TERMINAL EVALUATION

Project ID:	4158
Project Name:	Agricultural Biodiversity Conservation and Man and Biosphere Reserves in Cuba: Bridging Managed and Natural Landscapes
Countr(ies):	Cuba
Implementing Agency:	UNEP

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I. Overview

A. Description

Project name
Agricultural Biodiversity Conservation and Man and Biosphere Reserves in Cuba: Bridging Managed and Natural Landscapes

Country
Cuba

GEF ID	Implementing Agency
4158	UNEP

Executing Entity
Instituto de Investigaciones Fundamentales en Agricultura Tropical (INIFAT), Cuba; Sistema Nacional de Areas Protegidas (SNAP), Bioversity International

Trust Fund	Project Type
GET	FSP

Objective
To mainstream agricultural biodiversity into the management of the Cuban MaB Reserve System

B. Key Dates

CEO Endorsement/Approval	Agency Approval
8/22/2012	1/17/2013
Implementation Start	First Disbursement
3/1/2013	3/1/2013
Expected MTR	MTR Submission
6/1/2016	6/26/2025
Actual MTR	Expected Completion
4/30/2017	5/30/2019
Actual Completion	Actual TE
5/31/2018	3/1/2024
TE Submission	Final Disbursement
6/26/2025	9/24/2020

C. Disbursements

Project Financing	Cumulative Disbursement
1,505,000.00	1,332,026.00

II. PROGRESS STATUS AND ISSUES

A. Main Terminal Evaluation Findings

Strategic Relevance: The project "Agricultural Biodiversity Conservation and Man and Biosphere Reserves in Cuba" was relevant to new policy directions in biodiversity conservation and protected area management. The project offered a vehicle to pilot and validate approaches for agrobiodiversity conservation and landscape management; recuperation and dissemination of underutilized food crops and wild crop relatives; recognition of traditional knowledge and farming systems. Several of its initiatives supported policy priorities of the national environmental strategy and biodiversity conservation action plans. The project was additionally relevant to government food security objectives that encouraged broader private production and commercialization and supplied seeds to the national programme for urban and suburban agriculture.

Above all, the project was relevant to Cuba´s over-arching need for access to the external knowledge of the international scientific and conservation communities. The project facilitated spaces for dialogue, collaboration and learning that connected national and international institutional stakeholders and catalysed their cooperation. This enabled the implementation of initiatives such as those mentioned above, with technical guidance from Bioversity and other partners. Project objectives and components were aligned with Ecosystems Management priorities under UNEP´s 2014-2017 Medium-Term Strategy, and with GEF IV´s strategic objectives of biodiversity mainstreaming at landscape scale and sustainable commercialization of biodiversity goods and services.

Quality of Project Design: Project design was Satisfactory and benefitted from the technical capacities and prior collaboration between Biodiversity and the Cuban government co-executing partners. The project was based on an integrated and multi-tiered approach, with components devoted to agrobiodiversity research and dissemination, agrobiodiversity mainstreaming in protected area management, farmer extension, and livelihood improvements through benefit-sharing and commercialization of certified agricultural products. Project components and stakeholders were articulated by a Project Management Unit, and supported by over-arching capacity building, monitoring and communication strategies. The project´s integrated design combined different types and levels of intervention, which enabled it to address a broader spectrum of challenges and opportunities. This enhanced the project´s potential for generating transformational change processes.

