

TERMINAL EVALUATION

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I. Overview

A. Description

Project name

Integrated Natural Resources Management in Degraded Landscapes in the Forest-Steppe and Steppe Zones of Ukraine

Country

Ukraine

GEF ID

9813

Implementing Agency

FAO

Executing Entity

Government

Trust Fund

GET

Project Type

MSP

Objective

B. Key Dates

CEO Endorsement/Approval

7/5/2017

Agency Approval

7/3/2017

Implementation Start

10/4/2017

First Disbursement

2/12/2018

Expected MTR

MTR Submission

3/3/2025

Actual MTR

Expected Completion

12/31/2022

Actual Completion

6/30/2023

Actual TE

5/12/2023

TE Submission

3/3/2025

Final Disbursement

C. Disbursements

Project Financing	Cumulative Disbursement
1945249	1622081

II. PROGRESS STATUS AND ISSUES

A. Main Terminal Evaluation Findings

Relevance and coherence

The project strategically aligned with national development goals and policies. It was consistent with the country's obligations under several international conventions. The project also contributed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The project aligned with FAO's strategic framework and objectives, the GEF's focal areas, and regional priorities. FAO accelerated strategic thinking on global challenges and opportunities to boost preparedness and effectiveness, as per the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–2031 (FAO,2021a).

The project was particularly relevant in terms of environmental degradation and climate change, especially in light of the ongoing war. Ukraine recognized the project's steps to enhance the integration of environmental policy into governance systems.

Effectiveness (achievement of project results)

The project generated meaningful achievements for improved INRM. However, the total emissions reduction (CO₂e per year sequestered) as an overall result of the project interventions was not available at the time of this review.

The project significantly contributed to successful capacity building among key stakeholders. This enhanced information sharing and led to the development of draft laws on environmental protection. The project took important steps with the State Service of Ukraine for Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre and the Ministry of Agrarian Policy and Food to build a national landdegradation neutrality (LDN) monitoring system. Soil maps and regulation, however, still need substantial updating and harmonization. Not all of the activities could be finalized due to the invasion by the Russian Federation, so the total surface area of the three integrated land use plans was not available at the time of this review.

Shelterbelt management models were developed and tested. This included a shelterbelt inventory(a total of 1 150 ha of shelterbelts) and a definition of ownership rights. This also involved recommendations for the establishment, reconstruction and maintenance of shelterbelts in the forest-steppe and steppe zones, as well as guidelines on good agroforestry practices in different agroclimatic zones.

The agroforestry practices and conservation agriculture interventions were supplemented by criteria and indicator development for payments for ecosystem services (PES). A chain assessment of high-demand species involving non-wood forest products (NWFPs) and medicinal herbs was key. Recommendations on shrub planting, medicinal herb cropping and crop rotation schemes were also meaningful achievements. This review also highlights the engagement of women interims of leadership and the cultivation of medicinal and honey herbs in the steppe zones.

Numerous demonstration activities on good conservation agricultural practices with project stakeholders revealed greater awareness. The project created a strong, multilevel enabling environment through capacity building programmes and the introduction of Farmer Field School(FFS) initiatives. Such an environment is necessary to address climate change. The initiation and scaling up of sustainable land management (SLM) and best practices involving climate-smart agriculture (CSA) with improved shelterbelt management were applied on a surface area that covered almost ten times more than the 248 220 ha planned. Eight FFS initiatives on

conservation agriculture and one shelterbelt management training were conducted. Capacity was built among 436 participants. Knowledge exchange on climate change and its impact on agriculture, water bioresearches and ecology were among the key outcomes. Also important were proposals for scientific research and the improvement of educational programmes. The Ukrainian-English digest, Best Soil Conservation Practices, is highlighted. Curricula, webinars and field trips were also held.

A gender-oriented desk review led to conservation agriculture trainings for at least 73 female farmers. Important initiatives were undertaken under a New Opportunities for Women programme. This involved the ecological and economic potential of shelterbelts, self-forested or other uncultivated (abandoned) natural areas. Nine business models were generated on their use.

The project produced a significant range of communications and outreach materials: publications; television and radio broadcastings; radio and newspaper interviews; press conferences; webinars and workshops; panels and outreach events; newsletters; web publications and posts; training manuals and courses for bachelor's and master's degree students; and scientific articles. Compiling these and other essential reports into an accessible portal for future use is crucial.

Efficiency and factors affecting performance

Coordination, decision-making and stakeholder engagement

The project faced significant structural shortcomings upon setup. FAO Ukraine acted as a project office, not a Country Office. This proved to be particularly challenging as FAO Ukraine lacked sufficient organizational structure and officially assigned units with appropriate functions. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the outbreak of the war in 2022, and a deteriorating country situation exacerbated these issues. The FAO offices temporarily closed. Numerous activities halted. Compounded, this fundamentally impeded efficient project planning.

