

# Conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity: Strengthening network of protected areas through advanced governance and management

Review CEO Endorsement and Make a recommendation

## Basic project information

**GEF ID**

10113

**Countries**

Azerbaijan

**Project Name**

Conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity: Strengthening network of protected areas through advanced governance and management

**Agencies**

FAO

**Date received by PM**

12/10/2020

**Review completed by PM**

4/23/2021

**Program Manager**

Sarah Wyatt

**Focal Area**

Biodiversity

**Project Type**

FSP

## **PIF**

### **CEO Endorsement**

#### **Part I ? Project Information**

##### **Focal area elements**

**1. Does the project remain aligned with the relevant GEF focal area elements as presented in PIF (as indicated in table A)?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response

**12 March 2021**

No response required

##### **Project description summary**

**2. Is the project structure/design appropriate to achieve the expected outcomes and outputs as in Table B and described in the project document?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

4/21/2021

Yes.

2/01/2021

No, please address the following:

1.1.2 ? How will the project ensure uptake of these approaches and their application by other ministries?

2.1.2 ? Who will be responsible for maintaining this at project end?

3.1 ? The target of 700 ha of mainstreaming seems rather low given the size of the PAs. How was this decided upon?

- Species population indicators ? Given the challenge of achieving as well as measuring such population benefits, it will be important to have complementary indicators that can show progress on threats. Certainly population numbers are great if they can be achieved, but it will good to have multiple indicators.

3.1 ? We strongly encourage the project team to learn from and build upon the strong work done by USAID on conservation enterprise. They have good theories of change and identification of barriers.

3.1.1a ? While carbon is certainly valuable, its value is abstract. It seems unlikely that carbon alone will motivate sustainable land use decisions. Will the project include other ecosystem services with more direct impacts on people?

4.1 ? It will be important that the training program connects with other programs in the region and build upon them and be updated with them to ensure long term sustainability.

1.1.3 ? Very much welcome the piloting of the communications approaches and strategy.

Minor:

?Sanitary zones? ? The word choice sounds odd in English. Would it be possible to explain or stick to the more commonly used term ?buffer zones??

## Agency Response

**12 March 2021**

1.1.2. All line ministries and other relevant government institutions will be represented in Working group (technical level) and Project Steering Committee (decision-making level). This will ensure intense consultations prior to any decisions or activities planned within the framework of the project during implementation phase and actions aiming sustainability beyond the project life. National Action Plans, developed strategies, recommendations on legal revisions and other documents on integrated management will be mainstreamed into key national policies and regional development plans to ensure clear distribution of roles and responsibilities among each institution. This will also provide solid bases for implementation of the approaches by other ministries and local government structures after completion of the project.

2.1.2. Main responsible institution will be Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources. But as mention in above comment as a member of PSC, all other main stakeholders (Ministry of Agriculture, related governmental agencies, local municipalities) will actively participate in development of strategy for long term sustainability of the project results. Besides, main binding documents (strategies, national action plans and etc.) will be submitted to higher government structures (Cabinet of Ministries, Parliament) for adoption which will then be included in to annual work plans of the line ministries and other institutions as obligatory duties.

(3.1) The 700 ha originally represented the number of hectares where the project will finance activities. This number has been revised as follows:

Type	Ha	Cost/ha
Livestock activities	600	\$200/ha
Forest (assist. Nat regen)	400	\$250/ha
Restoration of municipal lands/erosion prevention	1200	\$200/ha
Total	2,200	

In addition, the project will develop participatory management plans (Output 2.1.3) which will cover at least the 41,986 ha of the sanitary zone (Core indicator 4). These will be the basis for mainstreaming biodiversity across the productive landscapes surrounding the protected areas.

The project will invest GEF resources in approximately 2,200 ha within these landscapes (ie. both in and outside of the protected areas). It is expected that co-financing (approx. \$2.4m) will support upscaling restoration and improved management in roughly 5,760 ha during the life the of the project.

Agreed. These additional indicators will be captured by the BD monitoring system (Comp.1) under the guidance of the BD Monitoring Technical Committee (see Section 6 of the PRODOC). Some indicators that could be included are: (i) ?Relative population trend? to complement absolute figures (based on camera traps and their 6-month period analysis), (ii) ?Suitable habitat extent? as a complementary indicator to population numbers (based on satellite images), or (iii) ?Poaching trend?, which could be collected from Service for the Protection of Biological Diversity under the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Recourses and from State Statistical Committee.

