

GEF-8 WORLD BANK APPRAISAL STAGE/ GEF DATA SHEET

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General Project Information

Project Title	
Blueing the Caspian Sea	
Region	GEF Project ID
Europe and Central Asia	11429
Country(ies)	Type of Project
Regional	FSP
Azerbaijan	
Kazakhstan	
Turkmenistan	
GEF Agency(ies)	GEF Agency Project ID
World Bank	P181526
UNEP	
Project Executing Entity(s)	Project Executing Type
Tehran Convention Interim Secretariat, TCIS (UNEP)	GEF Agency
United Nations Office for Project Services, UNOPS	Others
GEF Focal Area (s)	Submission Date
Multi Focal Area	9/12/2025
Type of Trust Fund	Project Duration (Months)
GET	60
GEF Project Grant: (a)	GEF Project Non-Grant: (b)
11,743,120.00	0.00
Agency Fee(s) Grant: (c)	Agency Fee(s) Non-Grant (d)
1,056,879.00	0.00
Total GEF Financing: (a+b+c+d)	Total Co-financing
12,799,999.00	86,200,000.00
PPG Amount: (e)	PPG Agency Fee(s): (f)
183,489.00	16,512.00
Total GEF Resources: (a+b+c+d+e+f)	
13,000,000.00	
Project Tags	
CBIT: No NGI: No SGP: No Innovation: No Competitive Window: No	
Project Sector (CCM Only)	

Rio Markers

Climate Change Mitigation	Climate Change Adaptation	Biodiversity	Land Degradation
Significant Objective 1	Principal Objective 2	Significant Objective 1	Principal Objective 2

Project Summary

Provide a brief summary description of the project, including: (i) what is the problem and issues to be addressed? (ii) what are the project objectives, and if the project is intended to be transformative, how will this be achieved? (iii), how will this be achieved (approach to deliver on objectives), and (iv) what are the GEBs and/or adaptation benefits, and other key expected results. The purpose of the summary is to provide a short, coherent summary for readers. (max. 250 words, approximately 1/2 page)

The Caspian Sea region is rapidly developing primarily due to its vast natural resources and geographic location. Key resources include oil and natural gas reserves, making it a major global energy hub, with countries like Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Iran, and Turkmenistan actively extracting and exporting these resources. The sea is an integral part of the Caspian Middle Corridor, multimodal trade route connecting Europe and China via Central Asia and the Caucasus. The region is also characterized by its rich biodiversity, including unique and endangered species such as the Caspian seal and sturgeon. However, the Caspian Sea faces numerous environmental challenges, including pollution from industrial activities, habitat degradation, and the impacts of climate change affecting the water level. These challenges threaten the ecological integrity of the Caspian Sea and the livelihoods of the communities that depend on its resources.

With increasing sources and quantities of pollution and negative impacts on biodiversity, the Caspian Sea has come under greater climatic, environmental and human pressures. These affect the ability for the Caspian Sea to continue to be a healthy ecosystem that serves to keep the riparian populations healthy, provide jobs, and economic prosperity to the region. Out of the five Caspian Sea riparian countries (Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, and Turkmenistan), three countries (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan) are participating in the project. Effective solutions require both national and transboundary cooperation in areas of strategic regional planning that respects ecosystem services to people, biodiversity conservation actions that provide jobs a leisure, pollution management that prevents disease in humans and keep fisheries and aquaculture potential for food production. Addressing the challenges requires a coordinated, multi-country approach that can demonstrate successful models for scaling up, alongside regional action to address the shared dimensions of these complex issues.

The project will be co-implemented by World Bank and UNEP and executed by UNOPS and the Tehran Convention Interim Secretariat (TCIS). It will support national activities aimed at strengthening the capacity of the three participating countries (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan) to monitor pollution and create marine protected areas for biodiversity in the Caspian Sea. At regional level, the project will support the development of regional assessments, establish transboundary frameworks with a source-to-sea approach, strengthen regional institutional capacities, and improve the region's understanding on the current environmental issues. The project complements ongoing efforts of countries to meet the obligation of the Tehran Convention, including the Moscow Protocol (Source-to-Sea) and Ashgabat Protocol (Biodiversity) at the transboundary level.

The **Pollution Monitoring** component will deliver targeted actions aimed to reduce pollution's impact on biodiversity, ecosystem health, and water quality. By comparable monitoring parameters and formats, countries can build a shared understanding of pollution levels and strengthen policy alignment and regional cooperation on pollution monitoring in the Caspian Sea. Key activities include multi-country monitoring of freshwater inputs, enhanced tracking in marine protected areas and nature reserves, and addressing pollution from oil and gas operations. The project will also create consultative platforms for collaboration between the

oil and gas sector and other stakeholders, promoting best practices in pollution control. The **Biodiversity Planning** component will strengthen policy alignment and regional cooperation in the Caspian Sea, fostering knowledge exchange and best practices among countries on biodiversity planning. Using a keystone species approach, it will focus on the Caspian seal and sturgeons to guide for advocacy and rationale for protected areas management with the aim of bringing demonstrated successes to scale post-project. The project will move from recommendations to active reporting on seal populations across three countries, addressing past gaps in data sharing and coordination. To boost impact and sustainability, the project will explore innovative financing, such as leveraging the World Bank’s bond platform and attracting non-governmental contributions—building on successful models like the “Rhino Bond”—to expand results beyond the project’s duration. The component on **Regional Cooperation Mechanisms** in the Caspian Sea region will focus on transboundary fresh and marine water resources management by applying a source-to-sea approach. This component’s outcome aims to strengthen integrated transboundary coordinated action on pollution control, biodiversity conservation, and climate adaptation in the Caspian Sea region to support an informed transition to sustainable blue economy. Upstream pressures will be linked to downstream impacts; land–sea interactions across river basins, deltas, coastal zones will be assessed; and action will be coordinated across sectors and borders. The intervention will contribute to the established regional environmental protection policy and governance by developing and updating joint transboundary cooperation frameworks; strengthening institutional capacities to support the application of these frameworks; filling regional knowledge and data gaps by providing evidence-based transboundary assessments to guide decision making; and improving the understanding of the region’s environmental issues and possible solutions. Improved transboundary knowledge sharing will underpin this work, further strengthening collaboration and coordination. This will strengthen national and regional institutions and accelerate joint action to support a sustainable Blue Economy.

Global Environmental Benefits and other expected results: 67,365 ha of terrestrial protected areas under improved management effectiveness (CI1); 278,869 ha of Marine Protected Areas will be created and/or under improved management (CI2); 1 shared water ecosystem (Caspian Sea) under improved cooperative management (CI 7); over 200,000 people benefiting from GEF-financed investments (CI11); as well as contributing to reduced pollution and hypoxia in the Caspian Sea (CI5) through the development of the regional program of action for pollution prevention and control (Moscow Protocol). Other key results are: (i) improved regional coordination on biodiversity conservation and pollution mitigation; (ii) improved regional knowledge, monitoring and planning capacities, and policy synergies; (iii) improved national marine spatial planning and integrated coastal zone management capacities; and (iv) improved PA management capacities.

Project Description Overview

Project Objective

The project is aimed to strengthen (i) pollution monitoring and biodiversity planning in targeted sites within the Caspian Sea in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, and (ii) coordinated action on pollution control, biodiversity conservation, and climate adaptation in the Caspian Sea region.

Project Components

Component 1a (TA): Strengthening Pollution Management

Component Type	Trust Fund
Technical Assistance	GET
GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)

1,000,000.00	10,000,000.00
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Outcome:

1.1 Strengthened institutional capacities for systematic approaches and comparable pollution monitoring, assessment, and action across the three countries within the Caspian Sea.

Output:

1.1.1 Pollution monitoring and best practices guidebook for the project (Impact Accelerator) developed and delivered.

1.1.2 Multi-country Marine Pollution Roundtables (gender focused) delivered to: (a) allow economies of scale on opportunities for better pollution monitoring; (b) present findings of instruments to improve policy harmonization, share knowledge, and make comparable data available.

1.1.3 At least one per focus country pre-feasibility study of finance and policy instrument for pollution monitoring and reporting developed.

Component 1b (Inv): Strengthening Pollution Monitoring

Component Type	Trust Fund
Investment	GET
GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)
2,449,000.00	20,000,000.00

Outcome:

1.2 Strengthened pollution monitoring in marine areas at national level in focus countries

Output:

1.2.1 National Pollution monitoring schemes developed and operationalized in focus countries (incl. provision of equipment, monitoring & reporting tools).

1.2.2 Capacity-building plan, training manuals, and tools for marine pollution monitoring developed and implemented in focus countries and MPAs staff trained (in particular, women).

1.2.3 Knowledge and awareness raising/ outreach campaigns for pollution monitoring developed and implemented (gender focused) in each focus country.

1.2.4 Annual pollution monitoring reports (comparable) developed and adopted across the three countries.

Component 2a (TA): Strengthening Biodiversity Planning

Component Type	Trust Fund
Technical Assistance	GET
GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)

1,000,000.00	10,000,000.00
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Outcome:

2.1. Strengthened institutional capacity for biodiversity planning in marine areas

Output:

2.1.1 Studies to understand the ecosystem in specific areas within the Caspian Sea.

2.1.2 Analyses of institutions and regulatory frameworks in focus countries related to biodiversity conservation completed.

2.1.3 Studies and how-to guidebook on biodiversity conservation developed and disseminated in focus countries.

2.1.4 Learning and exchanges among regional experts and with international scientists developed and delivered (gender focused)

2.1.5 Regional workshop on innovative finance instruments for biodiversity planning organized (gender focused)

2.1.6 At least one per focus country pre-feasibility study on one selected finance instrument delivered.

Component 2b (Inv): Strengthening Biodiversity Planning

Component Type	Trust Fund
Investment	GET
GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)
3,250,000.00	26,400,000.00

Outcome:

2.2 Strengthened biodiversity planning and conservation measures, including for flagship species indicative of the Caspian Sea health

Output:

2.2.1 Policies and laws to update legal status and management of expanded MPAs in focus countries in place

2.2.2 New Marine Protected Areas established in each focus country

2.2.3 Protected areas management system developed and under implementation in each focus country (MPA plans, equipment, etc.).

2.2.4 Evaluation of and conservation measures recommended to focus countries and under implementation for flagship species indicative of Caspian Sea viability: the Caspian seal and sturgeon populations.

2.2.5 Marine protected areas management training (METT Training) delivered to MPAs staff, multi-country knowledge exchange organized (gender focused).

Component 3: Strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the Caspian Sea region to address pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change

Component Type	Trust Fund
Technical Assistance	GET
GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)
3,298,125.00	13,000,000.00

Outcome:

3.1 Strengthened regional cooperation mechanisms applied in the Caspian Sea region to address pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change vulnerabilities, and to support an informed transition to Blue Economy

Output:

3.1.1 Regional state and trends assessments produced to quantify source-to-sea climate vulnerabilities, pollution and coastal and marine biodiversity

3.1.2 Regional source-to-sea consistent frameworks for policy coherence co-designed addressing pollution, biodiversity conservation and restoration, climate adaptation and sustainable blue economy

3.1.3 Capacity-building to support the application of regional frameworks for policy coherence and Sustainable Blue Economy delivered

3.1.4 Regional knowledge exchange and outreach established

M&E

Component Type	Trust Fund
Technical Assistance	GET
GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)
203,522.00	3,000,000.00

Outcome:

Robust M&E framework in place to monitor project outputs and outcomes

Output:

M&E regular reports, mid-term review evaluation and report, end-project evaluation and report, surveys

Component Balances

Project Components	GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)

Component 1a (TA): Strengthening Pollution Management	1,000,000.00	10,000,000.00
Component 1b (Inv): Strengthening Pollution Monitoring	2,449,000.00	20,000,000.00
Component 2a (TA): Strengthening Biodiversity Planning	1,000,000.00	10,000,000.00
Component 2b (Inv): Strengthening Biodiversity Planning	3,250,000.00	26,400,000.00
Component 3: Strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the Caspian Sea region to address pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change	3,298,125.00	13,000,000.00
M&E	203,522.00	3,000,000.00
Subtotal	11,200,647.00	82,400,000.00
Project Management Cost (PMC)	542,473.00	3,800,000.00
Total Project Cost (\$)	11,743,120.00	86,200,000.00

Please provide Justification

PROJECT OUTLINE

A. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This section asks for a theory of change as part of a joined-up description of the project as a whole. The project description is expected to cover the key elements of good project design in an integrated way. It is also expected to meet the GEF's policy requirements on gender, stakeholders, private sector, and knowledge management and learning (see section C). This section should be a narrative that reads like a joined-up story and not independent elements that answer the guiding questions contained in the guidance document. (Approximately 3-5 pages) see guidance here

Project Rationale

The Caspian Sea, the largest enclosed water body on Earth, is home to a unique ecosystem with approximately 400 endemic species, making it one of the world's most valuable natural heritages. However, its health is deteriorating due to climate change, pollution, and unsustainable human activities, leading to declining water levels, biodiversity loss, and reduced socioeconomic opportunities for coastal communities. Major challenges include overfishing, pollution from industrial and agricultural activities, introduction of invasive species, and impacts of oil and gas exploration. The declining water levels and biodiversity are also harming fisheries, livelihoods, and prospects for a blue economy. Economic sectors like fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, and shipping face reduced productivity, while regional disparities grow. In response, the five Caspian states developed the Caspian Environment Program (CEP) and adopted the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (Tehran Convention) to protect the marine environment and promote sustainable development. These initiatives foster transboundary collaboration, pollution monitoring, and biodiversity conservation. However, gaps in policy harmonization, capacity building, and investment remain significant barriers, requiring further efforts to achieve sustainable outcomes and support the blue economy in the region.

Continued unsustainable activities and use of resources in the Caspian Sea region are not sufficiently addressed at the regional level. The Caspian Sea is holding approximately 44% of the Earth’s inland waters[1]¹, bordering Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, and Turkmenistan. It is experiencing rapid environmental degradation, reducing its ecosystem resilience, due to unsustainable use of resources (e.g. oil and gas, fish, and water) and other unsustainable activities (e.g., poor waste management practices; pollution from agricultural, oil and gas, and transport activities; urban expansion in coastal areas; and introduction of invasive species). Climate change impacts further exacerbate these issues by contributing to declining sea levels and increasing salinity. This threatens the region’s marine and coastal biodiversity, economic stability, and the livelihoods of millions of people dependent on its resources.

The Caspian region’s economy heavily depends on oil and gas production and exports. In 2015, the region accounted for approximately 20% of the world's crude oil production, making it the second-largest producer globally[2]². Additionally, the Caspian Sea was the leading producer of natural gas, contributing around 27% of global production that year[3]³. One of the primary environmental problems of the Caspian Sea is oil pollution, which is associated both with oil production and transportation, as well as changes in sea level, leading to secondary pollution, river runoff and even seismic activity, which provokes natural oil seeps from the bottom of the sea[4]⁴. According to some estimations, about one million tons of oil is leaked annually to the Caspian Sea[5]⁵ [6]⁶.

Additionally, the introduction of invasive species, input of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) (e.g., pesticides) from agricultural activities, and chronic low-level pollution from transport contribute to environmental degradation. Research has shown that the marine environment of the southern basin is under serious threat due to inputs of these pollutants[7]⁷. A 2016 study estimated that Caspian Sea coastal countries generated around 425,000 tons of plastic waste, with 58,000 to 155,000 tons entering the sea[8]⁸. Without improved waste management, this could increase to 68,000–182,000 tons by 2030[9]⁹. Eutrophication of the Sea is also increasing[10]¹⁰, and some coastal areas are losing over 50% of their wetlands due to urban expansion and industrial activity. Dewatering and damming are separating fish from their spawning rivers while illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing has driven sturgeon populations to decline by 90%, a species historically abundant in the Caspian Sea[11]¹¹.

The continued unsustainable activities and use of resources impedes the transition to a Sustainable Blue Economy. Ongoing degradation of the Caspian Sea has far-reaching consequences, threatening the region’s biodiversity and ecological balance and increasing climate vulnerability. A total of 112 plant species and 240 animal species were identified in the Caspian Coastal Site Inventory (CCSI) are included in the International

Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) 2006 Red List and National Red Books[12]¹². These conditions pose significant risks for public health and livelihoods, with contaminated water and declining fish stocks affecting coastal communities. Pollution and biodiversity loss also undermine key industries such as fisheries and tourism by reducing available ecosystem goods and services. For instance, illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing has led to declining fish stocks, resulting in job losses and decreased fisheries export value. Coastal economies are particularly vulnerable to climate impacts, amplifying economic instability.

The lack of an integrated regional response has allowed environmental pressures in the Caspian Sea to continue unchecked. The lack of strong regional policies and governance frameworks on environmental protection in the Caspian Sea; regional data, knowledge and technical capacity gaps; and limited stakeholder engagement further weaken regional governance and hinder environmental action. The “problem tree” below illustrates these underlying causes.

The most important drivers of the core problem include the following:

- Climate change impacts: the Caspian Sea has experienced a steady decline in water levels, with projections indicating a drop of 9–18 meters by the end of the 21st century due to rising temperatures and decreasing river inflows[13]¹³ [14]¹⁴ [15]¹⁵. Climate change is also increasing the frequency of extreme weather events, leading to higher risks of coastal erosion, salinization of freshwater sources, and displacing communities reliant on coastal livelihoods.
- Limited economic diversification and lack of sustainable development opportunities: heavy reliance on extractive industries increases the region’s environmental and economic vulnerability.
- Demographic and social pressures, including population growth and increased urbanization: rapid urbanization and population growth along the coasts of the Caspian Sea have increased industrial activity, leading to higher levels of air, water, and soil pollution. Coastal development reduces wetlands and other critical ecosystems, further impacting local biodiversity.
- Geopolitical factors: historical conflicts and political instability among Caspian Sea countries discourage regional collaboration as well as stakeholder engagement in governance structures. Political disputes over resource extraction rights further hinder environmental initiatives.

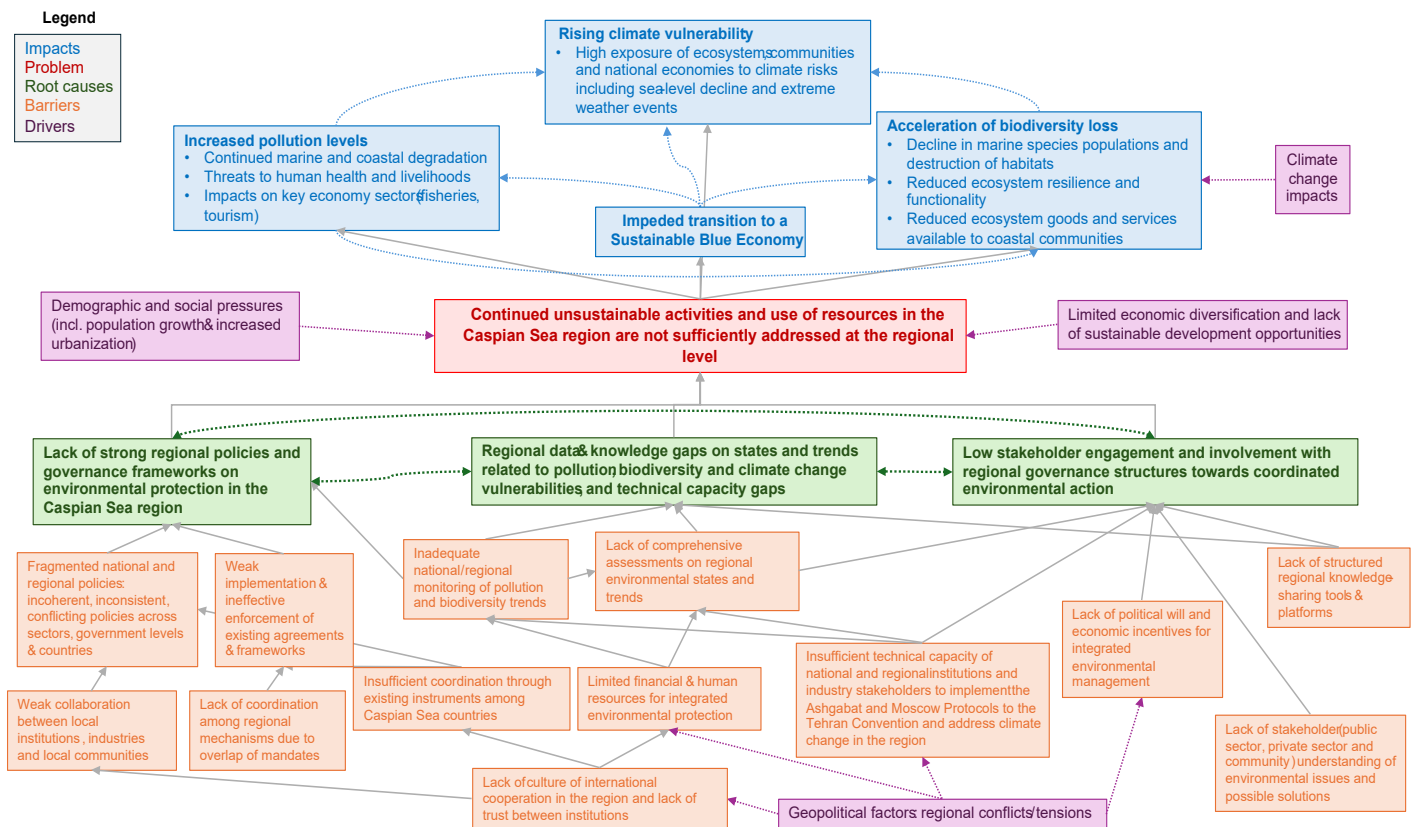
The key barriers are:

- Lack of strong regional policies and governance frameworks on environmental protection in the Caspian Sea region. A fragmented and weak policy environment is a major contributor to environmental degradation. Several barriers exacerbate this issue. A culture of cooperation on environmental matters remains limited, which leads to poor collaboration between local institutions, industries, and governance bodies. These issues are reinforced by insufficient coordination among existing instruments, including between the Tehran Convention and its Protocols and other intergovernmental agreements such as the Agreement on Hydrometeorology Cooperation, the Agreement on Cooperation on Disaster Warning and Relief, and the Agreement on Preservation and Rational Use of Marine Biological Resources. A critical gap in cooperation

also exists between the Tehran Convention and the Agreement on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Aquatic Biological Resources, limiting the effectiveness of regional governance frameworks.

- National and regional policies are fragmented. Policies across sectors, government levels, and countries are often inconsistent, preventing unified regional action. Despite regional agreements such as the Tehran Convention (the first legally binding regional treaty on environmental protection of the Caspian Sea), implementation remains weak. Even where policies exist, ineffective enforcement mechanisms and insufficient regulatory oversight allow harmful practices to persist (e.g. 90% declines in sturgeon populations due to IUU fishing). Overlapping mandates exist in the presence of multiple governance mechanisms with unclear or conflicting responsibilities that reduce effectiveness.
- Regional data and knowledge gaps on states and trends related to pollution, biodiversity, and climate change vulnerabilities, and technical capacity gaps. Reliable environmental data is crucial for evidence-based policymaking, yet inadequate monitoring and reporting and the lack of comprehensive assessments undermine the region's ability to track pollution levels, biodiversity trends, and climate vulnerabilities. These challenges are reinforced by limited financial and human resources and insufficient technical capacity among national and regional institutions and industry stakeholders. Many agencies lack the expertise, technology, and funding needed for thorough environmental monitoring. Without structured regional data exchange and assessments, decision-makers struggle to grasp the full scale and trends of environmental degradation. For instance, monitoring of pollutants (e.g., oil hydrocarbons, heavy metals) remains inconsistent, hampering harmonized regional responses.
- The absence of structured knowledge-sharing platforms worsens these issues. Without effective regional data exchange, monitoring efforts remain fragmented, and countries cannot harmonize policies or coordinate action.
- Low stakeholder engagement and involvement with regional governance structures towards coordinated environmental action. The private sector and civil society are key to sustainable environmental management, yet their involvement remains limited. One challenge lies in the lack of economic and policy incentives for sustainability. Inadequate frameworks fail to encourage businesses to invest in environmentally friendly technologies. The absence of clear sustainability incentives discourages industries from transitioning to greener practices, further straining marine resources.

Figure 1: Barriers and challenges from a regional perspective in the Caspian Sea region



Additionally, insufficient awareness of environmental risks means that many businesses do not recognize the long-term costs of pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate vulnerabilities. Limited stakeholder engagement mechanisms prevent businesses and communities from actively participating in regional decision-making. Few structured opportunities exist for stakeholders to shape governance processes, leaving private sector and civil society actors disconnected from environmental policy discussions. The lack of technical capacity among national and regional institutions and industry stakeholders also weakens stakeholder engagement by limiting their ability to participate in governance frameworks. Without proper training, knowledge-sharing, and institutional support, public and private entities fail to integrate sustainable practices.

Furthermore, over time, the Caspian Sea’s ecosystem resilience has been diminished due to the cumulative effects of human development and climate change impacts. This includes overfishing and the separation of the Caspian Sea fish from their spawning rivers through dewatering and damming of the rivers; introduction of invasive species that modify the appearance and functions of the water system; input of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and platinum monosulphide from agricultural activities; chronic low-level pollution from oil and gas exploration and transport activities; and increasing impact of climate change on the fluctuating water level, living resources, and coastal areas of the sea. The water level decline poses great challenges to the wellbeing of the coastal populations and the region’s economic development, in particular to shipping infrastructure. To address the impacts of climate change, more adaptation measures are needed, with adaptation measures also providing co-benefits for economic and social development. The project will also include such adaptation measures for all three countries to address this.

Pollution into the Caspian Sea is degrading the marine environment and is affecting the livelihoods of coastal populations. Research has shown that the marine environment of the southern basin is under serious threat due to the entry of pollutants (industrial and municipal sewage, marine and coastal litter, and agricultural pesticides) as well as the effects of climate change and drought, which impact the livelihoods of

those dependent on fishing and aquaculture. Every year, it is estimated that one million tons of oil is leaking into the Caspian Sea. This pollution is exacerbating existing issues, such as invasive species, fluctuations in water levels, eutrophication, and declining coastal habitats that are detrimental to the marine environment. This harms the coastal environment, fish populations, biodiversity, and the well-being of the sizable coastal populations of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, while also reducing the prospects for economic diversification due to diminishing natural assets.

In Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, the gaps for implementing the Tehran Convention's Ashgabat Protocol and the Tehran Convention's Moscow Protocol are similar and have identified as a) insufficient policy harmonization, strategic planning, and regional collaboration around biodiversity conservation and pollution management, b) countries' limited capacity for pollution monitoring, and c) insufficient investment in biodiversity conservation. These gaps represent substantial barriers for the countries to meet their obligations to the Convention and its protocols.

The health of the Caspian Sea is crucial for developing the region's blue economy as a critical avenue for economic diversification. Unsustainable use of natural capital has affected prominent sectors, reducing opportunities for economic diversification. For example, unsustainable fishing, including poaching, has decreased the number of workers employed in, and the value of, fisheries exports. Improving the marine environment of the Caspian Sea represents a development opportunity for these countries as it will help develop new blue economy sectors such as tourism, aquaculture, and shipping – sectors that can boost economic diversification and coastal socioeconomic outcomes. Crucially, the development of the blue economy can also aid in reducing prominent regional disparities by providing economic opportunities to coastal populations.

Restoring and protecting the Caspian Sea's marine environment presents a unique opportunity for economic development. A healthier ecosystem can support the expansion of blue economy sectors such as tourism, aquaculture, and shipping, which in turn can drive economic diversification and improve coastal socioeconomic conditions. In addition, fostering these sectors can help address regional disparities by creating broader economic opportunities for coastal communities.

The proposed project will benefit three countries with important economic status. Azerbaijan's economic growth reduced poverty significantly over two decades. Medium-term growth is projected at 2.5%.

Kazakhstan's economy slowed to 3.2% in the first half of 2024, down from 5.3% a year ago, with notable weaknesses in investment and government spending. Economic growth is projected to temporarily rise to 4.7% in 2025, driven by increased oil production, before gradually slowing to a long-term potential rate of 3.0–3.5%. Turkmenistan's economy has seen a very high rate of growth, with GDP increasing by 12.3% on average between 1998 and 2016 due to a significant expansion in the export of natural gas, oil and related products, which accounted for the bulk of its exports over this period. Although the economy remains dependent on hydrocarbons, cotton is the country's next most important export, accounting for the bulk of textile exports, which in turn constituted 6.2% of all exports in 2017. The project is consistent with several political priorities in the participating countries, mainly related to climate resilience, environmental protection, and sustainable natural resource management.

The project recognizes that women and men in riparian communities across Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan engage differently with fisheries, aquaculture, oil and gas activities, and tourism, and that these gendered roles shape their reliance on and vulnerability to the Caspian Sea's ecosystem services. By acknowledging these differences, the project ensures that interventions are responsive to the needs and capacities of both women and men, and that women are recognized as agents of change in marine conservation and sustainable resource management.

It is recognized that full transboundary cooperation – so the engagement of all Caspian littoral states - is crucial to achieving a healthy Caspian Sea. Therefore, the project will ensure that non-beneficiary countries are fully involved through inclusive consultations, knowledge exchange, and participation in regional mechanisms under the Tehran Convention and information platforms. While this involvement will not be funded through GEF-resources, their participation will ensure full transboundary cooperation in this shared marine ecosystem.

Stakeholder engagement under this project will be crucial to achieve the project’s outcomes, including GEBs. They will be engaged throughout all components, and their roles, impacts, risks, and engagement are described in detail in respective Annexes. The table below sets out an overview of how the different stakeholders will contribute to the project’s global environmental benefits (GEBs).