The main executing bodies – the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, afterwards Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources, and the Ministry of Agrarian Policy and Food – were largely unavailable. This made it impossible to assess the coordination, the quality of collaboration, and the management mechanisms among the central and subnational authorities. Apparently, the FAO Ukraine project team coordinated the stakeholders and managed the interventions.

The project's participatory processes and emphasis on inclusivity could not be adequately assessed. Many stakeholders, as per the 2016 project document, were inactive. The 2014 regional development and decentralization reforms for 1 469 amalgamated municipalities meant that the local municipalities primarily delivered public services under a multilevel regional development planning framework. Despite a tremendous strain on financial and human resources, these stakeholders drove the implementation of activities.

Management arrangements and workplans

The project had significant obstacles: a delayed inception; key executing ministries restructured in 2019 and 2020; the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021; uncertain ownership rights due to ongoing land reform; and the outbreak of the war in 2022. Compounded, these factors significantly impeded the timely delivery of results. Further, rather lengthy procurement processes and delayed letter of agreement (LOA) signings interrupted the services. This negatively affected efficient implementation. Regardless, the FAO Ukraine project team strived to complete the main activities.

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Financial management

Co-financing contributions from the main implementing partners at the decentralized level created the potential for valuable synergies that favoured the project.

The budget was managed efficiently. However, planned co-financing from the central ministries – especially USD 6 million from the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, afterwards Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources – did not materialize. Of the planned USD 12 099 751 (cash and in kind)

from different donors, USD 1 285 380 was implemented by the end of June 2023. In contrast, USD 607 000 against the planned USD 590 000 was received from the Ministry of Agrarian Policy and Food. Ninety-four percent of the total cash grant (USD 1 776 481) from the GEF was disbursed.

Monitoring and evaluation

The project's efforts to measure and collect data through a monitoring system were unclear. An appropriate system would have updated stakeholders on decisions and workplans. The main M&E mechanism assessed progress in terms of achieving results and meeting objectives. This was based on targets and indicators from the project's results matrix. The National Project Coordinator, assisted by the Lead Technical Officer (LTO), was responsible for M&E. However, it seems that the project steering committee did not follow up on this aspect. In fact, only one project steering committee meeting was held.

Communications and knowledge management

Formalized internal communication between the executing bodies and the implementing partners was weak throughout the project's life cycle. Sophisticated tools for a communication structure were not implemented. Communication between the ministries and FAO Ukraine, as well as between the ministries and the implementing partners, was very weak. This led to a lack of transparency and mutual accountability. A website or portal for sharing internal project outputs, information and products among stakeholders was not achieved.

In contrast, the project elaborated a wide range of significant communications products and materials. At subnational and local levels, the All-Ukrainian Association of Village Councils and Amalgamated Communities (ASSOGU, by its Ukrainian acronym) had considerable potential to engage communities. An important platform for dialogue and cooperation was created with the Ukrainian Soil Partnership (USP). However, a project-related, internet-based knowledge management system was not set up.

Sustainability and impact

Institutional, socioeconomic, sociopolitical and financial sustainability

The overall risks to sustainability include: i) force majeure caused by the war with the Russian Federation; ii) the departmental fragmentation of soil observations, including methodical inconsistencies that hamper proper soil monitoring; iii) gaps in legislation; iv) insufficient analytical data for land protection; v) the lack of modern soil laboratories based on European standards; vi) the lack of a large-scale soil map; and vii) an inadequate model map on the sequestration of carbon in soils.

Capacity building is at the core of the project's strategy to scale up CSA interventions and ensure sustainability. The evaluation found high ownership in terms of institutional capacity development, especially at the subnational level.

The project's arrangements immediately strengthened existing institutional capacities. In 2018, the Ukrainian Coordination Council to Combat Land Degradation and Desertification (CC-LDD) supported intersectoral coordination for the INRM at national and subnational levels. This body, however, was not operational at the time of the review. Continued support is therefore essential.

The ASSOGU, with 15 000 members, has considerable potential to reach communities and agroenterprises at subnational and local levels. The association's continued outreach and dissemination of good practices and management advice largely helped to sustain capacity among communities. This included, inter alia, important information on income generation for women.

It was difficult to critically assess the project in socioeconomic terms. This was attributed to missing economic impact data and the inability to see immediate changes among beneficiary communities in terms of income generation.

This project was the first in Ukraine to plant shelterbelts against wind erosion. Its achievements in conservation agriculture-related activities and sustainable shelterbelt management improved soil fertility. This will likely be sustained as participating farmers can now cope with soil erosion. The combined application of no-till technology, subsurface drip irrigation and afforestation reclamation measures represent a new, integrated approach to soil management that stops soil degradation. A prerequisite for sustainable land use under arid conditions was created, and this will have an improved, long-term stabilizing effect on ecosystems and soils. In contrast, however, the negative consequences of intense chemical and pesticide use were found to be critical.

