	Bayan Zul Gerel Cooperative	Sukhbaatar Soum, Sukhbaatar Aimag	Female
42	Munkhzaya	Cooperative member	Bayan Zul Gerel Cooperative	Sukhbaatar Soum, Sukhbaatar Aimag	Female
43	Amaasuren	Cooperative member	Bayan Zul Gerel Cooperative	Sukhbaatar Soum, Sukhbaatar Aimag	Female
44	Enkhtaivan	Cooperative member	Bayan Zul Gerel Cooperative	Sukhbaatar Soum, Sukhbaatar Aimag	Male
45	Enkhtuul	Soum Project Coordinator	Sukhbaatar Soum	Sukhbaatar Aimag	Female
46	Khosbayar	Volunteer ranger	Khar Yamaat NR	Bayan-Ovoo soum,	Male

				Sunkhbaatar Aimag	
47	Erkhembayar	Volunteer ranger	Khar Yamaat NR	Bayan-Ovoo Soum, Sukhbaatar Aimag	Male
48	Khaltar	Group Leader	Shine Urgats vegetable group	Tumentsogt Soum Sukhbaatar Aimag	Female
49	Ochgerel	Group member	Shine Urgats vegetable group	Tumentsogt Soum Sukhbaatar Aimag	Male
50	Munkhtuya	Group member	Shine Urgats vegetable group	Tumentsogt Soum Sukhbaatar Aimag	Female
51	Usukhbayar	Soum coordinator	Tumentsogt Soum	Sukhbaatar Aimag	Male
52	Sainbayar	Herder	Khurga bordokh	Tumentsogt Soum Sukhbaatar Aimag	Male
53	Sarantuya	Group Leader	Bayan Taliin Urgats women's vegetable group	Munkhhaan Soum Sukhbaatar Aimag	Female
54	Narantuya	Group member	Bayan Taliin Urgats	Munkhhaan Soum	Female

			women's vegetable group	Sukhbaatar Aimag	
55	Oyungerel	Group member	Bayan Taliin Urgats women's vegetable group	Munkhhaan Soum Sukhbaatar Aimag	Female
56	Erdenetuya	Group member	Bayan Taliin Urgats women's vegetable group	Munkhhaan Soum Sukhbaatar Aimag	Female
57	Alimantuya	Group member	Bayan Taliin Urgats women's vegetable group	Munkhhaan Soum Sukhbaatar Aimag	Female
58	Undarmaa	Group member	Bayan Taliin Urgats women's vegetable group	Munkhhaan Soum Sukhbaatar Aimag	Female
59	Uranchimeg	Leader	Bee keepers' association	Tumentsogt Soum Sukhbaatar Aimag	Female
60	Tuvshinbayar	member	Bee keepers' association	Tumentsogt Soum Sukhbaatar Aimag	Male
61	Enkhtaivan	member	Bee keepers' association	Tumentsogt Soum Sukhbaatar Aimag	Male

62	Bayanmunkh	Soum governor		Bayan-Ovoo Soum Khentii Aimag	Male
63	Battulga	Volunteer ranger	Khar Yamaat NR	Bayan-Ovoo Soum Khentii Aimag	Male
64	Nyamdorj	Herder group leader		Bayan-Ovoo Soum Khentii Aimag	Male
65	Terbish	Vegetable grower group leader	Eco-street	Bayan-Ovoo Soum Khentii Aimag	Female
66	Enkhsaikhan	Vegetable grower group member	Eco-street	Bayan-Ovoo Soum Khentii Aimag	Female
67	Bat-Orgil	Vegetable grower group member	Eco-street	Khentii aimag Bayan-Ovoo soum	Male
70	Tsolmonbayar	Soum project coordinator		Khentii aimag Bayan-Ovoo soum	Male
71	Aruinbat	Herder	Ulz river upper fencing	Norovlin Soum Khentii Aimag	Male
72	Ganbold	Herder	Ulz river upper fencing	Norovlin Soum Khentii Aimag	Male
73	Shurenkhand	Herder	Ulz river upper fencing	Norovlin Soum Khentii Aimag	Female
74	Batmunkh	Herder	Ulz river upper fencing	Norovlin Soum Khentii Aimag	Male

75	Davaajargal	Soum Project Coordinator	Norovlin Soum	Khentii Aimag	Male
77	Ouynjargal	Director/owner	Ider Onon (Crop plantation private sector)	Bayan-Adraga Soum Khentii Aimag	Male
78	Tovchinsuren	Director/owner	Gurvan Khujurt Khan (LS breeding private sector)	Bayan-Adraga Soum Khentii Aimag	Female
79	Oyun-Erdene	Agriculture specialist	Aimag Agriculture Department	Khentii aimag	Male
80	Ankhbayar	Deputy Governor	Bayan-Adraga Soum	Khentii Aimag	Male
81	Ulziisaikhan	Head of soum citizen khural representatives	Bayan-Adraga Soum	Bayan-Adraga Soum Khentii Aimag	Female
82	Altantsetseg	Director	Savings and credit cooperative	Bayan-Adraga Soum Khentii Aimag	Female
83	Olzmunkh	Board member	Savings and credit cooperative	Bayan-Adraga Soum Khentii Aimag	Female
84	Lkhagvasuren	Herder group leader	Dairy product processing	Bayan-Adraga Soum Khentii Aimag	Male

85	Munkhbat	Director	Khunchin Bogd Onon Eco tour company	Bayan-Adraga Soum Khentii Aimag	Male
86	Bayasgalan	Soum Project Coordinator	Bayan-Adraga Soum	Khentii Aimag	Male
87	Sukhbat	Soum Project Coordinator	Bulgan Soum	Dornod Aimag	Male
88	Otgonbaatar	Soum Project Coordinator	Matad Soum	Dornod Aimag	Male
89	Sergelenbaatar	Soum Project Coordinator	Khulunbuir Soum	Dornod Aimag	Male
International level stakeholders					
90	Fritjof Boerstler	Coordinator	DSL-IP, FAO		Male
91	Marcelo Rezende	M&E Officer	DSL-IP, FAO		Male
92	Yurie Naito	GEF Liaison	FAO RAP		Female
93	Kenichi Shono	Technical Officer	FAO HQ		Male
94	Aaron Backer	LTO	FAO RAP		Male
95	Heike Lingertat		WWF US		Female

Appendix 4. MTR matrix (review questions and sub-questions)

Evaluation Component	Evaluative questions/ sub-questions	Indicators	Sources	Data collection methods
Relevance: The extent to which the intervention's design and intended results are consistent with local, national, sub-regional and regional environmental and development priorities and policies and to GEF and FAO strategic priorities and objectives; its complementarity with existing interventions and relevance to project stakeholders and beneficiaries; its suitability to the context of the intervention over time.				
Relevance	Are the project outcomes congruent with country priorities, GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework and the needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries (local communities, men and women, and indigenous peoples, if relevant)?	▪ Alignment of the objectives of the project with the priorities and GEF focal area's strategies. ▪ Alignment of the objective with GEF core indicators ▪ Intended results are consistent with local national and sub- national and countries environmental and development priorities ▪ Aligned with the FAOMN country programming framework ▪ FAO strategic priorities and objectives; its complementarity with existing interventions ▪ Level of alignment between the key assumptions formulated in the ProDoc and the situation in the project implemented sites ▪ Level of alignment of project outcomes and outputs with national priorities at the beginning of the project; and in the mid-term	Project document, GEF priorities area Interviews of GEF focal point, and participating government ministries and bodies PPRs, FAO MN country framework, review of GEF core indicators, worksheets, and bio-diversity focal area	Document review, interviews
	Has there been any change in the relevance of the project since its formulation, such as adoption of	▪ Emerging new policy after project came to implementation ▪ Extent of changes in government priorities	ProDoc, steering committee meeting minutes, PTF meeting minutes, PIR and PPR, interviews with FAO-GEF	Document review, interviews

	new national policies, plans or programs that affect the relevance of the project objectives and goals? If so, are there any changes that need to be made to the project to make it more relevant?	▪ Alignment of the project with the priorities agreed between UN-FAO and the government of Mongolia, WWF and SAF	team, PMU, Steering committee members, WWF	
Effectiveness of results: The degree to which the intervention has achieved or expects to achieve results (project outputs, outcomes, objectives and impacts, including Global Environmental Benefits) (GEF, 2019c) taking into account key factors influencing the results, including an assessment of whether sufficient capacity has been built to ensure the delivery of results by the end of project and beyond and the likelihood of mid- and longer-term impacts.				
Effectiveness	To what extent has the project delivered on its outputs, outcomes and objectives?	▪ Extent to which the objectives, outcomes and outputs indicated in the results implemented ▪ Expectation to meet the project targets by its Mid-term milestone have been achieved ▪ Existence of unplanned activities and outcomes and their impact ▪ Progress between the most recent GEF monitoring tool and its baseline version	Interviews with project participants, project team, WWF team, private sector and project stakeholders, project qualitative and quantitative results, review of PIR and PPR	Document review and analysis, interviews
	What broader results (if any) has the project had at regional and global level to date?	▪ Extent the project result framework and objectives contributed to regional and global level for bio- diversity conservation and ecosystem benefits ▪ Extent to which results against relevant core indicators have been achieved (as per the mid-term targets)	Interviews with FAO and WWF budget holders, FAO and WWF team, LTO, review of ProDoc and steering committee and PTF meeting minutes	Document review, interviews
	Were there any unintended consequences?	▪ Positive and negative unintended consequences of the project	PIR and PPR, steering committee meeting minutes, and interviews	Document review, interviews