Table 1. Stakeholder contribution to project GEBs

GEBs	Stakeholders
<p>Core Indicator 1: 67,365.9ha of terrestrial protected areas under improved management effectiveness (sub-indicator 1.2)</p>	<p>Several national governmental entities, Caspian Sea research institutes, national academies of science, local communities, hydrometeorological and monitoring agencies, and private sector (mainly fisheries and tourism industries) will participate in consultation and validation meetings related to the development of several regional frameworks under the Tehran Convention and its Protocols which will promote management of land-sea interactions, habitat protection, sustainable land use and biodiversity conservation across protected areas.</p> <p>National and local government officials, national protected area authorities, regional working groups, researchers and local communities will participate in regional training activities on integrated management approaches (Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM), Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), and Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), application of nature-based solutions, and improved monitoring and reporting aligned with the Tehran Convention and its Protocols. This will strengthen their capacity to manage protected areas. The project will invite the two project non-beneficiary countries to attend these meetings and trainings.</p>
<p>Core Indicator 2: 278,869ha of marine protected area created (sub-indicator 2.1)</p>	<p>National governmental entities of participating countries, Caspian Sea research institutes, local administration will provide policy coordination, regulatory oversight and will be involved in the set up and management of MPAs in different capacities; national academies of science, local communities, hydrometeorological and monitoring agencies, and private sector (mainly fisheries and tourism industries) will participate in consultation and validation meetings and provide support to conservation and pollution monitoring activities. Research institutes and academia will also provide technical inputs, contribute to primary data collection (reports, analyses), ecological monitoring, technical backstopping, engage in project activities on monitoring and biodiversity planning.</p>
<p>Core Indicator 7: 1 shared water ecosystem under improvement cooperative management (Caspian Sea) <i>Level 4 of TDA/SAP implementation (sub-indicator 7.1)</i> <i>Level 2 of regional legal agreements/regional management institutions to support implementation (sub-indicator 7.2)</i> <i>Level 3 of national/local reforms and active participation of inter-ministerial committees (sub-indicator 7.3)</i> <i>Level 1 of IW:LEARN engagement (sub-indicator 7.4)</i></p>	<p>Regional scientific institutions (e.g. institutions (e.g., national academies of science, Caspian Sea Institute of Turkmenistan, Caspian Sea Research Institute (Aktau), policymakers, and industry representatives (fisheries, primary industries, tourism, shipping and transportation) will participate in the development of regional state and trends assessments on the Caspian Sea. Similar stakeholders will participate in regional consultation and validation meetings of these assessments. The assessments will inform the 5 riparian countries of the Caspian Sea’s current pollution, biodiversity and climate states and trends, to inform an informed Sustainable Blue Economy transition.</p> <p>Several national governmental entities, Caspian Sea research institutes, national academies of science, local communities, hydrometeorological and monitoring agencies, and private sector (mainly fisheries and tourism industries) will be heavily engaged in the development of several regional frameworks /legal agreements under the Tehran Convention and its Protocols which serve as additional tools for the cooperative management of the Caspian Sea and implementation of the SAP.</p>

	<p>All regional and national governments, institutions, industry stakeholders, and local communities will share knowledge on the Caspian Sea’s current environmental state and the implementation of the Teheran Convention’s Protocols and agreements through the Caspian Environmental Information Center (CEIC) knowledge platform and engage with IW:LEARN. The general public will increase its awareness through targeted communication outreach.</p> <p>National governmental entities, Caspian Sea research institutes, national academies of science, local communities, hydrometeorological and monitoring agencies, and private sector (mainly fisheries and tourism industries) will be also engaged in the development of the comparable pollution monitoring reports. Additionally, NGOs and CSOs working on the Caspian Sea agenda will be actively engaged through consultations, policy dialogue, awareness, contribute to knowledge-sharing workshops.</p>
<p>Core Indicator 11: 204,290 direct project beneficiaries</p>	<p>The project beneficiaries include all types of stakeholders: government (national and local public authorities), private sector, academia, public, local communities, etc. Through the project’s intervention, they will support the delivery of its global environmental benefits.</p> <p>Additionally, multi-country activities are covering the following beneficiaries: (i) Fisheries: The three marine protected areas will provide refuge for fish reproduction which benefits people beyond the specific marine protected area. (ii) Tourism: new/ improved MPAs will offer spaces for leisure and sports. (iii) Indirect job creation: we estimate that about 40,000 will benefit from indirect or part time jobs in tourism and service sectors related to results of the project.</p>

Project Description

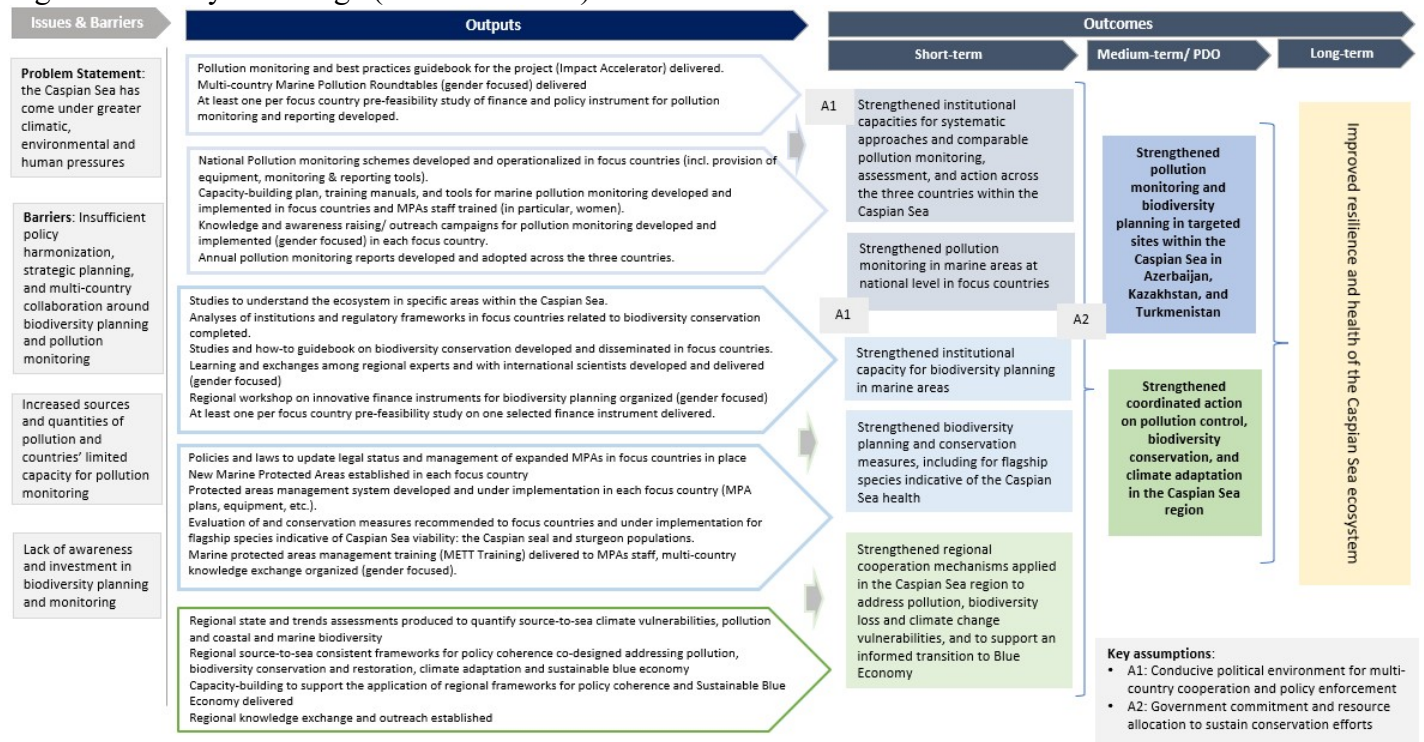
Project Development Objective: The project is aimed to strengthen (i) pollution monitoring and biodiversity planning in targeted sites within the Caspian Sea in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, and (ii) coordinated action on pollution control, biodiversity conservation, and climate adaptation in the Caspian Sea region.

The Theory of Change outlines a structured progression from coordinated activities to the ultimate impact of improving the resilience and health of the Caspian Sea ecosystem at regional and national levels. The process begins with foundational actions aimed at addressing national pollution and biodiversity challenges, and regional cooperation and institutional capacity. For pollution, these include identifying point sources and hotspots and developing national and regional action plans while setting up monitoring mechanisms, training personnel, and conducting public awareness programs. Similarly, for biodiversity, the focus is on conceptualization and planning for marine protected areas, enhancing management plans, training staff, and improving national inventories. At the regional level, the project will focus on strengthening the regional cooperation mechanisms applied in the Caspian Sea region to address pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change vulnerabilities, and to support an informed transition to Blue Economy. Strengthened national capacities to identify and monitor pollution and enhanced knowledge and abilities to establish marine protected areas (MPAs) as well as strengthened regional cooperation and coordination set the stage for better care for the Caspian Sea in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. These improvements contribute to the ultimate impact of the project, which is the increased resilience and health of the Caspian Sea ecosystem.

The GEF alternative will build directly on the long-standing regional cooperation frameworks established under the Tehran Convention and its Protocols, as well as on the Caspian Environmental Programme (CEP) supported by UNDP, UNEP, the EU, and the World Bank since the late 1990s. These initiatives have laid a strong foundation for regional dialogue, joint monitoring, data collection, and policy harmonization among

the five littoral states, including the Caspian Environmental Information Center (CEIC), and regional action plans on biodiversity, pollution, and climate resilience. While the baseline scenario would maintain these mechanisms at a minimal operational level, it would not provide sufficient resources to advance them, deepen cooperation or scale up results. The GEF alternative will therefore leverage this legacy by updating and expanding joint frameworks, filling knowledge and data gaps through coordinated regional assessments, and institutionalizing cooperation via expert networks and working groups, including strengthening the CEIC as a regional knowledge-sharing platform. In this way, the project strengthens and modernizes existing regional investments (listed under the section on coordination with other ongoing initiatives and projects), aligns closely with countries' ongoing efforts concerning implementing the relevant protocols of the Tehran Convention and provides the additional technical and financial resources needed to translate past achievements into concrete, regionally coordinated actions for pollution reduction, biodiversity protection, and climate adaptation, thereby catalyzing a transition toward a sustainable Blue Economy in the Caspian Sea.

Figure 2. Theory of Change (WB and UNEP)



The achievement of the project outcomes rests on several critical assumptions that underpin the project's theory of change. It is assumed that regional and national institutions will maintain sufficient political commitment and willingness to cooperate across sectors and borders to advance pollution reduction, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable Blue Economy practices. It is further assumed that at least one regional framework and implementation roadmap will be adopted within the project's lifetime, providing a structured platform for coordinated action. The project assumes that sufficient baseline data can be compiled and harmonized despite gaps and past uncoordinated efforts, enabling the development of robust state-of-environment assessments. It also assumes that training and capacity-building activities will result in long-term institutional strengthening, with mechanisms in place to mitigate knowledge loss due to staff turnover. Another key assumption is that stakeholder engagement processes will be inclusive and representative, particularly of coastal communities, women's groups, and the private sector, to ensure frameworks and action plans are relevant, supported, and effectively implemented. Finally, it is assumed that the pace of environmental change, including Caspian Sea-level decline, will not significantly outstrip the project's ability to provide meaningful assessments and adaptive management responses. These assumptions are critical to ensuring that identified risks are mitigated and that the project's results framework remains achievable.

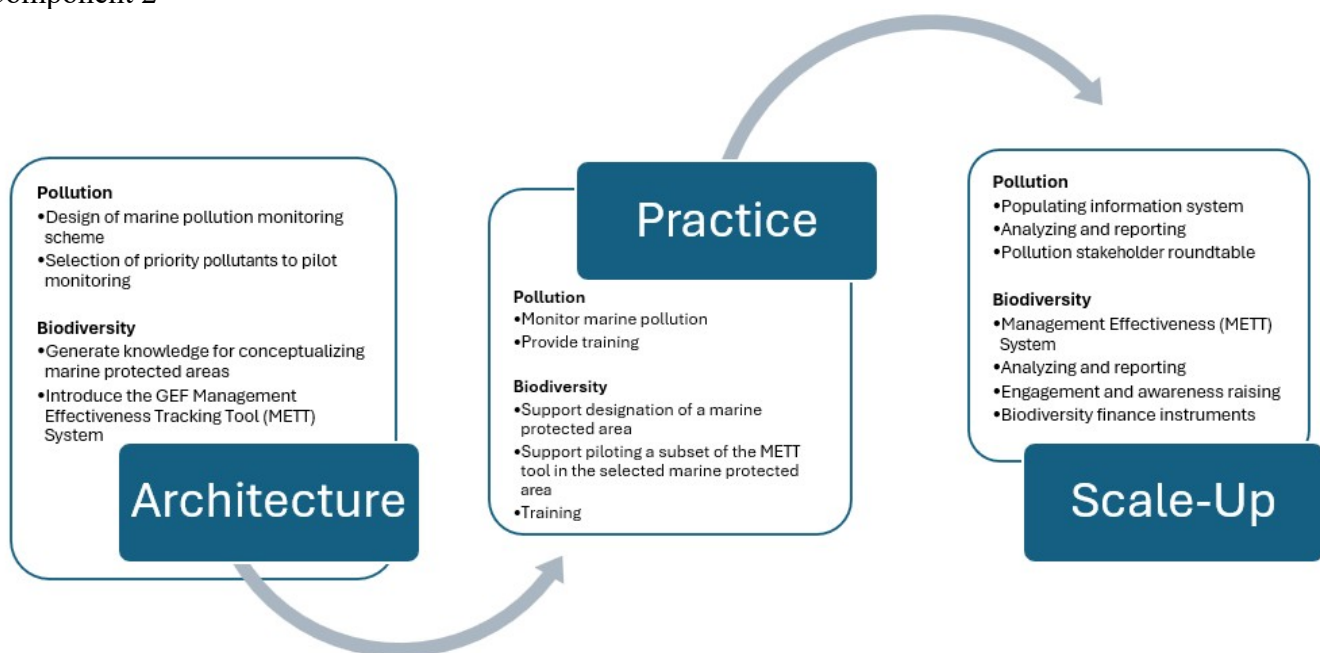
The primary target group is the three Caspian Sea riparian countries—Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan—which will benefit from the Project through direct GEF support for the implementation of the project activities that will help them meet the obligations under the Tehran Convention and its protocols. In addition, relevant ministries from the three Project Focus Countries identified as key stakeholders in each country will benefit from capacity building in biodiversity and pollution management.

Project Components

Component 1: Strengthening Pollution Monitoring (World Bank)

An “Impact Accelerator” for pollution monitoring and biodiversity planning is applied to support selectivity of activities for maximum scale-up effect. For both pollution monitoring and biodiversity planning, the project will introduce the “Impact Accelerator” approach across countries with the aim of bringing results to scale post-project. The reason for this approach is that the project is limited to technical assistance and because there is a limited amount of financing available. Figure 3 illustrates the logical flow of the “Impact Accelerator” from architecture through practice toward scale-up for pollution monitoring and biodiversity planning

Figure 3. Illustration of the “Impact Accelerator” to leverage and expedite Impact on Component 1 and Component 2



Outcome 1.1: Strengthened institutional capacities for systematic approaches and comparable pollution monitoring, assessment, and action across the three countries within the Caspian Sea

Comparability. Given the multiple sources, kinds, and varying impacts of pollutants affecting the Caspian Sea, the project will focus on developing systematic approaches and comparable monitoring, assessment, and action across the three countries in several dimensions of critical impact of pollution on biodiversity, ecosystem health, and water quality. The generation of comparable parameters and formats for pollution monitoring will enable countries to establish the state of pollution at regional level.

Caspian Sea focus. Each country has documented and addressed pollution challenges in different ways over time, with discontinuous investment in capacity and data collection and sharing of information and analysis on the common resources. Activities will focus on common areas at the national level with maximum impact

on the Caspian Sea ecosystem and waters including (a) monitoring pollution from freshwater inputs (watersheds and runoffs), (b) enhancing coastal and marine pollution monitoring within the MPAs and nature reserves, and (c) addressing pollution originating from oil and gas exploration and production.

Scale-Up. The project will provide technical assistance to establish a national-level consultative and collaborative mechanisms for private and public sectors in the oil and gas industry with other sectors—notably regarding environment and marine resources—active in the Caspian Sea. The intent is to engage on the application of best practices to monitor and improve control of pollution and explore leveraging of companies’ compliance monitoring of oil and gas industry operations. During project implementation, each country will convene at one national roundtable, followed by participation in one regional roundtable.

Output 1.1.1 Pollution monitoring and best practices guidebook for the project (Impact Accelerator) developed and delivered. This output will cover multi-country technical assistance to strengthen pollution monitoring. A set of activities benefiting the three countries simultaneously will develop national programs of action consistent with the “Impact Accelerator” mentioned above. The assistance aims to improve policy harmonization, share knowledge, and make comparable data available. The project will provide a balance of technical assistance for policy, training, knowledge exchange, methods, and equipment. Multi-country activities also offer economies of scale such as for provision of guidebooks/approaches and training.

Output 1.1.2 Multi-country Marine Pollution Roundtables (gender focused) delivered. Under this output, the roundtables will be the main multi-country activity as it will allow economies of scale in the technical assistance and provide an opportunity for cross-learning among the three countries (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan). The following linked activities will be undertaken by the project:

- (a) Organize national pollution roundtable discussions to engage stakeholders (government, private sector, academia, civil society, and international experts) on opportunities for better pollution monitoring and identify needs for scale-up
- (b) Organize a multi-country roundtable (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan) to present findings of instruments and policy/regulations needed to capitalize on opportunities for pollution monitoring.

Output 1.1.3 At least one per focus country pre-feasibility study of finance and policy instrument for pollution monitoring and reporting developed. This output is focused on the development with each country one or more concrete prefeasibility studies of finance and policy instruments for pollution monitoring and reporting.

The project will prioritize inclusive stakeholder engagement, empowering women participation and, as part of the Gender Action Plan, will ensure that TA products include considerations in regard to gender, youth and vulnerable groups.

Outcome 1.2: Strengthened pollution monitoring in marine areas at national level in focus countries

Output 1.2.1 National Pollution monitoring schemes developed and operationalized in focus countries (incl. provision of equipment, monitoring & reporting tools). The activities under this output will focus on pollution monitoring in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. In Azerbaijan, the Environment Policy Department of the MENR Azerbaijan will be the recipient of technical support in the following areas. Four linked activities will be undertaken by the project:

- (a) Conduct a gap review of pollution monitoring practices and provide recommendations for a MENR coordinated marine pollution monitoring scheme for Azerbaijan.
- (b) Support MENR in developing a marine pollution monitoring scheme.

- (c) Organize a national validation workshop with stakeholders to review and endorse the scheme, including institutional arrangements.
- (d) Provide technical assistance to MENR to draft the policy instruments needed to facilitate adoption and implementation of the scheme (e.g., policies/laws, institutional frameworks, coordination, execution, and reporting/monitoring).

In Kazakhstan, the Kazakh Scientific and Research Institute of the Caspian Sea (KSRICS) of the MENR located in Aktau on the Caspian coast will be the recipient of support on pollution monitoring. A Presidential Decree created the institute on January 25, 2024, with a mission to coordinate national actions and regional engagement to address the multiple, diverse challenges to the Caspian Sea and its resources. The following linked activities will be undertaken by the project:

- a) Conduct a gap review of pollution monitoring practices and provide recommendations for a KSRICS (MENR) coordinated marine pollution monitoring scheme for Kazakhstan
- b) Support KSRICS in developing a marine pollution monitoring scheme.
- c) Organize a national validation workshop with stakeholders to review and endorse the scheme, including institutional arrangements.
- d) Provide technical assistance to KSRICS to draft the policy instruments needed to facilitate adoption and implementation of the scheme (e.g., policies/laws, institutional frameworks, coordination, execution, and reporting/monitoring).

In Turkmenistan, the CaspEcoControl of the MEP located in Turkmenbashi on the Caspian coast will be the recipient of support on pollution monitoring. The project will reinforce monitoring through targeted purchase of equipment vital to monitoring key pollutant inputs from rivers and runoff areas, with particular focus on biodiversity impacts and protected areas. The following linked activities will be undertaken by the project:

- a) Conduct a gap review of pollution monitoring practices and provide recommendations for CaspEcoControl (MEP) coordinated marine pollution monitoring scheme for Kazakhstan
- b) Support CaspEcoControl (MEP) in developing a marine pollution monitoring scheme.
- c) Organize a national validation workshop with stakeholders to review and endorse the scheme, including institutional arrangements.
- d) Provide technical assistance to CaspEcoControl (MEP) to draft the policy instruments needed to facilitate adoption and implementation of the scheme (e.g., policies/laws, institutional frameworks, coordination, execution, and reporting/monitoring).

Additionally, the project supports equipment for implementing the pollution monitoring scheme in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. Two linked activities will be undertaken by the project:

- a) Procure selected equipment to monitor and analyze key pollutants identified in the scheme, with emphasis on impacts on (i) in Azerbaijan: MPAs (seal rookeries) and river estuaries (fish spawning areas); (ii) in Kazakhstan: MPA (with focus on seal birthing areas), (iii) Turkmenistan: MPAs (with focus on seal birthing areas).
- b) Hand over equipment and provide training on its operation and maintenance to the staff in respective countries.

Output 1.2.2 Capacity-building plan, training manuals, and tools for marine pollution monitoring developed and implemented in focus countries and MPAs staff trained (in particular, women). This output will focus on capacity building in the pollution monitoring scheme, including key pollutants (i.e. hydrocarbon sources). Two linked activities will be undertaken by the project:

- a) Develop MENR (Azerbaijan), KSRICS (Kazakhstan), CaspEcoControl (Turkmenistan) capacity-building plans, training manuals, and tools for marine pollution monitoring, with particular focus on pollutants affecting marine protected areas (MPAs) and river estuaries.
- b) Support MENR (Azerbaijan), KSRICS (Kazakhstan), CaspEcoControl (Turkmenistan) to implement the capacity-building plan by delivering targeted training programs for staff and partners on the use of the monitoring system and other identified areas, and by supporting relevant staff in the participating countries in applying the acquired knowledge and integrating monitoring practices into institutional processes.

Output 1.2.3 Knowledge and awareness raising/ outreach campaigns for pollution monitoring developed and implemented (gender focused) in each focus country. The output will focus on awareness raising, education and outreach, incl. monitoring report. The following linked activities will be undertaken by the project:

- a) Develop awareness raising and outreach campaigns on: (i) Azerbaijan: marine pollution highlighting valuation of Absheron National Park MPA area in Baku metropolitan area and sturgeon regeneration in river estuaries. (ii) Kazakhstan: marine pollution and biodiversity impacts. (iii) Turkmenistan: for identified pollution sources (i.e., oil and gas sectors), decision makers and the public nationally and specifically Turkmenbashi and the Caspian coast.
- b) Implement awareness raising and outreach campaign for affected stakeholders with focus on urban audiences and ecotourism.

Output 1.2.4 Annual pollution monitoring reports (comparable) developed and adopted across the three countries. This output will cover the following activities: (i) Azerbaijan: Technical Support to MENR for the preparation of the annual pollution monitoring report in collaboration with its partners, including SOCAR and AGSC. (ii) Kazakhstan: Provide technical support to KSRICS for the preparation of the annual pollution monitoring report, developed jointly with KazHydroMet (MENR) and KazMunayGaz. (iii) Turkmenistan: Provide Technical Support to CaspEcoControl for the preparation of the annual monitoring report in association with oil and gas industry and other partners.

Under Component 1, the project will also consider the gender-related activities across all outputs, including engagement of women in capacity building activities for better knowledge and skills in pollution monitoring, inviting women-led businesses to bid, as well as actively reaching out to women with awareness/ communication programs on the importance of preserving on the importance of addressing pollution.

Component 2: Strengthening Biodiversity Planning (World Bank)

Outcome 2.1: Strengthened institutional capacity for biodiversity planning within marine protected areas (MPAs)

A keystone species approach. The project will focus on visible and well-known keystone species, Caspian seal and sturgeons, as beacons for advocacy and rationale for protected areas management with the aim of bringing demonstrated successes to scale post-project. Each country has documented and addressed biodiversity challenges in different ways over time, with discontinuous investment and coordination in data collection and sharing of information and analysis on the common resources. For example, the population of

Caspian seal today is a rough estimate, and without a functioning protocol for monitoring seals and keystone species, the population cannot be effectively managed at the national or regional level. The project will go beyond recommendation for monitoring to actual reporting on the status of seal populations in the three countries.

Phased approach to marine protected areas. The project will apply the phased approach to protected areas management which includes “conceptualization” with biophysical and socioeconomic assessments to confirming protected areas boundaries, “establishment” with drafting and enacting required legislation and regulations, and “management” with training of personnel and provision of selected equipment.

Biodiversity finance for scale-up. To raise the ambition and scale of results beyond project life, the project will engage the government and partners on innovative financing instruments. As an example, the World Bank’s bond issuance platform has been used successfully for biodiversity, for example with the Bank’s “Rhino Bond.” The focus will be on addressing biodiversity monitoring and planning consistent with the “Impact Accelerator” and the phased approach to protected areas mentioned above.

Output 2.1.1 Studies to understand the ecosystem in specific areas within the Caspian Sea. The output will include technical assistance to understand the ecosystem in specific areas and to inform evaluation of and conservation measures for flagship species indicative of Caspian Sea viability, notably the Caspian seal and sturgeon populations.

Output 2.1.2 Analyses of institutions and regulatory frameworks in focus countries related to biodiversity conservation completed. This output will cover the activities to analyze institutions and regulatory frameworks, inform protected areas management plans of the targeted sites within the Caspian Sea.

Output 2.1.3 Studies and how-to guidebook on biodiversity conservation developed and disseminated in focus countries. This output will include activities that guide national implementation for biodiversity monitoring and planning. Specifically, the project will undertake technical studies and how-to guidebook on biodiversity conservation building in part on existing guides and incorporating latest innovations. The project will also prepare a guidebook on the “phased approach to protected areas management,” including guidance on managing environmental and social issues, on the phased approach that will be put in practice with the proposed MPAs in each country.

Output 2.1.4 Learning and exchanges among regional experts and with international scientists developed and delivered (gender focused). This output will further support Output 2.1.3 and will focus on activities to facilitate learning and exchanges among national experts from the three countries and with international scientists on comparability of biodiversity/species information.

Output 2.1.5 Regional workshop on innovative finance instruments for biodiversity planning organized (gender focused). To support biodiversity finance for scale-up, the project will organize a regional workshop presenting models of finance instruments that could be applied in the context of the biodiversity finance gap.

Output 2.1.6 At least one per focus country pre-feasibility study on one selected finance instrument delivered. To sustain and scale up results beyond the project’s lifetime, the project will also prepare pre-feasibility study of a government-selected finance instrument (one per country), assessing its applicability, operational requirements, and potential for long-term implementation. This work will be done through close engagement with the governments through, including through the regional workshop.

The project will prioritize inclusive stakeholder engagement, empowering women participation and, as part of the Gender Action Plan, will ensure that TA products include considerations in regard to gender, youth and vulnerable groups.

Outcome 2.2: Strengthened biodiversity planning and conservation measures, including for flagship species indicative of Caspian Sea viability

The project will contribute to biodiversity monitoring and planning through an increase in and improvements to its MPAs system and evaluation of the status of flagship species across three participating countries. In Azerbaijan, through the Biological Diversity Protection Service in the MENR, the project will add a marine protected area to the existing Absheron National Park, which located in central Azerbaijan adjacent to the Baku metropolitan area. In Kazakhstan, the project will contribute to Kazakhstan biodiversity monitoring and planning through support to the recently created Caspian Itbalygy State Nature Reserve in the Mangistau Region that serves as an important habitat for the migratory Caspian seal. In Turkmenistan, the project will contribute to Turkmenistan biodiversity monitoring and planning through support to the creation of a new Garabogaz marine protected area, improvements to the country's MPAs system and evaluation of the status of flagship species.

Output 2.2.1 Policies and laws to update legal status and management of expanded MPAs in focus countries in place. Under this output, the project will support the governments with provision of technical assistance and support in preparing related policies, charters, and legal instruments required to formalize the governance structure of the MPAs in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan.

Output 2.2.2 New Marine Protected Areas established in each focus country. As part of the project, the governments are expected to formalize the establishment of new MPAs in each focus country. The project will support all governments during the consultation process and through preparing related legal instruments required to formalize the updated status of the MPAs in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan.

Output 2.2.3 Protected areas management system developed and under implementation in each focus country (MPA plans, equipment, etc.). Under this output, the project will support the participating countries with technical assistance to enhance the protected areas management system with emphasis on (i) Azerbaijan: expanding the Absheron National Park, (ii) Kazakhstan: the Caspian Itbalygy State Nature Reserve, (iii) Turkmenistan: Garabogaz marine protected area. The following interlinked activities are planned, which will also contribute to Outputs 2.2.1 and 2.2.2:

- (a) Technical study and recommendations for the overall protected areas system enhancement, including application of the GEF Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) approach.
- (b) In view of the expansion of the MPAs, support the consultation process with participation of government, research, tourism, oil companies, fish companies, and civil society on MPAs and use of GEF promoted METT approach.
- (c) Provide technical assistance to MENR to strengthen the management framework for the expanded MPAs, including support in drafting the management plan
- (d) Preparation of site-specific environmental and social instruments for (i) Absheron MPA, (ii) Caspian Itbalygy State Nature Reserve, (iii) Garabogaz marine protected area.
- (e) Procure selected equipment for MPAs based on identified needs for the implementation of the METT approach, including support in defining technical specifications and providing training on the operation and maintenance of the procured equipment.

Output 2.2.4 Evaluation of and conservation measures recommended to focus countries and under implementation for flagship species indicative of Caspian Sea viability: the Caspian seal and sturgeon populations. As part of national biodiversity priority setting, the following activities will be undertaken by the project: (i) Azerbaijan: Stocktaking of lead species, with particular attention to status Caspian seals, fish

and waterfowl in the country, and especially in the proposed Absheron MPA. (ii) Kazakhstan: Stocktaking of lead species, with particular attention to status Caspian seal birthing areas in Mangistau marine area. (iii) Turkmenistan: Stocktaking of lead species, with particular attention to status Caspian seal and sturgeon in the proposed Garabogaz marine protected area.

