MID-TERM REVIEW

Project ID:	9525
Project Name:	Strengthening Institutions, Information Management and Monitoring to Reduce the Rate of Illegal Wildlife Trade in South Africa
Countr(ies):	South Africa
Implementing Agency:	UNEP

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I. Overview

A. Description

Project name Strengthening Institutions, Information Management and Monitoring to Reduce the Rate of Illegal Wildlife Trade in South Africa	
Country South Africa	
GEF ID 9525	Implementing Agency UNEP
Executing Entity Department of Environment Affairs (DEA)	
Trust Fund GET	Project Type FSP
Objective To fight against illegal wildlife trade through institutional strengthening, improved information management and monitoring (and collaboration at an international level), thereby influencing the supply system at local (protected area), national (South Africa) and regional levels	

B. Key Dates

CEO Endorsement/Approval 5/8/2018	Agency Approval 3/1/2018
Implementation Start 2/26/2019	First Disbursement 11/20/2019
Expected MTR 10/31/2024	MTR Submission 9/10/2025
Actual MTR 11/30/2024	Expected Completion 12/31/2026

II. PROGRESS STATUS AND ISSUES

A. Main MTR Findings

The IWT project exhibits several strengths, including the following:

It aligns well with the United Nations Environment Programme's Programme of Work and Medium-Term Strategy. The project integrates well with the Global Environment Facility's strategic goals and international agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Additionally, it supports the Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. It aligns well with regional and national conservation priorities, including the African Union's Agenda 2063, the Southern African Development Community's biodiversity strategies, and South Africa's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. The project complements various initiatives to combat illegal wildlife trade in South Africa, including the Global Wildlife Programme and conservation efforts by the United Nations Development Programme, the World Wide Fund, and the United States Agency for International Development.

The project design is well-structured, with components that tackle poaching and illegal wildlife trade. It integrates technological advancements and institutional capacity-building in Components 1 and 2, strengthening data management, wildlife monitoring, and law enforcement. While Component 3's governance framework is aligned with reducing illegal wildlife trade; there is a logical gap between outputs and outcomes. This gap highlights the need for refined performance indicators and a clearer alignment between outputs and outcomes. Clarifying the linkage between governance structures and behaviour change will enhance the project's effectiveness in achieving sustainable community engagement.

The project has achieved substantial progress in developing the South African Wildlife Population Monitoring System and a centralized e-permitting system for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora - listed species which have leveraged partnerships and technological innovations for enhanced wildlife monitoring and law enforcement. The e-permitting Page 11 system has processed over 10,000 applications strengthening control over wildlife trade, in alignment with the CITES international standards. The phased provincial rollout is designed to ensure a smooth national integration.

The MTR identified some weaknesses which include: Resource utilization in the project has been primarily effective, particularly in implementing technology[1]driven monitoring and e-permitting systems and the Environmental Monitors Programme. However, the UNEP budget burn rate is 43% due to delayed disbursements and limited cash co-financing, with only 17% of committed funds received by June 2024. Nevertheless, partner commitment is evident through increased in-kind co-financing. Financial management is moderately satisfactory, indicating a need for better tracking and reporting to improve efficiency in the remaining project period.

Component 3, focusing on community governance and livelihood development, has faced challenges in delivering the intended outcome due to delays in developing governance guidelines and alternative livelihood interventions. These delays and difficulties in aligning outputs with intended outcomes have complicated the implementation of the intervention logic. While some livelihood projects have received funding, there remains a need for aligning the supported livelihoods interventions to provide alternative livelihoods to deter people living in the periphery of the KNP from participating in illegal wild life trade and poaching. Such an approach would enhance project performance, increase community benefits, and strengthen community ownership and commitment to conservation efforts. Adaptive management has led to extra outputs, mainly on capacity building on good governance, to assist in the co-development of governance guidelines. Additionally, adaptive management contributed to addressing technical, operational, and stakeholder-related challenges.

While the Project Steering Committee, Project Management Team and the Project Management Unit are in place, these structures have not provided the needed monitoring, evaluation, and learning roles. This has hindered systematic data-driven progress tracking and sharing of lessons learned, reducing the visibility of the project's current outputs and outcomes. As a result, some indicators are not aligned to what they are designed to measure. Furthermore, data to measure the progress of performance is not being collected. For example, capacity assessment of Components 1 and 2 outputs and outcomes were not updated, and the data to assess community knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions toward wildlife conservation had no baseline data measured.