	Is there any evidence of environmental stress reduction (for example, in direct threats to biodiversity) or environmental status change (such as an improvement in the populations of target species), reflecting global environmental benefits or any change in policy, legal or regulatory frameworks?	▪ Interventions outlined in the ProDoc and successful delivery of them	PIR, PPR and interviews with PMU, WWF team, private companies and executing partners	Document review, interviews
	To what extent can the achievement of results be attributed to the GEF-funded component?	▪ Broader objective of the project set out in the design phase ▪ Contribution of the project to the implementation of national policies	Interviews with executing partners, MET, WWF team, governor aimag/soum budget holders, FLO and LTO and FAO-GEF team	Document review, interviews
Likelihood of impact	Are there any barriers or other risks that may prevent future progress towards and the achievement of the project's longer-term objectives?	▪ Internal and external risk to the project, degree of the risk ▪ Nature and extent of factors that are hindering progress towards the objectives and expected result	PIR and PPR, PSC meeting minutes, interviews with PMU team, WWF team, and governors of project target aimag/soum	Document review, interviews
	What can be done to increase the likelihood of positive impacts from the project?	▪ Major learning and corrective measures ▪ Nature and extent of opportunities generated by the most significant achievement by the project to the date.	Interviews with PMU team, WWF team, MET, private companies, project participants, PIR, and steering committee and PTF meeting minutes	Document review and analysis, interviews
	To what extent can the progress towards long-term impacts be attributed to the project?	▪ Stakeholder views on the need and contribution of the project to improve lives of beneficiaries ▪ Efforts undertaken by the project to share success, best practices, and lessons with wider audience ▪ Project stakeholders participated in dissemination of the project achievements	PIR and PPR, interviews with stakeholder at national, aimag/soum	Document review, interviews
Efficiency: The cost-effectiveness of the project and timeliness of activities; the extent to which the intervention has achieved value for resources by converting inputs (funds, personnel, expertise, equipment, etc.) into results in the timeliest and least costly way compared with alternatives.				

Efficiency	To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently and cost effectively?	▪ Costs related to the result achieved in to similar inputs in other project ▪ Cost ratio in implementing activities by other agencies in the provinces. ▪ Level of management costs and discrepancy with planned costs ▪ Costs related to the results achieved compared to the costs of similar projects ▪ Level of discrepancy between planned and executed budget (total, by year and component) ▪ Financing and co- financing management	Financial reports, budget execution analysis reports and adjustments made by project team, interviews with PMU team and Operations unit, budget holders	Document review, interviews
	To what extent has project management been able to adapt to any changing conditions to improve the efficiency of project implementation?	▪ Comparison of start-up activities with agreed approach and methodology ▪ List of delays and causes ▪ Appropriateness of corrective actions in relation to delays and causes	PIR, project inception report, interviews with PMU team, Operations unit, budget holders, and LTO	Document review and analysis, interviews
	To what extent has the project built on existing agreements, initiatives, data sources, synergies and complementarities with other projects, partnerships, etc. and avoided duplication of similar activities by other groups and initiatives?	▪ Complementarities with other projects ▪ Partnership and coordination with the executing partners ▪ Duplication of the activities	PIR, interviews with budget holders, and MET focal point	Document review and analysis, interviews
Sustainability: The likelihood of continuation of positive effects from the intervention after it has ended and the potential for scale-up and/or replication; any financial, socio-political, institutional and governance, or environmental risks to sustainability of project results and benefits; any evidence of replication or catalysis of project results.				
Sustainability	What is the likelihood that the project results will be useful or persist after the end of the project?	▪ Evidence that particular partnerships/linkages will be sustained	Interviews with partners, project participants/ MET and governors (aimag/soum) of project target area	Interviews,

	What are the key risks that may affect the sustainability of the project results and its benefits (consider financial, socioeconomic, institutional and governance, and environmental aspects)?	▪ Likely budgetary allocations by implementing partner for repair, operation and maintenance of project investments after closure of the project ▪ Ownership level and ability of the implementing partner and potential usefulness of project investments for communities ▪ Role of private company after project completed	Interviews with project participants, PMU team, private companies, cooperatives of sheep wool and other products, FGD with vegetable production groups, livestock value chain group (herders)	Interviews, observations
Replication and catalysis	What project results, lessons or experiences have been replicated (in different geographic areas) or scaled up (in the same geographic area, but on a much larger scale and funded by other sources)?	▪ Commitment of communities, Aimags and Soum governments, and central government to project objectives and approach ▪ Evidence that specific practices at the Aimag/soum level will be sustained	Interviews with governor of aimag /soum, and project beneficiaries	Interviews, observations
	What results, lessons or experiences are likely to be replicated or scaled up in the near future?	▪ Degree of satisfaction expressed by project beneficiaries and, AIGMs government SOUM government departments and ministries on achievements of the project ▪ Commitment from the Aimag/soum and WWF and private companies and to replicate the activities/already replicated	PIR, PPR, interviews with aimag/soum, PMU, WWF team, interviews with cooperatives, vegetable farming group, herder group etc.	Document review and analysis, interviews
Factors affecting performance: The extent to which different aspects of project operation affecting the project performance.				
Project design	Is the project design suited to delivering the expected outcomes?	▪ Degree to which results framework indicators are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound)	ProDoc, theory of change, interviews with Operations unit, PMU team, WWF team, and MET focal point	Document review, interviews
	Is the project's causal logic (per its theory of change) coherent and clear?	▪ Consistency between project objective, outcomes, outputs and activities ▪ Feasibility of the objectives, outcomes and outputs within the project's budget and timeframe ▪ Appropriateness measures taken to address any weaknesses in project design or to respond to changes made between project approval (prior to project inception or in the inception phase)	Project inception report, interviews with Operations unit, FAO-GEF unit, WWF team, and MET Focal point	Document review, interviews

	To what extent are the project's objectives and components clear, practical and feasible within the timeframe allowed?	▪ Degree to which results framework indicators are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound)	ProDoc, interviews with PMU team, MET focal point and WWF project team	Document review and analysis, interviews
	To what extent was gender integrated into the projects objectives and results framework?	▪ Use of gender-disaggregated indicators and targets ▪ Availability of gender action plan ▪ Allocation of the budget according to gender action plan	Gender assessment report and action plan, interviews with PMU team, WWF team, and MET focal point	Document review and analysis, interviews
	Were other actors – civil society, indigenous peoples or private sector – involved in project design or implementation and what was the effect on project results?	▪ The stakeholder engagement in the design phase, list of them ▪ Roles and responsibilities of stakeholders in the ProDoc	ProDoc, interviews with stakeholders at the national and aimag/soum level	Document review, interviews
Project execution and management	To what extent did the executing agency effectively discharge its role and responsibilities in managing and administering the project?	▪ Evidence of clear roles and responsibilities ▪ Evidence of timely and transparent decision making ▪ Adequacy in project-management arrangements (initial staffing, procurement of good and services, and financing) in place when the project began ▪ Level of responsiveness of the project team and respective implementing agencies to the changing political context	PIR, project inception report, interviews with Operations unit, PMU team, WWF project team, and MET focal point	Document review and analysis, interviews
	What have been the main challenges in terms of project management and administration?	▪ The risk log developed during the design phase and updated during COVID-19 period ▪ Extent of mitigation and management of risks posed by COVID-19	Risk log and changes made on it, interviews with the PMU, WWF project team, and implementing partners	Document review, interviews
	How well have risks been identified and managed?	▪ Risk log proposed in the ProDoc and evidence of updating those in PSC/PTF and during Covid-19 scenario for adaptive management	PSC meeting minutes, interview with PMU team, and WWF project team	Document review and analysis, interviews
	What changes are needed to improve delivery in the latter half of the project?	▪ Correction measure of risk and mitigation measures	Interviews with PMU team, Operations unit, WWF project team and MET focal point	Document review, interviews
Financial management		▪ PMU, project financials, including knowledge of project progress/status		Financial data analysis, interviews