Output 2.2.5 Marine protected areas management training (METT Training) delivered to MPAs staff, multi-country knowledge exchange organized (gender focused). Under this output, the project will include the following activities across the participating countries:

- (a) Azerbaijan: Provide technical training for government, academia, NGOs and private sectors (including tourism) on issues related to MPA management with the Absheron NP pilot (incl. training plans, training/workshop and training on public communications, stakeholder consultations, and equipment).
- (b) Kazakhstan: Provide Technical assistance KSRICS and its partners to draft the MPA management system/plan, specifically for the recently created Caspian Itbalygy State Nature Reserve in the Mangistau Region.
- (c) Turkmenistan: Provide technical training for government, academia, NGOs and private sectors (including tourism) on issues related to MPA management with the Garabogaz marine protected area (incl. training plans, training/workshop and training on public communications, stakeholder consultations, and equipment).
- (d) Additionally, the project will develop and implement awareness/outreach strategy on MPAs and biodiversity conservation highlighting Caspian seals and sturgeon regeneration. In Azerbaijan, the target audience may include private sector (including the tourism industry) to promote understanding of marine conservation, the planned expansion of the Absheron National Park MPA, the ecological importance of islands for seals, and river estuaries for fish habitats, at both local and national levels. In Kazakhstan, the target audience may include the private sector (including the tourism industry) to promote understanding of marine conservation, the ecological importance of islands for seals, and river estuaries for fish habitats, at both local and national levels. In Turkmenistan, the target audience may include private sector (including the tourism industry) to promote understanding of marine conservation, the planned Garabogaz marine protected area, the ecological importance of islands for seals, and river estuaries for fish habitats, at both local and national levels.

Under Component 2, the project will also consider the gender-related activities across all outputs, including engaging women organizations participating in evaluation and conservation measures for flagship species, reaching out and empowering engagement of women in capacity building activities for better knowledge and skills in MPA management, inviting women-led businesses to bid, as well as designing gender-sensitive awareness/communication programs on the importance of preserving on the importance of MPA management.

Component 3: Strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the Caspian Sea region to address pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change (UNEP)

Outcome 3.1: Strengthened regional cooperation mechanisms applied in the Caspian Sea region to address pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change vulnerabilities, and to support an informed transition to Blue Economy.

The component aims to strengthen integrated transboundary coordinated action on pollution control, biodiversity conservation, and climate adaptation in the Caspian Sea region. The intervention is designed to tackle all three identified root causes (see figure 1 above) by contributing to the established regional environmental protection policy, and governance by developing and updating joint frameworks (output 3.1.2); strengthening institutional capacities to support the application of these frameworks (output 3.1.3); filling

regional knowledge and data gaps by providing evidence-based assessments to guide decision making (output 3.1.1); and improving the understanding of the region’s environmental issues and possible solutions (output 3.1.4). Improved regional knowledge sharing (output 3.1.4) will underpin this work, further strengthening collaboration and coordination. This will strengthen national and regional institutions and facilitate the transition toward a sustainable Blue Economy. This component operationalizes an integrated source-to-sea (S2S) approach—linking upstream sources in river basins with coastal and marine conditions in the endorheic Caspian—so that pressures are managed along the full continuum (catchments → deltas/estuaries → coastal waters). It aligns river-basin measures with ICZM/MSP and the Moscow and Ashgabat Protocols. It is assumed that government, regional organizations and other key stakeholders (e.g., shipping, transport, tourism sectors, and local communities) remain engaged and collaborative during consultation and adoption processes and that the regional political context will not heavily impact regional cooperation. To mitigate risks related to political instability and lack of engagement, the project will foster inclusive consultation processes and institutionalize cooperation mechanisms (e.g., by establishing working groups and expert networks, developing regional action plans and agreements, and institutionalizing multi-stakeholder dialogues, and working through the Caspian Environmental Information Center (CEIC)). A detailed description of this component can be found in the UNEP appendices (Appendix 2).

While Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan are the direct beneficiaries of this project, the engagement of all Caspian littoral states remains integral to achieving regional coherence and long-term sustainability. In line with Outcome 3 on strengthening regional cooperation mechanisms, the project will ensure that nonbeneficiary countries are fully involved through inclusive consultation, knowledge exchange, and participation in regional mechanisms under the Tehran Convention and information platforms.

Representatives of non-beneficiary countries will be invited to participate in the Regional Steering Committee in an observer capacity, contribute to technical working groups, and attend regional stakeholder consultations and capacity-building activities. Through the Caspian Environmental Information Center (CEIC) and other knowledge management tools, non-beneficiary countries will have full access to project-generated data, assessments, training materials, and policy toolkits developed under outputs 3.1.1-3.1.4. The outcome intervention will improve the Caspian Sea’s cooperative management (CI 7) through the implementation of the Caspian Sea SAP (CI 7.1, level 4), the establishment of 5 regional legal agreements (CI 7.2, level 2) and IW:LEARN engagement (CI 7.4, level 1). 1,990 direct beneficiaries (60% women) and 750,000 indirect beneficiaries (50% women) (CI 11) will be targeted under this component. Indirectly, the outcomes will also contribute to the terrestrial (67,366 ha) and marine protected areas under improved management (CI 1.2&2.2).

Output 3.1.1: Regional state and trends assessments produced to quantify source-to-sea climate vulnerabilities, pollution and coastal and marine biodiversity

Under this output, the project will produce four regional assessments that provide critical data on regional pollution, biodiversity states and trends, and climate vulnerabilities:

1. Regional Assessment and Projection of Coastal and Marine Climate Vulnerability, covering sea level fluctuations, warming trends, and extreme weather events including basin coast environmental flow and delta resilience diagnostics
2. Regional Assessment of Land- and Sea-Based Pollution Sources and Impacts, aligned with the Moscow Protocol.
3. Regional Assessment of Coastal and Marine (river–delta–coast connectivity) Biodiversity State and Trends, supporting the implementation of the Ashgabat Protocol.
4. Regional Assessment of Ecosystem Goods and Services, analyzing the economic contributions of biodiversity to key sectors such as fisheries, tourism, and shipping, and identifying opportunities for a sustainable Blue Economy.

Gender aspects will also be included in the assessments to further understand the roles women are playing in resource management and community resilience in the region, and gender-related impacts.

These assessments aim to tackle the identified barriers related to a lack of comprehensive assessments and low collaboration between government institutions and private sector and will serve as a foundation for evidence-based decision-making, policy development in the Caspian region and will be developed in close collaboration with regional scientific institutions (e.g., national academies of science, Caspian Sea Institute of Turkmenistan, Caspian Sea Research Institute (Aktau), policymakers, and industry representatives (fisheries, primary industries, tourism, shipping and transportation) to ensure their relevance and usability. Stakeholders will be provided with access to these assessments (through the Caspian Environmental Information Center (CEIC), to facilitate their application in policymaking and management practices. The successful completion of this output assumes active participation from scientific institutions and policy bodies in data collection and analysis. Challenges such as data gaps and uncoordinated past monitoring efforts may hinder assessment accuracy. To address this, the project will strengthen data-sharing mechanisms and adopt flexible methodologies to adapt to rapidly changing environmental conditions. The output will also result in 120 (60% women) direct beneficiaries (contributing to core indicator 11).

- Activity 3.1.1.1: Conduct gender-responsive baseline data collection and gap analysis: Review existing environmental assessments, identify data gaps, and consolidate previous monitoring efforts to establish a foundation for regional assessments. The analyses will be gender-responsive, ensuring gender-disaggregated data is included and women's roles are understood. This will involve engagement with national agencies (e.g., hydrometeorological and monitoring services), research institutions (e.g., Caspian Sea institutes in Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, NANA in Baku), and regional initiatives. Consultation meetings (online and in-person) will be organized for each assessment to validate the chosen methodology and ensure that national perspectives are accurately reflected (at least 80 participants, at least 60% women).
- Activity 3.1.1.2: Produce and publish regional state and trends assessments: Develop four comprehensive assessments focusing on (i) climate vulnerability projections, (ii) pollution sources and impacts, (iii) coastal and marine biodiversity trends, and (iv) ecosystem goods and services for key sectors (as listed above).
- Activity 3.1.1.3. Validate, disseminate, and promote the use of assessment findings: Organize stakeholder consultations and validation workshops with government agencies, scientific institutions, industry representatives, and civil society to endorse the assessments (at least 40 participants, 60% women) and submit them to Tehran Convention Conference of the Parties. The finalized reports will be made accessible via Caspian Environment Information Centre, and targeted capacity-building sessions organized under the output 3.1.3 to equip institutions with the knowledge and tools to apply findings in decision-making.

Output 3.1.2: Regional source-to-sea consistent frameworks for policy coherence co-designed addressing pollution, biodiversity conservation and restoration, climate adaptation and sustainable blue economy. This output focuses on strengthening regional/transboundary cooperation by co-designing 5 policy frameworks that address pollution control, biodiversity conservation, climate adaptation, and sustainable blue economy development in an integrated way:

1. Integrated River Basin (IRB), Marine, and Coastal Zone Management Framework will establish an integrated river basin, marine, and coastal zone management framework to address pollution, climate change and biodiversity use. It will support harmonized approaches to managing land sea interactions, habitat protection, and sustainable land use planning.
2. Regional Program of Action for Pollution Prevention and Control (Moscow Protocol) will include a comprehensive pollution prevention and control program, targeting both land-based pollution sources, with a focus on strengthening monitoring, data-sharing, and pollution mitigation actions in alignment with the Protocol for the Protection of the Caspian Sea against Pollution from Land-based Sources and Activities (Moscow Protocol).
3. Regional Climate Adaptation Framework for the Caspian Sea will outline climate adaptation strategies to address sea level fluctuations, extreme weather events and rising temperatures. It will support climate

resilient policies, promote nature-based solutions, and provide guidance for integrating climate risks into national and regional decision-making.

4. Blue Economy (BE) Cooperation Framework with the Tehran Convention and the Agreement on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Aquatic Biological Resources will strengthen regional cooperation between the two regional agreements to manage and safeguard the marine biodiversity in the Caspian Sea for a sustainable Blue Economy, ensuring economic growth while maintaining ecosystem integrity.

5. Development of a Regional Blue Economy Strategy will support a resilient and sustainable Blue Economy in the Caspian region. This will involve focusing that biodiversity conservation and environmental sustainability remain at the core of economic strategy

In this context, “regional frameworks” refers to the agreed policy, governance, and cooperation mechanisms developed under the Tehran Convention and its Protocols, as well as complementary regional strategies and guidelines endorsed by Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

This output will contribute to the implementation of the Caspian Sea SAP (core indicator 7.1) and aims to tackle barriers related to weak and fragmented regional policies and frameworks on the environmental governance of the Caspian Sea, and coordination between institutes, private sector and local communities. Its activities, along with those under output 3.1.3 will contribute most toward the improved management effectiveness of terrestrial protected areas (core indicator 1.2). The output will also contribute to core indicator 7.2 and result in 250 (60% women) direct beneficiaries (contributing to core indicator 11).

The project will facilitate consultations among stakeholders, including primary stakeholders the national governments (incl. hydrometeorological and monitoring agencies), scientific institutions (e.g. Caspian Sea research institutes and other institutions of national academies of science), local communities, and the private sector (e.g., fisheries and tourism industries), to ensure the frameworks are practical, implementable, and aligned with existing agreements such as the Tehran Convention and its Protocols as well other regional agreements such as the Agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of aquatic biological resources of the Caspian Sea. To ensure gender responsiveness, the project will integrate gender perspectives into all consultations and policy development processes, ensuring that the frameworks reflect the differentiated needs, vulnerabilities, and contributions of women and men in environmental governance and resource management. Limited involvement from a broad stakeholder base may result in frameworks that lack practical relevance and support, therefore, the project will ensure strong engagement with all stakeholders while promoting inclusive, gender-responsive consultations. This will further ensure integration of existing local actions and best practices, resulting in sustainable and effective frameworks.

- Activity 3.1.2.1: Conduct stakeholder consultations and policy gap analysis: Engage national authorities, local communities, and private sector actors, in structured consultations to assess gaps, align with ongoing initiatives, and ensure the frameworks address real needs (at least 200 participants, 60% women).
- Activity 3.1.2.2: Develop and draft regional cooperation frameworks: Formulate policy frameworks covering (i) Integrated River Basin (IRB), Marine, and Coastal Zone Management Framework, (ii) pollution prevention and control, (iii) biodiversity conservation and restoration, (iv) climate adaptation and (v) blue economy strategy. Gender considerations will be integrated into the regional frameworks, based on the gender-responsive assessments developed under output 3.1.1.
- Activity 3.1.2.3: Validate and promote adaptation and implementation of frameworks: Organize regional validation workshops and high-level meetings to secure commitment, refine frameworks, and outline implementation roadmaps to be further submitted to the Conference of the Parties of the Tehran Convention to ensure long-term uptake (at least 50 participants, 60% women).

Output 3.1.3: Capacity-building to support the application of regional frameworks for policy coherence and Sustainable Blue Economy delivered. This output will strengthen the capacity of at least 520 beneficiaries (60% women) at regional and national institutions, industry stakeholders, and local communities to effectively apply regional frameworks and tools prescribed by them for policy coherence and Sustainable Blue Economy practices in the Caspian Sea (contributing to core indicator 11). More specifically, it will focus

on the practical use of these frameworks to harmonize policies across countries, support compliance with existing commitments, and enable more coherent, coordinated approaches to marine protection and Blue Economy development. This will help tackle identified barriers related to low technical capacity on the implementation of Teheran Convention Protocols. Through structured training, sectoral dialogues, and technical support, key actors will gain practical skills in integrated resource management, climate adaptation, and ecosystem-based approaches. Risks include frequent personnel turnover of environmental agencies may lead to the loss of acquired knowledge and skills, but continuity will be ensured through structured knowledge transfer mechanisms and institutional support to retain expertise. This output, along with those under output 3.1.2 will contribute most toward the improved management effectiveness of terrestrial protected areas (core indicator 1.2).

- Activity 3.1.3.1. Organize sectoral roundtables and industry group discussions: The activity will stimulate private sector engagement. The sectoral roundtables will be interactive spaces that enhance cross-sectoral cooperation for blue economy, ensuring policy alignment, and facilitating knowledge exchange, while identifying challenges and opportunities. Participants will include key sectors such as aquaculture, fisheries, tourism, extractive industries, and shipping as well as women's groups engaged in marine and coastal livelihoods. Industry group discussions will be organized, bringing together policymakers, private sector, civil society organizations, and academia. Summary reports with key recommendations will be disseminated through the CEIC to sustain the dialogue beyond the project duration.
- Activity 3.1.3.2. Train regional and national state and non-state institutions on the application of integrated management approaches towards Blue Economy transformation: The project will develop a capacity-building curriculum to strengthen institutional and technical expertise among stakeholders, tailored to national and local government officials, national protected area authorities, regional working groups, researchers, and local communities. Training workshops will equip participants with the necessary knowledge and practical skills to apply integrated management approaches (incl. Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM), Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM), and Marine Spatial Planning (MSP)) into national and regional policies, ensuring alignment with sustainable development objectives. Special emphasis will be placed on addressing pollution control, climate change adaptation, and biodiversity conservation. The training will be delivered through a combination of in-person workshops and online modules to ensure broad participation. Expert trainers from regional and international institutions will lead the sessions, and practical case studies from the Caspian region will be used to reinforce learning. A follow-up mechanism will be established to track the application of acquired skills in policy and practice. The project's gender expert will ensure that the training is gender responsive and address gender-related challenges. All capacity building material will be made available on the CEIC platform (activity 3.1.4.2).
- Activity 3.1.3.3. Develop regional nature-based solution toolkit: The toolkit will compile best practices, technical guidance, and case studies to facilitate the adoption of nature-based solutions in sustainable resource management and ecosystem restoration. It will serve as a practical resource to enhance decision-making, improve ecosystem management, and promote nature-based approaches to sustainable resource use. The toolkit will be developed through a collaborative process involving regional experts, practitioners, and policymakers, including the project gender expert. A series of expert consultations and working group meetings will be conducted to identify region-specific challenges and opportunities. Draft versions of the toolkit will be reviewed by stakeholders to ensure its applicability, and capacity-building workshops will be organized to promote its use among decision-makers and industry representatives. The toolkit will be made available and promoted on the CEIC platform (activity 3.1.4.2).
- Activity 3.1.3.4. Support to the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment (WGMA): This activity will support participating countries in the work of the WGMA in the implementation of the Caspian Sea Environmental Monitoring Programme. This support will include expert consultations, facilitation of WGMA meetings, and provision of technical resources. These efforts will be directed toward developing common regional guidelines for monitoring procedures to improve the comparability and consistency of environmental data among the Caspian States. The support will include the engagement of national experts to provide country-specific inputs, the organization of periodic meetings to review progress, and the

development of technical documents outlining standardized monitoring methodologies. CEIC online platform will be used for data sharing and collaboration among WGMA members.

- Activity 3.1.3.5. Support the adoption, ratification implementation of the Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment and Information Exchange: This activity will assist participating countries in resolving outstanding negotiation issues through facilitated consultations, expert analysis, and legal advisory services. The activity will enhance the technical and institutional readiness of the Contracting Parties for effective Protocol implementation by offering capacity-building workshops and policy alignment recommendations. Legal expertise will be provided, and bilateral consultations will be facilitated to address country-specific concerns.

Output 3.1.4: Regional knowledge exchange and outreach established

This output will carry out robust regional knowledge exchange by making key knowledge products produced under this project (incl. assessments, toolkits, training materials, regional guidelines for monitoring procedures, round table summary reports etc.) available to all stakeholders across the Caspian Sea region. This will help tackle barriers of stakeholder understanding on the Caspian Sea's environmental issues and possible solutions. A communication and outreach strategy will be developed and implemented at regional level. The output will result in 1,100 direct beneficiaries (60% women), contributing to core indicator 11.

- Activity 3.1.4.1. Strengthen the Caspian Environmental Information Center (CEIC): The CEIC will be enhanced to serve as a knowledge-sharing platform where stakeholders can access key resources, collaborate on best practices, and discuss emerging issues in pollution management, biodiversity conservation, and climate adaptation.
- Activity 3.1.4.2. Share knowledge products on pollution, biodiversity, and climate adaptation: Knowledge products developed under output 3.1.1-3.1.3 will be made available through the CEIC. A gender consultant will ensure all products are gender-responsive.
- Activity 3.1.4.3. Conducting an online meeting on lessons learned and sharing best practices in the context of the project achievements: To further promote knowledge exchange, the project will ensure that best practices and innovative solutions are widely shared and adopted across the region.
- Activity 3.1.4.4. Carry out outreach and promote best practices via global platforms: Under this activity, the project will leverage existing global platforms like IW: LEARN conference and Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (RSCAPs) meetings to promote collaboration and disseminate lessons learned from the project, fostering cross-regional cooperation on Blue Economy initiatives. Best practices will be highlighted through engagement with international platforms and events, drawing from experiences in the Aral Sea, Black Sea, and Mediterranean regions. Targeted contributions to GEF IW:LEARN will include case studies, technical reports, and participation in global learning exchanges. Regular engagement with RSCAPs will be ensured, expert exchanges.
- Activity 3.1.4.5. Develop and implement the gender-responsive communication and outreach strategy: At inception, a communication and outreach strategy will be developed. The strategy will include the development of public awareness tools such as fact sheets, infographics, and multimedia content will be created to engage wider audiences. These will be disseminated both digitally and through printed publications and targeted outreach to decision-makers. The project will also utilize awareness-raising platforms, such as Caspian Sea Day, to showcase successful case studies and encourage broader stakeholder participation.
- Activity 3.1.4.6. Development of project exit strategy: A comprehensive exit strategy will be designed to facilitate the seamless transition of Project activities, knowledge products, and institutional mechanisms to relevant national and regional stakeholders. The exit strategy will outline clear roles and responsibilities, capacity-building measures for sustaining Project outcomes, and mechanisms for continued stakeholder engagement beyond the Project's duration

Project Coordination (World Bank; UNEP). Because both the World Bank and UNEP receive GEF finance for implementation under the same GEF allocation, the concerned institutions will ensure synergy, strong collaboration and coordination, even though they are separate from a fiduciary management point of view.

Mechanisms for information sharing and collaboration will be established to ensure overall coherence and complementarity across national and regional components of the project.

Approach to Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E). The project M&E is designed for accountability, transparency, communication, learning, and project management support. M&E activities will (a) track the progress of the project, (b) generate information about the status of project activities, (c) analyze and aggregate data generated at regional and national levels, and (d) document and disseminate key lessons learned and good practices from the project activities to stakeholders in participating countries and beyond the region.

Each executing agency—the Tehran Convention Interim Secretariat, TCIS, (UNEP) and UNOPS—will assume responsibility for monitoring and evaluation on behalf of their respective implementing partners. This includes coordination of national- and regional-level reporting, data collection, indicator tracking, and contributions to joint learning outputs.

The World Bank and UNEP will conduct internal midterm reviews for the national and regional components to assess implementation progress toward the achievement of the project development objectives and outcomes. This review will also evaluate early signs of project success or identify challenges, with the aim of proposing adjustments to strengthen delivery in the second half of the project, if any. At project completion, Terminal Evaluation report will be prepared.

Project monitoring will be carried out twice per year and is the responsibility of project execution entities. M&E will provide the overall monitoring of information collection with regard to the project activities progress as well as compliance with the ESF standards and fiduciary regulations. The M&E information will inform any policy adjustments and decision-making needed to successfully achieve project results. The M&E reports will also provide details on the progress made as part of the Gender Action Plan actions and respective indicators, with regular data collection across all components.

Project Sustainability. The project is committed to ensuring that its outcomes and benefits continue well beyond its completion in the context of the Tehran Convention platform, the Secretariat of the Convention is provided by the UNEP Regional Office for Europe. The project design has been developed to embed sustainability through several key activities, ensuring the long-term continuation and institutionalization of project results. The project ensures long-term sustainability through structured training, knowledge transfer, and capacity-building which are anchored in the structure of the Tehran Convention and its Protocols. A comprehensive capacity-building program will focus on providing training and transferring knowledge to government agencies, institutions, and local communities. This will include technical workshops, specialized training, and the strengthening the Caspian Environment Information Center as a platform for ongoing knowledge sharing. These initiatives will equip stakeholders with the skills and expertise necessary to sustain the project's benefits and expand interventions after the project concludes.

The sustainability of the project will also be reinforced through Output 3.1.4, which establishes a robust regional knowledge exchange and outreach platform to share key lessons, best practices, and technical resources among stakeholders across the Caspian Sea region. This initiative will ensure that knowledge generated through the project, particularly on pollution, biodiversity conservation, and climate adaptation, remains accessible and continues to inform decision-making. The development and dissemination of knowledge products, such as technical reports, policy guidelines, and capacity-building materials, will facilitate the transfer of expertise to future initiatives. Policy recommendations and other knowledge products will be disseminated through platforms such as the Tehran Convention and its web-based Caspian Environment Information Centre (CEIC). The CEIC will serve as a regional web-based knowledge platform to facilitate learning and collaboration. Strengthening the CEIC as a dynamic knowledge hub will enable long-term access to critical resources, fostering collaboration and engagement among stakeholders.

Furthermore, outreach efforts through global platforms like IW: LEARN and Regional Seas Conventions will promote best practices beyond the region, supporting sustained cooperation and knowledge-sharing.

The project will leverage existing mechanisms under the Tehran Convention among the Caspian states to ensure that the necessary capacities are developed to independently carry forward the results by the time the project concludes. This exit strategy will build upon these established frameworks, with clear milestones for the withdrawal of UNEP support, while continuing to utilize regional collaboration and existing structures to ensure a smooth transition. Continued mentoring will be provided to facilitate this process and ensure long-term sustainability.

The project design anticipates that the expected results will endure after its completion. Strong ownership and active involvement of government stakeholders are vital to ensuring the sustainability of project results. The project aligns its activities with national and regional priorities, including those outlined under the Tehran Convention (TC) and other relevant regional agreements. By embedding interventions into national and regional governance structures, the project strengthens institutional frameworks for marine biodiversity conservation (Ashgabat Protocol), pollution management (Moscow Protocol), and Blue Economy initiatives. The project's alignment with these frameworks ensures that its outcomes will continue to be prioritized in future policy and planning.

The sustainability of the project is closely linked to the involvement of regional initiatives, such as the Tehran Convention, the Caspian Economic Forum, CAB, CASPCOM, national and local governments, local communities and civil society entities, regional think tanks, universities, academia, the private sector, and other relevant stakeholders. This broad engagement ensures that project priorities are aligned with the visions and objectives of partners, fostering synergies with national and regional priorities. It also helps leverage large-scale funding for urban, regional coastal development, and resilience.

The project directly contributes to the implementation of the Tehran Convention's protocols, which the Caspian states have legally committed to. For instance, development of the regional frameworks for policy coherence addressing pollution, biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation, coupled with related capacity-building activities, support the implementation of the Moscow Protocol on Pollution from Land-Based Sources and Activities. Additionally, the ecosystem-based adaptation measures aimed at protecting biodiversity, such as establishing coastal and marine protected areas, advance the goals of the Ashgabat Protocol on Biological Diversity and the global Convention on Biological Diversity.

The project also contributes to the work of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment, as well as the Environmental Monitoring Program under the Tehran Convention. By supporting the collection of environmental indicators and, the project enhances the Caspian countries' capacity to develop and implement the Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment, and Information Exchange. Furthermore, the upgrade of the Caspian Environment Information Centre will support climate adaptation efforts and other environmental protection initiatives under the Tehran Convention.

By embedding these strategies into the project design, the sustainability of the project's results is assured, and the necessary systems and structures are put in place to ensure that the benefits will continue long after the project has concluded. This integrated approach ensures that the project will leave a lasting positive impact, contributing to ongoing environmental resilience and sustainable development in the region.

Gender. Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan exhibit varying degrees of gender equality, with notable achievements and persistent challenges. In Kazakhstan, significant progress has been made in education and health, with virtually eliminated gender disparities in education and higher life expectancy for women. However, cultural norms and economic disparities persist, with women earning about two-thirds of what men earn and facing barriers in accessing services, finance, and information. In Azerbaijan, women face challenges

in labor force participation and decision-making power, with entrenched social norms limiting their economic empowerment. Similarly, in Turkmenistan, while there have been improvements in women's representation in national parliaments, gender-based violence and limited economic opportunities for women remain significant issues.

Overall, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan rank low on gender equality across socio-economic dimensions based on the Global Gender Gap Index in 2025. The Caspian Sea region as a whole is assessed to have 69 percent parity between men and women, with Azerbaijan ranking 100th in the world in the index and Kazakhstan ranking 92nd. A ranking for Turkmenistan is not available due to data constraints.

In Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, women are indispensable in tackling the complex challenges posed by climate change. As primary caretakers of household and community well-being, they are often on the frontline of climate impacts — especially in areas particularly vulnerable to environmental shifts. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and changes in precipitation patterns tend to disproportionately affect women's livelihoods, notably those working in agriculture and rural settings. Similarly, biodiversity loss affects women disproportionately, as they are frequently responsible for gathering food, medicinal plants, and other natural resources essential for household survival. The degradation of ecosystems threatens these traditional roles, making it imperative to integrate women's knowledge into conservation efforts. In coastal communities of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, women are often more engaged in processing, small-scale trade, and household-level aquaculture, while men tend to dominate industrial fisheries, oil and gas operations, and formal tourism employment. These gendered roles influence who benefits from, and who is most vulnerable to, environmental degradation and economic shifts in the Caspian Sea region. At the same time, across the three countries, women typically carry a disproportionate share of unpaid care and household responsibilities, which increases their dependence on local ecosystem services (such as clean water and nearshore resources) and limits their mobility when climate or pollution-related disruptions occur.

Cultural and social norms across the region often constrain women's access to decision-making and control over natural resources, affecting their ability to benefit equally from fisheries, tourism, and other Caspian Sea-related income streams. Despite progress in education, women remain underrepresented in STEM fields in all the three countries, which translates into limited participation in environmental monitoring, conservation science, and policy-making. Women often face more limited access than men to training, modern technologies, and financing for pollution monitoring, biodiversity management, and conservation activities, constraining their ability to benefit from and contribute to sustainable practices. Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) remains at an early stage in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, with limited application to environmental sectors. Strengthening GRB could help ensure that resources for pollution management, biodiversity conservation, and climate adaptation address women's and men's needs equitably.

The project, through all components, will have direct impacts on women in the project target areas.

Given the socio-economic and cultural contexts of the three participating countries, gender roles influence access to natural resources, decision-making power, and economic opportunities in environmental sectors, including fisheries, coastal management, etc. Gender equality will form part of the project. The project, through all components, will have direct impacts on women in the project target areas. Given the socio-economic and cultural contexts of the three participating countries, gender roles influence access to natural resources, decision-making power, and economic opportunities in environmental sectors, including fisheries, coastal management, etc. Gender equality will form part of the project implementation, such as (but not limited to) gender-responsive and participatory stakeholder engagement. Gender considerations have been integrated in the project intervention (incl. results framework) based on the Gender Action Plan (GAP). This will allow gender to be monitored as part of the project's standard M&E framework. The national-level activities, executed by UNOPS on behalf of the World Bank, will include gender-responsive measures aimed at promoting equal participation and benefit for women, particularly in capacity-building programs and stakeholder engagement. Similarly, UNEP, through the Tehran Convention Interim Secretariat, will address

gender considerations within its regional activities to ensure inclusive representation in transboundary policy dialogue and cooperation efforts.

The project's gender-responsive approach is also expected to generate tangible socio-economic benefits by improving women's access to training, technologies, and financing in pollution monitoring, biodiversity management, and conservation activities. These measures will help create new opportunities for women in coastal communities, particularly in fisheries, aquaculture, and eco-tourism, thereby enhancing household incomes and strengthening local economies.

As part of regular reporting requirements, the project will report on progress toward gender equality and women's empowerment, highlighting inclusive participation in their respective interventions. Gender-disaggregated indicators will be used, where applicable, to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of gender-related actions. The results will be regularly tracked and reported. To measure the effectiveness of the proposed gender actions, the project will disaggregate respective intermediate results indicators (IRIs), with gender-disaggregated results and outcomes will be monitored and reported regularly. See also the Results Framework and the Gender Action Plan for additional details.

Beneficiaries and Stakeholders. The primary target group is the coastal people in three Caspian Sea riparian countries—Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. The people in the coastal areas of the countries will eventually benefit from the technical assistance provided to the country in pollution monitoring and biodiversity monitoring and planning. The focus is on ensuring a clean and productive Caspian Sea that supports fish reproduction and natural areas for recreation. Moreover, the project will aim to bring benefits to a wide range of stakeholders including the public and private sectors as well as a wider population.

