

Reversing Ecosystem and Water Degradation in the Volta River Basin (REWarD-Volta River Basin)

Edit and Submit CEO Endorsement

Basic project information

GEF ID

9910

Countries

Regional (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Togo)

Project Name

Reversing Ecosystem and Water Degradation in the Volta River Basin (REWarD-Volta River Basin)

Agencies

UNEP, IUCN

Date received by PM

12/19/2019

Review completed by PM

Program Manager

Astrid Hillers

Focal Area

International Waters

Project Type

FSP

PIF ☐

CEO Endorsement ☐

Project Design and Financing

1. If there are any changes from that presented in the PIF, have justifications been provided?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement

The submission is as complex as the PIF was – which we cautioned at that point. Meanwhile the WB Volta project experiences and lessons – incl. the ones leading to an early closure and partial disbursement of the grant – further call for caution against such diversity of project activities. This was partly due to complexity of the design with multiple on the ground implementation to be designed and partly due to not setting up a project staffed and hence VBA capacity enhancing PMU at VBA. These lessons are changes that should be taken account of.

While the overall project component titles have remained the same compared to the PIF, there are two major changes which are of significant concern:

1. Change in execution from VBA execution and suggesting of **four** different executing agencies (incl VBA) and incl non-competitive hire of a for-profit consulting agency as an “executing partner” and receiving contracts for > UD 1.2 million plus partial self-execution by one of the GEF agencies. Furthermore, the ownership, leadership and sustainability of project activities is doubtful with the minor role of VBA and country agencies in executing funds (see also other comments).
2. A shift from “community driven” aspects of e.g. drought preparedness and from an IAS removal program to mainly consulting designed modeling and early warning with very little description on how to involve country entities and create on the ground implementation mechanisms and impacts e.g. on actual IAS removal. This is double concerning given the final evaluation/implementation completion findings of the GEF/WB project which demonstrated the need for strengthening VBA and country systems, for simpler project design, and activities that are commensurate with VBA and country capacities.

The current project design is therefore a significant concern. It is now the time and opportunity to simplify project design and execution.

Response to Secretariat comments

2. Is the project structure/ design appropriate to achieve the expected outcomes and outputs?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement

No. The project is very complex and current design appears not aligned with local capacities.

Overall comments:

1. The complexity of design in its assumption of technical capacities, assuming country’s willingness and capacity for data and information exchange, and diversity of activities is unlikely to lead to sustainable project outcomes. The prodoc itself notes on page 19: that “The nature of the project (multitude of disciplines in six countries based on stakeholder inputs) makes it challenging to provide a detailed project description in this project document.” ... Please simplify project design.
2. The leadership of VBA and a plan to build its institutional together with its technical capacity needs to be more clearly described. (the prodoc is full of references of “consulting with VBA” but not on leadership and decisions by VBA structures). The prodoc indicates that the project coordinator and other staff will be hired by VBA (page 68). Please confirm that staff will hold VBA contracts and report to (who??) in VBA on day-to-day basis.
3. Please also indicate how the suggested PSC is interfacing and integrated into the regular VBA institutional structures.
4. Overall project execution functions need to be clearer and should be indicated for each component and sub-component. The mix of four entities, incl. non-competitive hire of a firm and partial self-execution by IUCN, is not acceptable as is. Specifically, It is noted that DHI is designated as an ‘executing agency’ with components budgets exceeding a total of USD 1.2 million. While DHI has international experience in the field of modeling and forecasting and has won contracts

(via competitive RFPs) in other basins (as described in the project) it is noted with concern that there is no intended competitive bidding for the tasks outlined. Contract of this size should be competitively contracted.

Please discuss and revise the execution modalities and attach draft TORs and/or draft tender documents for large contracts under the project.

5. Funds flow, oversight, hiring and reporting of staff and/or consultants hired by the project all need clarification and a simpler structure putting VBA and countries in much greater leadership role.
6. Provide a clear plan on how the project is building the institutional capacity of VBA, incl its financial management, procurement and other necessary project execution functions. Please outline what staff is paid by the project and located in the VBA which will carry out these functions (in addition to technical lead staff). A clear staffing diagram is needed (see also earlier comments).
7. Please show how the WMO/Adaptation Fund project addressing floods and droughts (emphasis on floods) is institutionally linked to the current project. Will there be one PMU ? Some shared staff and equipment ? Other ?
- 8. Please provide diagrams for funds flow, institutional structures for project delivery and staff reporting lines.**
9. Please provide a clear *narrative* of the Theory of Change of the project (alongside the diagram) – aligned with its PDO and supported by the design of components and activities.
10. Please revise the component descriptions across the board to be clearer on what the project will do and separate this from general technical background to the components.
 - 10.1. Please have clear descriptions of outputs and activities that align with the RF (and its indicators/targets) and are aligned to the budget and procurement plan. Often only the component text remains very general.
 - 10.2. Many of the components are void of making it clear WHO (what project staff and what country counterparts and on what level and how) will carry out the project activities. Who are counterpart agencies and/or actors for what component ? Project design should have identified national and local relevant counterparts (depending on the component this will differ).
 - 10.3. Has there been any assessment on how many project relevant stakeholders can be reached with very heavy reliance on e-modules, e-learning, and web-based decisions and dissemination tools in the countries ? <<For example – see details under component 2 comments below: for the drought preparedness and response affected population groups are mainly rural and the project is not clear on how affected groups will be reached with relevant information to them on drought threats and enable them to be more resilient and prepared to respond.>>