The Project Monitoring Unit is currently understaffed, operating with only two people instead of the planned four, missing two key positions, Finance and Coordinator. The lack of a Finance Officer has hindered timeous financial responses and reporting. The main responsibilities of the Project Coordinator were to oversee monitoring and evaluation and to provide overall technical guidance on performance tracking. Due to the lack of continuity in the Project Coordinator position, performance tracking and project knowledge management are not being adequately provided. The limited personnel in the Project Monitoring Unit pressurises the Project Manager and reduces the ability to provide the necessary comprehensive programme management duties.

The project has established a strong foundation for sustainability, notably through institutionalizing wildlife monitoring and e-permitting systems. Capacity-building at institutional and community levels is a positive step towards sustainability. Although the policy environment supports South Africa's commitment to wildlife protection and aligns with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species for Fauna and Flora, financial sustainability remains uncertain. A comprehensive exit and sustainability strategy will be essential to ensure funding beyond the project's lifespan, leading to lasting benefits post-project completion

B. Stakeholder Engagement

Key national institutions and international organisations are involved in implementing the IWT projects. Through its participation in the GWP project, the IWT project is connected to stakeholders vital for data exchange and experience sharing on illegal wildlife trade issues. In the Greater Kruger landscape, the project has formed partnerships with several key stakeholders by supporting the GKSC. By strengthening the GKSC and participating in the implementation of the Greater Kruger Strategic Development Plan, the project is promoting collaborative action, resource-sharing, and common ownership of results. The project implements activities to involve communities through Component 3. The project is developing community governance framework to involve women, men and youth in wildlife conservation as well as providing support mechanisms for alternative livelihoods. The EMs programme demonstrated how youth in the KPN landscape can participate in wildlife conservation as well as contribute to curbing illegal wildlife trade. Whilst foundational capacity building on good governance has been developed by the project, further community engagement is needed through the development of community governance guidelines and mechanisms like in the manner that the Makuleke Contractual National Park Community Property Association is involved in wildlife conservation.

The Makuleke Community has participated and cooperated in project activities, providing experiences on community managed wildlife conservation. The Makuleke Community are also benefiting from GEF6 livelihoods project (see link https://url.za.m.mimecastprotect.com/s/7ndSCY6xmVTknnPoh0WCS_?domain=drive.google.com). Increased participation by the National Department of Agriculture and Veterinary Services, which manages the boundary fence in the project, could improve the performance of the EMs. Rating for Stakeholders

Participation and Cooperation: Highly Satisfactory

C. Gender Equality

Addressing human rights and ensuring gender equality and all aspects of social inclusion are issues to be considered in various ways in project implementation. The design indicated that implementation would align to the UN Common Understanding on the human rights-based approach and adherence to UNEP's Policy and Strategy for Gender Equality and the Environment. The PMT meeting of 26 September 2021 recommended enlisting the services of a consultant to conduct an assessment and develop a gender mainstreaming strategy and action plan for the project. The project is currently operating without a gender action plan. The MTR notes some gender and social inclusion consciousness in interviews, yet these considerations are limited in implementation as reflected in the reports. While the project indicates the participation of women in project-related decisions, more data is needed in terms of how the project is creating economic opportunities for women and other vulnerable population groups and whether the project is addressing the systemic, social, and cultural challenges faced by women and marginalized groups in the target wildlife economy. From analysis and observation, the EMs programme has a youth lens and ensures that 40% of the recruits are female. This addresses the high youth unemployment in South Africa, which stood at 45.5% in the first quarter of 2024, while the unemployment rate among young females was estimated at 49,4% in the same period. However, youth employment as EMs, is an alternative livelihood option provided by the project, yet it is underreported in all reports.

Rating for Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality: Moderately Satisfactory

D. Knowledge Management

The plan was that the communication strategy and plan developed under Component 3 would facilitate knowledge management and learning from the whole project. The MTR notes the said strategy is in draft form and the project has operated without an integrated plan for communication and public awareness. The MTR also notes the recommendation by the PMT on the need for developing a comprehensive communication strategy and action plan for the project. This had not been done by the review time. The identified gap limits the project's ability to fully share experiences, lessons learned, and knowledge products, reducing its visibility as envisioned in the project design. Greater public awareness could foster strategic partnerships for resource mobilization, enhancing the sustainability of efforts to combat illegal wildlife trade. However, GWP training equipped project partners to document lessons learned, which could have been further utilized to capture additional experiences and insights. Despite not having an integrated communication and awareness strategy, various opportunities to share project experiences, successes, best practices, and lessons learned were utilized. These include the launch of the e-permitting system during South Africa's 50th environmental day celebration, CITES event, and other regional and international fora.