Relevant stakeholders under this project will be crucial to achieve the projects outcomes, including GEBs. They will be engaged throughout all components. Through their respective mandates, national government institutions and government officials will be key to develop, adopt and enforce coherent policies and legal frameworks that will heavily contribute to GEBs under Components 1, 2, and 3. Research institutes, including the Kazakh Scientific and Research Institute of the Caspian Sea (KSRICS) and other research institutes (national and regional working on the Caspian Sea) will provide technical inputs, baseline studies, M&E support; primary data (reports, analyses), ecological monitoring, technical backstopping, engage in project activities on monitoring and biodiversity planning, as well as biodiversity and pollution data collection, scenario modelling; etc. Capacity building and awareness raising and outreach activities across all components will share knowledge inside and outside the project with relevant stakeholders and initiatives at national, regional and global level. Women will be targeted under capacity building and awareness training and knowledge exchanges across all components, as well as representatives of NGOs and CSOs. The table below provides further details of the stakeholder groups, their roles and contribution to GEBs

Stakeholder Engagement. The project is being prepared under the World Bank's Environment and Social Framework (ESF) and UNEP environmental, social and sustainability framework. The World Bank's Environmental and Social Standard 10 recognizes the importance of open and transparent engagement with all stakeholders, based on the recognition that effective stakeholder engagement can improve E&S sustainability of Program activities, enhance project acceptance, and implementation, and allow stakeholders to contribute to the project design. The key objectives of stakeholder engagement include a) an assessment of the level of interest and support of the Project by stakeholders to promote effective and inclusive engagement with all project-affected parties and b) to ensure that Project information on E&S risks and impacts is disclosed in a timely and understandable way.

Stakeholder engagement has been addressed through separate Stakeholder Engagement Plans, prepared independently by each implementing agency in line with their respective institutional policies and requirements. The SEP for the national-level activities, implemented by UNOPS on behalf of the World Bank,

outlines a structured approach to stakeholder identification, engagement, and consultation, with specific provisions for engaging vulnerable groups. It also includes a dedicated Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM), aligned with the World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework, to ensure concerns raised by project-affected people are addressed effectively. The project will adopt a gender-mainstreamed approach to stakeholder engagement by ensuring balanced participation of women and men from riparian communities, government institutions, academia, and civil society in consultations, training, and decision-making processes.

In parallel, UNEP, through the Tehran Convention Interim Secretariat, has developed a separate SEP for the regional-level activities. This SEP defines the approach to stakeholder engagement within the transboundary context of the project, including information dissemination, consultation methods, and its own GRM in accordance with UNEP policies and safeguards. As part of the UNEP appendices package, stakeholders are further detailed in Appendix 6: Gender, Stakeholder Plans, Stakeholder Response Mechanism (SRM) and Personnel ToRs, including Attachment 6b: Stakeholder Engagement Plan and Attachment 6c: Stakeholder Response Mechanism (SRM). These documents provide specific identification of stakeholders, their interests, potential project impacts, influence, and roles in delivery, ensuring accountability and transparency in engagement.

Each SEP includes a monitoring plan for its implementation and will be executed and reported on independently by the respective agency, ensuring accountability and alignment with their institutional stakeholder engagement standards.

Key stakeholders (at national and regional levels) have been consulted since the concept stage of the proposed project in an inclusive manner, which include central governments, research institutes, local government entities responsible for pollution monitoring, biodiversity conservation, NGOs, development partners. Their inputs have informed the project design, which includes the type of intervention, site selection, identification of potential E&S risks and impacts and their mitigations and implementation arrangements.

At the regional level, a range of institutional, private sector, and civil society stakeholders have been identified, including CASPCOM (environmental monitoring and climate data), the Commission for the conservation and rational use of aquatic biological resources and management of shared stocks of such resources of the Caspian Sea (sustainable fisheries), the High-level Legal Group under the Caspian Sea legal status convention (regional legal frameworks), the Caspian Economic Forum (regional economic cooperation), and UN entities (UNDP, UN-Habitat, WMO). In addition, private sector actors from oil and gas (e.g., BP Azerbaijan, KazMunayGas, Dragon Oil), transport (e.g., Caspian Pipeline Consortium, ASCO, Kazmortransflot), and aquaculture (e.g., Azerbaijan Fish Farm LLC, Organic Fish) are key stakeholders, with strong influence on project outcomes through their practices, investments, and partnerships. Their interests, influence, and engagement mechanisms are detailed in Appendix 6, Attachment 6b.

Inclusive and participatory monitoring minimizes misconceptions and misunderstandings about the Project and maintain a positive perception about the Project. The SEPs will be monitored based on both qualitative reporting and quantitative reporting linked to results indicators on stakeholder engagement and grievance performance. Monitoring will verify compliance and effectiveness of the SEPs and application of the recommended standards, stakeholder engagement and implementation of the GRM.

Knowledge Management and Communication Strategy. The project will follow principles that will guide national and regional collaboration on Knowledge Management and Learning (KML), communications, gender and stakeholder engagement, and coordination and reporting, as well as monitoring and evaluation (M&E). These reporting frameworks will be agreed upon during the inception phase of the implementation period.

Communication for the Caspian Sea project will be managed through separate communication strategies, developed independently by each implementing agency to support their respective projects. The national-level communication strategy, led by UNOPS on behalf of the World Bank, focuses on effectively informing stakeholders about project activities and outcomes within Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. It emphasizes awareness raising, stakeholder engagement, and the promotion of behavior change to enhance national ownership and sustainability.

Concurrently, UNEP, through the Tehran Convention Interim Secretariat, will develop a distinct communication strategy for the regional component, aimed at fostering regional cooperation, transboundary dialogue, and advocacy on marine pollution and biodiversity issues. Both strategies prioritize inclusive communication approaches, the use of digital platforms, and tailored messaging, but will be implemented separately in accordance with the respective institutional mandates and target audiences. Each strategy contributes independently to the visibility and sustainability of the project's outcomes, in line with the overarching theory of change.

The project will raise awareness about the challenges facing the Caspian Sea and the potential for a sustainable Blue Economy transition. Targeted campaigns will inform stakeholders, including governments, local communities, and the private sector, about the project's objectives, activities, and anticipated outcomes.

Advocacy efforts will focus on influencing policies at regional and national levels to promote the adoption of integrated coastal management practices, biodiversity protection, and climate change adaptation measures. This will include engaging policymakers and regional decision-makers through high-level workshops and roundtables. The project will mobilize local communities and stakeholders by building local ownership of the project's outcomes and encouraging participation in capacity-building activities. This will be achieved through stakeholder consultations, community workshops, and regional events.

The project's behavior change efforts will focus on encouraging sustainable practices, such as the adoption of nature-based solutions and climate adaptation strategies. Workshops, training programs, and information dissemination will empower stakeholders to adopt these practices and integrate them into local and regional governance frameworks.

Digital platforms will be critical in disseminating project updates and engaging stakeholders. The project will use social media channels (Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook) to provide real-time updates and promote the visibility of key milestones. Additionally, the project website will serve as a central hub for sharing detailed reports, publications, and knowledge products.

Communication for the Caspian Sea project will be guided by two separate communication strategies, developed and implemented independently by the respective executing agencies, in line with their institutional mandates and target audiences.

- For the national component, implemented by UNOPS on behalf of the World Bank, the communication strategy aims to effectively inform stakeholders in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan about project objectives, activities, and results. It focuses on raising awareness, stakeholder engagement, behavior change, and the use of digital tools to foster ownership and long-term sustainability.

- For the regional component, implemented by UNEP through the Tehran Convention Interim Secretariat, a separate communication strategy has been developed to promote transboundary dialogue, regional cooperation, and advocacy on marine pollution and biodiversity conservation. This strategy will be implemented in line with UNEP's institutional communication standards and may be supported by the UNEP Communications Division to ensure strategic visibility and alignment with UNEP's global messaging.

The project's Knowledge Management (KM) approach tackles critical gaps in climate, pollution, and biodiversity data and capacity across the Caspian region by leveraging the Tehran Convention framework and its CEIC platform to generate, standardize, and disseminate actionable knowledge. Under Component 3, it

delivers targeted products—regional technical assessments (climate vulnerability, pollution, biodiversity, ecosystem services), policy frameworks (IRB/ICZM/MSP/BE, pollution prevention, regional climate adaptation), capacity-building packages and guidelines, and outreach materials—while using inclusive mechanisms such as online consultations, validation workshops, cross-country exchanges, sectoral roundtables, and four in-person trainings (IRB, ICZM, MSP, BE). Results are shared via CEIC and IW:LEARN, aligned with M&E to track effectiveness and uptake, and coordinated by the Tehran Convention Secretariat, which updates an annual KM workplan and implements a communication strategy; USD 238,125 is allocated to output 3.1.4 for regional knowledge exchange and outreach. Sustainability is pursued by embedding products in policies, institutionalizing trainings, and promoting replication (e.g., lessons from Aral/Black/Mediterranean Seas) with active engagement of policymakers, donors, private sector, and civil society. For more information, see Appendix 9: Knowledge Management Plan.

The stakeholder engagement strategy focuses on building strong partnerships with key regional and local actors, ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are actively involved throughout the project’s lifecycle. The engagement process will include:

- Stakeholders will be engaged via the Tehran Convention platform and they include primarily government institutions, regional bodies, local communities, private sector actors, and civil society organizations.
- Local communities, NGOs, and private sector representatives will be actively engaged through consultations, workshops, and sector-specific roundtables. These efforts will ensure that their voices are heard, and their concerns addressed, fostering a sense of ownership and ensuring the relevance of the project. Knowledge products and communication materials will be designed to highlight gender-differentiated roles, vulnerabilities, and contributions, showcasing women as agents of change in conservation, climate resilience, and pollution reduction. The communication strategy will use inclusive language and channels that reach both women and men, with particular attention to ensuring accessibility for women in rural and coastal communities.

Both the PCU and the RCU will utilize a variety of digital platforms to engage stakeholders. These include:

- Caspian Environment Information Center which is a central online platform where stakeholders can access detailed information on the project, including progress reports, assessments, and knowledge products.
- Webinars and Virtual Workshops on the occasion of Caspian Sea Day (12 August)
- Digital workshops and webinars will be organized to allow stakeholders to participate remotely, facilitating broader engagement across the Caspian region.
- Regular updates and engagement via social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, LinkedIn) will help engage stakeholders in real-time and promote interactive discussions around project topics.

In addition, collaboration with Regional and International Partners: The project will also collaborate with regional platforms like the Caspian Economic Forum, CAB, CASPCOM, and international development organizations, enhancing cross-border cooperation and ensuring the project’s activities align with regional policies and frameworks.

To enhance engagement and ensure the effective dissemination of project findings, the project will employ a variety of digital tools and techniques, including infographics, dynamic visualizations, dashboards, and other interactive content.

Infographics will be used to simplify complex information and present key data and project findings in an easily accessible format. These visual aids will be shared through the project’s website, social media, and during stakeholder meetings.

Interactive maps and visualizations will allow stakeholders to explore data related to the state of biodiversity, pollution levels, and climate vulnerabilities in the Caspian region. These tools will help stakeholders better understand the environmental challenges and potential solutions, encouraging informed decision-making. The

project will produce and share knowledge products such as reports, case studies, and toolkits. These products will be accessible online on the Caspian Environment Information Center and will also be distributed at project events, ensuring that information is available to a wide audience.

The effectiveness of the communication strategies at regional and national levels will be assessed regularly through stakeholder 1) Engagement Metrics: Monitoring attendance and participation rates in webinars, workshops, and roundtables; 2) Website Analytics: Tracking website traffic and user engagement, including downloads of reports, infographics, and knowledge products; and 3) Social Media Engagement: Evaluating the reach and engagement of posts on social media platforms.

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Institutional Arrangement and Coordination with Ongoing Initiatives and Project.

Please describe the Institutional Arrangements for the execution of this project, including financial management and procurement. If possible, please summarize the flow of funds (diagram), accountabilities for project management and financial reporting (organogram), including audit, and staffing plans. (max. 500 words, approximately 1 page)

Changes Implementation/Execution arrangements since PIF submission. At PIF Stage, the plan was that the WB would be the GEF Implementing Agency and UNEP would be the Executing Agency. However, on August 8, 2024, UNEP informed the Bank that it could no longer be the executing agency for

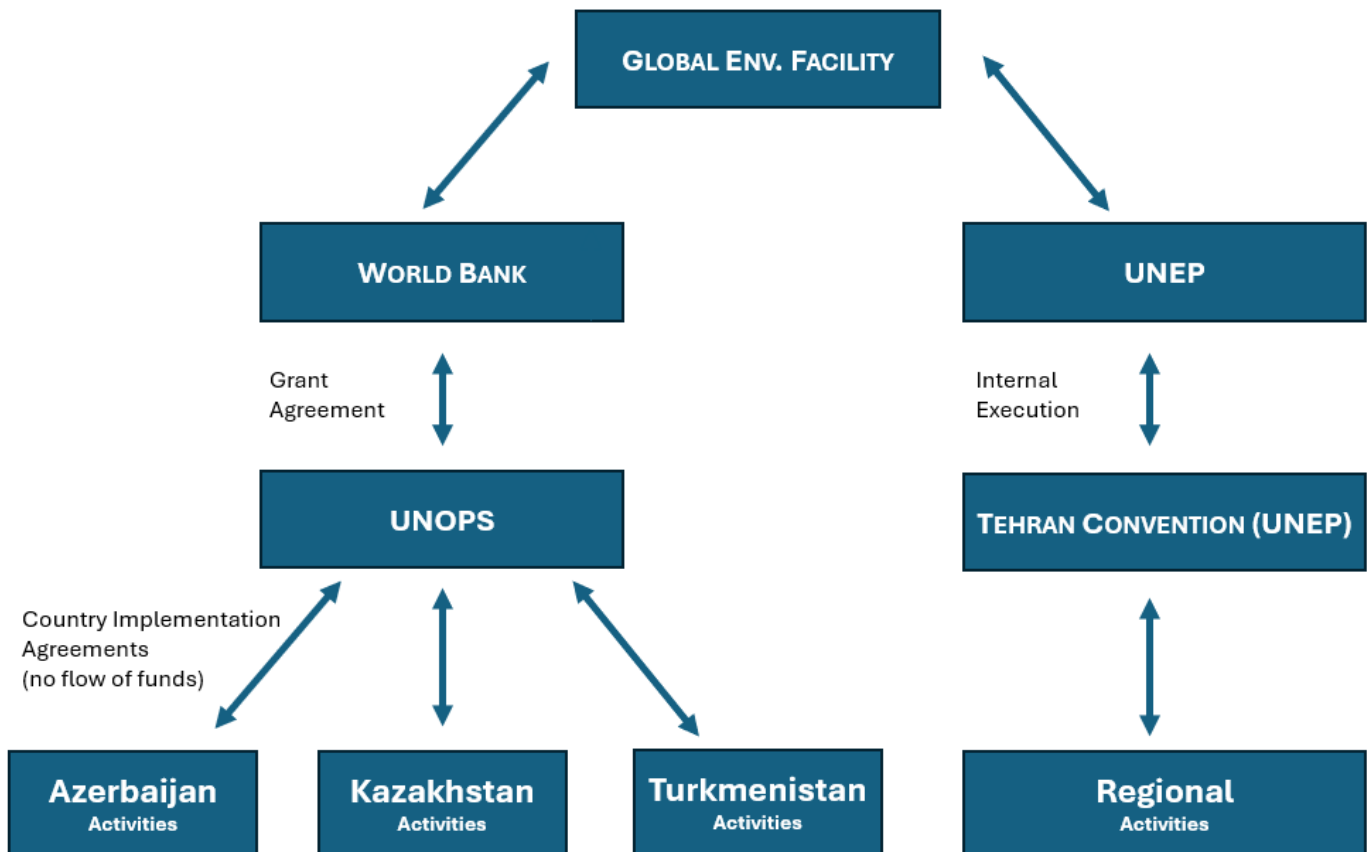
the entire project. This is because UNEP's Operational Guidelines for Implementing the Accountability Framework for Internally Executed GEF projects stipulate that UNEP cannot execute GEF projects for other GEF implementing agencies to maintain clear accountability to the GEF.

Consequently, it was no longer possible to have the UNEP administered Tehran Convention Interim Secretariat as Executing Agency for the entirety of the project. The revised implementation arrangement has been discussed and agreed with the GEF Secretariat, UNEP and the World Bank and the required revised “Letters of Endorsement” from the three focus countries, “Letter of Support” for Internal Execution by UNEP from the three focus countries, and the “Agency Notification on Project Transfer Memo” signed by the Bank and UNEP have been accepted by the GEF Secretariat.

Tehran Convention Interim Secretariat, TCIS (UNEP) as Executing Agency. The Tehran Convention is retained as executing agency because it supports coordinating legal frameworks for its five signatory states as it is the first legally binding agreement signed by all five Caspian littoral states: Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan. Specifically, the Convention ensures coordinated efforts on pollution and biodiversity and promotes regional cooperation to address pollution from land-based sources (The Moscow Protocol) and regional conservation of biological diversity (The Ashgabat Protocol). The execution services provided by UNEP through the Tehran Convention Secretariat are limited to delivering the regional activities of the project, which are closely aligned to the mandate of the Tehran Convention and its auxiliary Protocols and include regional assessments to on the state and trends of the Caspian Sea, regional frameworks on climate and integrated river basin, capacity building on integrated river basin management and marine spatial planning, and knowledge management and lessons learned through GEF IW:LEARN.

UNOPS as Executing Agency. As there is no other regional organization for the Caspian Sea that could play the role of an executing agency for the Bank provided GEF grant, the Bank turned to UNOPS with which the Bank has a similar project ongoing for the Black Sea (P173890, GEF ID 10563). UNOPS also acted as executing agency for the 2009-2017 Caspian Sea Program that was supported by GEF, UNDP, UNEP, WB and others. Hence, UNOPS has been identified as the most suitable option because of its distinct advantages and potential to add value to the project based on similar ongoing and past projects. UNOPS has over 20 years of experience in implementing environmental transboundary international waters (IW) projects and is a trusted partner of the GEF, UNDP, UNEP, and the World Bank and has a solid methodology for engaging local and regional entities, placing a strong emphasis on building the capacity of these institutions while working to achieve the outcomes of the projects. In September 2024 the Bank, the Bank and UNOPS agreed to proceed with the collaboration on the Blueing the Caspian Sea Project. A Project preparation grant to UNOPS was approved on March 19, 2024, and signed on April 25, 2025.

Figure 1. Illustration of the Co-Implementation Arrangements



Project Coordination Unit (UNOPS). A Project Coordination Unit (PCU) for national activities will be housed at UNOPS. In each of the three countries, a national project Focal Point would be designated by the government to ensure engagement of relevant national institutions and a designated national project Liaison Person for communications and monitoring the project calendar. The UNOPS PCU will be responsible for the overall coordination of its activities and will, among others, (a) oversee the preparation of annual work plans and (b) prepare progress and other reports, as required by the GEF through the World Bank. The PCU will be housed at the UNOPS Multi-Country Office in Vienna, Austria, where a cost sharing arrangement of administrative and support functions will be shared with a parallel GEF-WB Blueing the Black Sea project.

Regional Coordination Unit (TCIS/UNEP). A Regional Coordination Unit (RCU) for regional activities will be housed at the Tehran Convention Interim Secretariat (TCIS). The RCU will be housed by TCIS in the UNEP Europe office in Geneva, Switzerland, where the Tehran Interim Convention Secretariat is located. In each of the three countries, a National Focal point would be designated by the Government to ensure that the project engages with the relevant national institutions.

The PCU at UNOPS and the RCU at TCIS (UNEP) will coordinate on a regular basis to provide updates and ensure cohesiveness of project activities.

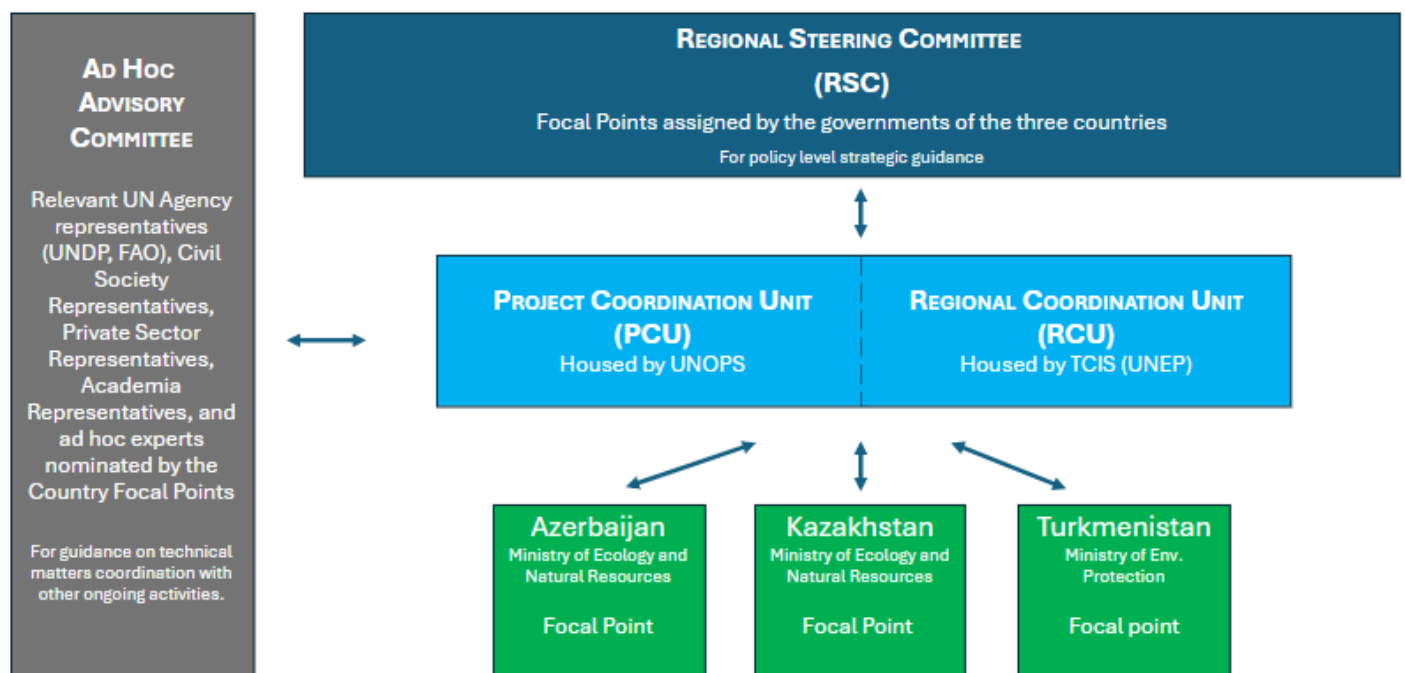
WB-UNEP Coordination. Because both the World Bank and UNEP receive GEF finance for implementation under the same GEF allocation (GEF-8 Project ID 11429, \$3.50m to UNEP and \$8.24m to WB), the concerned institutions have interest that ensuring synergy, strong collaboration and coordination, even though they are separate from a fiduciary management point of views. In practice, the World Bank Task Team and UNEP’s International Waters Unit will meet periodically to coordinate implementation support to the project.

Project governance arrangements. The project will have one **Regional Steering Committee (RSC)** that would approve the annual work program of **all** project activities executed by UNOPS and TCIS (UNEP). The

RSC will be co-chaired on a rotating basis by one senior representative of the three countries designated by their respective focal point ministry. Members will include representatives of national institutions related to the themes of the project (biodiversity and pollution) and a civil society representative from each country. The World Bank and UNEP will be invited as observers. UNDP will also be invited as observer due to the complementing GEF Project in Kazakhstan (UNEP PIMS 9727). The RSC will be set up during the first six months of implementation of the project and will meet at least once a year. Decisions of the Steering Committee will be reviewed and cleared by the Implementing Agencies to ensure compliance with the policies of both Implementing Agencies and with GEF Policies. A detailed terms of reference for the RSC will be developed ahead of the first RSC meeting as part of the Project Operations Manual (POM).

An **Ad Hoc Technical Advisory Committee** will be established to advise on specific technical issues and guidance on technical matters in coordination with other ongoing activities. Members of the Technical Advisory Committee would include representatives of academia, technical agencies, private sector, civil society organizations, fisheries committee(s) and other stakeholders including existing committees that are part of the Tehran Convention.

Figure 2. Project Governance Arrangements



Key personnel for the PCU at UNOPS will be responsible for the overall coordination, implementation, and monitoring, including procurement, financial management (FM), and compliance with the Environmental and Social Framework (ESF) of activities implemented by GEF funds provided via the World Bank. It will oversee the preparation of annual work plans and submit progress and other reports as required by the GEF through the World Bank. The PCU will consist of a National Project Coordinator and a shared Administrative Senior Assistant. To ensure cost efficiencies, the project team will be supported through the shared services of the UNOPS Austria Multi-Country Office, such as HR, Procurement, Finance, M&E, Communication and Logistics that will directly support the project. The PCU will be responsible for the implementation of the M&E function and the M&E plan. The PCU will plan and implement M&E activities, engaging the national focal points for information collection and verification requirements. National consultants hired by UNOPS on a retainer basis will be engaged as needed to fulfill this function. UNOPS will further engage E&S experts to ensure compliance with ESF throughout the project life.

Key personnel for the RCU at TCIS (UNEP) will be responsible for activities implemented by GEF funds provided via UNEP. The project foresees the recruitment of a Regional Technical Coordinator and a Regional Project Assistant to ensure effective delivery of UNEP-led activities. The Regional Technical Coordinator will be responsible for the overall management and coordination of technical work under Component 3, including the development of technical terms of reference, procurement and contract management plans, and coordination with implementing agencies and related GEF projects. The Regional Technical Coordinator will oversee the design and quality-assurance of technical outputs such as regional assessments and cooperation frameworks, and lead the preparation of the Communication Strategy and knowledge management outputs, and coordinate activities with the Caspian Environmental Information Centre (CEIC). The Coordinator will further organize and lead regional consultations, capacity-building activities, industry roundtables and stakeholder engagement.. The role also covers reporting, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), including tracking progress against approved workplans, monitoring safeguards and knowledge management plans, preparing co-financing reports and developing the project’s exit strategy. The Regional Project Assistant will support the Regional Technical Coordinator and provide general administrative and technical assistance to the Regional Coordination Unit. This includes support in the preparation of financial and progress reports, meeting documentation, payments, and procurements, as well as providing support to the secretariat functions for the Regional Steering Committee and organize its meetings. The Assistant will contribute to the drafting of ToRs for consultants, facilitate regional training and consultation events, and provide logistical support for regional stakeholder engagement activities. The role also involves supporting the production of project reports, knowledge products, lessons learned, and best practices, while assisting in monitoring project progress and compiling data for reporting. More information on the TORs for key personnel in the PCU and RCO can be found ‘Annex TORs PMC-covered’

National Focal Institutions. To meet national-level implementation needs, each participating country—Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan—will designate a project Focal Point to coordinate with national institutions and a project Liaison Person to support communication and monitoring of the national project calendar. National focal institutions include:

- The Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Azerbaijan
- The Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan
- The Ministry of Environment Protection of Turkmenistan

The PCU will coordinate closely with these focal institutions and mobilize or contract national experts, as needed, to support the implementation of project activities, the Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP), and the Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM), including regular reporting. National agencies will provide technical guidance and support in alignment with observations of the Regional Steering Committee (RSC).

The PCU will be coordinating with the three national United Nations Country Teams in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan on order to look for alignments and synergies with other projects being implemented in the region.

Country Implementation Agreements (CIA). UNOPS and each national Government will enter into an operational “Country Implementation Agreement” or Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) (name and type of agreement to be confirmed with UNOPS legal) with each country to spell out the division of roles and responsibilities between UNOPS and each Government under the Project, in alignment with the grant agreement and Regional Steering Committee decisions. Each agreement will help UNOPS ensure that it has the necessary legal procedures in place to effectively execute the project, and that each Government takes the actions necessary to help UNOPS comply with its Grant Agreement, including environmental and social obligations.

UNOPS. Through its role in both the Caspian and Black Sea initiatives, UNOPS is contributing to a broader vision of marine ecosystem protection and sustainable blue economy development across Europe and Central Asia. This continuity strengthens institutional knowledge, fosters regional cooperation, and promotes scalable,

cross-border solutions to transboundary environmental challenges. With robust fiduciary systems, a regional presence, and a proven ability to deliver in complex, multi-stakeholder settings, UNOPS is well-positioned to operationalize the ambitions of the “Blueing the Caspian Sea” project and contribute meaningfully to long-term environmental sustainability in the region. In line with UNEP’s Gender Action Plan and international commitments under the CBD and UNFCCC, the project will foster gender-responsive cooperation by promoting equal participation of women and men in regional dialogues and decision-making processes, ensuring that women’s knowledge and leadership are integrated into scalable, cross-border solutions. UNEP will implement activities via the Tehran Convention Interim Secretariat (TCIS), which serves as the executing agency. UNEP is responsible for supervision and overseeing activities as entrusted to them by the GEF. This entails responsibility for fund utilization and ensuring funds are used by TCIS solely for the purposes for which the grant was provided, and UNEP is overall accountable for their activities. UNEP will be responsible for quality assurance procedures, the review and clearance of their quarterly expenditure and progress reports and clearing disbursements. TCIS, in its capacity as Executing Agency, manages and executes activities in line with the approved project design and guidance from the Regional Steering Committee.

The role of TCIS (UNEP) is to coordinate, manage, and administer the day-to-day activities of the Regional component (Component 3). The responsibilities of TCIS include:

- a. Serve as executing agency for UNEP’s activities, as outlined above.
- b. Be responsible for the management of the financial and human resources related to its project activities
- c. Be responsible for timely and efficient delivery of the UNEP activities according to the project document and work plan (including implementation of gender action plan and stakeholder engagement plan).
- d. Be responsible for preparing expenditure reports (only for its UNEP activities) to the UNEP as its IA and provide progress updates to UNOPS for consolidated reporting to both IAs.
- e. Be accountable to the UNEP as IA and the PSC for the achievement of its project outputs and outcomes
- f. Be guided by its IA and the Regional Steering Committee in undertaking its responsibilities
- g. Undertake an all-partnership approach and build a consortium of partners to execute different activities of the project
- h. Organize an annual financial audit and transmit the report to the UNEP as its IA
- i. Any such other activities identified by Regional Steering Committee in all matters concerning the project

Monitoring & Evaluation. The project M&E is designed for accountability, transparency, communication, learning, and for project management support. M&E activities under national activities (WB) and regional activities (UNEP) will (a) track the progress of the project, (b) generate the information about the status of project activities, (c) analyze and aggregate data generated at regional and national levels, and (d) document and disseminate the key lessons learned and good practices from the project activities to stakeholders in participating countries and outside of the region. Halfway into the project, the World Bank and UNEP, with support from UNOPS and TCIS, will conduct internal midterm reviews to assess the implementation progress toward achieving the project objectives and outcomes specified in the PDO. It will also assess early signs of project success or challenges with the goal of proposing and recommending changes to strengthen the project over the second half of its lifetime. At the project completion stage, UNOPS and TCIS will produce the beneficiary’s implementation completion and results report.