Component 1:

1. - Please clarify the scope and envisioned uses of the DSS and knowledge and information system and ‘embedded mathematical models’ (use by who and for what and what are therefore data needs). As written there are no clear specs/TOR for this and the scope very wide/open-ended (see e.g. text on page 28: “The implemented DSS will provide tools supporting water management within the Volta Basin with specific focus on analyzing priority investments for improved water availability, increased water security, socio-economic benefits, protection of ecosystems and natural resources and climate resilience in coordinated management of the Volta basin surface and groundwater resources and related ecosystems. ...”)
2. - Please confirm: the DSS is envisioned as a planning not operational model.(?)of such
3. - What trainings are provided to the VBA and the observatory of emerging technologies (e.g. for data acquisition and in-house processing by VBA and national counterpart entities)?
4. - Who is “we” – this seems to refer to DHI ?
5. - How can the system be maintained and modified by key end-users even just in VBA ?
6. - In 1.1.2.1 – Valuation and review of existing methods: please build on recent reviews and tools developed under IW:Learn which seem to have addressed the same. Who is leading/executing the sub-component 1.1.2 on Valuation ?
7. - 1.1.2.3 – who will the scenarios be developed with ? who are in this case referred to by “key stakeholders”?
8. - 1.1.3.1 – please provide criteria for pilot site selection and describe envisioned implementation mechanism for these in an annex.
9. - 1.1.3.4. what provision will the project suggest besides developing an alert to not abstract water when withdrawals go to a ‘red’ level? Unless there are alternate sources what will WUA do at that point?

Component 2:

- Will the project support the countries in the ratification of the Water Charter (such as e.g. through dialogue processes, awareness raising and materials for cabinet , briefing , or other process support?
- 2.1.1.2: the title indicates the establishment of improved structures for interaction between VBA and national entities, but then goes on to indicate the delivery of 6 training events on a range of different topics. The connection between intent and what is delivered is not so clear as written. Please address.

- 2.1.2 Please – if maintained – revise the IAS program to be designed for quantifiable impact in hotspot/priority areas (provide baseline and target). The IAS program was suggested by countries via VBA to address immediate needs in areas of known concern to them.
- 2.2.1 See earlier comment on the “Community oriented early warning system” – please be more clear on how communities will be engaged, how warnings will reach them, and how this will aid their drought preparedness and early response. Please differentiate on how to reach sedentary farming communities versus pastoralist groups. Please aim for a clearer description and design. It is appreciated that there will be a review of existing community based drought systems, yet would that not have been done in the PPG in order to inform project design?
- 2.2.2 The outline of how to build the capacity of the Observatory appears complex. Is there a capacity needs assessment done on which this will build on?
- Also, just a detail but: Have e-learning modules proven to be effective with the target groups ?

Component 3:

1. - Please explain if there have been discussions to build on the feasibility and design work for community based interventions prioritized in the SAP and developed by the WB/GEF project instead of picking up new sites and activities on ecosystems restoration ?
2. - There are very many sites listed yet the project delivery mechanisms are not described.
3. - The component text describes number of people and ha targets for ‘sustainable management’ (also please provide an indication on what the indicators for this are); yet the table on key deliverables and benchmarks largely talks about ‘use of manuals’ etc. Please be clear what the project aims at, with whom it will work and how (what is the project mechanisms to work with these local actors ?).
4. - How specifically will the project work to address potential conflicts between farmers and pastoralists ? What groups have been consulted during project design and how will activities be carried out ?
5. - How does the selection of sites (e.g. such as under 3.1.1) build on community input or the SAP. Instead it describes an entity names as “we” (e.g. a “we will utilize the data ...” “we anticipate using remote sensing...” etc etc) in a top-down identification of sites and unclear activities at the sites. The “we” are certainly not local stakeholders. None of the sub-activities of 3.1.1. seem to be lead by VBA, country or by local entities at the listed sites and impacts are unclear. Please revise and consider less sites, provide a clearer design incl the list of actors and locally lead mechanism to implement activities and trackable results indicators.
6. - Fisheries (3.1.2): The Volta basin is home to significant inland fisheries in Africa. Activities to assess resources and most threatened fisheries are well noted.