The impact of the war on agriculture and rural households could not be determined at the time of this review. One out of every 4 of the 5 200 respondents had reduced or stopped agricultural production. The project undertook major efforts to move several activities to other regions. Regardless, unsustainable practices are expected due to the conflict-driven shift in priorities.

Political support, such as environmentally sustainable natural resources management from policy reform processes, was favourable upon project launch. There is still a medium risk associated with a lack of ownership on the integration of environmental considerations for both the agriculture and the forestry sectors. Notably, the project had a high risk of unclear responsibilities within institutions as a consequence of repeated restructuring processes and the country's volatile situation. This may have changed priorities. Several missed opportunities and concerns about legislation adaptation and the building of a national LDN monitoring system were emphasized.

In this sense, intersectoral cooperation and information support were highlighted as essential for sustainability given the LDN monitoring system.

It is highly likely that the project's benefits will continue. In fact, Ukraine's ecological policy and strategy through 2020 (Government of Ukraine, 2010) recognized the need to further integrate environmental policy into environmental governance systems. However, expected in-kind contributions from the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, afterwards Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources, were not obtained. This created a relevant risk in terms of long-term financial sustainability. There were, however, considerable contributions from state organizations, the private sector, government authorities, the local government, communities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). All of these entities had a strong presence and ownership at the decentralized level. In fact, they clearly showed investment and long-term vision.

It is highly likely that there will be financial sustainability for shelterbelt management. This is because 73 percent of forest land in Ukraine is owned by the state and managed by the State Forest Resources Agency. Further, socioeconomic and environmental sustainability is expected through AgroGeneration, an agricultural company that creates jobs and invests in modern agricultural machinery. This involves minimum tillage methods and the production of grains and oilseeds that adapt to specific regions.

Several initiatives showed potential, interesting synergies in terms of ongoing emergency projects in Ukraine. Conservation agriculture, combined with demining and soil remediation, is still a priority. A signed LOA with the Soils Protection Institute of Ukraine was in place at the time of this review. This involved baseline information for demining.

Cross-cutting dimensions

The project should have benefited from FAO REU gender expertise and engaged national gender experts throughout the entire life cycle. There was, however, no evidence that all project implementation staff members were given gender sensitization trainings at the inception stage – as proposed. This would have included a relevant review, adjustment and application of FAO checklists for gender mainstreaming during the entire life cycle.

Regardless, the project made remarkable strides towards greater female participation during its final stages. This involved access relating to: decision-making; employment; markets and value chains; knowledge; and new technologies. A late start to specific interventions meant that there was not an impact assessment on the medium- and long-term effects. Nevertheless, the gained knowledge and incentives offered great potential. Indeed, this was realized through: field trips; webinars; roundtable discussions; the Ecological and Economic Potential of Shelterbelts, Self-forested and other Uncultivated, Abandoned Natural Areas best practices manual (FAO, 2023d); and nine business models. From this perspective, the interventions are highly likely to be successful.

A lack of institutional coordination, the COVID-19 pandemic, erratic climate conditions and, particularly, the outbreak of the war in February 2022 negatively affected the project's implementation performance. Regardless, pertinent measures taken by FAO Ukraine positively contributed to mitigating the connected risks.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1. Strategically well aligned with national development goals and policies, the project was entirely consistent with the GEF's focal areas and FAO's strategic framework. The project also fully aligned with the country's obligations under several international conventions and significantly contributed to the SDGs.

Conclusion 2. The project had meaningful achievements in improved INRM. It provided the necessary information on soil protection to solve problems of agricultural land degradation. Significant steps towards the elaboration of a national LDN monitoring system were taken. However, important issues still need to be tackled: legislation adaptation; soil monitoring updates and harmonization; and clarification on land use and shelterbelt ownership rights. In addition, the total emissions reduction (CO₂e per year sequestered) from the implemented activities still needs to be calculated. This involves, for example, extrapolations from the overall project results.

Conclusion 3. The introduction of SLM and CSA best practices, including improved shelterbelt management, brought important results on a surface land area that covers 248 220 ha. This represents almost ten times more than the originally planned 29 400 ha.

Conclusion 4. An impact assessment of scaled up INRM interventions could not be conducted due to time limitations. In contrast, a significant range of communications and outreach materials were produced. It is essential to compile relevant project materials in a public, easily accessible portal that links to other websites. This will further scale up the INRM activities and lessons learned and promote continual information sharing with a focus on income generation for women.

Conclusion 5. It was impossible to assess the coordination, the quality of collaboration, and management mechanisms between the central and subnational authorities. The lack of availability among the main executing bodies – the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, afterwards Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources, and the Ministry of Agrarian Policy and Food – throughout the review substantiates the finding of significant structural challenges within the ministries. However, FAO Ukraine's commitment and the many dedicated, well-established implementing partners significantly contributed to important project outcomes.