Will the GEF Agency play an execution role on this project?

Yes

If so, please describe that role here and the justification.

Justification for self-execution and firewalls/operational arrangements: Under the World Bank-UNEP co-implementation arrangement for the project, UNEP will have self-execution of the regional component (component 3) to capitalize on UNEP's important role as host of the Tehran Convention Secretariat. UNEP has a convening power across the five littoral states of the Caspian Sea, alignment with Convention frameworks, and on-the-ground capability of UNEP's Regional Office for Europe (UNEP ROE) while ensuring delivery remains fully within UN/GEF standards.

Segregation of accountability. Recognizing that internal execution is generally limited to exceptional cases, UNEP will take necessary measures to separate implementation and execution duties to ensure segregation of accountability and financial management roles. UNEP Ecosystems Division will serve as the Implementing entity, and TCIS (UNEP Europe Office) as the executing agency. UNEP's implementation and supervision of the regional component would be strictly covered by the Agency Fee. TCIS's role as executing agency for the regional component and associated budget, and accountability for the execution of its activities, will be clearly defined in the Internal Cooperation Agreement (ICA) between UNEP Ecosystems Division and UNEP Europe Office. Firewalls and operational safeguards include: segregation of implementation and execution functions between agencies; explicit designation of responsible UNEP roles (Director/GEF EC/Portfolio/Task Manager) and adherence to UNEP's Accountability Framework (projects internally executed are treated as "projects at risk," triggering enhanced fiduciary oversight and segregation-of-duties controls); early consultation and justification of modality, and letters/support clarifying partner roles per GEF guidance. These measures ensure independence of decision-making, transparent fiduciary controls, and avoidance of conflicts of interest while leveraging UNEP's unique position to deliver regional cooperation results.

UNEP's comparative advantage is its mandate to coordinate the work of the UN in the area of environment, and its proven track record as an efficient GEF Implementing Agency (IA) specializing in regional and global activities. UNEP's expertise includes proof of concept, testing of ideas, and the best available science and knowledge to form the basis of GEF investments. Additionally, through its role in administering the Tehran Convention Secretariat ad interim, UNEP facilitates regional cooperation among all five Caspian littoral states, supporting implementation of the Convention's protocols. It is uniquely positioned to support ecosystem-wide application of the project's outputs and expected outcomes, beyond only the three participating countries. UNEP leverages its global expertise and networks to enhance environmental governance, capacity-building, and knowledge exchange in the region. This role strengthens south-south cooperation by fostering dialogue among Caspian states and linking them to broader international frameworks and best practices in biodiversity conservation and pollution prevention. UNEP plays a central role in advancing pollution prevention, biodiversity conservation, and climate adaptation through its mandates and partnerships. As the Secretariat to multiple MEAs (Convention on Biological Diversity, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, BRS Conventions), for which GEF serves as a financial mechanism, UNEP supports countries in implementing global commitments related to these issues. Through its various initiatives, UNEP has built a broad network of partners to enhance coordination and knowledge-sharing on pollution control, ecosystem resilience, and climate adaptation strategies. These efforts provide a platform to engage with UNEP divisions, peer agencies, and partners, while fostering collaboration with governments, businesses, NGOs, and academia at global, regional, national, and sub-national levels to drive integrated and science-based solutions.

UNEP's extensive expertise in environmental governance, policy development, and regional cooperation makes it uniquely suited to lead this project. With decades of experience in Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (RSCAPs), UNEP provides technical guidance, policy recommendations, and capacity-building to ensure effective implementation. Its strong networks with governments and regional organizations enable seamless coordination, fostering a harmonized approach to environmental management. UNEP's expertise in ecosystem-based management, pollution control, and climate adaptation ensures alignment with global best practices and sustainability goals. Through scientific research, stakeholder engagement, and policy coherence, UNEP strengthens institutional capacities and promotes long-term

environmental resilience in the Caspian region. Finally, the Tehran Convention Secretariat plays a crucial role in fostering cooperation among countries bordering the Caspian Sea, drawing on its established network of experts to address shared environmental challenges.

UNEP, with its extensive expertise in transboundary environmental governance, is well-placed to implement this initiative in collaboration with national governments. UNEP's leadership, through the Tehran Convention Secretariat, ensures efficient coordination among stakeholders, minimizing redundancy and ensuring alignment with regional policies and existing frameworks. The integration of regional institutional strengthening, knowledge-sharing mechanisms, and policy harmonization further enhances financial efficiency by reducing fragmentation and optimizing resources for maximum environmental and economic impact. As the UN's principal body for the environment and the de facto Secretariat of the Tehran Convention, UNEP is uniquely placed to align the project's interventions with the Convention's legal and policy frameworks. By ensuring that the 'Bluing the Caspian Sea' project aligns with the Tehran Convention's priorities, UNEP can not only enhance the project's relevance but also foster a sense of continuity and regional cooperation. Connecting the project outcomes to ongoing commitments can also help in securing long-term support and maintaining momentum in addressing environmental challenges in the Caspian Sea.

Also, please add a short explanation to describe cooperation with ongoing initiatives and projects, including potential for co-location and/or sharing of expertise/staffing (max. 500 words, approximately 1 page)

At the global and regional levels, the project will actively coordinate with key initiatives through the Regional Steering Committee and the knowledge exchange and outreach activities. This collaboration will ensure alignment with existing efforts, facilitate knowledge sharing, and maximize synergies. Key partners include:

- Coordinating Committee on Hydrometeorology and Pollution Monitoring of the Caspian Sea (CASPCOM): the project will engage in data-sharing meetings, joint research activities, and collaborative assessments with CASPCOM to strengthen regional environmental monitoring and management
- Commission for the Conservation and Rational Use of Aquatic Biological Resources and Management of Shared Stocks of the Caspian Sea: coordination with the Commission will focus on research collaborations, policy development discussions, and joint initiatives to promote sustainable fisheries and biodiversity protection
- High-Level Group under the Caspian Sea Legal Status Convention: the project will leverage this group's legal advisory expertise to ensure regulatory alignment and strategic policy integration.
- Caspian Economic Forum: The project will engage with the Forum through policy dialogues and partnerships in Blue Economy development projects to enhance economic sustainability while promoting environmental responsibility.

Coordination with Ongoing TCIS (UNEP) Activities: The component 3 of the project will be fully embedded in the Tehran Convention process and its Secretariat (TCIS), ensuring strategic alignment, operational coherence, and shared learning across global, regional, national and local levels. Coordination will be driven by formal governance (Regional Steering Committee), structured technical interfaces (working groups, data and policy fora), and a common knowledge and communications backbone (CEIC, IW:LEARN, Regional Seas). This approach avoids duplication, accelerates implementation of Convention decisions and protocols, and maximizes co-benefits with partner initiatives.

The project components 1 and 2 at the national level will operate in close collaboration with the Tehran Convention National Convention Liaison Offices (NCLOs) and the designated line ministries in each country—Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan (Ministries of Ecology and Natural Resources) and Turkmenistan (Ministry of Environmental Protection)—as the single-window national focal points. These entities will bridge the regional RCU (hosted by TCIS/UNEP) and the national PCU (hosted by UNOPS) to (i) fast-track clearances and inter-agency coordination, (ii) secure timely access to data and experts, and (iii) structure inclusive stakeholder engagement at national and sub-national levels.

UNEP and International Partners: The project will collaborate with the World Meteorological Organization on climate research, data sharing, and policy development. Discussions with UN-Habitat will explore synergies with ongoing projects on climate resilience, adaptation measures, and spatial and marine coastal planning. These efforts include potential alignment with the Adaptation Fund project 'Building Climate Resilient Cities and Communities in the Republic of Azerbaijan,' executed by UNEP, UN-Habitat, and IOM.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The project will coordinate with the UNDP on initiatives such as the 'Addressing Marine Litter and Marine Plastic – a Systemic Approach in the Caspian Sea' project, focusing on managing land-based pollution sources impacting the Caspian Sea marine environment. In Kazakhstan specifically, on the project will coordinate with the UNDP GEF Project (GEF ID 11524, UNDP PIMS 9727) Executed by Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources (MENR) including a \$7.3m grant over 72 months (6 years) for the project entitled “Integrated Management of Seascapes of the Kazakhstani part of the Caspian Sea and Land Resources of Adjacent Territories.” In addition, at the national and local levels, the project will coordinate with relevant ongoing initiatives to identify gaps, opportunities for joint interventions, and ways to build on past efforts. Key coordination mechanisms include: National Ministries: the project will engage with the Azerbaijan Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, the Kazakhstan Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, and the Turkmenistan Ministry of Environment Protection. These ministries will serve as national focal points, linking governments with the regional project implementation unit housed by the Tehran Convention Secretariat and the national project implementation unit housed by UNOPS Private Sector: regular consultations through sectoral roundtables, capacity-building workshops, and policy coherence discussions will promote private sector participation Regional Steering Committee: co-chaired on a rotating basis by representatives from the three participating countries and UNOPS, the committee will align project efforts with sectoral policies and regional programs. It will also include representatives from relevant national institutions and civil society to ensure broad stakeholder involvement. See also table below.

To enhance knowledge exchange and cross-regional collaboration, the project will:

1. Provide regular updates to co-financers and invite them to participate in the Regional Steering Committee.
2. Promote collaboration and disseminate lessons learned through global platforms such as IW:LEARN and Regional Seas Conventions.
3. Organize joint knowledge-sharing events and webinars with related initiatives.
4. Consult with partner projects during the development of knowledge products (e.g. reports, training materials) to ensure alignment and complementarity.
5. Collaborate with other initiatives on disseminating project-generated knowledge through tailored communication materials.

The Tehran Convention Secretariat, provided ad interim by the UNEP Regional Office for Europe, will facilitate ongoing coordination with UNEP divisions, peer agencies, and key stakeholders at global, regional, national, and sub-national levels. Project activities will be shared through the Caspian Environment Information Center (CEIC) platform, ensuring broad dissemination and stakeholder engagement. Potential for co-location and/or sharing of expertise and staffing will be explored during the project inception phase. The UNEP Europe Office will provide strategic support through a Geneva-based Programme Officer, ensuring effective linkage between the project and the Tehran Convention process. This role will enhance institutional coordination, facilitate knowledge exchange, and support project implementation.

Additionally, the project will leverage the results of the GEF-financed Caspian Environment Programme (CEP), which was implemented by UNEP, UNDP, and the World Bank, and aimed to halt the deterioration of the environmental conditions of the Caspian Sea and promote sustainable development in the

region. In 2006, the CEP became part of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea (Tehran Convention) - a regional agreement of all five states bordering the Caspian Sea on safeguarding the marine environment and biodiversity of the Caspian Sea. The Convention seeks to increase cooperation on pollution prevention and control, environmental impact assessments, monitoring and assessment, and institutional and scientific cooperation. Through its UNEP-based Secretariat, the Convention has facilitated the development of an Environmental Monitoring Programme, which identifies monitoring institutions, standardizes methods, and sets water quality criteria; establishment of a Caspian Environment Information Centre; preparation of State of the Caspian Sea Environment reports; and conferences and awareness raising programs. It has also updated the Strategic Convention Action Plan (SCAP) and aligned countries' National Convention Action Plans (NCAPs) to ensure improved protection of the Caspian Sea environment. The project will support the implementation of the five regional Convention protocols with focus on improving capacity and enabling policies: (i) Protocol Concerning Regional Preparedness, Response and Co-operation in Combating Oil Pollution Incidents (Aktau Protocol); (ii) Protocol on the Conservation of Biodiversity (Ashgabat Protocol); (iii) Protocol for the Protection of the Caspian Sea against Pollution from Land-based Sources and Activities (Moscow Protocol); (iv) Protocol on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (EIA Protocol); (v) Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment, and Information Exchange.

The planned World Bank-financed Middle Trade and Transport Corridor: Opportunities and Challenges Advisory Services and Analytics (ASA) and Kazakhstan Railway Maintenance Project. The ASA analyzes trade, infrastructure, and regional development challenges and opportunities to enable the development of a continuity plan for the Middle Corridor (a trade route that goes through the Caspian Sea and links cargo coming from western China and Kazakhstan to Azerbaijan and onwards to Europe via the Black Sea basin). The ASA also analyzes sea level changes. The data will be used to determine nature-based solutions for ecosystem management and B conservation and also improve the capacity of regional and national governments for environmental management and for maintaining the stability of the Caspian ecosystem.

The Blueing the Black Sea Program (BBSEA, World Bank, P173890). This project supports the governments and the private sector in Georgia, Moldova, Türkiye, and Ukraine to reduce pollution in the Black Sea. The project finances and promotes eco-innovations to address the eutrophication in the Black Sea enabling public sector institutions, development partners, and potential investors to identify, verify, and invest in innovative pollution prevention and reduction solutions. Additionally, the Project (i) examines the countries' current regulatory frameworks and their alignment with international instruments on pollution related to water management, agriculture, aquaculture; and (ii) develop national investment recommendations and knowledge exchange on pollution reduction and management. The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) is the recipient and implementing entity of the Project. Lessons from the design the Black Sea project has informed the design of the Caspian Sea Project with regards to private sector engagement for the targeting of specific pollutants, policy harmonization among countries, and with the execution arrangement via UNOPS.

West Africa Coastal Areas Management Program (WACA, World Bank, P162337, P175525). The WACA program was developed in partnership with the West African people who live on the coast and depend on it for their livelihoods, nutrition, food security, and prosperity. The program supports countries' effort to improve the management of their shared coastal resources and reduce the natural and man-made risks affecting coastal communities. WACA boosts the transfer of knowledge, foster political dialogue among countries, and mobilize public and private finance to tackle coastal erosion, flooding, pollution and climate change adaptation. The WACA Program consists of country projects, regional integration and support activities, and a WACA Platform as mechanism to scale-up knowledge, dialogue and finance. Lessons from the design the WACA Program include (i) focus on outcomes on coastal resources including protection of habitat, pollution management (including GEF supported activities for off shore oil and gas pollution issues),

and (ii) the regional cooperation synergy among four types of regional institutions - the West African Economic and Monetary Union, The Abidjan Convention (a UNEP Regional Seas Convention), the Dakar-based Center for Ecological Monitoring, and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The table below summarizes Tehran Convention Secretariat-led and associated initiatives that will be coordinated under TCIS's facilitation); in this context, the proposed project will collaborate closely and pragmatically with these efforts. TCIS will maintain coherence across these efforts through early sharing of annual and mid-year plans, exchange of drafts and datasets via CEIC, concise annual check-ins (with ad-hoc technical huddles as needed), and a simple coordination tracker (who/what/when), while each agency retains its own fiduciary and procurement procedures.

Project/Initiative	Partners	Beneficiary Countries	Total funding	Main objectives	Status	Expected duration
Addressing Marine Litter and Marine Plastic – a Systemic Approach in the Caspian Sea	Russian Office for Development Assistance (Funding partner) UNDP (Implementing Partner)	Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan	4,039,200 USD	Prevent and reduce marine litter, particularly plastic pollution, in the Caspian Sea. Improve management of land-based pollution sources affecting the marine environment	Project initiation phase completed; ready to commence full implementation	2025 – 2027 (3 years)
Building Climate Resilient Cities and Communities in the Republic of Azerbaijan	Adaptation Fund (Funding partner) UN-Habitat (Implementing agency) IOM (Co-executing agency)	Azerbaijan	10,000,000 USD	Enhance resilience to climate hazards (sea level fluctuations, floods, droughts, heatwaves) through adaptation measures integrating spatial and coastal planning. Strengthen capacity for climate resilience, support water management, early warning systems, and scale successful adaptation solutions	Approved by the Adaptation Fund Board (October 2024)	2025 – 2028
Building Climate-Resilient Cities and Communities in the Republic of Kazakhstan	Adaptation Fund (Funding partner) UN-Habitat (Implementing agency) IOM (Co-executing agency)	Kazakhstan	10,000,000 USD	Implement adaptation measures to mitigate climate risks and reduce adverse impacts of climate change in Kazakhstan	Endorsement obtained from the Ministry; project concept note submission to the Adaptation Fund Board scheduled for mid-April 2025	TBD

Building Climate-Resilient Cities and Communities in Turkmenistan	Adaptation Fund (Funding partner) UN-Habitat (Implementing agency) IOM (Co-executing agency)	Turkmenistan	3,000,000 USD	Implement adaptation measures to mitigate climate risks and reduce adverse impacts of climate change in Kazakhstan	Informal agreement reached with the Ministry	TBD
Tehran Convention Programme of Work	Nationally Determined Contributions by Members States	Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Turkmenistan	~200,000 USD per year	Implement Tehran Convention and its Auxiliary Protocols (ratification, entry into force, and implementation); Support monitoring, reporting, and information exchange; Enhance cooperation between the Tehran Convention and international/regional organizations.	Programme of work and budget for 2025-2026 will be approved by Member States at the COP7 in 2025	N/A
“Strengthening Climate Information and Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems for Increased Resilience in Azerbaijan”	GCF (Funding partner)	Azerbaijan	25,000,000 USD	Increase the resilience and reduce the vulnerability of government, sectors and communities in Azerbaijan to climate change and climate-related hazards through the establishment of science-based, data-driven climate information services and a people-centered, impact-based multi-hazard early warning system	Approved by GCF Board (24 October 2024); FAA executed (24 October 2024)	2025 – 2030 (six years)

Role of non-beneficiary countries' engagement and integration. Given the regional nature and strategic significance of the “Blueing the Caspian Sea” project, the engagement of all Caspian littoral states, regardless of beneficiary status, offers valuable contributions to the project’s objectives and overall regional coherence. While some countries may not be direct beneficiaries of project funding, their participation can play a key role in fostering shared ownership, enhancing regional cooperation, and supporting the long-term sustainability of outcomes across the Caspian Sea.

In this regard, the non-beneficiary countries will be invited to take part in the project’s steering committees in an observer capacity, where they can contribute regional perspectives, share technical expertise, and remain fully informed of project developments. They will also receive invitations to all major project events and stakeholder consultations, ensuring their access to knowledge products, training materials generated through the initiative.

Although non-beneficiary countries are not eligible to receive direct project funding and do not hold decision-making authority within the formal governance structure, they may explore opportunities to support and align with the project through national funding sources or complementary regional mechanisms, including those available under the Tehran Convention. This inclusive approach reinforces the project's commitment to a

coordinated, region-wide response to environmental and economic challenges in the Caspian Sea, promoting long-term cooperation and integration across all coastal states.

While GEF policies do not grant formal rights or funding access to non-beneficiary countries, they explicitly support the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders, including those not directly receiving funds, through consultation, dialogue, and technical cooperation, especially in regional and transboundary projects involving shared resources.

Moreover, the project's regional results will be regularly reported to various meetings under the Tehran Convention, such as the Preparatory Committee meetings and the Meeting of the Conference of the Parties. These results will be presented to the Tehran Convention Contracting Parties in the form of recommendations for their consideration.

Core Indicators

Indicate expected results in each relevant indicator using methodologies indicated in the GEF-8 Results Measurement Framework Guidelines. There is no need to complete this table for climate adaptation projects financed solely through LDCF and SCCF.

Indicator 1 Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
50000	67365.9	0	0

Indicator 1.1 Terrestrial Protected Areas Newly created

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
50000	0	0	0

Name of the Protected Area	WDPA ID	IUCN Category	Total Ha (Expected at PIF)	Total Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)
		Protected Landscape/Seascape	50,000.00			

Indicator 1.2 Terrestrial Protected Areas Under improved Management effectiveness

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)
0	67365.9	0	0

Name of the Protected Area	WDPA ID	IUCN Category	Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)	METT score (Baseline at CEO Endorsement)	METT score (Achieved at MTR)	METT score (Achieved at TE)
Aktay-Buzachi State Nature Sanctuary	62578	Habitat/Species Management Area		25,500.00					

(Kazakhstan)									
Bandovan State Nature Sanctuary (Azerbaijan)	94012	Habitat/Species Management Area		738.00					
Mangyshlak experimental Botanical Garden (Kazakhstan)	342652	Habitat/Species Management Area		5.90					
Samur-Yalama National Park (Azerbaijan)	555786171	National Park		2,840.00					
Shirvan National Park (Azerbaijan)	342505	National Park		932.00					
State Nature Sanctuary Karakiya-Karakol (Kazakhstan)	62600	Habitat/Species Management Area		20,625.00					
Ural River Delta and adjacent Caspian Sea coast (Kazakhstan)	478022	Strict Nature Reserve		16,725.00					

Indicator 2 Marine protected areas created or under improved management

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
10000	278869	0	0

Indicator 2.1 Marine Protected Areas Newly created

Total Ha (Expected at PIF)	Total Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)
10000	278869	0	0

Name of the Protected Area	WDPA ID	IUCN Category	Total Ha (Expected at PIF)	Total Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)
Absheron National Park	342509	National Park	10,000.00	100,000.00		
Caspian Itbalygy State Nature Reserve	n/a	Others		108,632.00		
Garabogaz Marine Protected Area	n/a	Others		70,237.00		

Indicator 2.2 Marine Protected Areas Under improved management effectiveness

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

Name of the Protected Area	WDP A ID	IUCN Category	Total Ha (Expected at PIF)	Total Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Total Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Total Ha (Achieved at TE)	METT score (Baseline at CEO Endorsement)	METT score (Achieved at MTR)	METT score (Achieved at TE)
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Indicator 5 Area of marine habitat under improved practices to benefit biodiversity (excluding protected areas)

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
20,000.00			

Indicator 5.1 Fisheries under third-party certification incorporating biodiversity considerations

Number (Expected at PIF)	Number (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Number (Achieved at MTR)	Number (Achieved at TE)
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Type/name of the third-party certification

Indicator 5.2 Large Marine Ecosystems with reduced pollution and hypoxia

Number (Expected at PIF)	Number (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Number (Achieved at MTR)	Number (Achieved at TE)
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LME at PIF	LME at CEO Endorsement	LME at MTR	LME at TE
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Indicator 5.3 Marine 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)
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Indicator 7 Shared water ecosystems under new or improved cooperative management

	Number (Expected at PIF)	Number (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Number (Achieved at MTR)	Number (Achieved at TE)
Shared water Ecosystem	Caspian Sea	Caspian Sea		
Count	1	1	0	0

Indicator 7.1 Level of Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis and Strategic Action Program (TDA/SAP) formulation and implementation (scale of 1 to 4; see Guidance)

Shared Water Ecosystem	Rating (Expected at PIF)	Rating (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Rating (Achieved at MTR)	Rating (Achieved at TE)
Caspian Sea		4		

Indicator 7.2 Level of Regional Legal Agreements and Regional management institution(s) (RMI) to support its implementation (scale of 1 to 4; see Guidance)

Shared Water Ecosystem	Rating (Expected at PIF)	Rating (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Rating (Achieved at MTR)	Rating (Achieved at TE)
Caspian Sea	1	2		

Indicator 7.3 Level of National/Local reforms and active participation of Inter-Ministeral Committees (IMC; scale 1 to 4; See Guidance)

Shared Water Ecosystem	Rating (Expected at PIF)	Rating (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Rating (Achieved at MTR)	Rating (Achieved at TE)
Caspian Sea		3		

Indicator 7.4 Level of engagement in IWLEARN through participation and delivery of key products(scale 1 to 4; see Guidance)

Shared Water Ecosystem	Rating (Expected at PIF)	Rating (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Rating (Achieved at MTR)	Rating (Achieved at TE)
Caspian Sea	1	1		

Indicator 8 Globally over-exploited fisheries moved to more sustainable levels

Metric Tons (Expected at PIF)	Metric Tons (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Metric Tons (Achieved at MTR)	Metric Tons (Achieved at TE)

Fishery Details

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)
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Female	100,000	102,256		
Male	100,000	102,034		
Total	200,000	204,290	0	0

Explain the methodological approach and underlying logic to justify target levels for Core and Sub-Indicators (max. 250 words, approximately 1/2 page)

The following GEBs will be supported by the project:

CI1: The regional component contributes to Core Indicator 1 through the strengthening of management effectiveness of existing terrestrial protected areas located along the Caspian coastline (indicator 1.2). While the project does not envisage the creation of new terrestrial protected areas, it focuses on improving management frameworks, institutional capacities, and policy coherence to ensure more effective and integrated conservation of coastal and connected terrestrial ecosystems. The regional component will contribute to this indicator through the development of regional source-to-sea consistent frameworks. These frameworks will promote harmonized approaches to managing land–sea interactions, habitat protection, sustainable land use, and biodiversity conservation across the included protected areas (Output 3.1.2). Under Output 3.1.3, the component will strengthen institutional and technical capacities of national and regional authorities responsible for protected area management through targeted capacity-building activities. These include training on integrated management approaches (IRBM, ICZM, MSP), application of nature-based solutions, and improved monitoring and reporting aligned with the Tehran Convention and its Protocols. The terrestrial protected areas proposed under Core Indicator 1 were selected as they are the main coastal and nearshore protected areas located along the Caspian Sea shoreline in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. These areas play a key role in maintaining the ecological connectivity between terrestrial, coastal, and marine ecosystems. While no eligible terrestrial protected areas were identified in Turkmenistan, this is balanced by the inclusion of the country’s Khazar State Nature Reserve, the largest marine protected area in the region, under Core Indicator 2.

The combined surface area of the proposed terrestrial protected areas amounts to approximately 449,106 hectares. A 15% improvement target (applied to each terrestrial protected area) was determined as a realistic and achievable goal within the project timeframe, resulting in a total of 67,366 hectares of terrestrial protected areas expected to achieve enhanced management effectiveness through project interventions.

CI2: Marine Protected Areas Created or Under Improved Management Effectiveness. Three marine protected areas will be supported, each of which includes a portion of terrestrial area that implicit to ensure an adequate coastal ecosystem dimension. The three areas are

- “Absheron National Park” in Azerbaijan. This park is proposed to be expanded with 100,000 hectares new marine protected area.
- “Caspian Itbalygy State Nature Reserve” in Kazakhstan. This reserve of a combined 108,632.31 hectares in two sites was created by decree on October 24, 2024 (during project preparation).
- “Garabogaz Marine Protected Area” in Turkmenistan. This is a new marine protected area proposed to be 70,237 hectares

Additionally, as part of CI5 on Area of marine habitat under improved practices (hectare), the exact number of hectares is not yet known because the specific pollution monitoring points in each country’s waters will be selected once the new pollution monitoring scheme has been developed with the countries. This indicator will be reassessed and updated during the implementation period.

CI7. The regional component contributes fully to core indicator 7. The cooperative management of the Caspian Sea will be improved through the development of 4 regional assessments (output 3.1.1) and 5 (and adoption of at least one) regional

frameworks (output 3.1.2). Under output 3.1.3, the capacity of the region to effectively apply regional frameworks will be improved while under output 3.1.4, the Caspian Environmental Information Center (CEIC) knowledge management platform will be strengthened and its use further promoted.

More specifically, through the development of 2 regional frameworks (the Regional Climate Adaptation Framework for the Caspian Sea; and the Blue Economy Cooperation Framework with the Tehran Convention and the Agreement on Conservation and Sustainable Use of Aquatic Biological Resources) under output 3.1.2 - which will function as regional agreements - the regional component will contribute to indicator 7.2 (level 2). The development of mainly the regional frameworks on conservation and sustainable use of aquatic biological resources of the Caspian Sea; regional program of action for pollution prevention and control (Moscow Protocol); and integrated river basin, marine, and coastal zone management, component 3 will also contribute to the implementation of Environmental Quality objectives 1, 3, and 4 of the Caspian Sea Strategic Action Plan (SAP) (indicator 7.1, level 4). The regional component will also contribute to indicator 7.4 (level 1) through the strengthening of the regional knowledge management platform, in line with IW:LEARN guidance. The multi-country activities will contribute to 7.3 Level of National/Local reforms and active participation of Inter-Ministerial Committees (Level 3) with a focus on (i) Caspian seal monitoring arrangement (comparable across the three Focus Countries), and (ii) National pollution monitoring report (comparable across the three Focus Countries).

Under (CI11) People benefiting from GEF-financed investments, given that the project will focus on MPAs that are in remote areas, the beneficiaries are targeted for capacity building, knowledge exchange. At the national level, the estimates are: 2,300 people (920 female beneficiaries) across the government agencies and public and private sector organizations. At the regional level, the estimates are: 1,990 beneficiaries (1,194 female beneficiaries). The breakdown table for the direct beneficiaries under the project and components 1,2, and 3, can be found in the Results Framework.

Additionally, multi-country activities will benefit the following estimated number of people:

- Fisheries: The three marine protected areas will provide refuge for fish reproduction which benefits people beyond the specific marine protected area. We estimate that there are about 15,000 people employed in activities related to fisheries per country, and the same amount of people in recreational fishing. Total estimation is 90,000 benefiting people.
- Tourism: new MPAs are created and offer spaces for leisure and sports. We estimate 50,000 visitors for Absheron, 10,000 each related to Garabogaz and Itbalygy as these are more remote areas, totaling 70,000 benefiting people.
- Indirect job creation: we estimate that about 40,000 will benefit from indirect or part time jobs in tourism and service sectors related to results of the project.

With the above estimates, it is expected that the project will benefit 204,290 people. Furthermore, expected indirect beneficiaries resulting from the regional component are 750,000 people. This assumes that 5% of the coastal population will benefit from adoption of 5 policy frameworks (output 3.1.2), leading to a Caspian Sea under improved cooperative management. Data source: Caspian Sea – State of the Environment 2019 (Tehran Convention/GRID-Arendal), page 19, Section 3.1.1 Population with Figure 3.1, According to the Caspian State of the Environment reports, the Caspian's coastal areas are home to more than 15 million people (SoE 2011).

Other key results are: (i) improved regional coordination on BD conservation and pollution mitigation; (ii) improved regional knowledge, monitoring and planning capacities, and policy synergies; (iii) improved national marine spatial planning and integrated coastal zone management capacities; and (iv) improved PA and fisheries management capacities.

