

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

Project ID:	9759
Project Name:	Promoting Sustainable Land Management (SLM) Through Strengthening Legal and Institutional Framework, Capacity Building and Restoration of Most Vulnerable Mountain Landscapes
Countr(ies):	North Macedonia
Implementing Agency:	UNEP

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I. Overview

A. Description

Project name

Promoting Sustainable Land Management (SLM) Through Strengthening Legal and Institutional Framework, Capacity Building and Restoration of Most Vulnerable Mountain Landscapes

Country

North Macedonia

GEF ID

9759

Implementing Agency

UNEP

Executing Entity

Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning of Macedonia (MoEPP)

Trust Fund

GET

Project Type

FSP

PIR Submission

9/15/2025

Fiscal Year , PIR Number

FY 2025 , 5th PIR

Objective

To develop and strengthen national policy and institutional capacity for sustainable land management (SLM) and to contribute to achieving the national land degradation neutrality target with integrated landscape management in north-western mountainous ecosystems of North Macedonia

B. Ratings and Disbursements

Implementation Progress

Moderately Satisfactory

Development Objective

Moderately Satisfactory

Overall risk

Moderate Risk

Project Financing

4,010,487.00

Cumulative Disbursement

1,826,469.00

C. Key Dates

CEO Endorsement/Approval

5/19/2020

Agency Approval

7/20/2022

Implementation Start 9/18/2020	First Disbursement 9/28/2020
Expected MTR 9/30/2023	Actual MTR 12/1/2024
Expected Completion 6/30/2025	Actual Completion

II. PROGRESS STATUS AND ISSUES

A. Progress: Information on progress and outcomes of project implementation activities

The goal of the project is to reduce the effects of land degradation and land use pressures on natural resources in the mountain landscapes in North Macedonia. In line with the objective, the following progress is made in achieving the project outcomes and activities implementation: Regular consultation meetings were held with the local UNEP team and the GEF, UNCCD and CBD Operational Focal Points, and other representatives from the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (MOEPP), as well as with local partners involved in the implementation of specific project activities. The first draft of the Soil Protection Law and the Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) report have been prepared and delivered to MOEPP, a consultation process of the draft Soil Protection Law will follow in the next reporting period; Synthesized report on Land utilization and ecosystems services valuation for forest and grasslands ecosystems in the pilot sites (municipality of Zhelino, Saraj, Arachinovo, Lipkovo, Jagunovce and Gazi Baba) completed, and available in Macedonian and Albanian language. In addition, separate factsheets have been prepared together with separate maps for the project area for each of the pilot municipalities. The final deliverables have been approved by MOEPP and will be promoted and further distributed in the upcoming period and during the entire project duration. Local Environmental Action Plans (LEAPs) are completed, approved by MoEPP and target municipalities, shared and available in Macedonian and Albanian language. ToR for the Development of Soil Protection Strategy and Guidelines for Establishing Soil Quality Monitoring Programme (first phase) is prepared and approved by MOEPP, local partner is selected, SSFA is prepared and ongoing is contracting procedure. ToR for the National trainings for capacity building on SLM/SFM in LDN for national and municipal representatives, as well as for the National Council for Sustainable Development (NCSD) is drafted, local partner selected, shared with MOEPP for approval. Signed Memorandum for cooperation (MoU) between UNEP, MOEPP and Public Enterprise National Forests (PENF), PCA with the PENF for afforestation of four (4) pilot sites: Bogoslovec (Sveti Nikole), Golashec (Gevgelija), Goceva Gora (Negotino) and Lipkovo Lake, with a total of 282 ha forest land under management of PENF, is signed. Ongoing is a procedure for engaging an external Supervisor/Forest Expert to oversee the appropriate selection of plant species, planting techniques, and cultivation practices, with this the project will ensure the quality and sustainability of the afforestation efforts. Revised and updated national LDN (Land Degradation Neutrality) Target Setting report; Revised and updated National Drought Management Plan. Prepared ToR for development of Land Management Study and Action Plan for the pilot municipalities and SLM practices tested, demonstrated and locally validated on 10 000 hectares to achieve local LDN targets, shared with MOEPP for approval, local partner selected. Develop ToR for outreach campaign with the SCOUT Association of Macedonia, through their Borenka programme, to raise public awareness, particularly among children and youth, about the causes and consequences of land degradation, droughts, forest fires and extreme flood events. Additionally, will promote long-term ecological benefits of the ecosystem services, SFM and SLM practices in achieving Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN)