Conclusion 6. Oftentimes, cumbersome FAO procedures and administrative rules regarding budgets and payments as part of the LOA arrangements with service providers offered only limited flexibility for the planned interventions. This negatively impacted efficient project implementation.

Conclusion 7. There is still a medium risk associated with a lack of ownership on the integration of environmental considerations into agriculture and shelterbelt management. Political support, such as environmentally sustainable natural resources management from policy reform processes for both the agriculture and the forestry sectors, was very favourable upon project launch. Priority setting changed due to the war. Regardless, the government must have also recognized that the economic return on current conservation agriculture investments will be significantly higher for measures that prevent degradation compared to measures that restore degraded land.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Strategic – to the Ukrainian Government and FAO Ukraine: the government should move towards SLM and scale up the rehabilitation of degraded land and soil. Further strengthen capacities among project stakeholders from different levels (the government and line sectors, local authorities, communities, and extension services) to replicate the INRM interventions. Decisive contributions to biodiversity conservation must be made to achieve the SDG Target 15.3 on LDN, improve food security in Ukraine and avoid further land degradation.

Recommendation 2. Strategic and operational – to the Ukrainian Government and FAO Ukraine: the national soil monitoring system needs to be elaborated. This involves significant soil map updates. The adoption and implementation of relevant legal frameworks is imperative. FAO Ukraine's expertise and comparative advantage can contribute through advocacy and synergy.

Recommendation 3. Strategic – to the Ukrainian Government: the state and local governments must solve the issue of ownership rights as soon as possible. Raise the level of legal awareness and improve land dispute resolution procedures in order to sustainably move from traditional to integrated land use management. This process should also protect the rights of landowners, land users and the local governments. This can be done through information campaigns on land rights among the population and local officials.

Recommendation 4. Operational – to the Ukrainian Government and FAO Ukraine: internal communication between the main executing bodies – the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, afterwards Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources, and the Ministry of Agrarian Policy and Food as the lead agencies – and the implementing partners should improve significantly. Develop a sophisticated tool and structure to formalize appropriate communication channels.

Recommendation 5. Operational – to FAO headquarters and FAO Ukraine: FAO should support service providers at an early stage of project implementation – especially in war contexts. The planning phase should have transparent communication on expected implementation modalities and outcomes. In addition, the identification of a timely risk assessment on the agreed upon workplan may be beneficial for decent planning. This ensures a continuous workflow under difficult working conditions.

Recommendation 6. Strategic – to the Ukrainian Government and FAO Ukraine: finalize ongoing and planned project activities by engaging more small-scale farmers. Focus on stronger NGO and large-scale private sector involvement (FAO, 2021c). FAO, together with the government, should foster partnerships, identify potential risks, and build synergies with ongoing opportunities and future interventions and initiatives. This will multiply the project's results in other regions and cushion the current challenges induced by the war.

Lessons learned

The project took key first steps towards an LDN monitoring system and integrated land use management plans in Ukraine. This included clarifying ownership rights, as well as inventory and standards-setting for the management and planting of shelterbelts based on soil types and natural zones.

The project introduced a new approach to INRM practices in the forest-steppe and steppe zones in Ukraine. The interventions facilitated the understanding and internalization of conservation agriculture, as well as relevant technical implementations that accompany this approach. Capacity building paved the way towards a more adaptable and sustainable production in the face of dwindling soil, water and biodiversity resources. This involved: no-till on irrigated land; subsurface drip irrigation; soil cultivation in arid zones; crop rotation in the Eastern steppe zones; soil fertility management; shelterbelt management;1 technology implementation in the forest-steppe zones; and trainings on the economic dimensions of conservation agriculture.2 Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and, even more – the ongoing war – the project's activities and incentives stand out as best practices to replicate across the country. In particular, drought-sensitive zones can benefit from these lessons.

It is essential to finalize the creation of the National Soil Information System and integrate it into the Global Soil Information System. This involves systematic soil data sharing at national and international levels. Indeed, this will further build on the project's experiences. In light of this, the project's results will be the basis for creating a complete cadastral soil map of Ukraine. This element was found to be highly relevant under the current land market conditions. In fact, this would significantly improve a still fragmented regulation, as demonstrated by the project.

Immediately conduct a survey of soil indicators at the monitoring sites. This is of utmost importance and involves not only affected areas that were liberated from the occupation by the Russian Federation but also areas that were flooded due to the destruction of the Nova Kakhovka Dam. This survey will provide a systematic assessment of the impacts, effects and costs of soil restoration and reclamation.

It is essential to shift from measuring soil humus content to measuring soil organic carbon (SOC) content. This involves SOC stocks based on FAO methodology and developing models to transform the current database on humus content into SOC content. Further, this will provide reliable data for the national report on SDG Indicator 15.3.1 (carbon stock subindicators) (UN Statistics Division Development Data and Outreach Branch, 2022; Vargas, 2023).