(3.1) Agreed. It will be taken into account and advised to the project team to follow.

(3.1.1a) Agreed. Valuation of ES is already in the Prodoc (output 1.1.2), and certainly is not confined to carbon. The assessment of natural resources described in 3.1.1a will focus on ecosystem services with more direct impacts on people. The text gave the wrong impression that carbon was the only ES evaluated. The text has been edited to remove this misunderstanding. Carbon appears quite prominent in the Prodoc because of the GEF requirements to monitor it in BD mainstreaming projects.

Agreed. Some of the tools recommended for landscape planning have been implemented under the Azerbaijan SFM project (GEFID 9795), CACILM (GEFID 9094) and other FAO led initiatives (Global Alliance on Sustainable Livestock and the Global Soil Partnership). This will be in addition to the work of other donors in the region on BD conservation (IUCN, WWF, RECC, GIZ, USAID)

1.1.3: Thank you? no response required.

Term "Sanitary zone" is used in several sections of the document when it referred to formally designated areas around the pilot national parks. According to the current legislation of the Azerbaijan there are no "buffer zones" established around the protected areas. Instead, "sanitary zones" exist and they have clear boundaries mandated by law. Therefore official maps, plans and other documents still uses "sanitary zone" instead of "buffer zone".

**3. If this is a non-grant instrument, has a reflow calendar been presented in Annex D?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

NA

Agency Response

**12 March 2021**

No response required

**Co-financing**

**4. Are the confirmed expected amounts, sources and types of co-financing adequately documented, with supporting evidence and a description on how the breakdown of co-financing was identified and meets the definition of investment mobilized, and a description of any major changes from PIF, consistent with the requirements of the Co-Financing Policy and Guidelines?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

4/21/2021

Yes, thank you for the explanation.

2/24/2021

No, the government co-financing appears to be recurrent expenditures rather than investment mobilized. Please provide more justification or reclassify.

Agency Response

**12 March 2021**

Government of Azerbaijan will mobilize investment (1.250.000 USD) for co-financing from other ongoing projects funded by other donors aiming to improve existing policy and strategies for better management and conservation of biodiversity, for developing and improvement of ecosystem services valuation capacity in country, as well as for improvement of overall protected areas management system, including monitoring and capacity development of the relevant government institutions. In addition to this, the Government will mobilize the investments (750.000 USD) from already approved state programs aimed to increase land productivity and water management through rehabilitation of the drainage systems at surroundings of the pilot project areas.

**GEF Resource Availability**

**5. Is the financing presented in Table D adequate and does the project demonstrate a cost-effective approach to meet the project objectives?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

2/24/2021

Yes.

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Project Preparation Grant**

**6. Is the status and utilization of the PPG reported in Annex C in the document?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

2/24/2021

Yes.

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Core indicators**

**7. Are there changes/adjustments made in the core indicator targets indicated in Table E?  
Do they remain realistic?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

4/21/2021

Yes.

2/24/2021

No, please provide an explanation for the changes in the core indicators.

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

Project changes have been summarized in section 1.H of the project document (paragraphs 135-137, pages 65 and 66).

Core Indicator 1 was reduced to 94,733 ha because, given the limited resources and as recommended by the STAP, the project will focus only on 2 protected areas instead of 4. On the contrary, Core indicator 4.1 has increased to 41,986 ha, which represents the total area of the 'sanitary zones' around Hirkan and Shirvan NP. These 41,986 ha will be covered by Participatory Management Plans. Within these plans, the project will invest resources in approximately 2,200 ha, and co-financing resources are expected to support activities on an additional 5,760 ha.



## **Part II ? Project Justification**

**1. Is there a sufficient elaboration on how the global environmental/adaptation problems, including the root causes and barriers, are going to be addressed?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

4/21/2021

Yes. However, throughout the project it will be important that laws and regulations reflect the realities of behavioral change and the necessities of rural life. For example, the banning of wood cutting without good support for alternatives will only serve to create illegality but not necessarily change behavior and could exacerbate certain problems as all behaviors become illegal.

2/01/2021

No, the project notes that people are prohibited from cutting wood for fires and the government wants to move them over to gas. However, there seem to be some big gaps in such a behavior change approach as we've seen the world over in the clean cook stove movement. At the same time, gas comes with its own substantial carbon footprint. It's unclear that the project's approach will effectively address this issue and whether or not sustainable forestry approaches, woodlots or other strategies might not be more likely to succeed. Please provide more information on the theory of change on this issue.