Key Risks

	Rating	Explanation of risk and mitigation measures
CONTEXT		
Climate	Moderate	The Climate risk is assessed as Moderate. The rapid pace of sea-level decline or other unanticipated ecological disasters may outstrip the quality of assessments. Unforeseen environmental changes may render regional assessments outdated or ineffective. Assessment methodologies and monitoring systems will be flexible enough to adapt to rapidly changing environmental conditions, allowing for timely and accurate data collection despite unforeseen environmental events. Collaboration with scientific institutions will help in predictive modeling to anticipate and incorporate climate change shifts. Additionally, extreme weather could disrupt marine ecosystems, infrastructure, and pollution control efforts. The project will develop regional climate vulnerability assessments and ensure adaptive regional frameworks for pollution control, biodiversity conservation, and marine resource management integrate climate adaptation strategies. Scientific institutions will contribute to forecasting capabilities and early warning systems.
Environmental and Social	Substantial	Environmental and social risk is Substantial. The project supports three Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), which will positively impact biodiversity conservation, enhance ecosystem services, and support fish populations. However, the creation and expansion of MPAs may restrict access to natural resources for communities and businesses, potentially creating economic pressure on local communities and leading to illegal activities such as poaching and fishing. There could also be negative impacts on vulnerable groups of land appropriation and conflict between law enforcement and communities around the MPAs. These risks and potential adverse impacts can be effectively prevented, mitigated, or minimized through the preparation and implementation of a comprehensive Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP). Recognizing the challenges of MPA expansion and designation, the project incorporates strong mechanisms for stakeholder engagement and consultation, demonstrates the implementing entity's capacity to handle environmental and social matters in alignment with the Environmental and Social Framework (ESF), and leverages worldwide experience in achieving conservation cooperation from stakeholder communities. To further manage these risks, a 'Marine Protected Areas Profile' for each protected area has been prepared and a phased implementation approach will be applied to ensure compliance with best practices.
Political and Governance	Substantial	Political and Governance risk is assessed as Substantial. Potential political instability, such as changes in government, can undermine

political commitment and directly impact project implementation. Governance challenges, including weak institutions, limited transparency, and accountability, along with gaps in the legal system, can further hinder the project's success. To mitigate these risks, the project will engage in continuous dialogue with government officials, monitor the political and security situation closely, and involve various stakeholders through information campaigns and complaint handling systems. The project has received support from national agencies in the three focus countries and will operate mostly at a technical level and remote from national political agendas. Also, the use of a bottom-up approach, collecting inputs nationally to build the pollution monitoring approach, will be used to steer participation. At the regional level, the risk of only three countries (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan) participating in the project is mitigated through the very design of the Outcome 3, which focuses on strengthening regional cooperation and knowledge sharing. The project's knowledge exchange mechanisms, including the Caspian Environmental Information Center (CEIC) and outreach efforts, will ensure that best practices, lessons learned, and technical resources are accessible to all five Caspian states. By fostering dialogue, disseminating evidence-based assessments, and promoting regional frameworks, the project will contribute to broader engagement and cooperation across the entire Caspian region, even beyond the directly participating countries. It is planned that two additional Caspian littoral states will be notified and invited to participate in relevant project activities where appropriate, as well as be invited to participate in the PSC as observers. Their potential participation will be funded by national sources within these countries. This approach will foster cross-learning and increase the likelihood of incorporating project outcomes—such as assessments, frameworks, and knowledge—into the Tehran Convention. At the regional level, there is also a risk that the climate adaptation frameworks and circular economy practices developed during the project may not be sustained after its conclusion. Without continued governmental commitment, financial resources, and stakeholder engagement, these frameworks may remain as recommendations rather than being fully integrated into national policies and economic systems. To ensure the sustainability of climate adaptation efforts, the project will embed adaptation frameworks within national policies, build institutional capacity for long-term implementation, and foster public-private partnerships to drive continued investment in circular economy practices. Additionally, the project will promote regional cooperation mechanisms to support knowledge exchange and ensure ongoing resilience-building efforts. Additionally, shifts in political priorities, diplomatic tensions, or changes in government leadership could weaken regional coordination and hinder collaborative efforts on pollution control, biodiversity conservation, and climate adaptation. Differences in national interests or policy approaches may create barriers to the implementation of regional

		<p>frameworks, delaying decision-making processes and reducing the effectiveness of cooperative mechanisms. To mitigate this risk, the project will emphasize science-driven through technical working groups, institutional capacity-building, and engagement with regional organizations to maintain progress regardless of political fluctuations. Fragmented governance, conflicting priorities, and bureaucratic inefficiencies among relevant ministries could hinder effective coordination and slow the adoption of key policies and frameworks. To address this risk, the project will establish structured coordination mechanisms, such as dedicated working groups, joint task forces, and roundtables, to ensure alignment of objectives and responsibilities. Capacity-building initiatives will be provided to strengthen technical expertise and foster a shared understanding of the benefits of regional cooperation. Security risks could lead to delays in the project implementation. The risk can be minimalized and overcome by maintaining maximum implementation flexibility.</p>
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INNOVATION

Institutional and Policy	Moderate	<p>Institutional and Policy risk is assessed as Moderate. The insufficient recognition could lead to frameworks that are misaligned with local realities, potentially limiting their effectiveness and long-term impact. The project will recognize existing local actions and practices and incorporate them into the framework development process to ensure alignment with local realities and enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of the frameworks. Additionally, turnover in institutions could lead to loss of expertise. The project will implement institutional knowledge transfer mechanisms, such as training toolkits, mentorship programs, and policy integration, to ensure knowledge continuity.</p>
Technological	Moderate	<p>Technological risk is assessed as Moderate. There could be a lack of baseline data and uncoordinated past efforts in monitoring. Data gaps and uncoordinated efforts could undermine the establishment of a reliable monitoring framework. The project will promote data-sharing mechanisms to ensure that existing data gaps will be effectively addressed and enable the establishment of reliable baseline monitoring.</p>
Financial and Business Model	Moderate	<p>Financial and Business Model risk is assessed as Moderate. Without sustainable financing, long-term implementation may be at risk. The project will work on developing financial sustainability plans, including private sector engagement, regional and national funding mechanisms, and investment frameworks for the Blue Economy transition.</p>

EXECUTION

Capacity	Moderate	<p>The Capacity for Implementation for the Caspian Sea project is rated as Moderate. This rating reflects the capacity of the implementing agencies to effectively manage and execute the project activities. The assessment considers the existing institutional framework, the experience of the agencies in handling similar projects, and the availability of skilled</p>
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		<p>personnel. The moderate rating indicates that while the agencies have some experience and capacity, there are areas that require strengthening to ensure successful project implementation. This includes enhancing technical skills, improving coordination mechanisms, and ensuring adequate resource allocation. The World Bank and UNEP will provide targeted support to address these gaps, including capacity-building initiatives and technical assistance to bolster the agencies' ability to manage the project effectively.</p>
Fiduciary	Moderate	<p>The Fiduciary risk is rated as Moderate. The moderate rating indicates that while the financial management systems are generally adequate, there are areas that would require robust fiduciary oversight, including ensuring timely and accurate financial reporting. To mitigate the identified fiduciary risks, the project will implement a comprehensive financial management framework that includes capacity-building initiatives, the project will establish a robust internal control framework to ensure transparency and accountability in the use of project funds. Continuous monitoring and evaluation will be conducted to assess the effectiveness of the fiduciary management measures and make necessary adjustments to address any emerging risks.</p>
Stakeholder	Moderate	<p>Stakeholder risk is assessed as Moderate. Activities of the project depend on the involvement of various stakeholders throughout the implementation, particularly in (a) the planned engagement of private sector and government agencies related to pollution monitoring and (b) the development of innovative financial instruments for biodiversity. These elements are designed to be ambitious and are in response to the GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP) review and are in line with the World Bank and UNEP vision of incorporating scale-up elements in projects. The risk will be mitigated by factoring in a robust engagement of key stakeholders related to pollution through the roundtables for pollution and engagement of government economy and finance agencies for the biodiversity finance instruments. Finally, the UNOPS-hosted PCU and TCIS- hosted RCU will strive to intensify networking and dissemination efforts, informing stakeholders about the benefits and advantages of participating in the project.</p>
Other	Moderate	<p>Other risks cover limited outreach efforts and poor accessibility of knowledge products and assessed as Moderate. If knowledge products are not effectively communicated or accessible, their impact will be limited. The project will ensure targeted outreach strategies, utilize multiple communication platforms, and translate materials into relevant languages for broad accessibility.</p>
Overall Risk Rating	Substantial	<p>The overall risk rating is assessed as Substantial, considering the abovementioned risks and mitigation measures embedded in project</p>

design. In particular, the environmental and social risks associated with the project are assessed as Substantial. The project will generally result in positive environmental and social impacts in the Caspian Sea region by mobilizing public and engaging private sector on prevention and mitigation of key marine pollutants, investing in pollution monitoring, biodiversity monitoring and planning new marine areas, and supporting pre-feasibility of innovative finance instruments. The potential risks and impacts of such activities could be temporary and reversible, low in magnitude, and site specific, which can be mitigated through good management practices. At the regional level, the project has built-in mechanisms such as structured regional cooperation, institutional capacity building, and policy integration to ensure resilience. The flexibility of monitoring frameworks, stakeholder engagement strategies, and financing mechanisms further strengthen the project's ability to adapt to evolving circumstances. However, ongoing attention to regional political dynamics, long-term financing, and knowledge retention will be essential to sustaining project outcomes beyond its implementation period.

B. ALIGNMENT WITH GEF-8 PROGRAMMING STRATEGIES AND COUNTRY/REGIONAL PRIORITIES

Explain how the proposed interventions are aligned with GEF- 8 programming strategies and country and regional priorities, including how these country strategies and plans relate to the multilateral environmental agreements.

For projects aiming to generate biodiversity benefits (regardless of what the source of the resources is - i.e., BD, CC or LD), please identify which of the 23 targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework the project contributes to and explain how.

Confirm if any country policies that might contradict with intended outcomes of the project have been identified, and how the project will address this. (max. 500 words, approximately 1 page)

The project is aligned with the GEF-8 International Waters (IW) and Biodiversity (BD) Focal Areas. It will support the IW Focus Area Objective 1 (Accelerate Joint Action to Support a Sustainable Blue Economy) by supporting the collective management of Caspian Sea coastal and marine systems and policy, legal, and institutional reforms; assisting the three countries in addressing stressors leading to climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution; and supporting countries' sustainable blue economy opportunities. More specifically, the project will support the strategic transboundary action on sustaining healthy blue ecosystems by developing five transboundary cooperative frameworks that address anthropogenic pressures through an integrated Source-to-Sea approach (under output 3.1.2). The frameworks will be informed by regional state and trends assessments developed under the project. The implementation of the frameworks by regional and national institutions will be strengthened through capacity building activities (output 3.1.3) and knowledge sharing (output 3.1.4). Private sector engagement will be stimulated through sectoral roundtables and industry groups (activity 3.1.3.1). The BD Focus Area Objective 1 (Improve Conservation, Sustainable Use, and Restoration of Natural Ecosystems) will be supported by supporting the effective management and ecosystem coverage of PA systems, sustainable use of fisheries, and biodiversity mainstreaming in marine spatial plans and integrated coastal zone management plans.

The project will contribute to meeting the objectives set forth in the World Bank Group’s Country Partnership Frameworks (CPFs) of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, while supporting the National Development Strategy of Turkmenistan. The project aligns closely with the CPF of Kazakhstan for the Period FY20-25 (Report No. 143372) Focus Area 1 (Promoting Inclusive Growth), Objective 3 (Strengthen Connectivity Infrastructure and Regional Service Delivery for Better Local and Regional Integration) by increasing the capacity of regional and local institutions for development planning, coordination, and implementation; and Focus Area 3 (Securing Sustainable, Resilient, and Low Carbon Growth), Objective 7 (Preserve and Restore Natural Capital) by strengthening institutions’ capacity for environmental planning, management, and coordination, strengthening systems and capacities to ensure compliance with environmental standards, and putting in place systems for restoration of degraded ecosystems. The project aligns with the CPF of Azerbaijan for the period FY25-29 (Report No. 195625-AZ, discussed by the Board on January 28, 2024), and its High-Level Outcome I (Increased Resilience and Sustainability), Objective 2 (Enhancing Adaptation to Climate Change) by supporting biodiversity conservation and pollution management and reducing the number of people exposed to pollution hazards. For Turkmenistan, the project is included in the Country Engagement Note for FY26-27 (Report No. CEN0000002 -TM) to support to ‘Economic Diversification’ and ‘Resilience to Climate Change’. It will ensure alignment with the future World Bank Group strategy for Turkmenistan. The project is aligned with the World Bank Regional Engagement Framework for Central Asia (REFCA, January 2023 Update), and its Pillar II (Regional Public Goods) focus on the Caspian Sea’s blue economy and the impacts of pollution and biodiversity loss on the region’s development.

At the regional level, the project will leverage South-South cooperation to address shared environmental challenges such as pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate change. Given the transboundary nature of the Caspian Sea’s ecosystems and the common environmental threats, the project will facilitate south-south cooperation through knowledge exchange, capacity-building, and the establishment of stronger institutional frameworks. Regional assessments will be conducted to quantify climate vulnerabilities, pollution impacts, and coastal and marine biodiversity status, ensuring data-driven decision-making and knowledge exchange. Regional training workshops and technical exchanges will enhance policy coherence, promote sustainable blue economy practices, and strengthen regulatory frameworks across the participating countries. The project will also develop toolkits and guidelines to facilitate the practical exchange and application of best practices in pollution management, biodiversity conservation, and climate adaptation. By supporting the development of regional frameworks addressing environmental issues, the project aims to create long-term transformation, strengthening institutional capacity and ensuring the sustainability of these efforts beyond the duration of the project

At regional level, the project supports UNEP PoW & MTS 2025 Outcomes by advancing Outcome 1B: Countries and stakeholders have increased capacity, finance and access to technologies to deliver on the adaptation and mitigation goals of the Paris Agreement. Outcome 2B: Sustainable management of nature is adopted & implemented in development frameworks through strengthened policies, marine spatial planning, and governance frameworks that integrate biodiversity conservation into economic activities. It contributes to Outcome 2C: Nature conservation & restoration are enhanced by promoting ecosystem restoration and transboundary cooperation. Additionally, the project aligns with PoW 2022-2025 Direct Outcomes, including 1.1: policymaking and decision-making for climate action are informed by the latest science-based analysis and data generation, 2.3: Productive land and seascapes and fresh water are sustainably managed by ensuring responsible use of marine and coastal ecosystems, 2.7: Natural assets are valued, monitored, and sustainably managed through improved biodiversity monitoring and policy integration, 2.8: A sustainable ocean and coastal economy contributes to prosperity and pollution-free development by fostering sustainable economic activities that minimize environmental impact, and 2.13: Commitments and actions to prevent, halt, and reverse the degradation of ecosystems are enhanced by driving national and regional actions for ecosystem protection and restoration. The project also contributes to the chemicals and pollution action sub programme by advancing 2025 outcome 3A: Human health and environmental outcomes are optimized through enhanced

capacity and leadership in the sound management of chemicals and waste and PoW 2022-2025 direct outcomes 3.1 (regional and national integrated policy has shifted towards the sound management of chemicals and waste), 3.5 (institutional capacity to adopt and act on national and international commitments is enhanced), and 3.13 (sound science, data and statistics, analysis, information and knowledge are generated and shared). The project also contributes to the environmental governance and science policy sub-programmes. In addition, the project directly supports PoW indicator 2.1.2 by ensuring equitable, inclusive, and gender-responsive representation of local communities in decision-making, and will contribute to UNEP's cross-cutting gender indicator applied across all programmes, thereby strengthening gender mainstreaming in regional environmental governance.

The project also contributes to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets. It supports SDG target 6.3 and 6.5 by improving water quality and promoting integrated water resource management. By fostering sustainable economic growth while reducing environmental impact, it aligns with SDG target 8.4. In addressing climate change, the project strengthens resilience (SDG target 13.1), integrates climate measures into policies (SDG target 13.2), and enhances education and awareness on climate action (SDG target 13.3). For ocean and marine sustainability, the project advances SDG targets 14.1, 14.2, 14.4, 14.5, 14.7, and 14.a by reducing marine pollution, protecting marine and coastal ecosystems, ensuring sustainable fisheries, conserving marine areas, promoting sustainable ocean-based economies, and enhancing scientific knowledge. It also supports SDG target 15.1 by ensuring the sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems. Through policy coherence, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and data monitoring, the project contributes to SDG targets 17.9, 17.14, 17.16, and 17.18. Additionally, it promotes education for sustainable development under SDG target 4.7. The project also aligns with SDG target 15.5, reinforcing commitments to nature conservation, sustainable management, and ecosystem restoration. Importantly, the project advances SDG target 5.5 by fostering gender-responsive participation and leadership in environmental decision-making, and SDG target 5.a by promoting women's equal access to resources, technologies, and opportunities in the sustainable blue economy.

The project will help address key gaps in the implementation of the Tehran Convention by building regional and national capacities for addressing marine pollution and biodiversity loss. In particular, it will support the implementation of the Convention's Protocol on the Conservation of Biodiversity (Ashgabat Protocol) and the Protocol for the Protection of the Caspian Sea against Pollution from Land-based Sources and Activities (Moscow Protocol), as well as the Protocol Concerning Regional Preparedness, Response and Co-operation in Combating Oil Pollution Incidents (Aktau Protocol), Protocol on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (EIA Protocol), and Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment, and Information Exchange (under negotiations).

Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework targets supported:

Target 1: by supporting participatory integrated BD-inclusive spatial planning in Caspian Sea coastal zones of the three countries

Targets 3+4: by designating PAs and putting in place PA management plans and capacities

Target 5: by developing fisheries management plans for overharvested fisheries

Target 7: by identifying pollution sources and hotspots and developing plans to address them

Target 14: by harmonizing policies, regulations, and development processes for BD conservation and pollution mitigation in the Caspian Sea

Target 20: by supporting South-South exchanges between PA practitioners to enhance participating countries' capacity for PA designation and management

Target 21: by studying policy and regulation gaps for harmonization of BD conservation in the Caspian Sea and providing training to policymakers accordingly

Targets 22+23: by placing strong emphasis on participation of women and local communities in activities and policymaking-informing deliverables

Relevance to Regional, National or Subnational Priorities. The project aligns with regional, national, and sub-national strategies and priorities across Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, supporting key policy frameworks and environmental commitments. At the regional level, the project contributes to the objectives of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), particularly:

- The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), supporting biodiversity conservation across the Caspian region.
- The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), contributing to climate adaptation and mitigation efforts.
- The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, protecting critical coastal and marine ecosystems.
- The Caspian Environment Programme (CEP), which fosters regional cooperation on biodiversity, pollution control, and sustainable fisheries.

The project also supports the Tehran Convention for the Protection of the Caspian Sea, a key regional mechanism for environmental governance and conservation, including the Moscow and Ashgabat Protocols.

In addition, other regional agreements would also be taken into account while during the project: (i) Coordinating Committee on Hydrometeorology and Pollution Monitoring of the Caspian Sea (CASPCOM); (ii) Agreement on the Preservation and Rational Use of Aquatic Biological Resources of the Caspian Sea.

The project is aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCF) for Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, supporting national efforts to enhance climate resilience, environmental protection, and sustainable natural resource management.

The project will help achieving the goals of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan NDCs which are based on the reduction of vulnerabilities from climate change impacts, particularly developing relevant adaptation measures for decreasing or minimizing the losses that may occur at national, local and community levels. It will also contribute to address the objectives, outcomes and priorities of the National Adaptation Plans (NAP), to help the region reduce climate vulnerability and increase resilience to climate change.

<i>Regional Climate Change Priorities Analysis – Caspian Sea Region Climate Change Strategic Focus Areas</i>	Relevant Program Areas	Relevant Policy Actions
Water Sea Level Fluctuations	Scientific research on the implications of the sea level fluctuations of the Caspian Sea	- Science Policy platform on the climate change adaptation -Clearing House Mechanism on Climate Change related information - Climate Change Integrated Coastal Zone Management Guidelines
Measures and procedures to alleviate implications of the sea level fluctuations of the Caspian Sea.		
Biodiversity Protection	Natural ecosystems restoration of the coastal zones	-Ecosystem based coastal planning
Combatting Land-based source of Marine pollution	Prevention, control, reduction and elimination of land-based source of pollution	-Improved management of the solid waste - Improved management of the sewage system
Climate Change related data and information	Regional programme to improve the climate change related knowledge in the Caspian Sea region	-Science Policy platform on the climate change adaptation

C. POLICY REQUIREMENTS

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

We confirm that gender dimensions relevant to the project have been addressed during Project Preparation as per GEF Policy and are clearly articulated in the Project Description (Section A).

Yes

1) Does the project expect to include any gender-responsive-measures to address gender gaps or promote gender equality and women's empowerment?

Yes

If the project expects to include any gender-responsive measures to address gender gaps or promote gender equality and women empowerment, please indicate in which results area(s) the project is expected to contribute to gender equality:

Closing gender gaps in access to and control over natural resources;

Yes

Improving women's participation and decision-making; and/or

Yes

Generating socio-economic benefits or services for women.

Yes

2) Does the project's results framework or logical framework include gender-sensitive indicators?

Yes

Stakeholder Engagement

We confirm that key stakeholders were consulted during Project Preparation as required per GEF policy, their relevant roles to project outcomes has been clearly articulated in the Project Description (Section A) and that a Stakeholder Engagement Plan has been developed before CEO endorsement.

Yes

Select what role civil society will play in the Project

Consulted only; Yes

Member of Advisory Body; Contractor;

Co-financier; No

Member of project steering committee or equivalent decision-making body ;

Executor or co-executor;

Other (Please explain)

Private Sector

Will there be private sector engagement in the project?

Yes

And if so, has its role been described and justified in section A project description?

Yes

Environmental and Social Safeguards

We confirm that we have provided information regarding Environmental and Social risks associated with the proposed project or program, including risk screenings/ assessments and, if applicable, management plans or other measures to address identified risks and impacts (this information should be presented in Annex E).

Yes

Please provide overall Project/Program Risk Classification

Overall Project/Program Risk Classification

PIF	CEO Endorsement/Approval	MTR	TE
High or Substantial	High or Substantial		

D. OTHER REQUIREMENTS

Knowledge management

We confirm that an approach to Knowledge Management and Learning has been developed during Project Preparation and is clearly described in the agency's Project Document.

Yes

Socio-economic Benefits

We confirm that the project design has considered socio-economic benefits to be delivered by the project and these have been clearly described in the Project Description and will be monitored and reported on during project implementation (at MTR and TER).

To strengthen pollution monitoring, the project will apply a comprehensive and systematic approach, addressing the diverse sources and impacts of pollutants affecting the Caspian Sea. By developing a 'common and comparable approach' to pollution monitoring, the project aims to standardize data collection and analysis, strengthen pollution monitoring capacities across Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. This will involve monitoring pollution from freshwater inputs, enhancing coastal and marine pollution monitoring within MPAs, and convening options to address pollution from oil and gas exploration. By promoting the engagement of the private sector, particularly the oil and gas industry, the project will leverage existing compliance monitoring and promote best practices. The Project will provide technical assistance to

develop national programs of action, strengthen pollution monitoring, improve policy harmonization, and facilitate knowledge sharing, helping the countries meet their obligations under the Tehran Convention Moscow Protocol.

The biodiversity monitoring and planning component focuses on providing the information for conceptualization, establishment and management of MPAs. By supporting the creation or increasing the size of specific MPAs, the project aims to create a robust foundation for biodiversity conservation. By exploring potential options for innovative financing instruments, such as the wildlife bond, the project could help mobilize private capital for conservation efforts, ensuring the sustainability of the project's outcomes. The project will also support species monitoring and conservation measures, focusing on migratory routes, spawning, breeding, and nursery zones, which are essential for the survival of these flagship species.

A methodological framework will be used to support the estimation of economic and social costs associated with pollution and biodiversity loss, while ensuring that these costs are measured and evaluated consistently across various impacts. Project resources will be used to support capacity-enhancing measures, such as reports, studies, training, workshops, provision of equipment, and other activities to strengthen national level pollution monitoring and protected areas management with maximum impact on the Caspian Sea ecosystem and waters. The expected benefits from the project will be improved government capacities for addressing marine pollution and the establishment of marine PAs for improved biodiversity. By improving the marine environment of the Caspian Sea, the three project countries can harness their natural assets and foster a sustainable blue economy to diversify their economies.

The UNEP regional component of the project will generate tangible socio-economic co-benefits across Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, particularly by supporting an informed transition toward a sustainable Blue Economy. By strengthening regional cooperation, improving environmental governance, and building institutional and technical capacities, the project contributes to the creation of green jobs and income-generating opportunities in coastal and marine sectors such as fisheries, tourism, shipping, and ecosystem restoration. The development of a Regional Blue Economy Strategy and nature-based solutions toolkit promotes the sustainable use of marine resources while safeguarding ecosystem services critical to community livelihoods. Gender equality will be fostered by promoting women's participation and leadership in blue economy sectors, addressing barriers to their access to training, finance, and technologies, and ensuring that livelihood benefits reach both women and men equitably. These interventions are particularly relevant for rural and coastal populations, including women and youth, who often rely on vulnerable natural resource-based livelihoods and face heightened exposure to climate risks.

Capacity-building activities and inclusive stakeholder engagement under Component 3 will enable local actors to participate more effectively in environmental decision-making, enhance their adaptive capacities, and benefit from climate-resilient and sustainable development practices. Moreover, by integrating the assessments of ecosystem goods and services, the project supports the accounting of environmental costs in economic planning, enabling policy shifts that can improve livelihoods and reduce poverty over the long term. These efforts align with the World Bank's 2021 guidance on the Blue Economy as a pathway for inclusive growth and resilience in coastal regions.

In addition, the project will deliver direct socioeconomic benefits at the local level through reduced risks associated with pollution, which are particularly relevant for vulnerable coastal and fishing communities. Strengthened fisheries management will help to steady income and nutrition for households dependent on fisheries and aquaculture. Improved coastal ecosystem health, especially through MPAs and habitat restoration, will create opportunities for sustainable tourism and recreation, generating new employment avenues.

At the national level, the project will support economic diversification by enabling countries to shift toward sustainable blue economy sectors, reducing dependence on oil and gas and contributing to economic resilience. Enhanced monitoring systems and governance frameworks will reduce the costs of environmental degradation and disaster response, while improved adaptation planning will strengthen infrastructure and community resilience against sea-level fluctuations, flooding, and dangerous weather events.

At the global level, the project contributes to the protection of an ecosystem of international significance, safeguarding migratory species such as the Caspian sturgeon and Caspian seal. By reducing pollutant loads and conserving biodiversity, the project generates global environmental benefits through the maintenance of ecosystem services and preservation of globally important genetic resources. These measures also contribute to global climate adaptation goals by protecting vulnerable ecosystems and communities against the impacts of climate change. In addition, the project will generate lessons learned, best practices, and knowledge products on transboundary ecosystem management, Blue Economy transition, and regional cooperation that can be shared with other semi-enclosed seas and inland water bodies. This knowledge transfer will allow replication and upscaling of effective approaches in other regions facing similar environmental and socio-economic challenges, thereby broadening the project's global contribution.

ANNEX A: FINANCING TABLES

GEF Financing Table

Trust Fund Resources Requested by Agency(ies), Country(ies), Focal Area and the Programming of Funds

GEF Agency	Trust Fund	Country/ Regional/ Global	Focal Area	Programming of Funds	Grant / Non- Grant	GEF Project Grant(\$)	Agency Fee(\$)	Total GEF Financing (\$)
World Bank	GET	Kazakhstan	Biodiversity	BD STAR Allocation: BD-1	Grant	903,317.00	81,298.00	984,615.00
World Bank	GET	Azerbaijan	Biodiversity	BD STAR Allocation: BD-1	Grant	903,317.00	81,298.00	984,615.00
World Bank	GET	Turkmenistan	Biodiversity	BD STAR Allocation: BD-1	Grant	903,317.00	81,298.00	984,615.00
World Bank	GET	Regional	International Waters	International Waters: IW-1	Grant	5,533,169.00	497,985.00	6,031,154.00
UNEP	GET	Regional	International Waters	International Waters: IW-1	Grant	3,500,000.00	315,000.00	3,815,000.00
Total GEF Resources (\$)						11,743,120.00	1,056,879.00	12,799,999.00

Project Preparation Grant (PPG)

Was a Project Preparation Grant requested?

true

PPG Amount (\$)

183489

PPG Agency Fee (\$)

16512

GEF Agency	Trust Fund	Country/ Regional / Global	Focal Area	Programming of Funds	PPG(\$)	Agency Fee(\$)	Total PPG Funding(\$)
World Bank	GET	Kazakhstan	Biodiversity	BD STAR Allocation: BD-1	14,115.00	1,270.00	15,385.00
World Bank	GET	Azerbaijan	Biodiversity	BD STAR Allocation: BD-1	14,115.00	1,270.00	15,385.00
World Bank	GET	Turkmenistan	Biodiversity	BD STAR Allocation: BD-1	14,115.00	1,270.00	15,385.00
World Bank	GET	Regional	International Waters	International Waters: IW-1	141,144.00	12,702.00	153,846.00
Total PPG Amount (\$)					183,489.00	16,512.00	200,001.00

Please provide Justification

Sources of Funds for Country Star Allocation

GEF Agency	Trust Fund	Country/ Regional/ Global	Focal Area	Sources of Funds	Total(\$)
World Bank	GET	Kazakhstan	Climate Change	CC STAR Allocation	1,000,000.00
World Bank	GET	Azerbaijan	Biodiversity	BD STAR Allocation	1,000,000.00
World Bank	GET	Turkmenistan	Biodiversity	BD STAR Allocation	1,000,000.00
Total GEF Resources					3,000,000.00

Focal Area Elements

Programming Directions	Trust Fund	GEF Project Financing(\$)	Co-financing(\$)
BD-1-1	GET	2,709,951.00	43,000,000.00
IW-1-1	GET	9,033,169.00	43,200,000.00
Total Project Cost		11,743,120.00	86,200,000.00

Confirmed Co-financing for the project, by name and type

Please include evidence for each co-financing source for this project in the tab of the portal

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Investment Mobilized	Amount(\$)
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Environment Protection of Turkmenistan	Public Investment	Investment mobilized	53,000,000.00
GEF Agency	World Bank	Grant	Investment mobilized	2,200,000.00
GEF Agency	Tehran Convention Interim Secretariat (TCIS/ UNEP)	Grant	Investment mobilized	500,000.00
GEF Agency	Tehran Convention Interim Secretariat (TCIS/ UNEP)	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	500,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	30,000,000.00
Total Co-financing				86,200,000.00

Please describe the investment mobilized portion of the co-financing

Turkmenistan: The Government of Turkmenistan (Ministry of Environment Protection) provides co-financing to support the objectives of the project in the equivalent amount of US\$53,000,000 (TMT 194,897,220). The public investment will cover: i) Construction of an oil spill recovery vessel with a capacity of 200 tons and wastewater, polluted water, and bilge water collection unit with a capacity of 20 tons, combined in a single project, ii) construction of the Sumbar River dam (stages I and II, lengths of 14.8 and 18.83 km, respectively) to prevent damage to engineering structures and bank erosion on the state border of Turkmenistan, iii) Development of 20,000 hectares of land in the Balkan velayat, improvement of land reclamation and water supply, iv) Improving the reclamation of irrigated lands in the Balkan region (stage II), v) design and commissioning of fire extinguishing systems at the Turkmenbashi Oil Refinery Complex, the Kenar Oil Refinery, and other hazardous facilities, and vi) Conversion of the Avaza Hydroelectric Power Plant gas turbine to a mobile design. Thus, the government requested that these activities financed by the State Budget to benefit restoration of natural resources, ecosystem conservation, and the rational use of aquatic and biological resources count as co-financing to the Blueing the Caspian Sea Project.