Considerable risks to sustainability were found regarding the project's aim to establish favourable conditions for policy integration. Intersectoral coordination and collaboration for the INRM at national and subnational levels are still not evident. This involves building linkages and synergies among sectors. The project demonstrated the need for continued support for the CC-LDD, as well as the Climate Change Adaptation Working Group.

Executive summary table 1. The GEF evaluation criteria rating

The GEF criteria/subcriteria	Rating ⁱ	Summary comments ⁱⁱ
A. STRATEGIC RELEVANCE		
A1. Overall strategic relevance	HS → HU	HS
A1.1 Alignment with FAO-GEF strategic priorities	HS → HU	HS
A1.2 Relevance to national, regional, and global priorities and beneficiary needs	HS → HU	HS
A1.3 Complementarity with existing interventions	HS → HU	HS
B. EFFECTIVENESS		
B1. Overall assessment of project results	HS → HU	S
B1.1 Delivery of project outputs	HS → HU	S
B1.2 Progress towards outcomes ⁱⁱⁱ and project objectives		
- Outcome 1	HS → HU	MS
- Outcome 2	HS → HU	S
- Outcome 3	HS → HU	S
- Overall rating of progress towards achieving objectives/outcomes	HS → HU	S
B1.3 Likelihood of impact	HS → HU	MS
C. EFFICIENCY		
C1. Efficiency^{iv}	HS → HU	MS
D. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES		
D1. Overall likelihood of risks to sustainability	L → HU	ML (= moderate risks to sustainability) (*)
D1.1 Financial risks	L → HU	ML (*)
D1.2 Sociopolitical risks	L → HU	ML (*)
D1.3 Institutional and governance risks	L → HU	ML (*)
D1.4 Environmental risks	L → HU	MU (= significant risks to sustainability)
D2. Catalysis and replication	HS → HU	MS
E. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE		
E1. Project design and readiness^v	HS → HU	U
E2. Quality of project implementation	HS → HU	MS
E2.1 Quality of project implementation by FAO (Budget Holder, LTO, Project Task Force [PTF], etc.)	HS → HU	HS
E2.2 Project oversight (project steering committee, project working group, etc.)	HS → HU	U
E3. Quality of project execution For direct execution modality projects: Project Management Unit (PMU)/Budget Holder For Operational Partners Implementation Modality projects: executing agency	HS → HU	U/A
E4. Financial management and co-financing	HS → HU	HU
E5. Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement	HS → HU	S

The GEF criteria/subcriteria	Rating ⁱ	Summary comments ⁱⁱ
E6. Communications, knowledge management and knowledge products	HS → HU	MS
E7. Overall quality of M&E	HS → HU	MS
E7.1 M&E design	HS → HU	S
E7.2 M&E plan implementation (including financial and human resources)	HS → HU	MS
E8. Overall assessment of factors affecting performance	HS → HU	MS
F. CROSS-CUTTING DIMENSIONS		
F1. Gender and equity	HS → HU	MS
F2. Human rights issues/Indigenous Peoples	HS → HU	N/A
F3. Environmental and social safeguards	HS → HU	S
Overall project rating (given the actual situation)	HS → HU	S

Notes:

i See the rating scheme in Appendix 1.

ii Include reference to the relevant sections in the report.

iii Assessment and ratings by individual outcomes may be undertaken if there is added value.

iv Includes cost efficiency and timeliness.

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

B. Stakeholder Engagement

Coordination, decision-making and stakeholder engagement

The project faced significant structural shortcomings upon setup. FAO Ukraine acted as a project office, not a Country Office. This proved to be particularly challenging as FAO Ukraine lacked sufficient organizational structure and officially assigned units with appropriate functions. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the outbreak of the war in 2022, and a deteriorating country situation exacerbated these issues. The FAO offices temporarily closed. Numerous activities halted. Compounded, this fundamentally impeded efficient project planning.

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C. Gender Equality

Finding 23. The project made remarkable strides towards increasing women's participation and access to decision-making, employment, markets, knowledge and new technologies. However, due to the late start of concrete interventions, female participation remained below expectations at the time of this review, and an adequate impact assessment was not yet available.

As a signatory to several international agreements, Ukraine joined and adopted most of the key international and regional gender equality, women's empowerment and human rights treaties. These commitments were

integrated into several national laws and policies. Despite important legislative advancements and international commitments, the World Economic Forum global gender gap reports from 2020 to 2022 (World Economic Forum, 2019, 2021, 2022) indicate that there is still a lot more to be done to improve gender equality in Ukraine. Ukraine was ranked 59th in 2020, but by 2022 it was only 81st out of 146 countries. On women's political participation, the 2021 Gender Inequality Index ranks Ukraine as 103rd out of 156 countries, with a slight improvement to 100th in 2022 (UN Women Europe and Central Asia, 2024). According to the project document (FAO and GEF, 2016, p. 29–30), women represent more than 53 percent of Ukraine's rural population and own 60 percent of the land. However, the needs of rural women are not fully recognized, and the challenges faced by women include income inequality (in agriculture, women earn 11 percent less than men on average) and inadequate participation in decision-making processes (over one third of rural women do not participate in decision-making). In addition, women over 60 years of age constitute one third of the rural population compared to one quarter in urban areas. Most single-parent households in rural areas are headed by women. These women have weak economic security and live under simple conditions in areas of underdeveloped infrastructure and poor access to social services. This situation has become even more critical, as many of the male family members are absent because of the ongoing war in the country.