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

Root causes/barriers are summarized and no attempt has been made in the Prodoc to rank their importance. They all (as listed in the Prodoc and the ToC) seem to be equally important and hence, they will be addressed as a package as shown in the ToC. Additionally, gas is not mentioned throughout the Prodoc alone, but always in combination with alternative energy sources (including woodlots, solar, etc) so that a mix of energy sources should replace low energy yield from fire wood

**2. Is there an elaboration on how the baseline scenario or any associated baseline projects were derived?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

No response required

**3. Is the proposed alternative scenario as described in PIF/PFD sound and adequate? Is there sufficient clarity on the expected outcomes and components of the project and a description on the project is aiming to achieve them?**

Secretariat Comment at PIF/Work Program Inclusion

2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

No response required

**4. Is there further elaboration on how the project is aligned with focal area/impact program strategies?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

No response required

**5. Is the incremental reasoning, contribution from the baseline, and co-financing clearly elaborated?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

No response required

**6. Is there further and better elaboration on the project's expected contribution to global environmental benefits or adaptation benefits?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

No response required

**7. Is there further and better elaboration to show that the project is innovative and sustainable including the potential for scaling up?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Project Map and Coordinates**

**Is there an accurate and confirmed geo-referenced information where the project intervention will take place?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request  
2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response  
**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Child Project**

**If this is a child project, is there an adequate reflection of how it contributes to the overall program impact?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request  
NA

Agency Response  
**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Stakeholders**

**Does the project include detailed report on stakeholders engaged during the design phase?  
Is there an adequate stakeholder engagement plan or equivalent documentation for the implementation phase, with information on Stakeholders who will be engaged, the means of engagement, and dissemination of information?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request  
2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**

**Has the gender analysis been completed? Did the gender analysis identify any gender differences, gaps or opportunities linked to project/program objectives and activities? If so, does the project/program include gender-responsive activities, gender-sensitive indicators and expected results?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

4/202/201

Yes.

2/01/2021

No, it would be good to have some indicator that focused on the quality of engagement and role of women rather than just the numbers in participation. However, the overall review of gender is quite good. Thank you for that.

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

Outcome indicator 4.1 has been modified to read: "Percent people (disaggregated by gender) trained by the project that are involved in the management and monitoring of PA and their surroundings."

In addition, Output Indicator 3.1.2 looks at the percentage of households that either increase their income (disaggregated by gender)

**Private Sector Engagement**

**If there is a private sector engagement, is there an elaboration of its role as a financier and/or as a stakeholder?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

2/24/2021

Yes. However, it would be good to note that small farmers and others are also the private sector.

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

It is noted and is considered in the revised Pro Doc related section

**Risks to Achieving Project Objectives**

**Has the project elaborated on indicated risks, including climate change, potential social and environmental risks that might prevent the project objectives from being achieved? Were there proposed measures that address these risks at the time of project implementation?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

4/23/2021

Yes, thank you for the additional information related to COVID adjustments.

4/20/2021

No, please include how this project will adjust for the risk and challenges presented by COVID during implementation.

2/24/2021

No, please clarify whether the relocations mentioned on pg 51 will be part of the project. If so, we will need the safeguards documentation. If not, we would like reassurances of that fact.

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

As mentioned in paragraph 87, decision with regards to resettlement of illegally occupied areas within the boundaries of the Shirvan National Park has been given by the Supreme Court in 2018. Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources and its local representatives together with Court Orders? Enforcement Office is responsible for the

implementation of Supreme Court decision. Therefore project will not have any activities with regards to this issue. It has been discussed with MENR and with Shirvan NP management several times and was assured accordingly.

### **23 April 2021**

Given that it is not yet clear when COVID 19 will end, if the situation is still acute by the time of project implementation, the World Health Organization's protocols on distancing and safeguards will be strictly followed throughout the project cycle, if circumstances and epidemiological situation requires to. At the same time, even if the epidemiological situation softens, the negative long-term consequences of the pandemic, such as the economic crisis, will still persist in the coming years. Unfortunately, the economic disruption have increased poverty and food insecurity, while devastating ecotourism and other drivers of conservation initiatives. At the same time, the COVID 19 pandemic has hit hard a global biodiversity due to increased poaching of wild animals, deforestation, changes in forest habitats, poorly regulated agricultural lands, thus showing that there is a need to protect ecosystems to increase resilience to potential ecological and food crises.