Effectiveness: Overall project effectiveness was assessed as Moderately Satisfactory. The project demonstrated satisfactory levels of output delivery, and Moderately Satisfactory achievement of the expected outcomes. Agrobiodiversity was integrated into Cuba´s national strategy for protected areas and into the management plans of both MAB reserves, with a strong capacity development dimension (Outcome 2). There were advances in registration of new plant species, the reproduction and distribution of seed varieties, and extension of sustainable agricultural practices to farmers under the first Outcome, yet the extent to which these initiatives met or exceeded their target indicators is unclear. Improvements to local livelihoods and incomes from benefit-sharing and commercialization initiatives (Outcome 3) were not documented or quantified; capturing such improvements would likely have required post-project monitoring using different methodological instruments. A participatory certification mechanism for organic produce was designed and put in place, yet its level of utilization or impact are not known. The establishment of market outlets for local agricultural products faced various obstacles, and the progress achieved appeared to be modest in relation to performance targets (and local expectations). Given the limited scale of local participation in these initiatives, it is probable that this Outcome was only partially achieved. The likelihood of project impact is considered to be moderately low as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic that followed the project and restricted institutional presence in the Reserves; and its repercussion on the national economy (affecting the budgets and operational capabilities of government co-executing agencies and other national institutional partners).

Financial Management: The project showed low expenditure levels during the approved implementation period, 1 with an accumulated unspent balance that was used to finance a one year no-cost extension. By the end of the project extension, expenditure delivery had improved significantly and absorbed 97% of the

GEF contribution. In spite of co-financing reductions and delays in their disbursement, project finances were well managed. Co-financing gaps were filled and unspent funds re-programmed by annual budget revisions. Financial reporting was conducted in accordance with UNEP guidelines. The project´s effective financial management was highlighted by external audit reports that were contracted on an annual basis.

Efficiency: The project appears to have been cost-effective in its approach. Implementation was led by a compact PMU team that contracted external consultants and institutions (through Letters of Agreement) for specific deliverables on an as-needed basis. The technical staff of the Project Management Unit were provided by INIFAT. However, expenditure and output delivery were unsatisfactory for most of the approved period, requiring a one-year extension. Low delivery was attributed to externalities – slow international procurement, cumbersome banking and currency exchange processes, staff turnover within national partner institutions – that were outside the project´s control. Administrative closure was delayed by almost two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the initial period, there were delays in approving budget revisions and disbursements due to the transition of financial accounting (IMIS to Umoja) within UNEP. Efficiency was one of the project´s weaker aspects and received an unsatisfactory performance rating.

Monitoring and Reporting: The project combined implementation monitoring, led by the PMU, with technical monitoring of field deliverables by project partners and contracted institutions. The project´s design included a monitoring component that absorbed over a quarter of the GEF contribution, and was guided by a detailed and well-budgeted Monitoring Plan with clearly defined roles. Provisions for the ex-post impact monitoring were not included, which may have prevented the final measurement of results against their performance targets. However, this omission was influenced by corporate practice – project budgets are administratively closed within a year after the completion of implementation activities - and did not represent an oversight on the part of the project.

Six-monthly progress reports and annual Project Implementation Reviews (PIRs) were well documented and offered insight into the status of implementation. Substantive findings were disseminated nationally and shared with the global MAB Reserve network. However, quantified data for several outcome indicators were lacking in the final reporting. A Mid-Term Evaluation was conducted in 2017 in accordance with UNEP guidelines. Conversely, the mandatory Terminal Evaluation was not held despite UNEP´s extensive (and unsuccessful) efforts to reach the Cuban government authorities. This was a major setback to an otherwise satisfactory M&E performance, given the methodological limitations of the Final Performance Assessment (which did not enable direct access to project partners and stakeholders or site visits). As a result, the project´s monitoring and reporting performance was rated as Moderately Unsatisfactory.

Low expenditure delivery was aggravated by slow procurement, currency exchange and banking processes that are influenced by the US economic embargo. The project was extended by two years without additional funding.

Sustainability: The likelihood of sustainability could not be reliably assessed despite the (more than) four years that have lapsed since the project´s completion. Institutional sustainability is Moderately Likely with the inclusion of agrobiodiversity in CNAP´s national strategy for protected areas and both MAB management plans. However, financial and socio-political sustainability were possibly undermined by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on Cuba´s economy. This was reflected in reduced tourist visitation to the Reserves, lower market demand for the products being offered, and the reduced capacity of national executing agencies to provide continued field support with limited resources.