and co-financing)	What have been the financial management challenges of the project?	▪ Status of co-financing availability of budget on time within organization ▪ -Expenditure by outcome and output ▪ Revisions to budgets and any issues with disbursement ▪ PMU and MET and WWF responsiveness to addressing and resolving financial issues ▪ Degree of attention paid to compliance with procurement rules and regulations ▪ Any relevant legal agreements, such as letters of agreement	Financial data, interviews with PMU team, Operations unit and WWF project team	
	To what extent has pledged co-financing been delivered?	▪ Status of co-financing disbursement	FPMIS data, interviews with Operations unit, PMU team and WWF project team, and MET focal point	Document review and analysis, interviews
	Has any additional leveraged co-financing been provided since implementation?	▪ Status of additional financial resources	FPMIS data, interviews with Operations unit, finance, WWF project team, and MET focal point	Document review, interviews
	How has any shortfall in co-financing or unexpected additional funding affected project results?	▪ Co-financing and their utilization and effectiveness	Interviews with Operations unit, budget holders, and MET focal point	Document review, interviews
Project oversight, implementation role	To what extent has FAO delivered oversight and supervision and backstopping (technical, administrative, and operational) during project identification, formulation, approval, start-up and execution?	▪ Implementing agency's supervision and support ▪ Implementation support by the executing entity ▪ Approval process within FAO ▪ Supervision, guidance, operational and technical support provided by FAO (BH, LTO and FLO), the PSC and other supervising/supporting bodies ▪ Reporting lines clear, transparent and on timely manner Support through PTF meeting	Interviews with PMU, LTO and FLOs, budget holders	Interviews, back to office reports
Partnerships and stakeholder engagement	To what extent have stakeholders, such as government agencies, civil society, indigenous populations,	▪ Role and responsibilities of different stakeholders in project formulation and implementation phase ▪ Evidence of clear roles and responsibilities	ProDoc and interviews MET focal point, WWF project team, private companies, and other stakeholders at national, aimag and soum level	Document review and analysis, interviews

	disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, people with disabilities and private sector been involved in project formulation and implementation?	▪ Evidence of timely and transparent decision making		
	What has been the effect of their involvement or non-involvement on project results?	▪ The coordination and synergy building	Interviews with PMU, WWF, and MET team	Interviews
	How do the various stakeholder groups see their own engagement with the project?	▪ Roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders in ProDoc ▪ Ownership taken by stakeholders	Interviews with key stakeholders at national, aimag and soum level	Interviews
	What are the mechanisms of their involvement and how could these be improved?	▪ Existence of specific mechanism for stakeholders' involvement ▪ Joint project monitoring missions	Interview with PMU team and MET and WWF project team and key stakeholders	Document review, interviews
	What are the strengths and challenges of the project's partnerships?	▪ Mobilization of multiple partners especially Government at different level	Interviews with PMU team, Operations unit, WWF project team	Interviews
	Has the stakeholder engagement plan been adhered to and documented?	▪ List of stakeholders consulted during design and implementation phases	ProDoc, PIR, PPR	Document review
	Have all stakeholders been made aware of the ESS plan and the grievance complaint mechanism?	▪ Existence of GRM at the project level	PIR, PPR, interviews with stakeholders	Document review, interviews
Communication and knowledge management	How effective has the project been in communicating and promoting its key messages and results to partners, stakeholders, and general audience? How can this be improved?	▪ Communication strategy, mechanism, communication materials produced ▪ Availability of resources (both financial and specialized technical communication expertise) for communication and knowledge-management activities ▪ Expertise on financial and specialized technical communication ▪ Mechanism for improving communication and promoting key messages	Review of communication materials, interviews with PMU team and project team	Document review and analysis, interviews
				Document review,

	How is the project assessing, documenting, and sharing its results and lessons learned and experiences?	▪ Experience sharing, lesson learnt sharing, participation in international conference	Case story/ documentation, interviews with PMU team	interviews
	To what extent are communication products and activities likely to support the sustainability and scaling up of project design	▪ Value added by communication strategy and mechanism ▪ Communication approaches and activities to support sustainable project results	Communication documents, interviews with PMU team	Document review, interviews
M&E design	Is the project's M&E system practical and sufficient?	▪ Existence of project progress tracking system ▪ Requirement of reformulation of outcome indicators to make them 'SMART'	Interviews with PMU team, FAO M&E, and WWF project team	Interviews
	How has stakeholder engagement and gender assessment been integrated into the M&E system? How could this be improved?	▪ Gender analysis and stakeholder analysis report, ▪ Sex- disaggregated data maintained at the project level ▪ Availability of baseline information for the indicators at the design stage ▪ Adequacy of gender-disaggregated indicators included in the project log frame and M&E framework	M&E plan, database, interview with project M&E and gender expert	Document review and M& E data analysis, interviews
M&E implementation	Does the M&E system operate per the M&E plan?	▪ Availability of M&E plan, human and financial resources, dedicated M&E staff ▪ Submission of PIRs and updating of tracking tools and core indicators	Interview with M&E (FAO and WWF), and review of documents	Interviews and M&E data base, and
	Has information been gathered in a systematic manner, using appropriate methodologies?	▪ Existence of different methods for information gathering ▪ Mechanisms used for capturing lessons learned (for example, external facilitators, annual project retreats or stakeholder-led workshops, dissemination workshop etc.)	Interview with PMU team, FAO, WWF and government M&E	Interviews and document review
	To what extent has information generated by the M&E system during project implementation been used to adapt and improve project planning and execution, achieve outcomes and ensure sustainability?	▪ Degree of utilization of M&E data and lesson learnt adaptive management process identified, captured, documented, shared and incorporated into project implementation	Monitoring tracking sheets, interviews with M&E- FAO and WWF	Document review and analysis, read publication interviews

	Are there gender-disaggregated targets and indicators?	▪ Gender sensitive indicators in ProDoc	M&E data base, interview with project M&E	Document review and analysis, interviews
	How can the M&E Plan system be improved?	▪ Functioning of M&E plan ▪ Quality, utility and timeliness of PMU and partner reporting to both GEF and FAO	M&E plan, interview with project M&E (FAO and WWF)	Interview and document review
Cross-cutting dimensions: The extent to which different cross-cutting dimension are considered in the project.				
Gender and minority groups, including indigenous peoples, disadvantaged, vulnerable and people with disabilities	To what extent were gender considerations taken into account in designing and implementing the project?	▪ Gender specific needs identified and interventions proposed accordingly in ProDoc ▪ Likelihood of the project having same level of positive and/or negative effects on women and men, girls and boys ▪ Evidence of activities that mainstream gender in planning or activities as a result of the project ▪ Representation and participation of gender and marginalized groups in decision making level of the project (PMU, PSC, project coordination committee at the aimag and soum level) ▪ Availability of gender action plan ▪ Allocation of the budget according to gender action plan	PIR, PPR, interview with the PMU team	Document review, interviews
	Has the project been designed and implemented in a manner that ensures gender-equitable participation and benefits?	▪ Extent of evidence of participation of women and girls during project design ▪ Degree and extent of women's participation in project activities and specific mechanism to include them ▪ Project contribution in addressing gender gaps in (1) access to and control of natural resources; (2) participation and decision-making; and (3) access to socioeconomic benefits and services. ▪ Constraints on women's participation in the project activities ▪ Gender responsive results framework ▪ Availability of gender expertise in the project	ProDoc, interviews with PMU team, WWF, private companies, cooperatives for, vegetable farming groups	Document review and analysis, interviews

		▪ Contribution of project in achieving GEF and FAO's gender equality objectives		
	Was a gender analysis done?	▪ Extent of gender differentiate impact identified during the design phase ▪ Extent of gender specific activities and indicators listed in ProDoc	ProDoc, interviews with PMU team, MET and WWF	Document review and analysis, interviews
ESS	To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project?	▪ Quality of risk analysis in the project document / Completeness of risk identification during project planning and design ▪ Extent to which the planning documents foresaw or reflected the risks already faced by the project during implementation ▪ Quality of existing information systems to identify and analyse new risks ▪ Quality of risk mitigation strategies developed and followed ▪ Assessment of environmental and social risks during project	Interview with PMU team and WWF project team	Interviews
	Has the project been implemented in a manner that ensures the ESS Mitigation Plan (if one exists) has been adhered to?	▪ Existence of ESS plan including risk classification ▪ Consistency of risk analysis and implementation of mitigation measures with FAO standards ▪ Degree of progress in the implementation of the environmental and social management plan ▪ Adequacy of definition and implementation of measures to prevent negative effects of Covid-19 on technical and financial implementation ▪ Risks posed by climate change and other natural hazards ▪ Environmental and social instruments applied by the project	ProDoc, PIR, PTF and PSC meeting minutes	Document review, interviews

Appendix 5. List of documents consulted ("Reference list")