Rating for Communication and Public Awareness: Moderately Satisfactory

III. Core Indicators

Indicator 1 Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
	1948500	1948500	

Indicator 1.1 Terrestrial Protected Areas Newly created

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)

		1948500	

Name of the Protected Area	WDPA ID	IUCN Category	Total Ha (Expected at PIF)	Total Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)
Kruger National Park	873	National Park		0.00	1,948,500.00	

Indicator 1.2 Terrestrial Protected Areas Under improved Management effectiveness

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)
	1948500		

Name of the Protected Area	WDPA ID	IUCN Category	Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)	METT score (Baseline at CEO Endorsement)	METT score (Achieved at MTR)	METT score (Achieved at TE)
				1,948,500.00				1,948,500.00	

Indicator 11 People benefiting from GEF-financed investments

	Number (Expected at PIF)	Number (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Number (Achieved at MTR)	Number (Achieved at TE)
Female		1,750	1,800	
Male		1,750	1,800	
Total	**0**	**3,500**	3,600	**0**

IV: Co Financing

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Investment Mobilized	Anticipated at CEO($)	Materialized at MTR($)
Recipient Country Government	Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	2,500,000.00	
Recipient Country Government	Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA)	Grant	Investment mobilized	2,500,000.00	

Recipient Country Government	South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	420,000.00	902,657.00
Recipient Country Government	South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI)	Grant	Investment mobilized	200,000.00	252,360.00
Recipient Country Government	South African National Parks (SANParks)	Grant	Investment mobilized	480,000.00	
Recipient Country Government	South African National Parks (SANParks)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	20,000.00	862,126.00
Civil Society Organization	World Wildlife Fund South Africa (WWF-SA)	Grant	Investment mobilized	500,000.00	112,026.00
Civil Society Organization	Peace Parks Foundation (PPF)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	300,000.00	121,946.00
Civil Society Organization	Peace Parks Foundation (PPF)	Grant	Investment mobilized	300,000.00	1,540.00
GEF Agency	World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	200,000.00	
Civil Society Organization	World Wildlife Fund South Africa (WWF-SA)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures		492,439.00
Recipient Country Government	Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE)	Grant			10,715.00
Recipient Country Government	Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE)	In-kind			2,893,310.00
Total Co-financing				**7,420,000.00**	**3,396,464.00**

Comments

V: ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL SAFEGUARDS

Overall Project/Program Risk Classification

PIF	CEO Endorsement/Approval	MTR	TE
		Low	

Measures to address identified risks and impacts

The IWT project presents a low safeguard risk due to its lack of direct environmental footprint. However, it highlights significant gaps in its approach to environmental and social safeguards. A major concern is the lack of a Social Safeguards Strategy and Implementation Plan. Communities near KPN receive few economic or social benefits, as conservation efforts primarily focus on tourism rather than local development. While the project's design aligns with UN General Assembly Resolution 69/314, advocating for developing sustainable, alternative livelihoods for communities impacted by illegal wildlife trafficking, its implementation has not yet facilitated meaningful inclusion or benefit-sharing. Delays in co-developing governance guidelines have limited the project's impact on the livelihoods of local men, women, and youth. The MTR notes that in September 2021, the PMT recommended the development of a comprehensive safeguards strategy. Without the strategy, the project struggles to engage communities as partners in conservation and sustainable resource use. This shortfall underscores the necessity of prioritizing safeguard measures to foster community inclusion and capacity-building for better alignment with the project's wildlife conservation goals. While the livelihoods projects aimed to support alternative livelihoods, the practical impact remains limited. Livelihood initiatives have yet to show significant social benefits. This conclusion is based on the fact that the implemented livelihoods projects have not yet demonstrated measurable social benefits. Without M&E tools, the MTR cannot verify the extent of community benefits, such as the number of households or demographics impacted. A robust safeguards strategy and action plan would help balance conservation goals with local socio-economic development.

VI. ANNEX

Uploaded Document

Document Category	Title
M and E Document	MTR report_South Africa IWT GEFID 9525 Final CLEAN _ 17 Dec 2024