Contributing Factors: Project performance benefited from Satisfactory levels of preparation and readiness, in particular for the first and second components which benefitted from the earlier work of the executing agencies. The project engaged government institutions, NGOs, academics and researchers in the implementation of field activities and capacity development initiatives. Stakeholder participation and cooperation were Highly Satisfactory, as evidenced by the project´s institutional arrangements that included Project Steering and Technical Advisory Committees. Participation was driven by a strong sense of country ownership and institutional commitment throughout the project cycle.

Community participation was focused on the implementation of field activities, with limited engagement in strategic project management, planning or strategic oversight. Responsiveness to gender and human rights were not directly addressed although women fully participated in project activities. Project implementation, and the socialization of lessons and results, were supported by a robust communications strategy that gave visibility to the project and enabled the dissemination and publication of experiences through different media (including the Earthscan/Routledge series on “Issues in Agricultural Biodiversity”).

B. Stakeholder Engagement

The Stakeholder Engagement was Highly Satisfactory: The project generated spaces for stakeholder dialogue, networking and knowledge-sharing that brought together relevant ministries and government agencies, the academic sector, national researchers, farmer cooperatives, NGOs and representatives from the tourism and hotel sectors. The issues that were covered included the identification and conservation of new plant varieties and species, the sustainable management of crop genetic diversity, sustainable landscape management, and quality certification of agricultural products. These events and associated capacity building activities raised the level of technical preparedness.

The scope of stakeholder engagement is reflected in the project´s management arrangements, which included a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and National Steering Committee.

Stakeholder participation was well organized and represented at two levels. A Project Steering Committee was comprised by the implementing and executing partners: UNEP, UNESCO, FAO, Bioversity International, Ministry of Environment Science and Technology (CITMA), Ministry of Agriculture (MINAG), National Institute for Fundamental Research on Tropical Agriculture (INIFAT) and National Center for Protected Areas (CNAP). According to the project document, the PSC was responsible for taking policy decisions on the implementation of the project, providing oversight, and holding periodic reviews.

Annual meetings were held consistently with the additional participation of technical experts from various institutions, university professors and farmer representatives from communities inside the Reserves. The reports of these meetings indicate that the Steering Committee did play a substantive role in providing technical guidance and supporting communications and coordination. For example, the agenda for the 3rd SC meeting (2015) included a review of the project logframe and discussions on management issues, project risks and risk management. The final PSC meeting (2018) highlighted the need of an exit strategy for the project.

The other vehicle for stakeholder participation was the Technical Advisory Committee. The TAC had several functions that included providing guidance on agrobiodiversity approaches at landscape scale; developing improved sustainable management practices; developing policy and regulatory frameworks; determining market and non-market benefits; and strengthening institutional frameworks. Representatives of the international partners and technical resource persons formed the basis of the TAC, which joined the Steering Committee meetings as observer.

Through these committees, participating institutions, scientific experts and researchers contributed substantively to the planning and implementation of the project´s components. Less evident was the level of participation of farmer and community representatives who attended these meetings. They do not seem to have been part of the project Steering or Technical Advisory Committee structures, or given an explicit role in the design, implementation or oversight of the Reserve management plans. Farmer representatives attended Steering Committee meetings and were included in roundtable discussions. However, these discussions often tended to focus on coordination issues and technical issues that may not have been accessible to this focus group.

There was direct farmer participation in the implementation of field activities. The Final Report states that the project worked with farmers in defining and implementing various activities. Recognition is given to the role of farmers in maintaining crop genetic diversity and sharing traditional knowledge of plants. There were frequent farmer consultations and participation with relation to the implementation of field activities, rather than

oversight, monitoring or co- management. The degree of community participation in the project was likely to have been influenced by local organizational capacities and prevailing practice.

Farmer participation was highest under the first project component of increased agrobiodiversity. Conversely, the scale of local participation in product marketing and commercialization activities under the third component was low (according to interviews); this may have been influenced by the limited number of market outlets that were created, low business capacities and other difficulties that are mentioned in the report.