1. GEF PIF with technical clearance
2. FAO–GEF project preparation grant document
3. GEF-approved project document and any updated approved document following the inception workshop, with latest budgets showing budget revisions (including the DSL-IP PFD)
4. Project inception report
5. Six-monthly FAO PPRs
6. Annual work plans and budgets (including budget revisions)
7. Annual GEF PIR reports
8. Monitoring reports prepared by the project
9. Documentation detailing any changes to the project framework or components, such as changes to originally designed outcomes and outputs
10. Relevant technical, backstopping and project-supervision mission reports, including back-to-the-office reports by relevant project staff
11. Minutes of the meetings of the PSC, PTF and other relevant groups
12. Environmental and Social Management Framework of the project
13. ESS analysis and mitigation plans produced during the project design period and records
14. Awareness-raising and communications materials produced by the project
15. FAO, WWF Mongolia policy documents in relation to topics such as Strategic Objectives and Gender
16. Finalized GEF Core Indicators Sheet at CEO endorsement, as well as updated at Mid-Term
17. Financial management and expenditures to date information
18. The GEF Gender Policy (GEF, 2017), GEF Gender Implementation Strategy (GEF, 2018a), GEF Guidance on Gender Equality (GEF, 2018b) and the GEF Guide to Advance Gender Equality in GEF Projects and Programmes (GEF, 2018c)
19. FAO and WWF Mongolia Country Programme Framework documents, the FAO and WWF Mongolia Guide to the Project Cycle, FAO and WWF Environment and Social
20. Dryland Sustainable Landscapes Program (DSL IP)
21. https://www.changethegameacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Kirckpatrick-Evaluating-capacity-building-on-four-levels-template.pdf

Appendix 6. Results matrix showing achievements at mid-term and MTR observations

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Mid-term target	End of project target	Level at first PIR (self reported)	Mid-term level and assessment (colour coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement Rating	Justification for rating
Development objective: Resilient dryland landscape and biodiversity that sustain inclusive, resilient livelihoods and secure multiple environment benefits								
Project Objective: *To reverse and prevent dryland ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss through an inclusive, integrated landscape and value chain approach securing multiple environment benefits and sustainable, resilient livelihoods in the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia*	Core Indicator 1: Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use (hectares) Sub-Indicator 1.2: Terrestrial protected areas under improved management effectiveness	There are six NRs in the target area, with total area of 1,189,866 ha (includes area of Toson Khulstai that is outside of the 9 target soums). 2 NRs (Khar Yamaat and Toson Khulstai) have existing management plans. METT scores: See separate file	1,189,866 ha METT score targets: See separate file	1,189,866 ha 6 NRs have new or improved management plan. METT score targets: See separate file	Sub-Indicator 1.2: Sub-Indicator 1.2: - 2 NRs (Toson Khulstai and Khar yamaat NR) have existing management plans – 520,619 ha - Development of management plans for 2 NRs (Bayantsagaanii tal and Ulz River head NR) is ongoing – 434,889 ha - Management plan for 2 NRs (Jaran Togoony A and B, Menen Tsagaan khooloi NR) developed by with co-financing by TNC Mongolia – 234,358 ha. Assessment on management effectiveness for target 6 NRs will be conducted in 2023. - 852981.3 ha of Protected area (Khar Yamaat, Toson Khulstai, Bayantsagaanii tal NRs) officially established and the boundaries are set by the Parliament and Cabinet. - 336884.7 ha of Protected area (Jaran Togoony A and B, Menen Tsagaan khooloi NR and Ulz goliin ekh NRs) officially established by the Parliament but the boundaries are not set by the Cabinet.	1,189,866 ha	MS	The first target (i.e. six NRs covering 1,189,866 ha) is partially achieved as 852,981.3 ha in Khar Yamaat, Toson Khulstai, Bayantsagaanii tal NRs is officially established and the boundaries are set by the Parliament and Cabinet. However, two NRs covering 336,884.7 ha in Jaran Togoony A and B, Menen Tsagaan khooloi NR and Ulz goliin ekh NRs are yet to be approved by the Parliament and

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Mid-term target	End of project target	Level at first PIR (self reported)	Mid-term level and assessment (colour coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement Rating	Justification for rating
								Cabinet. The second target (METT score) is not met. The assessment on management effectiveness is yet to be conducted.
	Core Indicator 3: Area of land restored (hectares) Sub-Indicator 3.2: Area of forest and forest land restored Sub-Indicator 3.3: Area of natural grass and shrublands restored Note: This indicator captures the total area of	Baseline: 0	Sub-Indicator 3.2: 50 ha Sub-Indicator 3.3: 49,765 ha (20% of end-of-project target)	Sub-Indicator 3.2: 200 ha Sub-Indicator 3.3: 248,827 ha Note: This target is based on 20% of the area severely and strongly affected by land degradation – which	Sub-Indicator 3.2: Supported natural regeneration process in 10 ha of community managed boreal forest area in Norovlin soum Supported establishment of wind break in adjacent to patch forest in Khar yamaat NR – 1 ha In five tree nurseries, a total of 59000 pieces of willow cuttings (Salix ledebouriana and Salix miyabeana) and Poplus (Populus laurifolia), and 6kg Elm tree seeds, (Ulmus sp.) were planted to be used for riparian restoration. 1.25 ha of riparian forest in Khulunbuir, Bulgan, Bayan-Ovoo soums were fenced to protect from livestock footprint and support natural restoration. Sub-Indicator 3.3: The two baghs (Bayan-Adarga and Matad soums) of critically degraded summer rangeland will be rested by the endorsement of Soum Citizen's Khural as part of soum's annual land-use plan 2022. However, achievement against the target can be verified by the end of the year.	12.25 ha (approx. 25%)	MS and HS	For Indicator 3.2, only 25% is achieved out of which 10 ha of community managed boreal forest through natural regeneration process, 1 ha wind break, and 1.25 ha riparian forest protected through natural regeneration. The indicator 3.3 is over achieved. A total of 292,265 ha of pastureland was improved due to resting in Sukhbaatar

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Mid-term target	End of project target	Level at first PIR (self reported)	Mid-term level and assessment (colour coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement Rating	Justification for rating
	land undergoing restoration in terms of ecosystem function and/or ecology.			will be priority for government in terms of restoration. The target will be confirmed once the assessments under Output 1.1.3 have been conducted. [12]				(231,556 ha) and Tumentsogt (60,709 ha) soums of Sukhbaatar aimag in 2022
	Core Indicator 4: Area of landscapes under improved practices (excluding protected areas) (hectares)	Sub-Indicator 4.1 will correspond to LPAs in connectivity areas under improved management. LPAs already exist, but connectivity areas have not yet been identified. Baseline and	Sub-Indicator 4.1: TBD	Sub-Indicator 4.1: TBD	Sub-Indicator 4.1: - Habitat connectivity areas for Mongolian gazelle were identified Study on habitat connectivity areas for iconic birds is ongoing. Sub-Indicator 4.3: Capacity development activities (demonstration training and provision of field tools) were conducted for photo monitoring of grazing impact at soum level. (i) The project supported two crop companies in Bayan-Adarga soum to cultivate rapeseed and wheat as rotational crop using minimum tillage technology in 284 ha.		MU	For sub-indicator 4.1,The progress mentions of habitat connectivity areas for Mongolian gazelle and iconic birds were identified whereas the progress is TBD

[12] If it is determined that some of the area to be restored is inside the protected areas above, it will need to be deducted from Core Indicator 1 target (to avoid double-counting).

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Mid-term target	End of project target	Level at first PIR (self reported)	Mid-term level and assessment (colour coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement Rating	Justification for rating
	Sub-Indicator 4.1: Area of landscapes under improved management to benefit biodiversity Sub-Indicator 4.3: Area of landscapes under sustainable land management in production systems (sub-indicator may include agriculture, rangeland, and forests)	targets will be defined based on assessments under Activity 3.1.1.1 and 3.1.4.1 Sub-Indicator 4.3 will refer to the area under improved land management plans. To avoid double-counting, areas under Core Indicators 1 and 3 and Sub-Indicator 4.1 will be deducted from this number. Baseline: 0	Sub-Indicator 4.3: 2,826,660.5 ha (50% of end-of-project target) (i) 4,000 ha of cropland under improved management (ii) 1,861,305 ha[13] of rangeland under improved rangeland management plans	Sub-Indicator 4.3: 5,640,117 ha 6,857,748 ha will be under improved land management plans (entire area of 9 soums). To avoid double-counting, Core Indicator 1 and Core Indicator 3 were deducted from this	(ii) 451,226.4 ha (24% against final target) Two baghs in Bayan-Adarga (112,601.8 ha) and Matad soums (338,627.6 ha) adopted participatory bagh-based pasture management plan as part of annual soum land management plan and it is incorporated into the national land administration system. – 451,226.4 ha (iii) Capacity building training and restoration assessment on riparian forest restoration was conducted. Forest and steppe fire prevention tools and equipment and relative training were provided to 9 soums			Target for sub-indicator 4.3 is approximately achieved (approx. 96.8%). (i) Cropland under improvement is partially met (42.32%) out of which 717 ha improved farming/intercropping practices under no tillage; 250 ha with super elite wheat seed replication; 714 ha for oats planted by crop farmers and herders for fodder; 12 ha vegetable/green house production under application of sustainable crop

[13] Estimate calculated as 33% of total 5,640,117 ha. See Outcome 2.2, Indicator d), 33% of baghs have improved bagh-level rangeland management plans.