in the country. On 5th December 2024 was marked the World Soil Day, through an organized event in Municipality of Lipkovo, where the Minister of MOEPP, with the general director of the PENF and the Mayor of Lipkovo, have planted trees and announced the afforestation activities. In the frame of Component 1 the following activities have been accomplished: Output 1.1.1. Analysis of the ongoing legal, institutional and capacity needs of land management sector including key opportunities and threats to achieving Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) at national scale in North Macedonia, is completed and approved by MoEPP, and made available to the local and national government. The following documents have been produced: a) Stakeholders; engagement plan; b) Report/minutes from the first stakeholders; engagement meeting regarding the process of drafting the law); c) Report on the current legal and institutional framework in the country relevant to soil protection, sustainable land management (SLM) and land degradation neutrality (LDN); d) Roadmap for development and adoption of the Soil Protection Law; e) Report/minutes from the second stakeholders; consultation meeting (to present the results of the legal and institutional framework, discuss the roadmap, and present the structure with discussions on the scope of the law); f) Functional analysis on soil protection, SLM and LDN in North Macedonia (what each chapter of the draft law should contain); g) Guidance on demonstrating and scaling up SLM and LDN best practices. Output 1.1.2. Development of Soil Protection Strategy and Guidelines for Establishing Soil Quality Monitoring Programme completed and made available for adoption: TOR for Development of Soil Protection Strategy is prepared and finalized in consultations with local partners and approved by MOEPP. There is an ongoing procedure for contracting the Local partner. Output 1.1.3. Land utilization and ecosystems services valuation for forest and grasslands ecosystems in the pilot sites in the north-western part of Macedonia. Synthesized report on Land utilization and ecosystems services valuation for forest and grasslands ecosystems in the pilot sites (municipality of Zhelino, Saraj, Arachinovo, Lipkovo, Jagunovce and Gazi Baba) completed, and available in Macedonian and Albanian language. In addition, separate factsheets have been prepared together with separate maps for project area for each of the pilot municipalities. The final deliverables have been approved by MOEPP and will be promoted and further distributed in the upcoming period and during the entire project duration. Output 1.1.4. Support in the Development of the Law on Soil Protection: Roadmap for development and adoption of the Law on Soil Protection in North Macedonia is prepared, the working thesis and structure of the LSP were completed. An official announcement regarding the preparation of the LSP was published on MOEPP website [Известување за започнување на изработка на Закон за заштита на почвите | Министерство за животна средина и просторно планирање](#), and on Unique National Electronic Register of Regulations of the Republic of North Macedonia (ENER) [ЕНЕП | Закон за заштита на почвите](#), on (22 May 2024), Expert working group was established with a MOEPP decision (signed on 29 May 2024). The first draft of the LSP is prepared and shared with MOEPP, following this, a preliminary consultative meeting was held with the local partner and MOEPP. A second meeting between MOEPP and the expert team is planned prior to the law's publication on ENER. During the upcoming reporting period, additional public consultation meetings will be conducted with all relevant stakeholders to ensure broad input and comments. Additionally, communication is established with the Ministry of Environment and Water of the Republic of Bulgaria for organizing of a Study visit for national and local governmental representatives. The purpose of this visit is to facilitate an exchange of experiences in implementing soil protection and management legislation, and gain insights into Bulgaria's established regulatory framework, including law enforcement practices, reporting mechanisms, and institutional communication processes. Output 1.1.5. Local Environmental Action Plans (LEAPs) of targeted municipalities are revised and updated, to include sustainable land management considerations and ecological approaches for erosion control: The LEAPs for the pilot municipalities (Arachinovo, Jagunovce, Saraj and Zelino), are completed, shared with MOEPP and pilot municipalities and approved. Synergy activities report and Erosion protection and torrent waters with Action plan for Municipality of Lipkovo are also completed, delivered to MOEPP and Municipality of Lipkovo and approved. The final versions of the documents are