C. Gender Equality

The project document did not address these issues, nor are they mentioned in project reports. The project´s design lacked a gender strategy and did not include explicit gender-inclusive activities; the publishing of a recipe book was presented as an example of women´s empowerment in the Final Project Report. However, women from both Reserves participated in project activities and were beneficiaries with their male counterparts; women led the juice processing enterprise under the third component. Although quantified data on the level of women´s participation or other gender indicators weren´t reported, the project approach was generally consistent with UNEP's Policy and Strategy for Gender Equality and the Environment.

D. Knowledge Management

Rating: Highly Satisfactory

Communications were linked to public awareness and was central to the project strategy. The project developed a Communications Strategy for the 2015-16 period that set guidelines and approaches for communicating with different stakeholder groups – farming communities, resource users, government decision-making levels – in order to raise public awareness on the importance of agricultural biodiversity within the Reserves. The communications strategy provided national and international visibility to the project and supported the dissemination of experiences, results and lessons through different media - newsletters, videos, press releases, promotional events and publications (such as the Earthscan/Routledge series on "Issues in Agricultural Biodiversity"). The reviewed documentation does not indicate if the Communications Strategy was renewed or extended to cover the full implementation period.

III. Core Indicators

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	INIFAT	Grant		145,316.00		223,661.27

Recipient Country Government	INIFAT	In-kind		881,712.00		1,356,269.73
Recipient Country Government	PGR&PB Dept	Grant		50,000.00		249,710.00
NGO	ProNaturaleza	Grant		107,018.00		161,397.00
NGO	Diversity & Development	In-kind		45,000.00		155,000.00
GEF Agency	Biodiversity International	Grant		498,602.00		602,983.89
Recipient Country Government	Biodiversity International	In-kind		732,378.00		886,840.11
Multilateral	UNESCO	In-kind		200,000.00		223,000.00
Multilateral	FAO-Land and Water Division	Grant		60,000.00		15,000.00
Multilateral	FAO-Land and Water Division	In-kind		60,000.00		15,000.00
Other						549,417.00
Total Co-financing				**2,780,026.00**	**0.00**	**4,438,279.00**

Comments

For the last entry the name of the co-financier has not been provided because the report is missing in the documentation.

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 environment social safeguard was Satisfactory: The project carried few environmental or social risks, and was formulated to conserve biodiversity, promote indigenous crops and wild crop relatives, and incorporate agrobiodiversity concerns into the management of protected areas. Under the first component, improved agricultural practices that promoted organic production without agrochemical inputs were demonstrated and transferred to farmers in the Reserves. In addition to the supporting biodiversity conservation and improving crop resilience to climactic events, this approach was key to generate market niches for the commercialization of certified organic (and healthy) products under the third project component.

The project document recognized the latent environmental risk of concentrating production on a specific agrobiodiversity product (encouraging monoculture); and the risk of intensive production in response to market demand, which could lead to over harvesting or soil depletion. An explicit Safeguards Plan or Strategy was not formulated for the project. However, the project´s monitoring framework, combined with the dissemination of on-farm biodiversity assessment methodologies, were expected to contain these risks. However, the relatively small level of increased agricultural production and commercialization that was achieved is unlikely to have generated the conditions for environmental degradation.

Social safeguards were reflected in the project´s efforts to include local participation in field implementation and monitoring, and in promoting farmer alliances and group-based commercialization ventures (such as the community fruit juice enterprise that was created in the Cuchillas del Toa Reserve). Nevertheless, there was the potential risk that the distribution of newly- generated income could widen socio-economic disparities or undermine the social cohesion of farming communities. However, the project´s impact on farmer livelihoods or income was insufficient to engender internal conflict or negative social repercussions (with the possible exception of unmet local expectations).

VI. ANNEX

Uploaded Document

Document Category	Title
M and E Document	4158_2024_Perf