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Mid-term target	End of project target	Level at first PIR (self reported)	Mid-term level and assessment (colour coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement Rating	Justification for rating
			(iii) 19,800 ha[14] of forest area under improved management	target.[15] Sub-Indicator 4.1 will also have to be deducted, when available. Within this area: (i) 4,000 ha of cropland under improved management (ii) 1,861,305 ha[16] of pastureland under improved pasture management plans				and fodder production practices through the introduction of improved/climate-smart technologies (ii) Only 38.21% of MT target is achieved under improved rangeland management plans covering only pastureland use and hay making areas of three soums (iii) The forest area brought under improved management is 70.91%. The reporting is not

[14] Total forest area in the nine soums is 109,872.7 ha. Project interventions are anticipated to cover approximately 20,000 ha of forest area, of which 200 ha of forest restoration.

[15] Area of Toson Khulstai that is outside of the 9 target soums = 221,262 ha (Tsagaan-Ovoo 192,522 ha and Bayantumen 28,740 ha). Thus, area of Core Indicator 1 that needs to be deducted from Core Indicator 4 (to avoid double-counting) is 1,189,866 ha minus 221,262 ha = 968,604 ha. 6,857,748 ha minus 968,604 ha minus 249,027 ha = 5,640,117 ha.

[16] Estimate calculated as 33% of total 5,640,117 ha. See Outcome 2.2, Indicator d), 33% of baghs have improved bagh-level pasture management plans.

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Mid-term target	End of project target	Level at first PIR (self reported)	Mid-term level and assessment (colour coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement Rating	Justification for rating
				(iii) 19,800 ha[17] of forest area under improved management				supporting the figures presented in the PIR
	Core Indicator 6: Greenhouse Gas Emissions Mitigated (metric tons of CO2e) Sub-indicator 6.1: Carbon sequestered or emissions avoided in the AFOLU sector	Baseline: 0 Without project scenario: net emissions of 175,184 tons of CO2e	TBD - target will be defined in Year 1.	10,302,215 tons CO2e (of which 8,052,215 direct, 2,250,000 indirect)[18] With project scenario: net emissions of -787,7031 tons of CO2e Difference: 8,052,215	Calculations will be conducted before the mid-term review takes place.		S	Exceeded the target. Total CO2 sequestration reported in PIR 6,067,548 tones direct mitigated. GEF CC tracking tool was not made available to the MTR

[17] Total forest area in the nine soums is 109,872.7 ha. Project interventions are anticipated to cover approximately 20,000 ha of forest area, of which 200 ha of forest restoration.

[18] Lifetime indirect GHG emissions mitigated are those attributable to the long-term outcomes of GEF activities that remove barriers, such as capacity building, innovation, and catalytic action for replication. See GEF-7 Results Guidelines.

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Mid-term target	End of project target	Level at first PIR (self reported)	Mid-term level and assessment (colour coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement Rating	Justification for rating
				tons of CO2e				
	Core Indicator 11: Number of direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as co-benefit of GEF investment	Baseline: 0	(i) 12,420 people (53.4% men, 46.6% women) receive targeted support and/or use the resources that the project maintains or enhances (50% of total population of 9 target soums). (ii) 200 national and aimag stakeholders trained* (at least 40% representation of	(i) 24,841 people living in nine target soums (53.4% men, 46.6% women) receive targeted support and/or use the resources that the project maintains or enhances (100% of total population of 9 target soums). (ii) 400 national and aimag stakeholde	i) 6211 people (52% male, 48% female) – attended project activities (25% achieved against final target) - 594 people (51% male, 49% female) – campaigns - 1172 people (50% male, 50% female) – surveys - 2388 people (45% male, 55% female) – trainings - 952 people (60% male, 40% female) – meetings - 839 people (51% male, 49% female) – conferences and workshops - 764 people (56% male, 44% female) – received project support (seeds, tools, feed, fire prevention equipment etc.) 499 national and aimag stakeholders were trained (58% male, 42% female) on sustainable land management planning, sustainable rangeland management and NR management		HS	(i) Number of direct beneficiaries as co-benefited from GEF investment is over achieved with 110.66%, however, the percentage of men and women ratio as given in the ProDoc is not fully met (ii) More than 4 fold (406%) national and aimag stakeholders were trained (58% male, 42% female) on sustainable land management planning, sustainable rangeland management and NR management

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Mid-term target	End of project target	Level at first PIR (self reported)	Mid-term level and assessment (colour coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement Rating	Justification for rating
			female and male participants) .	rs trained* (at least 40% representation of female and male participants)				
Capacity Scorecard results	Capacity development scores (average of 3 aimags and 9 soums) See Annex R1 and R2 for the detailed scores.	47% (21.1 points)	52.5% (23.6)	61.3% (27.6)	Capacity development assessment will be conducted before the mid-term review takes place.		HS	MTR target is fully met as 60% trained people have increase their capacity by 26.8 points
Component 1: Strengthening the enabling environment for the sustainable management of drylands in Mongolia								
Outcome 1.1: Strengthened policies and planning mechanisms for the sustainable management of	a. Number of multi-stakeholder working groups established and operational.	Baseline: 0 National Land Reform Committee in government level established by Prime Minister Resolution in 2017.	1 national, 3 aimag and 9 soum level working groups	1 national, 3 aimag-level working groups and 9 soum level working groups	8 working groups of multi-stakeholder representation established (61% achieved against final target) - 12 working groups were established, out of which 8 working groups had met criteria for multi-stakeholder criteria and 4 working groups are undergoing re-structuring process. - Training on improving integrated land management planning is conducted for working groups. Establishment of National level technical working group is under progress.		MS	Out of 13 working groups, 12 were established, however the reporting is not clear on how many groups at which level

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Mid-term target	End of project target	Level at first PIR (self reported)	Mid-term level and assessment (colour coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement Rating	Justification for rating
drylands at national, aimag and soum levels								
	b. Number of aimag and soum land management plans incorporating sustainable land use, landscape management and biodiversity conservation strategies and targets.	Baseline: 0 Norovlin has developed land management plan but does not incorporate specific LD and BD targets.	3 aimag land management plans Annual targets will be defined with stakeholders in Year 1. 12	3 aimag land management plans, 9 soum territorial development (mid-term land management) plans	In progress Under the guidance and supervision of Working groups, the development of 3 aimag general land management plans and 9 soum territorial development plans is on-going with revised TORs and/or guidelines incorporating SLM/LDN, climate change and biodiversity conservation considerations.		MU	Mid-term target not fully achieved, only seven (58.33%) aimag and soum land management plans incorporated sustainable land use, landscape management and biodiversity conservation strategies and targets
	c. Number of improved monitoring systems and processes in place.	Baseline: 0 Existing land monitoring database but does not provide comprehensive information on land use and status. IRIMHE existing soum-level pasture	Process and methodology for land use/land degradation and biodiversity monitoring agreed upon by relevant stakeholder	9 soum-level and 3 aimag-level land monitoring systems	In progress The sets of activities implemented during the reporting period are as follows: - Supported demonstration of participatory monitoring of pastureland restoration - The methodology for national level land monitoring system based on remote sensing was developed and piloted to determine rangeland health and productivity on extended coverage in the target nine (9) soums. After the validation it will be applied nationwide through www.egazar.gov.mn - online land monitoring sub-system.		MU	Monitoring system in nine soums improved out of 12

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Mid-term target	End of project target	Level at first PIR (self reported)	Mid-term level and assessment (colour coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement Rating	Justification for rating
		monitoring stations. Mongolian METT, BIOSAN systems in place, but not used systematically. Last gazelle population assessment conducted in 2009. Aimags conduct gazelle surveys every 5 years; but these are not coordinated.	s (as per law and/or multi-stakeholder working group). Annual targets will be defined with stakeholders in Year 1. 9 soums and 3 aimags		Draft guidelines on identification of degraded land and its rehabilitation based on remote sensing was developed and will be sent for approval in December 2022.			
	d Area under improved land management plans.	- See Core Indicator 4 above -						
	e. Number of revised policies, laws or resolutions drafted and submitted to Cabinet/local Khural.	Baseline: 0 Existing legal and policy framework includes, among others, Law on Soil Conservation and Desertification	n/a (progress towards the final target will be monitored annually)	At least 3 revised policies, laws or resolutions drafted and submitted to Cabinet/	1 regulation on responsibilities for pasture use in Munkhkhaan was approved by the Ministry of Justice (33% achieved against final target) - Draft Law on Land cadastre was cleared by the Cabinet and submitted for deliberation to Parliament. - 2 draft pasture management regulations were submitted for endorsement to Citizen's representative Khural of Sukhbaatar soum and Matad soum.		HS	No mid-term target set in the ProDoc, however PIR reported of 3 soum level pasture use regulations enforced