Azerbaijan: The Government of Azerbaijan through the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources provides co-financing support to support the objectives of the project in the equivalent amount of US\$30,000,000. The financing supports strengthening of the capacity of the Ministry of Ecology and Natural resources in addressing marine pollution in the Caspian Sea and for the management of the Absheron National Park which is proposed to be expanded with a marine area by the project. The government expressed that it is looking forward to contributing to the Blueing the Caspian Sea project.

Kazakhstan: While the government of Kazakhstan has not yet submitted their letter of co-finance, it informed the Bank that a building in Aktau had been dedicated to the Kazakh Scientific and Research Institute of the Caspian Sea (KSRICS) and that 90 staff was planned to be affected to this institute which in turn is the main scientific body with which the project will be supporting for marine pollution monitoring and biodiversity planning.

World Bank: The Bank estimates co-financing of US\$2.2m will support the objectives of the GEF project over the next four years. The World Bank is undertaking a range of technical assistance activities proposed as co-financing to support environmental sustainability and resilience in the Caspian Sea region: (i) assistance to enhance environmental knowledge in Caspian Sea fisheries and aquaculture through value chain assessments and exploring Nature-Based Solutions, (ii) assistance to promote sustainable forest management in Azerbaijan by enhancing local livelihoods through Payment for Environmental Services, Non-Timber Forest Products, and ecotourism, while supporting biodiversity conservation, economic growth, and maintaining good environmental status in the Caspian Sea, (iii) support to enhance the resilience of Azerbaijan’s coastal ecosystems by leveraging ecosystem valuation, strengthening capacity building, and supporting national policies on coastal areas, (iv) support to improving the resilience of port infrastructure, shipping and logistics to climate-related risks and disasters in the Caspian Sea, and (v) support to Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan to greening of build infrastructure such as ports, cities, industries, to have lower negative environmental footprint, making information via Bank’s Living Planet Observatory WebApp with datasets, library and science resources in view of advancing a sustainable blue economy in the Caspian Sea.

The Tehran Convention Secretariat (UNEP). The secretariat provides co-financing of the GEF project, including US\$500,000 (in-kind) and US\$500,000 (grant), which will support the objectives and outcomes of the project by enhancing coordination and synergy in the areas of pollution control, biodiversity conservation, and climate change adaptation in the Caspian Sea region for the next five years. The support will be delivered through the implementation of the Convention’s Protocols, as well as through other intergovernmental activities including holding of Preparatory Committee meetings and Meetings of the Conference of the Parties. Moreover, the Secretariat’s institutional knowledge and expertise will be leveraged to support the implementation of the project. The areas that the Tehran Convention can support the project include: a) Strengthening regional cooperation mechanisms to address pollution, biodiversity, and climate change, b) Capacity-building for the application of regional frameworks supporting policy coherence and a sustainable blue economy, c) Facilitating regional knowledge exchange and outreach.

ANNEX B: ENDORSEMENTS

GEF Agency(ies) Certification

GEF Agency Type	Date	Project Contact Person	Phone	Email
GEF Agency Coordinator	6/5/2025	Elif Kiratli		ekiratli@worldbank.org
Project Coordinator	6/5/2025	Peter Kristensen		pkristensen@worldbank.org
Project Coordinator	6/5/2025	Kaisa Uusimaa		kaisa.uusimaa@un.org

Record of Endorsement of GEF Operational Focal Point (s) on Behalf of the Government(s):

Please attach the Operational Focal Point endorsement letter(s) with this template.

Name of GEF OFP	Position	Ministry	Date (MM/DD/YYYY)
Emin Garabaghli	Head, Division of International Cooperation, OFP	Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Azerbaijan	8/7/2025
Saule Sabiyeva	Director, Climate Policy Department, OFP	Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources of Kazakhstan	3/18/2025
Nury Jumashov	Deputy Minister, OFP	Ministry of Environmental Protection of Turkmenistan	1/15/2025

ANNEX C: PROJECT RESULTS FRAMEWORK

Please indicate the page number in the Project Document where the project results and M&E frameworks can be found. Please also paste below the Project Results Framework from the Agency document.

Results Framework; Approach to Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)

The project M&E will ensure accountability, transparency, communication, learning, and project management support. M&E activities will (a) track the progress of the project, (b) generate information about the status of project activities, (c) analyze and aggregate data generated at regional and national levels, and (d) document and disseminate key lessons learned and good practices from the project activities to stakeholders in participating countries and beyond the region.

Each executing agency—the Tehran Convention Interim Secretariat (TCIS) under UNEP and UNOPS under the World Bank—will assume responsibility for monitoring and evaluation on behalf of their respective implementing partners. This includes coordination of national- and regional-level reporting, data collection, indicator tracking, and contributions to joint learning outputs.

The World Bank and UNEP will conduct internal midterm reviews for the multi-country/ national and regional components to assess implementation progress toward the achievement of the project development objectives and outcomes. This review will also evaluate early signs of project success or identify challenges, with the aim of proposing adjustments to strengthen delivery in the second half of the project, if any. At project completion, Terminal Evaluation report will be prepared.

Results Framework

Project Indicators - PDO	Notes	Baseline	End Target
Aquatic areas under enhanced conservation and/or protected management within the Caspian Sea supported by the project (Hectare) <i>*Note: mapped to Corporate Scorecard Indicator</i>	Mapped to GEF CI2: Marine protected areas created or under improved management The indicator measures, in hectares, the area of terrestrial ecosystem that have been covered under protected area management. Land is the terrestrial biologically productive system comprising soil, vegetation, and the associated ecological and hydrological processes. Aquatic areas or seascapes are defined as large, multiple-use marine areas, typically encompassing a range of ecosystems and	0	278,869

<p><i>'Terrestrial and aquatic areas under enhanced conservation and management'</i></p>	<p>habitats, that are managed for sustainable use and conservation. Protected area management refers to the processes and practices involved in the administration and stewardship of designated natural areas that are set aside to conserve biodiversity, protect ecosystems, and preserve cultural and natural heritage.</p> <p>Assumptions: Three marine protected areas will be supported, each of which includes a portion of terrestrial area that implicit to ensure an adequate coastal ecosystem dimension. The three areas are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Absheron National Park" in Azerbaijan. This park is proposed to be expanded with 100,000 hectares new marine protected area. - "Caspian Itbalygy State Nature Reserve" in Kazakhstan. This reserve of a combined 108,632.31 hectares in two sites was created by decree on October 24, 2024 (during project preparation). - "Garabogaz Marine Protected Area" in Turkmenistan. This is a new marine protected area proposed to be 70,237 hectares <p>Means of verification: national reports and/or WDPA records, GIS mapping, and (where possible) field or remote sensing validation.</p> <p>Frequency: MTR, TE (with annual progress reports as per standard reporting requirements)</p>		
<p>Areas brought under strengthened pollution monitoring schemes in targeted sites within the Caspian Sea supported by the project (Hectare)</p>	<p>This is WB-custom indicator. The indicator measures, in hectares, the areas for which new and/or pollution monitoring schemes have been introduced. Aquatic areas or seascapes are defined as large, multiple-use marine areas, typically encompassing a range of ecosystems and habitats, that are managed for sustainable use and conservation. Land is the terrestrial, biologically productive system comprising soil, vegetation, and the associated ecological and hydrological processes. Pollution monitoring scheme provides accurate and timely data on pollution levels, identifies pollution sources, and evaluates the effectiveness of pollution control measures. Key components of a pollution monitoring scheme for</p> <p>Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in each focus country include, inter alia: (i) a gap review of pollution monitoring with recommendations, (ii) national validation workshop with government approving institutional arrangements and adopting scheme, (iii) development and implementation of the institutional arrangements and capacity building plan (incl. arrangements decreed in each focus country, training manuals developed, training conducted, including training on pollution monitoring system and equipment procured, its operations and maintenance). Assumptions: 786 ha (Azerbaijan); 108,632 ha (Kazakhstan); and 70,237 ha (Turkmenistan).</p> <p>Means of verification: GIS mapping, national reports, and (where possible) field or remote sensing validation.</p> <p>Frequency: Semi-annually</p>	0	179,655
<p>People benefiting from GEF-financed investments</p>	<p>Mapped to GEF CI11. This indicator estimates the number of people that benefit from project interventions. As part of capacity building and learning, stakeholder engagement and awareness raising activities it is estimated that: (i) At the national level, the estimates are: 2,300 people (920 female beneficiaries) across the government agencies and public and private sector organizations (the disaggregation and further details are included under respective indicators of Component 1 and 2). (ii) At the regional level, the estimates are: 1,990 beneficiaries (1,194 female beneficiaries) (the</p>	0	204,290 (women: 102,256)

	<p>disaggregation and further details are included under respective indicators of Component 3).</p> <p>Additionally, multi-country activities will benefit the following estimated number of people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fisheries: The three marine protected areas will provide refuge for fish reproduction which benefits people beyond the specific marine protected area. We estimate that there are about 15,000 people employed in activities related to fisheries per country, and the same amount of people in recreational fishing. Total estimation is 90,000 benefiting people. • Tourism: new MPAs are created and offer spaces for leisure and sports. We estimate 50,000 visitors for Absheron, 10,000 each related to Garabogaz and Itbalygy as these are more remote areas, totaling 70,000 benefiting people. • Indirect job creation: we estimate that about 40,000 will benefit from indirect or part time jobs in tourism and service sectors related to results of the project. <p>Means of verification: national reports, stakeholder surveys, workshops/ consultations reports Frequency: Semi-annually</p>		
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Indicators by Components 1 and 2:

IRI Indicator Name	Comment	Baseline	End Target
Component 1 on Strengthening Pollution Monitoring			
Marine pollution monitoring scheme in targeted areas established and operational in participating countries (Number)	<p>The indicator refers to the establishment and operationalization of systems designed to observe, measure, evaluate, and analyze pollution levels and their effects in specific areas within participating countries. These systems are intended to ensure that pollution management efforts are effectively monitored and managed. The project will support the following components of a pollution monitoring scheme for MPAs, inter alia: (i) a gap review of pollution monitoring with recommendations, (ii) national validation workshop with government approving institutional arrangements and adopting scheme, (iii) development and implementation of the institutional arrangements and capacity building plan (incl. arrangements decreed in each focus country, training manuals developed, training conducted, including training on pollution monitoring system and equipment procured, its operations and maintenance).</p> <p>Means of verification: national reports, and (where possible) field or remote sensing validation. Frequency: Annually</p>	0.00	3.00
Kazakhstan: Pollution Monitoring Report developed and disclosed (No/Yes)	<p>The indicator refers to the development and disclosure of the Annual Pollution Monitoring Report in Kazakhstan that will cover project-supported marine protected areas within the Caspian Sea.</p> <p>Means of verification: disclosed national reports by the governmental agencies. Frequency: MTR, TE (with annual progress reports as per standard reporting requirements)</p>	No	Yes
Azerbaijan: Pollution Monitoring Report developed and disclosed (No/Yes)	<p>The indicator refers to the development and disclosure of the Annual Pollution Monitoring Report in Azerbaijan that will cover project-supported marine protected areas within the Caspian Sea</p> <p>Means of verification: disclosed national reports by the governmental agencies.</p>	No	Yes

	Frequency: MTR, TE (with annual progress reports as per standard reporting requirements)		
Turkmenistan: Pollution Monitoring Report developed and disclosed (No/Yes)	The indicator refers to the development and disclosure of the Annual Pollution Monitoring Report in Turkmenistan that will cover project-supported marine protected areas within the Caspian Sea Means of verification: disclosed national reports by the governmental agencies. Frequency: MTR, TE (with annual progress reports as per standard reporting requirements)	No	Yes
% of TA products include considerations in regard to gender, youth and vulnerable groups	% of TA products include considerations in regard to gender, youth and vulnerable groups Means of verification: project progress reports, surveys Frequency: Semi-annually	0	100
# of women-led businesses invited to bid	This indicator will measure the number of women-led businesses reached out and invited to participate in the project-led bids and procurement processes Means of verification: procurement platform records Frequency: Semi-annually	0	At least 1 per country
Beneficiaries reached with public awareness/communications programs on the importance of preserving the Caspian Sea's biodiversity and addressing pollution (Number)	The indicator measures number of people who have been engaged through public awareness campaigns and communication efforts focused on the significance of conserving the biodiversity of the Caspian Sea and addressing pollution issues. These programs are part of broader efforts to improve policy harmonization, regional cooperation, and capacity building for pollution management and biodiversity conservation in the Caspian Sea. Assumptions: around 3 programs per each CY starting from Year 2 and targeting at least 100 people in each country per program Means of verification: project reports, surveys Frequency: Semi-annually	0	1,800
% of female beneficiaries reached with awareness/communication programs on the importance of preserving on the importance of addressing pollution	The indicator measures percentage of female beneficiaries who have been engaged through public awareness campaigns and communication efforts focused on the significance of conserving the biodiversity of the Caspian Sea and addressing pollution issues Means of verification: project reports, surveys Frequency: Semi-annually	0	40%
National-level convening mechanisms for private sector in the oil and gas industry active in the Caspian Sea supported by the project (Number)	The indicator measures the number of national-level convening mechanisms (or information-sharing platforms) for private sector in the oil and gas industry supported by the project. The mechanism will promote application of best practices to monitor and improve control of pollution and explore the leveraging of companies' compliance monitoring of oil and gas industry operations. Means of verification: project reports, surveys Frequency: Semi-annually	0	3
Prefeasibility study of finance and policy instruments for pollution monitoring and reporting developed and presented in each participating country (Number)	This indicator measures the number of prefeasibility study of finance and policy instruments for pollution monitoring and reporting developed and presented in each participating country. Means of verification: project reports Frequency: MTR, TE (with annual progress reports as per standard reporting requirements)	0	3
Component 2 on Strengthening Biodiversity Planning			
Kazakhstan: METT (Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool) score improvement for targeted MPA (Percentage)	The METT is the GEF's Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool, with categories of protected area management and we would collaborate with the countries to select the areas of the METT to improve upon and adjust country activities to meet those improvements. METT scores are composite scores ranging from 0 to 100 derived from dozens of	0.00	10%

	<p>socioeconomic, governance, and biophysical indicators. The project will target Caspian Itbalygy State Nature Reserve in Kazakhstan.</p> <p>Baseline: METT score is currently not available for this MPA, to be estimated during Year 1 of the project implementation. The METT is completed by the protected area management staff, with input from relevant stakeholders (government, NGOs, academia, ecotourism actors, and local communities). External facilitation or validation workshops may be held to ensure objectivity and stakeholder engagement.</p> <p>Means of verification: validation workshops led by national authorities</p> <p>Frequency: MTR, TE (with annual progress reports as per standard reporting requirements)</p>		
Azerbaijan: METT (Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool) score improvement for targeted MPA (Percentage)	<p>The METT is the GEF's Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool, with categories of protected area management and we would collaborate with the countries to select the areas of the METT to improve upon and adjust country activities to meet those improvements. METT scores are composite scores ranging from 0 to 100 derived from dozens of socioeconomic, governance, and biophysical indicators. The project will target the Absheron National Park in Azerbaijan.</p> <p>Baseline: METT score is currently not available for this MPA, to be estimated during Year 1 of the project implementation.</p> <p>Means of verification: validation workshops led by national authorities</p> <p>Frequency: MTR, TE (with annual progress reports as per standard reporting requirements)</p>	0.00	10%
Turkmenistan: METT (Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool) score improvement for targeted MPA (Percentage)	<p>The METT is the GEF's Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool, with categories of protected area management and we would collaborate with the countries to select the areas of the METT to improve upon and adjust country activities to meet those improvements. METT scores are composite scores ranging from 0 to 100 derived from dozens of socioeconomic, governance, and biophysical indicators. The project will target Garabogaz Wildlife Sanctuary in Turkmenistan.</p> <p>Baseline: METT score is currently not available for this MPA, to be estimated during Year 1 of the project implementation.</p> <p>Means of verification: validation workshops led by national authorities</p> <p>Frequency: MTR, TE (with annual progress reports as per standard reporting requirements)</p>	0.00	10%
Marine Protected Area Management Plans developed and adopted (Number)	<p>This indicator measures the number of MPA management plans developed and approved by participating countries.</p> <p>Means of verification: validation workshops led by national authorities</p> <p>Frequency: MTR, TE (with annual progress reports as per standard reporting requirements)</p>	0.00	3.00
Guidebook on the "phased approach to protected areas management" developed and presented (No/ Yes)	<p>This indicator refers to the guidebook on the "phased approach to protected areas management" developed and presented to the participating countries.</p> <p>Means of verification: validation workshops led by national authorities</p> <p>Frequency: MTR, TE (with annual progress reports as per standard reporting requirements)</p>	No	Yes
% of women organizations participating in evaluation and conservation measures for flagship species	<p>This indicator includes percentage of women organizations participating in evaluation and conservation measures for flagship species</p> <p>Means of verification: project reports, surveys</p> <p>Frequency: Semi-annually</p>	0	20
Prefeasibility study of a government-selected biodiversity finance instrument developed and discussed with each participating country (Number)	<p>This indicator measures the number of prefeasibility study of a government-selected biodiversity finance instrument developed and discussed with each participating country</p> <p>Means of verification: project reports, surveys</p> <p>Frequency: Semi-annually</p>	0.00	3.00

Beneficiaries engaged in capacity building activities for better knowledge and skills in pollution monitoring and biodiversity conservation management (Number)	The indicator measures the number of people who participate in training, short courses, workshops, and seminars (both in-person and virtual) on a range of topics aimed at addressing national pollution and biodiversity challenges. Means of verification: project reports, surveys Frequency: Semi-annually	0.00	500
Percentage of female individuals engaged in capacity building activities (Percentage)	This sub-indicator measures the number of female beneficiaries who participate in capacity building activities on a range of topics related to marine pollution management and biodiversity planning. Means of verification: project reports, surveys Frequency: Semi-annually	0.00	40.00
Grievances registered related to delivery of project activities and addressed (Percentage)	This indicator related to Project Management measures the proportion of feedback/grievances that are addressed within the standards as given in the project GRM guidelines.	0.00	90.00

Indicators by Component 3:

Outcome /Output	Outcome/ Output Indicators	Baseline	Targets and Monitoring Milestones	Means of Verification
Outcome 3.1: Strengthened regional cooperation mechanisms applied in the Caspian Sea region to address pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change vulnerabilities and to support an informed transition to Blue Economy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> No. of shared water ecosystems under improved cooperative management (core indicator 7) Ha of terrestrial protected areas under improved management effectiveness (core indicator 1.2) 	<p>Continued unsustainable use of resources and activities in the Caspian Sea region is not sufficiently addressed at regional level.</p> <p>The Caspian Region has established legal frameworks to address pollution and biodiversity loss; however, these frameworks are not effectively implemented.</p> <p>Additionally, the region lacks a clear pathway for transitioning to a sustainable Blue Economy</p>	<p>End of project: 1 shared water ecosystem under improved cooperative management (core indicator 7) <i>(Caspian Sea through adopted and implemented regional frameworks (output 3.1.2))</i></p> <p>67,365.9 ha of terrestrial protected areas under improved management effectiveness</p> <p><i>(15% improvement of the following areas (- 15% of protected area): Shirvan National Park (Azerbaijan) – 932 ha;</i></p> <p><i>Samur-Yalama National Park (Azerbaijan) – 2,840 ha;</i></p> <p><i>Bandovan State Nature Sanctuary (Azerbaijan) – 738 ha;</i></p> <p><i>Ural River Delta and adjacent Caspian Sea coast (Kazakhstan) – 16,725 ha;</i></p> <p><i>Mangyshlak experimental Botanical Garden (Kazakhstan) – 5.9 ha;</i></p> <p><i>State Nature Sanctuary Karakiya-Karakol (Kazakhstan) – 20,625 ha</i></p>	<p>Adopted regional frameworks (Ministerial Statement and decision of the TC COP)</p> <p>Implementation roadmaps of regional frameworks adopted</p>

Outcome /Output	Outcome/ Output Indicators	Baseline	Targets and Monitoring Milestones	Means of Verification
			<p><i>Aktay-Buzachi State Nature Sanctuary (Kazakhstan) – 25,500 ha</i> This will be through adopted and implemented regional frameworks (output 3.1.2) and strengthened institutional capacities of national and regional authorities (output 3.1.3).</p>	
<p>Output 3.1.1: Regional State and trends assessments produced to quantify source-to-sea climate vulnerabilities, pollution and coastal and marine biodiversity</p>	<p>3. No. of gender-responsive regional assessments quantifying climate vulnerabilities, pollution, coastal and marine biodiversity state and trends (with gender disaggregated participation in consultation and validation tracked)</p>	<p>Lack of up-to-date and harmonized assessments to quantify climate vulnerabilities, pollution, and coastal and marine biodiversity. Two State of Environment Reports have been published, and a number of academic publications have been produced on these topics</p>	<p>Mid-term:</p> <p>4 online consultations for assessments (<i>at least 80 participants (60% women), contributing to CI11</i>)</p> <p>4 gender-responsive regional assessments quantifying pollution, coastal and marine biodiversity and related climate vulnerabilities developed</p> <p>- <i>Regional Assessment and Projection of coastal and marine climate vulnerability, including sea level fluctuation and implications, warming and extreme weather including basin coast environmental flow and delta resilience diagnostics</i></p> <p>- <i>Regional assessment of land and sea-based sources and effects of pollution (Moscow Protocol)</i></p> <p>- <i>Regional Assessment of state and trends of coastal and marine (river–delta–coast connectivity) biodiversity (Ashgabat Protocol)</i></p> <p>- <i>Regional Assessment of Ecosystem Goods and Services from coastal and marine biodiversity per sector (fisheries, tourism and shipping) and potential for Sustainable Blue Economy</i></p> <p>End of project:</p>	<p>Regional assessments</p> <p>TC COP decisions</p>

Outcome /Output	Outcome/ Output Indicators	Baseline	Targets and Monitoring Milestones	Means of Verification
			<p>2 validation workshops for assessments.</p> <p><i>At least 40 participant (60% women), contributing to CI11</i></p>	
<p>Output 3.1.2: Regional source-to-sea consistent frameworks for policy coherence co-designed addressing pollution, biodiversity conservation and restoration, climate adaptation and sustainable blue economy</p>	<p>4. No. of regional cooperation frameworks and agreements established for biodiversity conservation and restoration, climate adaptation, and pollution management (with gender disaggregated participation in consultation and validation tracked)</p>	<p>Existing legal frameworks for pollution and biodiversity loss are not effectively implemented. There is no framework for cooperation between the Tehran Convention and the Agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of aquatic biological resources of the Caspian Sea. Additionally, regional frameworks for climate adaptation, IRB, CZM, and a Blue Economy Strategy are lacking to ensure strong regional governance on these topics.</p>	<p>Mid-term: 10 online consultations during preparatory meetings for each policy frameworks. <i>At least 200 participants (60% women), contributing to CI11</i></p> <p>2 regional frameworks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - BE Cooperation Framework with TC and the Agreement on conservation and sustainable use of aquatic biological resources of the Caspian Sea - Regional Program of Action outlined (pollution prevention/control) (Moscow Protocol) <p>End of project:</p> <p>3 regional frameworks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regional climate adaptation framework for the Caspian Sea - IRB, Marine and Coastal Zone Management Framework development - Regional Blue Economy Strategy <p>5 Validation workshops for policy frameworks.</p> <p><i>At least 50 participants (60 % women), contributing to CI11</i></p>	<p>Reports on stakeholder consultations</p> <p>Regional frameworks</p> <p>TC COP Decisions</p>
<p>Output 3.1.3: Capacity-building to support the application of regional frameworks for policy coherence and Sustainable Blue Economy delivered</p>	<p>5. No. capacity building events and participants trained in the application of regional frameworks for policy coherence and Sustainable Blue Economy in the Caspian Sea (with gender disaggregated participation tracked)</p>	<p>Insufficient technical capacity of national and regional institutions/ industry stakeholders to implement the Ashgabat and Moscow Protocols to the Tehran Convention and address climate change in the region, and on IRB, CZM, and MSP for Blue Economy transformation</p>	<p>Mid-term: 2 sectoral roundtable and industry groups conducted <i>At least 200 participants (60% women), contributing to CI11</i></p> <p>4 online consultations to identify region-specific challenges and opportunities for the development of the</p>	<p>Reports and recommendations from roundtables and industry groups</p> <p>Stakeholder surveys</p>

Outcome /Output	Outcome/ Output Indicators	Baseline	Targets and Monitoring Milestones	Means of Verification
	<p>6. No. of gender-sensitive training packages and toolkits developed and shared</p>	<p>Low stakeholder engagement (incl. among aquaculture, fisheries, tourism, extractive, and shipping industries) and involvement with regional governance structures towards coordinated environmental action.</p>	<p>regional nature-based solution toolkit <i>At least 80 participants (60% women), contributing to CI11</i></p> <p>4 online consultations of regional and national state and non-state institutions prior to the trainings <i>At least 80 participants (60% women), contributing to CI11</i></p> <p>1 gender-responsive training package developed on integrated management approaches</p> <p>3 meetings to support WGMA, as periodic meetings to review progress, and develop technical documents outlining standardized monitoring methodologies. <i>At least 60 participants (60% women), contributing to CI11</i></p> <p>End of project:</p> <p>1 regional nature-based solution toolkit</p> <p>4 gender-responsive capacity building trainings of regional and national state and non-state institutions conducted <i>At least 40 participants (60% women), contributing to CI11</i></p> <p>3 capacity-building workshops on the Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment and Information Exchange <i>At least 60 participants (60% women), contributing to CI11</i></p> <p>1 regional guideline for monitoring procedures</p>	<p>Training packages, toolkits and guidelines</p> <p>Workshop reports</p>

Outcome /Output	Outcome/ Output Indicators	Baseline	Targets and Monitoring Milestones	Means of Verification
Output 3.1.4: Regional knowledge exchange and outreach established	<p>7. No. of knowledge products shared and accessed by regional and global stakeholders and outreach material published</p> <p>8. No. of regional/global exchange events (with gender disaggregated participation tracked)</p>	<p>Little use of regional knowledge sharing tools/platforms incl. the Caspian Environment Information Centre (CEIC). The CEIC is established under the Tehran Convention and serves as a central information and communication hub on the Caspian Sea environment.</p> <p>Lack of stakeholder (public sector, private sector and community) understanding of environmental issues and possible solutions</p>	<p>Mid-term:</p> <p>1 communication and outreach strategy</p> <p>-</p> <p>End of project:</p> <p>1 meeting on lessons learned and sharing best practices in the context of the project achievements</p> <p><i>At least 200 participants (60% women), contributing to CI11</i></p> <p>22 knowledge products shared on CEIC and IW:LEARN</p> <p><i>(incl. 9 methodologies for regional assessments and frameworks and survey results, 4 regional assessments, 5 regional frameworks, 1 capacity building curriculum, 1 regional nature-based solution toolkit, 2 reports of sectoral roundtable and industry groups conducted)</i></p> <p><i>Targeting 200 beneficiaries (60% women), contributing to CI11</i></p> <p>At least 3 global/regional exchange events (IWC, biannual Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans meetings, other international platforms and events) <i>Targeting 200 beneficiaries (60% women), contributing to CI11</i></p> <p>20 gender-responsive outreach materials published (fact sheets, infographics, articles, and multimedia content) <i>Targeting 500 beneficiaries (60% women), contributing to CI11</i></p>	<p>Working groups ToRs</p> <p>Communication and outreach strategy</p> <p>Knowledge products</p> <p>URLs to shared products / access tracked through CEIC</p> <p>Reports on global events</p> <p>Outreach materials (URL)</p>

Outputs	Component 3: Direct beneficiaries targeted (contributes to GEF-8 Core Indicator 11)	Indicator 11 (women)	Indicator 11 (men)
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	-one capacity building workshop on Blue Economy with application of IRB, CZM and MSP		
Output 3.1.4	- Online meeting (200 participants), on lessons learned and sharing best practices in the context of the project achievements (activity 3.1.4.3)	120	80
	- Knowledge products shared on CEIC (activity 3.1.4.1) and IW:LEARN (activity 3.1.4.4)	120	80
	- Global exchange events	120	80
	- Outreach material published	300	200
Total		1194	796

ANNEX D: STATUS OF UTILIZATION OF PROJECT PREPARATION GRANT (PPG)

Provide detailed funding amount of the PPG activities financing status in the table below:

Project Preparation Activities Implemented	GETF/LDCF/SCCF Amount (\$)		
	Budgeted Amount	Amount Spent To date	Amount Committed
Local consultations, field visits, multi-country discussions (including travel): Organization of project consultations and/or meetings to discuss the project design, including in accordance with the ESF	73,489.00	73,489.00	0.00
Development of project technical design parameters and documentation such as preparation of TORs, validation, costing, Project Procurement Strategy for Development (PPSD), Project Operations Manual, Workplan Year 1, Procurement Plan	100,000.00	90,000.00	0.00
ESF and Gender Analysis, developing related action plans and ESF documents such as Env and Soc Mgt Framework (ESMF), Resettlement Policy Framework (RPF), Labor Management Plan (LMP), Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP), Env and Soc Commitment Plan (ESCP)	10,000.00	20,000.00	0.00
Total	183,489.00	183,489.00	0.00

ANNEX E: PROJECT MAP AND COORDINATES

Please provide geo-referenced information and map where the project interventions will take place

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Absheron National Park	40.2966862	50.3462568	

Location Description:

Activity Description:

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Caspian Itbalygy State Nature Reserve	44.9466227	50.9310025	

Location Description:

Activity Description:

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Garabogaz Sanctuary	41.03	52.54	

Location Description:

Activity Description:

Please provide any further geo-referenced information and map where project interventions are taking place as appropriate.