- a. When it comes to implementation of ‘ecosystems-based management’ of fisheries and fish farming systems it remains unclear what the scope of project interventions are, what criteria are to identify fishing communities or to target fish farms (3.1.2.2.) and how many (even roughly are budgeted for?) and how. The description of efforts along value chains etc. is complex, yet rather generic (not specific in being aligned to regional/local situation of the Volta basin countries) and hence needs further elaborated project design.

Component 4:

1. - Please separate and budget separately: communication, KM, and M&E
2. - The intro to component 4 specifies that the project will use the previously designed communications strategy (under the WB/GEF supported effort), yet 4.1.1. makes no reference on the content and seems to start from square 1.
3. - Please confirm that the M&E budget is held/executed by the project (whatever the final execution modalities will be – see previous comments to revise the current execution) .

PMC:

1. - What is budgeted under PMC ? e.g. all admin personnel belongs there
2. - For example: Project liaison office (budgeted under component 3) to “plan, monitor, evaluate, and support” would belong under PMC costs not project component costs
3. - How can the WMO/Adaptation Fund project share some of the PMC related costs ? (Staff, premises, ...). They would be co-located , correct ?

Other budget related:

- - Please provide budgeted unit costs (daily/monthly rates for consultants) not just lumpsums (see some the TORs in the annexes).
- -Annex E- please clarify unit costs per day or per month for consultants listed; - please also separate % of effort for technical effort versus project coordination/management. The latter % of staff time to be included in the PMC.
- - Could you please point us to the project initial or overall procurement plan, incl. procurement thresholds? Apologies for any oversight.

Sustainability, innovation and scale up potential:

The text says that this project will deal with updating the hydro-met network. IW regional funds are not set out to fund and maintain national networks; the adaptation fund and LDCF/SCCF are better designed to do so and assure national uptake and O&M costs.

Stakeholder involvement:

- Project design needs to strengthen the component description on how the project will be delivered – often it is unclear who will deliver what effort and with what result (note: I noted that the RF is sometimes clearer on results than the component text, yet neither makes it clear on results will be achieved).
- Please clarify who was consulted at project design stage of entities that will carry out local actions (incl early warning and pilot activities).
- There are local consultant reports attached with a quite detailed overview of national and local entities. Please translate these findings into project component design/ component descriptions or relevant annexes (as you see fit) such that it will be clear who will carry out project activities on national level. We assume that the intent is not to have on the ground actions be all consultant executed.

Gender:

1. - The project component design is void of mentioning gender considerations. The mention of gender specific indicators does not convince gender sensitive design especially of components with on the ground interventions. Please mainstream gender consideration into the project design and not rely on a separate ‘gender section’ only.
2. - Has there been a gender assessment during project design? Is there a report on this from PPG ?
3. - Can you please point me to the gender action plan for the project?

Response to Secretariat comments

3. Is the financing adequate and does the project demonstrate a cost-effective approach to meet the project objective?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement

1. No. the project seems to complex and cover too many activities. This is furthermore more urgent as all co-finance is in kind (parallel) and only the WMO/Adaptation Fund (and possibly GCF?) provides very closely mutual supporting on regional level (and not so clear how it is doing so in terms of work planning, staffing or possibly back-to-back PSC meetings to effectively coordinate efforts).

2. DHI is correctly labeled as “international consultant”. As mentioned before, given the size of contracts (390 K; 390K and 440 K) an RFP needs to be issued (and specs/TORs to be attached).
3. Annex F – VBA was designated as the main project execution agency at PIF stage. What has there been consideration to retain this with possible support by by a procurement/FM agency/consultancy or similar.
4. The VBA hired lead coordinator is a senior regional expert; please clarify monthly salary and how it compares to similar project salaries on such regional posts.
5. IUCN execution – mixing of implementing and executing functions is not allowed under GEF policies (there are few exceptions; please refer to the GEF policy). Also, how would there be USD 1.6 mill equipment costs?
6. GWP – please clarify its role. Why are there no funds transferred directly to countries for specific items and all funds suggest to go to GWP or IUCN (the latter mixing IUCN roles – see above and earlier comments)

Response to Secretariat comments

4. Does the project take into account potential major risks, including the consequences of climate change, and describes sufficient risk response measures? (e.g., measures to enhance climate resilience)

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement

A risk matrix is provided and project component 1 itself aims to assess specific climate risks to the basin.