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Mid-term target	End of project target	Level at first PIR (self reported)	Mid-term level and assessment (colour coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement Rating	Justification for rating
		Prevention, Land Law, Law on Environmental Protection, State Policy on Forests, Sustainable Livestock Action Plan, National Agriculture Development Policy, Law on Special Protected Areas, Law on Buffer Zones.		local Khural. Note: This is anticipated to include 1 national level law/policy related to pasture/land use, and 2 aimag-level resolutions on land management planning process.				
Component 2: Scaling up sustainable dryland management in the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia								
Outcome 2.1: Farmers/crop producers in target areas are applying more sustainable	a Area under improved practices: See Core Indicator 4.	- See Core Indicator 4 above –						

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Mid-term target	End of project target	Level at first PIR (self reported)	Mid-term level and assessment (colour coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement Rating	Justification for rating
crop and fodder production practices through the introduction of improved/climate-smart technologies								
	b Quantity of crop produced from sustainable and climate-smart practices	Baseline: 7,506.7 tons of cereals, potatoes and vegetables and 2,092.5 tons of fodder produced with traditional practices in 9 target soums	5% (375 tons) of total food crops and 5% (104 tons) of fodder produced with sustainable practices Annual targets will be defined with stakeholders in Year 1	10% (750 tons) of total food crops and 10% (208 tons) of fodder produced with sustainable practices	In progress Two crop farming companies in Bayan-Adarga soum started cultivating rapeseed and wheat on 247 ha as new rotational crops under minimum tillage technology. Yield quantity will be verified after harvesting. In progress - Crop company in Bayan-Adraga soum, Khentii aimag cultivated mixed grains as green fodder on 40 ha as rotational crop to prevent soil erosion. Yield quantity will be verified after harvesting.		MS	The mid-term target is fully met, only 237 tonnes (63.2%) of grain and vegetables is produced through the application of sustainable and climate smart agriculture practices.
	b Quantity of fodder produced	0	104 ton	208 ton	180 herder households in 9 soums planted oats as green fodder on their winter camps to build resilience to climate change.		HS	The mid-term target is overachieved

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Mid-term target	End of project target	Level at first PIR (self reported)	Mid-term level and assessment (colour coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement Rating	Justification for rating
	from sustainable and climate-smart practices							(192.3%) produced from application of sustainable and climate-smart practices
	c Number of farmers (women and men) participating in environment friendly or improved crop management activities	0	20 individual farmers (of which at least 40% women farmers, or households involving both spouses) At least 2 crop companies	40 individual farmers (of which at least 40% women farmers or households involving both spouses) At least 2 crop companies	In progress 5 vegetable group established including 71 farmers (11 farmers are female-headed household) participated in the crop management/vegetable production activities. - 1 vegetable cooperative with 12 members, - 1 vegetable women group from 11 vulnerable households, - 3 vegetable farmer groups consist of 48 unemployed people - Out of 71 farmers, 3 farmers are people with special needs 121 individuals (46% male, 54% female) in 9 soums and 15 households (3 female headed household and 2 household have person with disability in Eco Street in Bayan-Ovoo soum participated in the crop management/vegetable production activities.			Mid-term target overachieved with 11 fold in terms of total target with gender disaggregation. 238 farmers (93 men and 145 women) are organized in vegetable farming groups
Outcome 2.2: Local communities are applying sustainable management and restoration	d Number of bagh-level pasture management and/or pasture use agreements adopted by local stakeholders.	Baseline: 0 PUGs, pasture management plans in Bayan-Ovoo, Tumentsogt soums.	6 (15% of baghs in the 9 soums) Annual targets will be defined with stakeholders in Year 1.	13 (33% of baghs in the 9 soums)	In progress 2 baghs. (15% achieved against final target) Rangeland management plans for 2 baghs in Bayan-Adarga and Matad soums got adopted as part of annual soum land management plan that encompassed restoration. They are registered in the national land management system.		MS	Mid-term target not fully, only 5 rangeland user groups agreement formalized for implementation of participatory bagh level rangeland

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Mid-term target	End of project target	Level at first PIR (self reported)	Mid-term level and assessment (colour coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement Rating	Justification for rating
of rangelands and forest patches in the target area	(Note: Pasture management plans will also encompass restoration.) (Adopted through Soum Governor's resolution or decision of Citizen Representatives Khurals.)	Winter and spring camp agreements between herders and local government in soum annual plans, but implementation is not monitored. There are 39 baghs in the 9 target soums.						management which covers more than 376,907 ha
	e Area under restoration: See Core Indicator 3.	- See Core Indicator 3 above -						
	f Area under improved practices: See Core Indicator 4.	- See Core Indicator 4 above –						
Outcome 2.3: Local communitie	Number of people (women and men)	Baseline: 0 Note: This target adds up to the #	180 (average 20 per soum), of which at	450 (average 50 per soum), of	In progress 1473 people (43% male, 57% female) participated in value chain development training as follows.		HS	The mid-term target is fully achieved with more than

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Mid-term target	End of project target	Level at first PIR (self reported)	Mid-term level and assessment (colour coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement Rating	Justification for rating
s benefit from enhanced value chains, public-private partnerships and access to markets in support of sustainable grazing practices	benefiting from enhanced value chains in support of sustainable grazing practices. (Note: Refers to the interventions described in the ProDoc under Outcome 2.3. Enhanced value chains may result from public-private partnerships, improved market linkages, improved standards of production that enhance quality, etc.)	of beneficiaries listed above as core indicator. Benefits may include capacity development, monetary benefits, and/or other measurable benefits.	least 50% women Annual targets will be defined with stakeholders in Year 1. 3	which at least 50% women	134 people (10% male, 90% female) on sustainable code of practices for sorting and grading cashmere 601 people (46% male, 54% female) on promotion of agriculture cooperative governance and management 423 people (49% male, 51% female) on sustainable livestock production and marketing 87 people (33% male, 58% female) on Fruit and berry tree planting technology 121 people (46% male, 54% female) on small scale fodder production 107 people (41% male, 59% female) sustainable animal husbandry and value chain in 5 target soums.			threefold. Six hundred members from 15 cooperatives have benefited and actively engaged in project value chain activities. 127 female herders from seven received "Cashmere sorter" competency-based training and 117 herders received certification
	Number of herder	Baseline: 0	3 herder groups/	9 herder groups/	In progress		HS	Mid-term target overachieved

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Mid-term target	End of project target	Level at first PIR (self reported)	Mid-term level and assessment (colour coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement Rating	Justification for rating
	groups/cooperatives that obtain certification on sustainable practices through project (e.g., SFA codes of practice for cashmere, traceability standards for meat)		cooperatives (of which at least 1 women-led) Annual targets will be defined with stakeholders in Year 1. 5%	cooperatives (of which at least 3 women-led)	- 5 cooperatives in Munkhkhaan, Matad, Khulunbuir, Bayan-Ovoo and Bulgan soums undergone process for obtaining certification as sustainable fibre (cashmere) supplier/producers - 16 herders from 3 cooperatives obtained certification as qualified national wool shearer			(167%). However, the reporting does not mention on women-led herder groups/cooperatives
	Additional or new income from value chain activities (% increase).	Baseline: TBD Note: Targets will be elaborated in consultation with the communities during implementation.	Increase of 5% over baseline measurement	10% increase over baseline measurement	In progress A cooperative in Matad soums earned 3.1% higher income compared to market price for supplying sustainably produced cashmere as a result of applying SFA standard. A cooperative in Munkhkhaan soum signed contract to supply 30-ton sheep wool to domestic wool processor and organic wool fertilizer (pellets) producer through partnership building meeting/ study visit.		HS	The mid-term target is overachieved with approximately eight fold, however the PIR does not mentioned on the income survey conducted
Component 3: Strengthening biodiversity conservation and landscape connectivity								
Outcome 3.1 Manageme	a. Area of terrestrial	- See Core Indicator 1 above -						

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Mid-term target	End of project target	Level at first PIR (self reported)	Mid-term level and assessment (colour coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement Rating	Justification for rating
nt capacity of Nature Reserves (NRs)[19] and Local Protected Areas (LPAs) in connectivity areas is increased to support survival of Mongolian gazelle and other iconic species	PAs[20] under improved management effectiveness: See Core Indicator 1.							
	b. Area of landscapes under improved local protection to benefit biodiversity: See Core Indicator 4.	- See Core Indicator 4 above (Sub-Indicator 4.1) –						

19

20 Protected Areas.

<table>
<tr><th>Project strategy</th><th>Indicator</th><th>Baseline level</th><th>Mid-term target</th><th>End of project target</th><th>Level at first PIR (self reported)</th><th>Mid-term level and assessment (colour coded red, yellow or green)</th><th>Achievement Rating</th><th>Justification for rating</th></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>c.BD/species indicators:
(i) Mongolian Gazelle: Number of individuals and number of days in which gazelles are observed in target NRs during relevant season

(ii) White-napped Crane: Number of breeding pairs in target area; Nesting success[21]</td><td>Baseline and targets will be defined based on baseline survey result under Activity 3.1.1.1. See Biodiversity baseline report for more details.