Thus, regular consultations and meetings with stakeholders will ensure that the importance of the project is understood by all directly or indirectly involved in the project, including relevant government and non-government institutions. It will also support the project's activities considering the long-term targets and strategies, even during potential pandemic situations.

At the same time, in response to potential implementation challenges, if any, the activities will be modified as needed; awareness raising, capacity building and training workshops will be completed virtually using online platforms, combined with a closer logging and recording of communications, or if conducted in-person, will be strictly following pandemic protocols for distancing and safeguards.

### **Coordination**

**Is the institutional arrangement for project implementation fully described? Is there an elaboration on possible coordination with relevant GEF-financed projects and other bilateral/multilateral initiatives in the project area?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Consistency with National Priorities**

**Has the project described the alignment of the project with identified national strategies and plans or reports and assessments under the relevant conventions?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Knowledge Management**

**Is the proposed Knowledge Management Approach for the project adequately elaborated with a timeline and a set of deliverables?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Environmental and Social Safeguard (ESS)**



**Are environmental and social risks, impacts and management measures adequately documented at this stage and consistent with requirements set out in SD/PL/03?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request  
2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response  
**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Monitoring and Evaluation**

**Does the project include a budgeted M&E Plan that monitors and measures results with indicators and targets?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request  
2/01/2021

Yes. We note that the approved budget (6%) is a small amount larger than the average for projects up to \$5 m (5%).

Agency Response  
**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Benefits**

**Are the socioeconomic benefits at the national and local levels sufficiently described resulting from the project? Is there an elaboration on how these benefits translate in supporting the achievement of GEBs or adaptation benefits?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request  
2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response  
**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Annexes**

**Are all the required annexes attached and adequately responded to?**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request  
2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response  
**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Project Results Framework**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request  
2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response  
**28 March 2021**

No response required

**GEF Secretariat comments**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request  
2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response  
**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Council comments**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request  
2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response  
**28 March 2021**

No response required

**STAP comments**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request  
2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response  
**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Convention Secretariat comments**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request NA

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Other Agencies comments**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request NA

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

No response required

**CSOs comments**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request NA

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Status of PPG utilization**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Project maps and coordinates**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

2/01/2021

Yes.

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Does the termsheet in Annex F provide finalized financial terms and conditions? Does the termsheet and financial structure address concerns raised at PIF stage and that were pending to be resolved ahead of CEO endorsement? (For NGI Only)**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request

NA

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Do the Reflow Table Annex G and the Trustee Excel Sheet for reflows provide accurate reflow expectations of the project submitted? Assumptions for Reflows can be submitted to explain expected reflows. (For NGI Only)**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request NA

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

No response required

**Did the agency Annex H provided with information to assess the Agency Capacity to generate and manage reflows? (For NGI Only)**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request NA

Agency Response

**28 March 2021**

No response required

**GEFSEC DECISION**

**RECOMMENDATION**

**Is CEO endorsement recommended? (applies only to projects and child projects)**

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement Request  
4/30/2021

**Yes, thank you for the revisions.**

4/27/2021

**No, please address the following small remaining issues:**

1. Expected Implementation Start date has already past - ? please ask the Agency to amend for a more realistic date, otherwise the project would necessarily need to be extended later on and the reports will not be accurate
2. Budget:
  - Terminal report of \$6,550 should be charged to M&E.
  - Mis. Expenses are being charged to all components, should be charged to the co-financing portion of the PMC or removed from Budget.
3. Project maps and budget table are not cut and paste into Portal's Annexes entry but only with reference to uploaded documents in Portal ? once resubmitted, we could provide a more complete assessment of the budget.

4/21/2021

**No, thank you for the revisions but the issue of how the project will adjust for COVID have not been included. Also, it would be good to define sanitary zones near the beginning of the document.**

2/24/2021

**No, please revise and resubmit.**

**Review Dates**

**Secretariat Comment at  
CEO Endorsement**

**Response to  
Secretariat  
comments**

**First Review**

**2/24/2021**

**Secretariat Comment at  
CEO Endorsement**

**Response to  
Secretariat  
comments**

<b>Additional Review (as necessary)</b>	<b>4/21/2021</b>
<b>Additional Review (as necessary)</b>	<b>4/23/2021</b>
<b>Additional Review (as necessary)</b>	<b>4/27/2021</b>
<b>Additional Review (as necessary)</b>	

**CEO Recommendation**

**Brief reasoning for CEO Recommendations**