The feminization of agriculture in Ukraine has led to over-representation of women in rural areas. However, the project document highlighted (FAO and GEF, 2016, p. 24) that women often shoulder the main responsibility for agricultural activities. Relating to FAO's commitment to promote gender equality (FAO, 2020b),⁴³ the project aimed to identify and support the specific needs of rural women in order to encourage their important roles in the farming sector. The gender mainstreaming strategy included a gender analysis that aimed to: i) close the gender gaps in access to and control over natural resources; ii) improve women's participation and decision-making; and iii) generate socioeconomic benefits or services for women.

The project should have benefited from FAO REU gender expertise and engaged national gender experts throughout the entire cycle. There is, however, no evidence that all project implementation staff were provided gender sensitization trainings at the inception stage (as proposed during project design). This also would have included a relevant review, adjustment and application of FAO checklists for gender mainstreaming during the entire project implementation period. During the initial stages, the project M&E Officer acted as the FAO Ukraine gender focal point to facilitate the tracking of gender-specific results. The project assistant has performed gender mainstreaming tasks since 2020.⁴⁴

Data from the FFS field trainings were disaggregated by gender. For eight FFS trainings conducted, 88 out of 436 participants were women. The only project steering committee meeting held in 2019 had balanced participation among women and men regarding decision-making. This was also the case for implementing partners from research institutes and academia. A key stakeholder, the ASSOGU, and the Executive Director of the USP were represented by women. The former National Project Coordinator (from 2018 to 2021) and the head of the FAO Ukraine project office (from 2019 to 2022) were also represented by women.

In 2020, the project established contacts with the younger generation through the FFS and webinars. This was followed by online courses on CSA and conservation agriculture for students, which are currently being expanded. This target group may be expected to shift to sustainable agricultural practices and increased gender-balanced approaches.

In 2021, a desk study on INRM and agriculture-related gender risks in the degraded steppe areas of the oblasts of Kyiv, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv and Kherson was conducted. The results were shared during a national conference. However, the assessment identified problems with the statistical database and challenges connected to the professional employment sector. Two questionnaires were developed, but it remains unclear if these had any follow-up. FAO recommended sharing the gender results and statistics with the sectoral ministries because many information gaps were identified at the national level.

D. Knowledge Management

Communications and knowledge management

Finding 16. Regarding external communications and outreach, the project elaborated a wide range of significant communications products and materials (see Component 3, Finding 8). The actively involved ASSOGU proved to have considerable potential in engaging communities at subnational and local levels. An important platform for dialogue and cooperation was built through the establishment of the USP. In contrast, a project-related, internet-based knowledge management system was not available, and the FAO X (formerly Twitter) account was not a practical tool for users.

Under Component 3, the project aimed to enhance communication and the visibility of the INRM through the dissemination of best practices and lessons learned. This effort stemmed from Component 2 field interventions, including demonstrations of the INRM practices related to conservation agriculture, CSA, and shelterbelt rehabilitation and management. This component supported community exchange visits through the FFS, including capacity building on improved market information and value chains.

In this respect, the project produced many important publications and a great deal of communications and outreach materials (FAO, 2019f, 2020c, 2021b). The USP regularly publishes relevant information under Output 1.1.1 (see Subsection 3.2). It would be beneficial to link this website to important sources from FAO. In addition, a Keep Soil Alive video was produced under Output 3.1.3 (FAO, 2020a).

A project-specific, internet-based knowledge management system was not produced. This could have involved a specific website or an easily accessible portal for disseminating all project-related information and materials to a larger number of beneficiaries and the broader public. This may be due to the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic and the escalating war created a situation that was not conducive to knowledge dissemination initiatives.

A Communication Specialist was not assigned to this project. Nonetheless, every publication had to be approved by a Communication Specialist. The person in charge acted as an additional supervisor to approve or reject the proposed activities related to communications rather than create content and manage and disseminate knowledge. Many relevant manuals and materials prepared by experts remained unpublished and were not disseminated – of note are the important best practices digest and a no-till handbook.

On the operational, subnational level, however, information exchanges on activities were used by the stakeholders and beneficiaries through social media accounts like Facebook or Instagram. This was particularly efficient. The planned Coordination Centre of Sustainable Agriculture (under Output 1.1.1) was still being elaborated at the time of this review.