In Khar Yamaat NR –Mongolian gazelle – 2,500 individuals/40 days in 2019.</td><td>TBD</td><td>TBD</td><td>
<table>
<tr><td>Name of NRs (relevant season)</td><td colspan="3">Mongolian gazelle count</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Feb 2021</td><td>August 2021</td><td>Dec 2021</td></tr>
<tr><td>Bayantsagaanii tal (summer)</td><td>108</td><td>961</td><td>411</td></tr>
<tr><td>Jaran togoonii A (summer)</td><td>46</td><td>974</td><td>916</td></tr>
<tr><td>Jaran togoonii B (summer)</td><td>2589</td><td>24316</td><td>3890</td></tr>
<tr><td>Menen Tsagaan khooloi (winter)</td><td>68027</td><td>0</td><td>1257</td></tr>
<tr><td>Toson khulstai (summer)</td><td>557</td><td>77853</td><td>246</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ulz river head (winter)</td><td>2300</td><td>120</td><td>3700</td></tr>
<tr><td>Khar Yamaat (winter)</td><td colspan="3">200 heads of Mongolian gazell observed all year</td></tr>
</table>
Based on the above seasonal monitoring studies, justification for improving biodiversity monitoring method and data management (BIOSAN).
</td><td></td><td>S</td><td>Mid-term target met for white nipped crane.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="9">Component 4: Project coordination, knowledge management and monitoring and evaluation</td></tr>
<tr><td>Outcome 4.1. Project coordinatio</td><td>a. Number of knowledge products</td><td>Baseline: 0</td><td>5</td><td>10 (of which at least one</td><td>1 knowledge product (15% achieved against final target)</td><td></td><td>HS</td><td>Knowledge products are over achieved</td></tr>
</table>

[21] Target area will be determined as part of Output 3.1.1. Nesting success can be assessed by monitoring the number of nesting cranes when the chicks are visible in July. Nesting success is determined by at least one chick successfully fledged from the nest site.

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Mid-term target	End of project target	Level at first PIR (self reported)	Mid-term level and assessment (colour coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement Rating	Justification for rating
n, knowledge management and monitoring and evaluation for the sustainable management of drylands in Mongolia	(publications, leaflets, case studies, best practice documents, videos or other media content, etc.) developed and disseminated.			best practice document and one media content specifically focused on women)	Report on Mongolian Gazelle connectivity analysis -1 to be published as first joint publication of FAO/WWF under the project.			(200%). Ten KM products are produced
	b. Number of people (women and men) at national/aimag level reached by communications and knowledge management activities (social media posts, TV clips, workshops and seminars, etc.).	Baseline: 0 Note: This target is in addition to (i.e., not included in) the # of beneficiaries listed above as core indicator.	25,000	50,000	- 6211 people (51% male, 49% female) engaged in project activities – (25% achieved against final target) ● 594 people (51% male, 49% female) – attended campaigns ● 1172 people (50% male, 50% female) – attended surveys ● 2388 people (45% male, 55% female) – attended trainings ● 952 people (60% male, 40% female) – attended meetings ● 839 people (51% male, 49% female) – attended conferences and workshops - 6030 people - reached by project promotional printed materials - Social media posts – 628,526 people reached by social media channels run by FAO and WWF Mongolia and social media channels of national and local TV.			Mid-term target over achieved. Communication and knowledge management materials reached over a million people. The project reached to 40,110 people through communication and knowledge management materials including promotional materials. In

Project strategy	Indicator	Baseline level	Mid-term target	End of project target	Level at first PIR (self reported)	Mid-term level and assessment (colour coded red, yellow or green)	Achievement Rating	Justification for rating
								addition more than a million people are reached through social media posts –run by FAO and WWF Mongolia including national and local TV channels
	c M&E deliverables (reports, MTR, TE, etc. as outlined in the ProDoc) are submitted on time.	Baseline: n/a	Yes	Yes	Yes Two project progress reports (PPRs) and one inception report were submitted on time.			

Indicator assessment key

Green = Achieved	Yellow = On target to be achieved	Red = Not on target to be achieved

***** As presented in the results framework in the original project document or subsequently updated by the Project Steering Committee (PSC) at project inception

Appendix 7. Co-financing table

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financer	Type of Co-financing	Amount confirmed at CEO Endorsement	Actual amount materialized on 30 June 2023	Actual amount materialized at mid-term (confirmed by the review/evaluation team)
Recipient country Government	Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET)	In-kind	10,000,000	3,593,797	3,593,797
Recipient country Government	Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry (MOFALI), including USD 6 million in World Bank / IFAD financing	In-kind	13,000,000	10,294,209	10,294,209
Recipient country Government	Agency for Land Administration and Management, Geodesy and Cartography (ALAMGAC)	In-kind	3,000,000	3,188,031	3,188,031
Recipient country Government	Sukhbaatar aimag and Tumentsogt, Sukhbaatar, Munkhkhaan soum Governor's office	In-kind	5,000,000	92,637	92,637
Recipient country Government	Khentii aimag and Bayan-Adraga, Bayan-Ovoo, Norovlin soum Governor's office	In-kind	5,000,000	100,932	100,932
Recipient country Government	Dornod aimag and Bulgan, Matad, Khulunbuir soum Governor's office	In-kind	5,000,000	95,946	95,946
UNDP/GCF	ADAPT project	In-kind		2,217,538	2,217,538
UN-FAO/EU	STREAM project	In-kind		472,905	472,905
Civil society organization	WWF Mongolia	In-kind	1,300,000	355,000	355,000
Civil society organization	TNC Mongolia (for Toson Khulstai Nature Reserve)	In-kind	300,000	30,000	30,000
GEF agency	Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)	In-kind	1,600,000		
GEF agency	World Wildlife Fund, Inc. (WWF)	In-kind	345,000		
Private sector	Crop production company (Ider Onon LLC)	Grant	500,000	162,800	162,800
Private sector	Crop production company (Munkhiin Duurlig LLC)	Grant	500,000	162,800	162,800
Private sector	Others include vegetable farmers and herders	Cash		114,908	114,908
NGO	Sustainable Fibre Alliance (SFA)	Grant	5,400,000		
		Total	**50,945,000**	**20,881,503**	**20,881,503**

Appendix 8. GEF evaluation criteria rating table and rating scheme

A. STRATEGIC RELEVANCE		
A1. Overall strategic relevance	HS	The project demonstrates a high degree of strategic relevance at the global, country, and community levels.
A1 Alignment with GEF and FAO strategic priorities	HS	The project's concept for and strategy in improving and restoring the dryland ecosystems and promoting biodiversity conservation in the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia is well aligned with the strategic priorities of GEF, FAO, and WWF. The project focuses on multi-focal areas of GEF-7 and includes five out of its 11 core indicators. The project is strongly aligned to the land degradation, biodiversity and climate change focal areas as well as FAO's SO-2, to outcome 2 and outputs 2.1.1, 3.5.1, and 3.5.2 of the country programming framework, and WWF's strategy priority 3 and 4.
A1.2 Relevance to national, regional and global priorities	HS	The project is unquestionably relevant. The project's development objective and its strategies, outcomes, and outputs area are fully aligned with the country's priorities. The project's objectives, components, and outcomes are well aligned with the country's LDN target, NDC priorities, national program and action plan on protected areas, national action program on climate change, green development policy, the Sustainable Development Vision of Mongolia, and the national bio-diversity program and action plan for sustainable livestock. The project is strongly aligned with regional and global priorities (reduction in GHG emissions) and reversing dryland degradation and restoring dryland ecosystems.
A1.3 Relevance to beneficiaries' needs	HS	The project is primarily framed in terms of increasing the resilience and diversifying the incomes of locals, especially herders and farmers, contributing to sustainable pasture management, and promoting climate-resilient crop production, livestock value chains, and market linkages. All these interventions have a high degree of relevance to beneficiaries in addressing their needs.
A1.4 Complementarity with existing interventions	S	The project followed a multi-sectoral and multi-partner approach and maintained good coordination and collaboration with on-going projects in the Eastern Steppe of Mongolia. It made satisfactory progress in building synergy with GCF- and EU-funded projects, universities, and other academics. It even managed several activities with co-financing from *soum* governments, the private sector, and production groups.
B. EFFECTIVENESS		