available in Macedonian and Albanian language. Output 1.2.1. Relevant national and municipal resource managers capacitated in SLM and SFM practices, ecosystem services and use of economic instruments: The Capacity Building Training (CBT) for SLM and Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) in LDN in Türkiye was organized on 08-15 September 2024. Training programme modules were developed in consultation with the Turkish/Directorate for Combating desertification and erosion. ToR for the National trainings for capacity building on SLM/SFM in LDN for national and municipal representatives as well as for the National Council for Sustainable Development (NCSD), is drafted and shared with MOEPP for approval, local partner selected. Output 1.2.2. Strengthened National Council for Sustainable Development (NCSD) to coordinate institutions, engage with local communities and manage information flows for better integration of SFM/SLM and LDN aspects: The new National Council for Sustainable Development (NCSD) is established, and progress has been made in discussions with representatives from institution members of the NCSD, regarding their participation in capacity-building trainings. ToR for this Output is drafted together with the Output 1.2.1 and shared with MOEPP for approval. In the frame of Component 2 the following activities have been accomplished: Output 2.1.1. SFM and SLM guidelines are prepared and made available to national and local authorities and all interested stakeholders, providing an effective framework for reforestation, afforestation, restoration and conservation activities: Within the scope of this output, consultants have been engaged to support the revision and update of the national LDN targets, as well as the National Drought Management Plan. These documents are finalized and will serve as a baseline for further development of the Soil Protection Strategy and updating the Draft National Action plan to Combat Desertification, but will also contribute to development of the guidelines and effective framework for re/afforestation activities. Output 2.1.2 SFM practices and priority actions for afforestation are implemented to accelerate optimized use of forest and non-forest land by communities and local government on 5 000 hectares at pilot sites: Signed Memorandum for cooperation (MoU) between UNEP, MOEPP and Public Enterprise National Forests (PENF), PCA with the PENF for afforestation of four (4) pilot sites: Bogoslovec (Sveti Nikole), Golashec (Gevgelija), Goceva Gora (Negotino) and Lipkovo Lake, with a total of 282 ha forest land under management of PENF, is signed. Output 2.1.3. SLM practices to address priority LD and deforestation issues tested, demonstrated and locally validated on 10 000 hectares to achieve local LDN targets: Revision of the Drought Management Plan and suggestions for inputs/revision of the Draft National Action Plan to Combat Desertification is completed. Expert team was selected to work on the implementation of SLM practice and development of the Land Management Study and Action Plan (LMSAP) for the target municipalities. Furthermore, the lessons learned from the conducted CBT in Türkiye, as well as NCSD-related upcoming trainings, are expected to be the baseline to conduct the trainings under Output 2.1.3 on testing of SLM practices, while the LMSAP will integrate SLM practices that will be replicated/piloted on selected forest, agriculture and pasture land with involvement of local communities. ToR for development of the LMSAP as well as training for farmers and piloting of SLM on 50ha agriculture land is drafted and shared with MOEPP for approval. In the frame of Component 3, the following activities have been accomplished: Output 3.1.1 Production of knowledge management products made available to national and local stakeholders, based on training and exchanges under Outcome 1.2 and best practice arising from Outcome 2.1 to ensure SLM/SFM and LDN: This activity is ongoing, and depends on the finalization mainly of Outcome 1.2 and Outcome 2.1. Output 3.1.2. Communication strategy and outreach campaign designed and made available to targeted national and local stakeholders, with an emphasis on ecological and economic benefits of sustainable management of land and forests of North Macedonia, including establishment of web-based national SLM/SFM and LDN knowledge management hub: Developed Communication Strategy, for stakeholders' engagement throughout the implementation of all project activities and approved by MOEPP. TOR for starting SLM/SFM outreach campaign/s and development of promotional materials was drafted and approved by MoEPP. There is an ongoing awareness campaign related to the development of the Soil Protection Law. The development of the

web-based communication hub has been agreed with MOEPP to be developed on their website. Initial informative text and documentation to be published, have been shared with MOEPP, which are approved, and in the next reporting period the dissemination hub is planned to be functional. On 5th December 2024 was marked the World Soil Day, through an organized event in Municipality of Lipkovo, where the Minister of MOEPP, with the General director of the PENF and the Mayor of Lipkovo, have planted trees and announced the afforestation activities. TOR developed and approved by MOEPP, with local partner SCOUT regarding youth involvement through the “Borenka” programme during the afforestation activities, including project visibility and raise awareness on SLM/SFM/LDN, SSFA prepared ongoing contracting procedure. Output 3.1.3 Development of three bankable project proposals made available to national authorities, for replication of sustainable land and forest management practices in other regions identified as vulnerable: This output will be implemented at the end of the project, following the deliveries of all components and specific stakeholders’ needs.

B. Challenges: Information on challenges of project implementation activities

During the implementation phase of the project, no significant challenges or obstacles were confronted.