- The low/medium rating based on the regional nature seems low given the current seemingly immense complexity of the project design. Both the rating may need to be increased and the project design more clear and simpler.
- Ditto for the rating of low institutional coordination and unclear regional, national, local responsibilities
- Data exchange – rated low to medium. This is a key prerequisite to procuring several of the project components/sub-components. Is there an adequate data exchange protocol (or similar) in place ? This seems to be pre-requisite for the project and should be secured now. If commitment is in place , please annex documentation.
- Masterplan ? Project will support with DSS tools but falls short of being able to develop a basin master-plan nor does UNEP or IUCN have a track record on this as discussed at PIF stage.

Response to Secretariat comments

5. Is co-financing confirmed and evidence provided?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement

1. Letters of co-finance are provided in all cases
2. Please confirm that all co-finance numbers only reflect the relevant portion of listed projects that align with the project PDO and directly support project implementation (e.g. for IUCN, UNEP (SDG monitoring - please also take note of the US Council member comment specifically with regard to SDG monitoring), and in some of the national letters of co-finance ?
3. I assume that this consideration (applying only a relevant fraction) is the base for the listed DHI co-finance in table C to be below its letter of co-finance. Please confirm.

Response to Secretariat comments

6. Are relevant tracking tools completed?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement

1. Please fill out all relevant core indicators in the Portal instead of the TT and please fill out all relevant core indicators both in the Portal and in the worksheet. TDA/SAP related sub-indicators have been filled out but please also incl. in the Portal and worksheet (not only the portal) the “ha under improved management” and their location; as per the project RF.
2. GEF 6 tracking tools are no longer needed.
3. Please fill out Rio Markers as appropriate

Response to Secretariat comments

7. Only for Non-Grant Instrument: Has a reflow calendar been presented?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement N/A

Response to Secretariat comments

8. Is the project coordinated with other related initiatives and national/regional plans in the country or in the region?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement

- 1) The project indicates collaboration with a number of initiatives, yet there seem to still be overlap and also not a clear operational linkage e.g. with the WMO adaptation fund project. Please provide a table on what each project does and how they compliment each other.
- 2) How will the project build on the Volta Hycos and TIGERNET efforts (mentioned early in the prodoc)?
- 3) Please use the inception phase to design an effective coordination mechanisms with related other national and regional level efforts described in the prodoc. Does VBA host a yearly development partner coordination meeting?

Response to Secretariat comments

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

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement

Yes, it does have a costed M&E plan.

1. Yet as indicated on page 73 the implementing agencies appear to draw on PMC costs (i.e. project budget) for project implementation and oversight function (e.g. monitoring of project progress. This is not allowable under GEF policies).
2. Ditto for management of the MTR and TE costs. An exception would need to be requested by the agencies to be considered for approval by GEFSEC (GPU manager). If approved further steps are needed.
3. Please note that the audit costs should be included in the PMC (not the M&E costs)

Response to Secretariat comments

10. Does the project have descriptions of a knowledge management plan?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement

Yes, it provides a knowledge management effort – yet as for other components the formulation of the component needs to be sharpened to be more clear on what will and can be done under the project and by who. The description is encompassing but generic. More focus and alignment of component descriptions to the RF and budget would be very helpful to be able to follow what the project is set out to do.

Response to Secretariat comments

Agency Responses

11. Has the Agency adequately responded to comments at the PIF stage from:

GEFSEC

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement

No.

-Please respond to the request to at endorsement provide detail on HOW the project will involve national agencies and build on and strengthen local governance systems in the delivery of on the ground efforts.

- It is unclear how the project is addressing potential use conflicts e.g. on groundwater , between farmers and pastoralists.

- please explain how the drought early warning will reach communities (farmers and pastoralists) and how this knowledge is translated to recommendations to increase their drought preparedness and response.

- IW not funding national Hydromet networks – see earlier comments

Response to Secretariat comments

STAP

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement

- STAP had asked for clearer rationale for targets and for benefits– please respond to comment 1.
- STAP comment 3 and their favorable note that the project will address environmental security aspects such as conflict potential between farmers and pastoralists. Yet that aspect from the PIF is no longer evident in the prodoc. Please strengthen.

Response to Secretariat comments

GEF Council

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement

Please respond to the comments by the US and German Council members

<https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/work-program-documents/Compilation%20of%20Council%20Comments%20-%20June%202018%20Work%20Program.pdf>

Response to Secretariat comments

Convention Secretariat

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement N/A

Response to Secretariat comments

Recommendation

12. Is CEO endorsement recommended?

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement

No. Please address comments upon which the project will need to undergo a comprehensive review again given the multitude of interrelated comments. Executing arrangement and level of complexity are of especially high concern. It would be good to have a conference call and have an exchange on main/overall points of the review after you had time to discuss internally among UNEP and IUCN teams.

Response to Secretariat comments

Review Dates

Secretariat Comment at CEO Endorsement

Response to Secretariat comments

First Review		
Additional Review (as necessary)		
Additional Review (as necessary)		
Additional Review (as necessary)		
Additional Review (as necessary)		