B1. Overall assessment of project results	MS	The project made good progress in mobilizing multi-sectoral and multiple partners, including the private sector. It had mixed progress in terms of achieving its objective and outcomes. It established NRs, developed protected area management plans, raised awareness about dryland ecosystem restoration and biodiversity conservation, initiated participatory biodiversity monitoring, restored forests and pasture, promoted climate-smart crop production, and introduced income diversification to increase the resilience of the livelihoods of herders and farmers. Progress was slowed slightly by the Covid-19 pandemic as well as by delays in obtaining the Cabinet's approval for the boundaries of the protected areas. The project has mixed success in meeting the mid-term targets as some were met and others are only under way.
B1.1 Delivery of project outputs	MS	The MTR could not assess the delivery of the project's outputs since there were no indicators or targets in the results matrix in the ProDoc,
B1.2 Progress towards outcomes[1] and objectives	MS	Overall, progress towards the outcomes is mixed. Out of the six outcomes, two met their mid-term targets well but the other four did so only partially. The outcomes are achievable, however, and the project should meet its final targets.
		Overall progress towards achieving the objective of the project was mixed. The majority of the five core indicators and their sub-indicators were partially met.
Outcome 1.1	MS	The project had mixed progress under this outcome. Two of the five mid-term targets are fully met, two are partially met and one indicator does not have a target so it could not be assessed.
Outcome 2.1	MS	The project had mixed progress under this outcome. Only one of four targets was fully met; the other three were only partially met.
Outcome 2.2	MS	The project had mixed progress under this outcome. Two of four targets were fully met and two were partially met.
Outcome 2.3	S	The project made promising progress under this outcome. All three targets were fully met or exceeded.
Outcome 3.1	MS	The project made mixed progress under this outcome. Only one of three targets was fully met but the other two are on the way to being achieved.
Outcome 4.1	S	The project made good progress under this outcome: it reached many stakeholders through its communication and knowledge management materials, which included video, TV programs, newsletters, social media and the sharing of best practices in international fora. It met all three of its mid-term targets.

Overall rating of progress towards achieving objectives and outcomes	MS	As a whole, the project attempts to reverse land degradation by mobilizing multi-sectoral and multiple stakeholders, including the private sector and members of local communities, including women and men, farmers and herders. It also took initiatives in fostering participatory integrated land management planning and integrating protected area management plans into land-use planning, protecting critical habitats for Mongolian gazelles and white-napped cranes, and sequestering carbon from the AFLOU sector. The project made mixed progress in integrated land use planning, climate-smart agriculture practices, and restoring riparian forest and pasture land. It made good progress in promoting livestock value chains, especially in terms of capacity-building, equipment support, and market linkages for the wool and lamb meat value chains.
B1.3 Likelihood of impact	Not rated at MTR	The project is on the way to delivering major impacts in terms of reversing land degradation through integrated land-use planning, reducing GHG emissions, and improving livelihoods through promoting livestock value chains in Eastern Mongolia. Its planned global benefits also materialized through carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation and contributions to the global IP for dryland.
C. EFFICIENCY		
C1. Efficiency[2]	S	The efficiency of the project was good despite a very slight delay due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The project made good use of its time during the inception period, a fact that contributed to smooth implementation. The project materialized co-financing well (40 percent at the mid-term point). The GEF trust fund budget burn rate is approximately 50 percent.
D. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES		
D1. Overall likelihood of risks to sustainability	ML	The project is following a multi-sector and multi-stakeholder participatory approach to reversing dryland degradation and restoring dryland ecosystems. This approach will contribute to the sustainability of the project's results and benefits. The ownership assumed by both the government and the community will contribute to the sustainability of the project's result.
D1.1. Financial risks	ML	The project facilitated the strengthening of market linkages and access to markets through agreements with private companies can be considered a good indication of the likely sustainability of the project's results. Promoting value chains and marketing could contribute to the financial sustainability of the project's interventions. Beneficiaries got support for diversifying their livelihood options, a measure that might complement their engagement.
D1.2. Socio-political risks	ML	Commercial-scale collective farming on 1-8 ha of abandoned land by mobilizing a group or cooperative and subsidies provided by the project are examples of measures ensuring the sustainability of the project's result.

D1.3. Institutional and governance risks	ML	The project has not conducted any participatory governance assessments to find out the status of or level at which pasture user groups and cooperatives are functioning. A strong monitoring mechanisms needs to be established for sustainability. Without such a mechanism, institutional capacity will erode. There is a moderate chance of sustaining the project's initiatives.
D1.4. Environmental risks	L	The project has conducted ESS assessment annually to identify environmental and social safeguard vulnerability and made recommendations for mitigation measures. It has developed GRM and trained project team, local authorities, and private companies. .
D2. Catalysis and replication	MS	The probability of replication is likely to be high once the project shares its best practices and lessons learnt with a wide group of stakeholders. Some activities, especially vegetable production in greenhouses, have been replicated in neighbouring communities.
E. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE		
E1. Project design and readiness[3]	MS	The project tried to link multiple focal thematic areas but those links were not free of shortcomings, some of which posed challenges during implementation. Those shortcomings included lack of sufficient targets for some outcomes, and lack of indicators and targets at the output level.
E2. Quality of project implementation	MS	In general, oversight and good-quality implementation ensured that the AWPBs were prepared though stakeholder participation. PIRs PPRs, and reports were completed on time. Quality assurance and adaptive management aspects could be improved.
E2.1 Quality of project implementation by FAO (BH, LTO, PTF, etc.)	S	FAO and WWF's oversight is good and a good number of PTF meetings were held. In addition, support received from FAO-HQ forest specialist, especially on Outcome 2.1.
E2.1 Project oversight (PSC, project working group, etc.)	S	The project was guided by the PSC. Four PSC meetings had been held by the time of the MTR.
E3. Quality of project execution	S	The quality of project execution was good. Generally, coordination with multiple sectors and multiple stakeholders, including the private sector, had no issues, or at least none reflected in implementation
E3.1 Project execution and management (PMU and executing partner performance, administration, staffing, etc.)	MS	The project faced a few challenges in finding appropriate human resources, dealing with the frequent turnover of government staff both at the national and *aimag* and *soum* levels; address the excessive workload of sub-national staff; and the ambitions of sectoral governments to coordinate.
E4. Financial management and co-financing	S	No major financial management issues were detected and budget expenditure is on track. The 40 percent materialization of co-financing at the mid-term was deemed satisfactory.
E5. Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement	S	Stakeholders contribute well to achieving project results. The nature of the project worked in its favour as it was the first ever project in the Eastern Steppe, applied integrated strategies and was embraced by the government at all three levels.

E6. Communication, knowledge management and knowledge products	S	A communication strategy and action plan exists and progress in communication is good. The project mobilized television and social media well to raise awareness and reach a large audience and establish and maintain good visibility. Knowledge management is good, substantial amount of documentation as well as several documentaries, newsletters, and videos were produced and best practices were shared in international fora, including at UNCDD COP 15.
E7. Overall quality of M&E	MU	The project did not prepared a detailed M&E plan or M&E framework. The project lacks a robust M&E system and mechanism to incorporate adaptive results-based management. Overall, M&E at the implementation level is weak.
E7.1 M&E design	MS	The ProDoc includes a basic M&E plan with different milestones and a budget however, budget for sharing best practices, getting support from global IP hub is lacking.
E7.2 M&E plan implementation (including financial and human resources)	MU	Project's detailed M&E plan is not prepared and data reporting is inconsistent. M&E needs to be strengthened
E8. Overall assessment of factors affecting performance	MS	The project faced a few challenges, including the fact that some activities proposed in the AWP were not achieved on time due to delays in administrative decisions (cabinet) of delineating boundaries for the remaining three NRs which were beyond the project's ability to control. These challenges were exacerbated by Covid-19 and an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease.
F. CROSS-CUTTING CONCERNS		
F1. Gender and other equity dimensions	S	The gender aspect is well integrated in the ProDoc and well reflected in the results matrix. Gender assessment was conducted to identify the current situation, challenges, opportunities, and potential interventions and included in GAP. Outcome-level indicators (where applicable) and their targets are gender-responsive, gender modules are well incorporated into training programmes, especially participatory land management planning and biodiversity conservation, and women are represented in technical groups at the national, *aimag* and *soum* levels. Single women-headed households and differently abled people are given priority in vegetable production and eco street groups. Women's representation in technical working groups and on the PMU team is remarkable
F2. Human rights issues	NA	Not evaluated.
F2. Environmental and social safeguards	S	Project interventions do not seem to have impacted the environment negatively.
Overall project rating	**MS**	