C. Stakeholder Engagement

Knowledge management sharing and raising public awareness of SLM/SFM/LDN targeting stakeholders at both national and local levels forms part of all project components and is carried out with particular support from the scientific community, the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy, as well as non-governmental organizations that can directly contribute to proactive engagement of stakeholders, such as Scout Association in North Macedonia. Regular meetings are held with the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning (CBD, UNCCD/GEF Operational Focal Points), as well as with local partners, to monitor the status of planned activities. Frequent coordination meetings are also conducted with the Faculty of Forestry, Public Enterprise National Forests, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy, Public Enterprise Pasture Management, and the Agriculture Institute, especially for the implementation of activities under Component 2. The activities under component 3 are expected to increase the access to information on the project, possibility for different stakeholders to access and contribute to the quality of deliverables and increase the knowledge on SLM/SFM/LDN challenges and opportunities. In this line frequent communication with local CSO were held, and involvement of youth in the project activities especially in the afforestation work is planned with the Scout Association in North Macedonia.

D. Gender Equality

Does the project have a gender action plan?

No

Gender mainstreaming (will be uploaded to GEF Portal):

The project is in line with UNEP’s commitment to gender equality and women’s empowerment and takes into account the differences, needs, roles and priorities of both men and women. Also, the project is consistent with the GEF Policy on Gender Equality (GEF/C.53/04, October 2017), and is also in line with the UNCCD, which recognizes the important role of women and of all individuals with expertise on desertification, land degradation and drought. The developed project Communication strategy includes gender mainstreaming tools in line with SDGs with focus on increasing the understanding of land degradation issues and impacts. Activities with reference to promotion of gender equality have been included in the selection of local partners, out of which 75% women are managing NGOs.

E. Knowledge Management

During the implementation of the project, several important lessons have been learned that contribute to improving future planning and coordination.

1. Effective Stakeholder Collaboration, the engagement between the Ministry and local municipalities in implementing Local Environmental Action Plans (LEAPs) has demonstrated the value of inclusive and participatory approaches. Strong local partnerships enhance ownership, improve responsiveness to environmental challenges, and facilitate smoother implementation.
2. Timely planning of afforestation and other project activities has proven essential for achieving desired outcomes. Aligning activities with seasonal and ecological conditions ensures greater efficiency and impact, highlighting the need for proactive and well-coordinated scheduling.
3. The Capacity Building Training (CBT) conducted in Türkiye provided valuable insights and practical knowledge. Integrating these learnings into the upcoming national training will ensure that international best practices are adapted to the local context, strengthening institutional and technical capacities.
4. Strategic and timely planning, combined with continuous monitoring, significantly enhances project implementation.

III: Minor Amendments

CONTEXT	
Result Framework	
Components and Cost	
Institutional And Implementation Arrangements	
Financial Management	
Implementation Schedule	
Executing Entity	
Executing Entity Category	
Minor Project Objective Change	
Safeguards	
Risk Analysis	
Increase of GEF Financing up to 5%	
Co-Financing	
Location of Project Activity	

others

IV: Geographic Coordinates of Project Activities

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Demir Kapija	41.413183	22.255862	

Location Description:

National

Activity Description:

Enabling activities of component 1 targets the whole country

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Gevgelija (Golashec)	41.235833	22.485000	

Location Description:

Local

Activity Description:

Pilot activities will be executed in Shar Mountain

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Aracinovo	42.023853	21.561557	

Location Description:

Land degradation

Activity Description:

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Gazi Baba	42.046616	21.531706	

Location Description:

Land degradation

Activity Description:

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Lipkovo	42.157009	21.585986	

Location Description:

Land degradation

Activity Description:

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Jegunovce	42.07287	21.120275	

Location Description:

Land degradation

Activity Description:

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Saraj	41.999581	21.327996	

Location Description:

Land degradation

Activity Description:

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Zelino	41.985419	21.065021	

Location Description:

Land degradation

Activity Description:

V. ANNEX

Uploaded Document

Document Category M and E Document	Title LEAP_ARACINOVO_Final
Document Category M and E Document	Title LEAP_ARACINOVO_Albanian
Document Category M and E Document	Title LEAP_JEGUNOVCE_Albanian
Document Category M and E Document	Title LEAP_JEGUNOVCE_Final
Document Category M and E Document	Title LEAP_SARAJ_Albanian

Document Category M and E Document	Title LEAP_SARAJ_Final
Document Category M and E Document	Title LEAP_ZELINO_Albanian
Document Category M and E Document	Title LEAP_ZELINO_Final
Document Category M and E Document	Title LEAP_ZELINO_Albanian
Document Category M and E Document	Title Lipkovo_Plan
Document Category M and E Document	Title Lipkovo_Plan_Albanian
Document Category M and E Document	Title 9759-PIR-UNEP-2025-Macedonia GEF6 SLM Project