Finding 17. Formalized internal communication between the executing bodies and the implementing partners was a weak point throughout the project's life cycle. Further, a sophisticated communication structure tool was never implemented.

As highlighted, there was not a designated Communication Specialist. This largely impacted the mainstreaming of meaningful project achievements. In contrast, the National Project Coordinator and the FAO Ukraine project team provided exceptional guidance and supervision capabilities that positively affected the directly implementing partners at the subnational level. Regular internal communication like weekly review meetings among these actors was satisfactory overall. Some interviewees, however, highlighted challenges regarding efficient response behaviour – particularly in the frame of LOA arrangements that were not signed in a timely manner (see Finding 13).

Communication between the ministries and FAO Ukraine, and between the ministries and the implementing partners, was very weak. This caused a lack of transparency and mutual accountability. This may essentially be attributed to difficulties within the executing bodies (see Subsections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2). In addition, the project could not develop a website or portal to share internal project outputs, information and products among stakeholders.

The following aspects were not subject to an in-depth analysis during the review: i) the quality of contact and communication among the Budget Holder, the PMU and the GEF Coordination Unit's FLO; ii) the knowledge of the PMU and the FLO on the project's financials; iii) the knowledge of project progress when disbursements were undertaken;³³ iv) attention to compliance with procurement rules and regulations;³⁴ v) the PMU and the FLO responsiveness to addressing and resolving any financial issues; vi) any budget revisions and any disbursement issues, including proof of transfers; and vii) any relevant legal agreements like LOA arrangements.

Overall assessment for efficiency (including factors affecting performance): MS

III. Core Indicators

Indicator 3 Area of land and ecosystems under restoration

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
0	0	0	32

Indicator 3.1 Area of degraded agricultural lands under restoration

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

Indicator 3.2 Area of forest and forest land under restoration

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
			32.00

Indicator 3.3 Area of natural grass and woodland under restoration

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

Indicator 3.4 Area of wetlands (including estuaries, mangroves) under restoration

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

Indicator 4 Area of landscapes under improved practices (hectares; excluding protected areas)

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
0	0	0	248220

Indicator 4.1 Area of landscapes under improved management to benefit biodiversity (hectares, qualitative assessment, non-certified)

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
			248,220.00

Indicator 4.2 Area of landscapes under third-party certification incorporating biodiversity considerations

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

Type/Name of Third Party Certification

Indicator 4.3 Area of landscapes under sustainable land management in production systems

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

Indicator 4.4 Area of High Conservation Value or other forest loss avoided

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

Indicator 4.5 Terrestrial OECMs supported

Name of the OECMs	WDPA-ID	Total Ha (Expected at PIF)	Total Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)

Documents (Document(s) that justifies the HCVF)

Title

Indicator 6 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Mitigated

Total Target Benefit	(At PIF)	(At CEO Endorsement)	(Achieved at MTR)	(Achieved at TE)
Expected metric tons of CO₂e (direct)	0	0	0	2344955.5
Expected metric tons of CO₂e (indirect)	0	0	0	0

Indicator 6.1 Carbon Sequestered or Emissions Avoided in the AFOLU (Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use) sector

Total Target Benefit	(At PIF)	(At CEO Endorsement)	(Achieved at MTR)	(Achieved at TE)
Expected metric tons of CO₂e (direct)				2,344,955.5
Expected metric tons of CO₂e (indirect)				
Anticipated start year of accounting				
Duration of accounting				

Indicator 6.2 Emissions Avoided Outside AFOLU (Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use) Sector

Total Target Benefit	(At PIF)	(At CEO Endorsement)	(Achieved at MTR)	(Achieved at TE)
Expected metric tons of CO₂e (direct)				
Expected metric tons of CO₂e (indirect)				
Anticipated start year of accounting				
Duration of accounting				

Indicator 6.3 Energy Saved (Use this sub-indicator in addition to the sub-indicator 6.2 if applicable)

Total Target Benefit	Energy (MJ) (At PIF)	Energy (MJ) (At CEO Endorsement)	Energy (MJ) (Achieved at MTR)	Energy (MJ) (Achieved at TE)
Target Energy Saved (MJ)				

Indicator 6.4 Increase in Installed Renewable Energy Capacity per Technology (Use this sub-indicator in addition to the sub-indicator 6.2 if applicable)

Technology	Capacity (MW) (Expected at PIF)	Capacity (MW) (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Capacity (MW) (Achieved at MTR)	Capacity (MW) (Achieved at TE)
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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				189
Male				261
Total	0	0	0	450

IV: Co Financing

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Investment Mobilized	Anticipated at CEO(\$)	Materialized at MTR(\$)	Materialized at TE(\$)
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Ecology and NR	In-kind		6000000		
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Agrarian Polotics and Food of	In-kind		590000		365500
Private Sector	Agrogeneration	In-kind		2188267		327207
Recipient Country Government	Ukrainian Soil Ecology Center	In-kind		400000		7200
GEF Agency	FAO	In-kind		600000		
GEF Agency	FAO	Grant		465000		421561
Recipient Country Government	MENR	In-kind		80000		
Recipient Country Government	Institute of Water Problems and Land Reclamation	In-kind				63020

Recipient Country Government	National Academy of Agriculture Sciences	In-kind				3400
Recipient Country Government	Institute of Irrigated Agriculture, Kherson	In-kind				9800
Recipient Country Government	Ukrainian Research Institute of Forestry and Agroforestry	In-kind				5670
Recipient Country Government	State Service for Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre	In-kind				7430
Recipient Country Government	State Forest Planning Agency	In-kind				2250
Recipient Country Government	Kherson Oblast State Administration	Other				4900
Other	Mostivska Amalgamated Territorial Community, Mykolaiv Oblast	Other				9500
Other	Vynohradivska Amalgamated Territorial Community, Kherson Oblast	Other				9500
Other	Pustovarivska Amalgamated Territorial Community, Kyiv Oblast	Other				4355
Other	Byshivska Amalgamated Territorial Community, Kyiv Oblast	Grant				570
Other	Makarivksa Amalgamated Territorial Community, Kyiv Oblast	Grant				1263
Other	Dmytrivska Amalgamated Territorial Community, Kyiv Oblast	Grant				754
Civil Society Organization	Ukrainian Soil Partnership (USP)	Other				6000

Other	PLAE Burlutske, Velykyi Burluk City, Kharkiv Oblast	Other				4000
Other	FE Tellus-Ug, Tavriiske Village, Kherson Oblast	Other				2500
Other	Yugran, Fedorivka Village, Kharkiv Oblast	Other				4000
Other	FE Arcadia, Ivanivka Village, Mykolaiv Oblast	Other				5700
Other	AP Zorya-Yug, Kucheryavovolodymyrivka Village, Kherson Oblast	Other				5000
Other	PLAE Frunze, Berdyanka Village, Kharkiv Oblast	Other				3500
Other	Agro-Survivor, Cherkasy, Cherkasy Oblast	Other				1500
Other	Agrofirma Kolos, Pustovarivka Village, Kyiv Oblast	Other				8000
Other	AF Dodola, Novoraisk Village, Kherson Oblast	Other				1300
Total Co-financing				10,323,267.00	0.00	163,912.00

Comments

V: ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL SAFEGUARDS

Overall Project/Program Risk Classification

PIF	CEO Endorsement/Approval	MTR	TE
			High or Substantial

Measures to address identified risks and impacts

The project design created a risk matrix and performed an environmental and social safeguards assessment, as reported in the project document (FAO and GEF, 2016, p. 75–79). A high risk was assumed due to a lack of close and collaborative cooperation between key institutional stakeholders, as well as unclear responsibilities among institutions at national and local levels. For both cases, mitigation measures were planned through Component 1 under the responsibility of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, afterwards Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources. According to the project document, enhanced cooperation should have been achieved through the strengthening of intersectoral coordination mechanisms with the existing CC-LDD. Regarding unclear responsibilities, this should have been mitigated by improving institutional structures and legislation for sustainable land and shelterbelt management. This would have included the clarification of roles and responsibilities at national and subnational levels. In addition, a moderately high risk was assumed due to a lack of political support for integrating environmental considerations into agriculture and shelterbelt management. The mitigation measures were justified with substantial political support in Ukraine: shifting to environmentally sustainable natural resources management practices; and policy reform processes in both the agriculture and forestry sectors with support from the European Union, FAO and others. As such, the project created the necessary conditions and paved the way to further integrate global environmental considerations and demonstrate good practices in the field.

Cooperation and ownership at the central ministry level proved to be challenging throughout the project, especially due to political reforms and an unclear division of responsibilities (see Subsection 3.3). However, important regional development and decentralization reforms have contributed positively to subnational community engagement since 2014. In addition, the numerous successful interventions may also be largely attributed to the many key stakeholders that represented established research institutions with a strong subnational and local presence.

The overall risk rating by the FAO Ukraine project team from low in 2019 to medium in 2020, and high since 2022, has been the result of: i) the COVID-19 pandemic and extreme weather conditions in 2020 and 2021; and particularly ii) the invasion by the Russian Federation in February 2022. The connected risks were largely mitigated through the cancellation or postponement of some activities, especially at project sites that directly witnessed the ongoing hostilities (see Section 2). The plan is to resume activities at a more appropriate point in time with funding from other ongoing emergency projects.

On the risk of natural changes in agroecological zones due to gradual changes in climate and extreme weather events, the most important mitigation measures to enhance resilience to climate change will be scaling up SLM, conservation agriculture practices and multipurpose agroforestry.

VI. ANNEX

Uploaded Document

Document Category	Title
M and E Document	GEFID9813_Core Indicators_TER_FAO_Ukraine
Document Category	Title
M and E Document	GEFID9813_TER_FAO_Ukraine