The project map is below:



ANNEX F: ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL SAFEGUARDS DOCUMENTS INCLUDING RATING

Attach agency safeguard datasheet/assessment report(s), including ratings of risk types and overall project/program risk classification as well as any management plans or measures to address identified risks and impacts (as applicable).

Title

UNEP SRIF

WB Appraisal ESRS

ANNEX G: BUDGET TABLE

Please upload the budget table here.

Appendix: Indicative Project Budget

Expenditure Category	Detailed Description								Total (USDeq.)	Responsible Entity	
		Component 1: Strengthening Pollution Monitoring		Component 2: Strengthening Biodiversity Planning		Component 3: Strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the Caspian Sea region	M&E	Sub-Total			PMC
		1.1 Strengthened institutional capacities for systematic approaches and comparable pollution monitoring	1.2 Strengthened pollution monitoring in marine areas at national level in focus countries	2.1 Strengthened institutional capacity for biodiversity planning in marine areas	2.2 Strengthened biodiversity planning and conservation measures	3.1 Strengthened regional cooperation mechanisms					
International Consultants	Tehran Convention Expert to ensure effective linkage and full alignment between the project and the Tehran Convention process (outputs 3.1.1-3.1.4). This includes a focus on activity 3.1.1.2, 3.1.1.3, 3.1.2.2, 3.1.2.3,						\$250,000	\$250,000	\$250,000	UNEP (TCIS)	

Expenditure Category	Detailed Description									Total (US\$Eq.)	Responsible Entity
		Component 1: Strengthening Pollution Monitoring		Component 2: Strengthening Biodiversity Planning		Component 3: Strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the Caspian Sea region	M&E	Sub-Total	PMC		
		1.1 Strengthened institutional capacities for systematic approaches and comparable pollution monitoring	1.2 Strengthened pollution monitoring in marine areas at national level in focus countries	2.1 Strengthened institutional capacity for biodiversity planning in marine areas	2.2 Strengthened biodiversity planning and conservation measures						
	3.1.4.1, and facilitating country engagement to address outstanding negotiation issues related to the Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment and Information Exchange (activity 3.1.3.5) - 30 working months, over project lifetime										
	Regional Gender Expert to ensure implementation under GAP (outputs 3.1.1-3.1.4) - 4 working months, over project lifetime					\$40,000		\$40,000		\$40,000	UNEP (TCIS)
Local Consultants	Environment and Social consultants/experts support to ensure project compliance with ESS requirements (UNOPS) - 20 months over project lifetime	\$40,000		\$50,000	\$150,000			\$240,000		\$240,000	UNOPS
Contractual services	Prefeasibility studies for finance instrument to	\$300,000						\$300,000		\$300,000	UNOPS

Expenditure Category	Detailed Description								Total (US\$Eq.)	Responsible Entity	
		Component 1: Strengthening Pollution Monitoring		Component 2: Strengthening Biodiversity Planning		Component 3: Strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the Caspian Sea region	M&E	Sub-Total			PMC
		1.1 Strengthened institutional capacities for systematic approaches and comparable pollution monitoring	1.2 Strengthened pollution monitoring in marine areas at national level in focus countries	2.1 Strengthened institutional capacity for biodiversity planning in marine areas	2.2 Strengthened biodiversity planning and conservation measures	3.1 Strengthened regional cooperation mechanisms					
	support pollution monitoring in three focus countries (under output 1.1.3 for finance and policy instruments for pollution monitoring and reporting)										
	Prefeasibility studies for finance instrument to support biodiversity planning in three focus countries (under output 2.1.6 on a government-selected finance instrument (one per country), assessing its applicability, operational requirements, and potential for long-term implementation)			\$300,000				\$300,000	\$300,000	UNOPS	
	Development of pollution monitoring scheme in Azerbaijan (Environment Policy Department of the MENR), incl.	\$350,000						\$350,000	\$350,000	UNOPS	

Expenditure Category	Detailed Description									Total (USDeq.)	Responsible Entity
		Component 1: Strengthening Pollution Monitoring		Component 2: Strengthening Biodiversity Planning		Component 3: Strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the Caspian Sea region	M&E	Sub-Total	PMC		
		1.1 Strengthened institutional capacities for systematic approaches and comparable pollution monitoring	1.2 Strengthened pollution monitoring in marine areas at national level in focus countries	2.1 Strengthened institutional capacity for biodiversity planning in marine areas	2.2 Strengthened biodiversity planning and conservation measures						
	gap review of and recommendations on pollution monitoring practices, development of the pollution monitoring scheme and institutional arrangements, its validation with stakeholders, drafting policy instruments to facilitate adoption and implementation (under output 1.2.1 on pollution monitoring scheme, 1.2.4 on pollution monitoring report)										
	Development of pollution monitoring scheme in Kazakhstan (KSRICS of the MENR located in Aktau on the Caspian coast), incl. gap review of and recommendations on pollution monitoring practices, development of		\$350,000					\$350,000		\$350,000	UNOPS

Expenditure Category	Detailed Description								Total (US\$eq.)	Responsible Entity	
		Component 1: Strengthening Pollution Monitoring		Component 2: Strengthening Biodiversity Planning		Component 3: Strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the Caspian Sea region	M&E	Sub-Total			PMC
		1.1 Strengthened institutional capacities for systematic approaches and comparable pollution monitoring	1.2 Strengthened pollution monitoring in marine areas at national level in focus countries	2.1 Strengthened institutional capacity for biodiversity planning in marine areas	2.2 Strengthened biodiversity planning and conservation measures	3.1 Strengthened regional cooperation mechanisms					
	the pollution monitoring scheme and institutional arrangements, its validation with stakeholders, drafting policy instruments to facilitate adoption and implementation (under output 1.2.1 on pollution monitoring scheme, 1.2.4 on pollution monitoring report)										
	Development of pollution monitoring scheme in Turkmenistan (CaspEcoControl of the MEP located in Turkmenbashi on the Caspian coast), incl. gap review of and recommendations on pollution monitoring practices, development of the pollution monitoring scheme and institutional arrangements, its		\$350,000					\$350,000	\$350,000	UNOPS	

Expenditure Category	Detailed Description								Total (US\$Eq.)	Responsible Entity	
		Component 1: Strengthening Pollution Monitoring		Component 2: Strengthening Biodiversity Planning		Component 3: Strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the Caspian Sea region	M&E	Sub-Total			PMC
		1.1 Strengthened institutional capacities for systematic approaches and comparable pollution monitoring	1.2 Strengthened pollution monitoring in marine areas at national level in focus countries	2.1 Strengthened institutional capacity for biodiversity planning in marine areas	2.2 Strengthened biodiversity planning and conservation measures	3.1 Strengthened regional cooperation mechanisms					
	validation with stakeholders, drafting policy instruments to facilitate adoption and implementation (under output 1.2.1 on pollution monitoring scheme, 1.2.4 on pollution monitoring report)										
	Technical assistance for adoption of policies/laws required to expand MPAs in Azerbaijan (MENR), incl. draft of policies/laws, consultations processes (under output 2.2.1 on policies and laws to update legal status and management of expanded MPAs, 2.2.2 on establishment of MPAs)	-			\$200,000				\$200,000	UNOPS	
	Technical assistance for adoption of policies/laws required to expand MPAs in				\$200,000				\$200,000	UNOPS	

Expenditure Category	Detailed Description								Total (USDeq.)	Responsible Entity	
		Component 1: Strengthening Pollution Monitoring		Component 2: Strengthening Biodiversity Planning		Component 3: Strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the Caspian Sea region	M&E	Sub-Total			PMC
		1.1 Strengthened institutional capacities for systematic approaches and comparable pollution monitoring	1.2 Strengthened pollution monitoring in marine areas at national level in focus countries	2.1 Strengthened institutional capacity for biodiversity planning in marine areas	2.2 Strengthened biodiversity planning and conservation measures	3.1 Strengthened regional cooperation mechanisms					
	Kazakhstan (MENR), incl. draft of policies/laws, consultations processes (under output 2.2.1 on policies and laws to update legal status and management of expanded MPAs, 2.2.2 on establishment of MPAs)										
	Technical assistance for adoption of policies/laws required to expand MPAs in Turkmenistan (MEP), incl. draft of policies/laws, consultations processes (under output 2.2.1 on policies and laws to update legal status and management of expanded MPAs, 2.2.2 on establishment of MPAs)				\$200,000			\$200,000	\$200,000	UNOPS	
	Development of PA management plan in Azerbaijan - expanding the Absheron National Park			\$50,000	\$200,000	-		\$250,000	\$250,000	UNOPS	

Expenditure Category	Detailed Description								Total (US\$Eq.)	Responsible Entity	
		Component 1: Strengthening Pollution Monitoring		Component 2: Strengthening Biodiversity Planning		Component 3: Strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the Caspian Sea region	M&E	Sub-Total			PMC
		1.1 Strengthened institutional capacities for systematic approaches and comparable pollution monitoring	1.2 Strengthened pollution monitoring in marine areas at national level in focus countries	2.1 Strengthened institutional capacity for biodiversity planning in marine areas	2.2 Strengthened biodiversity planning and conservation measures						
	(under output 2.1.2 on analyses of institutions and regulatory frameworks, output 2.2.3 on protected areas management system development and implementation support)										
	Development of PA management plan in Kazakhstan - the Caspian Itbalygy State Nature Reserve (under output 2.1.2 on analyses of institutions and regulatory frameworks, output 2.2.3 on protected areas management system development and implementation support)			\$50,000	\$200,000			\$250,000	\$250,000	UNOPS	
	Development of PA management plan in Turkmenistan - Garabogaz marine protected area (under output 2.1.2 on analyses of institutions and			\$50,000	\$200,000			\$250,000	\$250,000	UNOPS	

Expenditure Category	Detailed Description								Total (USDeq.)	Responsible Entity	
		Component 1: Strengthening Pollution Monitoring		Component 2: Strengthening Biodiversity Planning		Component 3: Strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the Caspian Sea region	M&E	Sub-Total			PMC
		1.1 Strengthened institutional capacities for systematic approaches and comparable pollution monitoring	1.2 Strengthened pollution monitoring in marine areas at national level in focus countries	2.1. Strengthened institutional capacity for biodiversity planning in marine areas	2.2 Strengthened biodiversity planning and conservation measures						
	regulatory frameworks, output 2.2.3 on protected areas management system development and implementation support)										
	Technical studies and guidebook on biodiversity conservation (reviews, recommendations, development of guidebook, consultations processes) (under output 2.1.1, 2.1.3)			\$200,000				\$200,000	\$200,000	UNOPS	
	Development of pollution monitoring and best practices guidebook (under output 1.1.1)	\$100,000						\$100,000	\$100,000	UNOPS	
	Contractual services for data sharing and innovation (technical support for "Impact Accelerator" approach to the three focus countries with comparable data approach,	\$120,000						\$120,000	\$120,000	UNOPS	

Expenditure Category	Detailed Description								Total (US\$Eq.)	Responsible Entity	
		Component 1: Strengthening Pollution Monitoring		Component 2: Strengthening Biodiversity Planning		Component 3: Strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the Caspian Sea region	M&E	Sub-Total			PMC
		1.1 Strengthened institutional capacities for systematic approaches and comparable pollution monitoring	1.2 Strengthened pollution monitoring in marine areas at national level in focus countries	2.1 Strengthened institutional capacity for biodiversity planning in marine areas	2.2 Strengthened biodiversity planning and conservation measures	3.1 Strengthened regional cooperation mechanisms					
	methods, knowledge and data sharing) (under output 1.1.2, 1.1.1)										
	Publication of 4 regional assessments including technical and language editing, translation (English/Russian), graphic design, maps, summaries for targeted audiences, and dissemination through various channels (under activity 3.1.1.3)					\$200,000		\$200,000	\$200,000	UNEP (TCIS)	
	Organizing/delivering trainings, capacity-building activities, toolkits, and regional assessments and frameworks by national agencies, research institutions, and regional initiatives, under the following activities: - 3.1.1.2: Produce the Regional Assessment and Projection of					\$490,000		\$490,000	\$490,000	UNEP (TCIS)	

Expenditure Category	Detailed Description								Total (US\$eq.)	Responsible Entity	
		Component 1: Strengthening Pollution Monitoring		Component 2: Strengthening Biodiversity Planning		Component 3: Strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the Caspian Sea region	M&E	Sub-Total			PMC
		1.1 Strengthened institutional capacities for systematic approaches and comparable pollution monitoring	1.2 Strengthened pollution monitoring in marine areas at national level in focus countries	2.1 Strengthened institutional capacity for biodiversity planning in marine areas	2.2 Strengthened biodiversity planning and conservation measures	3.1 Strengthened regional cooperation mechanisms					
	3.1.4.2, 3.1.4.3, 3.1.4.4)										
	Specialized advisory support on pollution, biodiversity, climate-related issues to the PMU; undertaking baseline data collection and gap analyses; reviewing and providing inputs to frameworks; and contributing inputs to knowledge products and resource material under the following activities: - Activity 3.1.1.1: Identify gaps and collect data for all 4 assessments from a pollution, biodiversity and climate perspective, to ensure the production of integrated assessments - Activity 3.1.2.1: Produce policy gap analysis for all 5 frameworks						\$240,000	\$240,000	\$240,000	UNEP (TCIS)	

Expenditure Category	Detailed Description								Total (US\$Eq.)	Responsible Entity	
		Component 1: Strengthening Pollution Monitoring		Component 2: Strengthening Biodiversity Planning		Component 3: Strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the Caspian Sea region	M&E	Sub-Total			PMC
		1.1 Strengthened institutional capacities for systematic approaches and comparable pollution monitoring	1.2 Strengthened pollution monitoring in marine areas at national level in focus countries	2.1 Strengthened institutional capacity for biodiversity planning in marine areas	2.2 Strengthened biodiversity planning and conservation measures	3.1 Strengthened regional cooperation mechanisms					
	prevention/control) (Moscow Protocol), the Regional climate adaptation framework for the Caspian Sea, the BE Cooperation Framework with TC and the Agreement on conservation and sustainable use of aquatic biological resources of the Caspian Sea, and the Regional Blue Economy Strategy (4 out of the 5 regional frameworks under output 3.1.2) - Activity 3.1.3.1: Lead the industry roundtables and industry groups - Activity 3.1.3.3: Lead the development of the regional nature-based solutions toolkit										
	Provision of national-level technical inputs into regional assessments, frameworks, and					\$555,000		\$555,000		\$555,000	UNEP (TCIS)

Expenditure Category	Detailed Description									Total (US\$Eq.)	Responsible Entity
		Component 1: Strengthening Pollution Monitoring		Component 2: Strengthening Biodiversity Planning		Component 3: Strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the Caspian Sea region	M&E	Sub-Total	PMC		
		1.1 Strengthened institutional capacities for systematic approaches and comparable pollution monitoring	1.2 Strengthened pollution monitoring in marine areas at national level in focus countries	2.1 Strengthened institutional capacity for biodiversity planning in marine areas	2.2 Strengthened biodiversity planning and conservation measures						
Procurement of Goods	Equipment for PA management in Absheron National Park		\$270,000		\$400,000	-		\$670,000		\$670,000	UNOPS
	Equipment for protected areas management of Caspian Itbalygy SNR in Mangistau Region		\$270,000		\$400,000	-		\$670,000		\$670,000	UNOPS
	Equipment for protected areas management with HSNR MPA extension (Garabogaz Wildlife Sanctuary area)		\$270,000		\$400,000	-		\$670,000		\$670,000	UNOPS
Workshop / Training	Capacity building in managing the Absheron National Park MPA (plans, training manuals and tools, targeted training programs) for pollution monitoring (1.1.2, 1.2.2) and biodiversity planning (2.2.5)	\$80,000	\$100,000		\$70,000	-		\$250,000		\$250,000	UNOPS
	Capacity building in managing the Caspian Itbalygy SNR in Mangistau Region (plans, training manuals and tools, targeted training	\$80,000	\$100,000		\$70,000	-		\$250,000		\$250,000	UNOPS

Expenditure Category	Detailed Description								Total (US\$eq.)	Responsible Entity	
		Component 1: Strengthening Pollution Monitoring		Component 2: Strengthening Biodiversity Planning		Component 3: Strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the Caspian Sea region	M&E	Sub-Total			PMC
		1.1 Strengthened institutional capacities for systematic approaches and comparable pollution monitoring	1.2 Strengthened pollution monitoring in marine areas at national level in focus countries	2.1. Strengthened institutional capacity for biodiversity planning in marine areas	2.2 Strengthened biodiversity planning and conservation measures						
	programs) for pollution monitoring (1.1.2, 1.2.2) and biodiversity planning (2.2.5)										
	Capacity building in managing the expanded HSNR MPA to Garabogaz Wildlife Sanctuary (plans, training manuals and tools, targeted training programs) for pollution monitoring (1.1.2, 1.2.2) and biodiversity planning (2.2.5)	\$80,000	\$100,000		\$70,000	-		\$250,000		\$250,000	UNOPS
	Learning and Exchange: Workshop at multi-country level to advance biodiversity conservation activities (incl. innovative finance instrument workshop, to be followed by national level pre-feasibility)			\$150,000		-		\$150,000		\$150,000	UNOPS
	Validation of recommendation			\$150,000		-		\$150,000		\$150,000	UNOPS

Expenditure Category	Detailed Description								Total (USDeq.)	Responsible Entity	
		Component 1: Strengthening Pollution Monitoring		Component 2: Strengthening Biodiversity Planning		Component 3: Strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the Caspian Sea region	M&E	Sub-Total			PMC
		1.1 Strengthened institutional capacities for systematic approaches and comparable pollution monitoring	1.2 Strengthened pollution monitoring in marine areas at national level in focus countries	2.1 Strengthened institutional capacity for biodiversity planning in marine areas	2.2 Strengthened biodiversity planning and conservation measures	3.1 Strengthened regional cooperation mechanisms					
	s and selection of pilot MPAs										
	Workshop at multi-country level to advance national pollution monitoring activities (inc. pollution roundtable)	\$200,000						\$200,000	\$200,000	UNOPS	
	Includes targeted activities for pollution control and biodiversity conservation in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. For pollution control (Component 1), the focus is on awareness raising, education, and outreach, accompanied by monitoring reports to measure effectiveness. For biodiversity conservation (Component 2), the emphasis is on raising awareness and conducting outreach activities specifically aimed	-	\$259,000	\$460,000				\$719,000	\$719,000	UNOPS	

Expenditure Category	Detailed Description								Total (US\$eq.)	Responsible Entity	
		Component 1: Strengthening Pollution Monitoring		Component 2: Strengthening Biodiversity Planning		Component 3: Strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the Caspian Sea region	M&E	Sub-Total			PMC
		1.1 Strengthened institutional capacities for systematic approaches and comparable pollution monitoring	1.2 Strengthened pollution monitoring in marine areas at national level in focus countries	2.1. Strengthened institutional capacity for biodiversity planning in marine areas	2.2 Strengthened biodiversity planning and conservation measures	3.1. Strengthened regional cooperation mechanisms					
	at improving management practices in protected areas within the same three countries.										
	Regional meetings (in-person meetings for consultations/validation of regional assessments and frameworks, logistical support for industry roundtables and industry groups (activities 3.1.1.1, 3.1.1.3, 3.1.2.1, 3.1.2.3, 3.1.3.1))					\$265,196		\$265,196		\$265,196	UNEP (TCIS)
Salary and benefits / Staff costs	National Technical Coordinator (UNOPS) - 48 months over project lifetime		\$30,000		\$30,000			\$60,000	\$311,000	\$371,000	UNOPS
	Regional Technical Coordinator (TCIS/UNEP) - 48 months over project lifetime					\$300,000	\$15,000	\$315,000	\$100,000	\$415,000	UNEP (TCIS)
Admin/finance	National Project Administration Assistant (UNOPS) - 24							-	\$40,000	\$40,000	UNOPS

Expenditure Category	Detailed Description									Total (US\$Eq.)	Responsible Entity
		Component 1: Strengthening Pollution Monitoring		Component 2: Strengthening Biodiversity Planning		Component 3: Strengthening transboundary cooperation mechanisms in the Caspian Sea region	M&E	Sub-Total	PMC		
		1.1 Strengthened institutional capacities for systematic approaches and comparable pollution monitoring	1.2 Strengthened pollution monitoring in marine areas at national level in focus countries	2.1 Strengthened institutional capacity for biodiversity planning in marine areas	2.2 Strengthened biodiversity planning and conservation measures						
	months over project lifetime										
	Regional Assistant (TCIS/UNEP) - 48 months over project lifetime					\$138,125		\$138,125	\$61,875	\$200,000	UNEP (TCIS)
Monitoring & Evaluation	Project implementation progress reporting and evaluation and Mid Term review and Terminal evaluation (UNOPS & UNEP IA)						\$188,522	\$188,522		\$188,522	UNOPS & UNEP IA
Travel	Travel of regional personnel and consultants					\$200,000		\$200,000		\$200,000	UNEP (TCIS)
	Travel support to members of working groups, sectoral roundtables and industry groups					\$349,804		\$349,804		\$349,804	UNEP (TCIS)
Other Operating Costs	Fiduciary/operating expenses - compliance, reporting, invoicing, etc.								\$29,598	\$29,598	UNOPS
Grand Total		\$1,000,000	\$2,449,000	\$1,000,000	\$3,250,000	\$3,298,125	\$203,522	\$11,200,647	\$542,473	\$11,743,120	

Please explain any aspects of the budget as needed here

The indicative project budget is attached

ANNEX I: RESPONSES TO PROJECT REVIEWS

From GEF Secretariat and GEF Agencies, and Responses to Comments from Council at work program inclusion and the Convention Secretariat and STAP at PIF.

Matrix of responses

Comments	Team's responses
<p>Summary of STAP's views of the project</p> <p>This project seeks to 'address pollution and improve biodiversity conservation in the Caspian Sea,' a worthwhile objective given the natural and economic value of the largest enclosed water body on Earth. While the problems facing the Caspian Sea are well understood and described, as is the history of general engagement in this transboundary water basin, the project's emphasis on activities such as capacity building, monitoring, and gap analyses, combined with very limited stakeholder engagement, and the lack of attention paid to gender issues and the private sector, makes it unlikely to contribute to meaningful improvement in environmental or socio-economic outcomes in this beleaguered water body.</p>	<p>The task team agrees with the STAP concept stage (PIF) comments that the project is worthwhile and notes that all project elements (gender, engagement, private sector) are reflected in the CEO endorsement package, also in line with the required appraisal questions for a WB project.</p> <p>The task team hopes that the STAP will appreciate the appraisal-stage GEF submission and the Project Appraisal Document that responds to all of the comments provided by the STAP.</p> <p>Regarding meaningful outcomes. The project outcomes now include strengthened transboundary cooperation between all riparian states of the Caspian Sea (the non-beneficiary countries will be engaged in the regional activities through co-finance) to support an informed transition towards a sustainable blue economy and strengthened institutional capacities for pollution monitoring and biodiversity planning in the three beneficiary countries. This further translates into the creation of three new marine protected areas, one in each project beneficiary country, the improved management of existing terrestrial protected areas (applying the source to sea approach).</p> <p>Stakeholder engagement: The project design stage has included engagement of government, civil society and private sector in each of the countries. Three appraisal missions took place throughout project preparation in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, including field visits.</p> <p>Stakeholder consultations. ESF instruments have been prepared for each country. In each country, stakeholder consultations on these instruments were completed.</p> <p>Gender. A Gender Action Plan was developed for both regional and national activities under the project, integrating gender perspectives into all consultations, policy development, and capacity building processes. This has been incorporated into the project design (see project description and results framework).</p> <p>Private sector. The final project design includes private sector engagement related to pollution monitoring. Also under component 3, sectoral roundtables and industry group</p>

	<p>discussions will be organized to enhance cross-sectoral cooperation for a sustainable blue economy.</p>
<p>Overall, it is a well-intentioned project that aims to address select environmental problems plaguing the shared water body (biodiversity loss and pollution). However, the project remains relatively unambitious, especially in light of the three decade history of GEF and non-GEF support for the Caspian Sea basin. Nor does the project appear to take into account recent legal, institutional, environmental, economic and political developments in the region.</p>	<p>The task team thanks the STAP for their view.</p>
<p>Despite the political challenges facing the region, which STAP acknowledges, the project is insufficiently ambitious to achieve significant environmental outcomes, especially in view of the challenges the region is facing, but also in light of earlier projects in the region, and it displays a general lack of innovation, let alone potential for transformation.</p>	<p>Environmental outcomes. The project now includes the creation of three new marine protected areas, one in each country.</p> <p>Innovation. The project includes three innovations: i) An “Impact Accelerator” for pollution monitoring and biodiversity planning is applied to support selectivity of activities for maximum scale-up effect, and applies a “Architecture Practice- Scale Up” process, ii) a phased approach to marine protected areas creation, ii) introduction of 10 innovative financing instruments of which countries are expected to prepare a pre-feasibility for one instrument each, and thereby setting the stage for sustaining and scaling up project outcomes.</p>
<p>While STAP is rating this project as a minor, mainly because the proposed activities seem feasible and can deliver some GEBs in the identified areas (pollution, biodiversity) and the design of the project supports those, the proponent needs to significantly revise the proposal in line with the comments below to ensure it delivers a good return on GEF investments especially with regards to proper integrated water (fresh and marine) management and a source to sea (S2S) approach (especially as the project has a strong IW component) and thus generates GEBs in an innovative and transformative manner.</p>	<p>The task team believes it has integrated to the extent possible the required elements related to water and S2S. The approach was incorporated in the regional component (component 3) where the project will assist the countries in meeting obligations under the Moscow Protocol (Source to Sea), and Ashgabat Protocol. For example, under the regional component, a transboundary source-to-sea approach will be applied which ensures an integrated approach to tackling biodiversity, pollution and climate change issues. Regional assessments (incl. on land-and sea-based pollution sources and impacts, and river-delta-coast connectivity) under output 3.1.1 will inform the development of several integrated regional frameworks under output 3.1.2 (incl. an Integrated River Basin (IRB), Marine, and Coastal Zone Management Framework; blue economy cooperation framework; and regional blue economy strategy).</p>
<p>Project rationale, and project description – are they sound?</p>	

<p>The document explains the relevance of the region and the issues at stake based on relevant scientific and other information. However, these critical issues are not addressed in a meaningful, transformative or effective way. Of all the problems facing the Caspian Sea, this project focuses solely on pollution and biodiversity loss, though climate change impacts and the need for adaptation are mentioned, but only as part of the problem description.</p> <p>This narrow focus might be sensible if the project were to focus on integrated/transboundary fresh and marine water resources management (using a source-to-sea approach), whereby pollution control/prevention and biodiversity protection/restoration would be integral components. However, this is not the case for the proposed project which treats these two issues separately, and consequently misses a potential opportunity for integration. It would be helpful to understand the rationale underpinning the project focus on these two issues and the selected approach (versus source to sea, for example).</p>	<p>Project focus. The national activities focus on very specific pollution and biodiversity issues. This is required to achieve specific outcomes with pollution reduction and biodiversity outcomes. project is aligned with Paris Agreement. The regional activities addresses dialogue on climate including sea level decline and supports an approach of integration of all threats as part of the marine spatial planning approach that is promoted.</p>
<p>Importantly, the PIF refers to the negative impacts of environmental degradation on the project countries of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan without acknowledging the other littoral countries that face similar issues. Despite political and other factors that may prevent direct engagement with these other countries, providing this type of contextual information – particularly in a transboundary water basin – is necessary to strengthen the overall rationale and justify the approach taken.</p>	<p>The contextual section has been revised to describe the environmental degradation of the Caspian Sea region in its entirety. This is also reflected in the problem tree figure. The text follows the World Bank’s new Project Appraisal Document (PAD) format.</p>
<p>While the project objective (“Strengthen the capacity of the participating countries to address pollution and improve biodiversity conservation in the Caspian Sea”) is relatively clear, the manner in which this will be achieved remains incomplete. For instance, the objective and the approach highlight the shared nature of challenges to justify the need to take a transboundary approach; however, most of the planned activities remain limited to the national level of the three participating countries (e.g. with marine spatial planning activities only focusing on the territorial waters of the countries, noting a contradiction between the project description (page 7) which refers to marine planning in territorial waters and the ToC figure which refers to transboundary spatial marine management).</p>	<p>Following discussions with the three concerned governments, the Project Development Objective (PDO) has been elaborated and adjusted to: “to strengthen pollution monitoring and biodiversity planning in targeted sites within the Caspian Sea in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan.” Discussions with local government, civil society and partners reflected in the components contents to what is presented in the PAD, emphasizing pollution monitoring and creation of marine protected areas. This design was confirmed by two rounds of peer review as part of the World Bank technical Quality Enhancement Review and the VP-chaired Regional Operational Committee.</p> <p>The spatial planning included as part of the regional activities(component 3) is expected to engage the countries on how to best undertake marine spatial planning in all segments of the Caspian Sea, including within the 15 nm territorial sea and the Exclusive Economic Zone, while recognizing that not all maritime boundaries have been agreed among the countries.</p>
<p>Given the immensity of the problems facing the Caspian Sea and the fact that this project builds on a history of GEF engagement (since 1990) and on existing agreements including a legally binding convention and relevant protocols, the project should be clear about how it is building on past efforts to avoid duplication . This should include an explanation of how this project will address issues/barriers</p>	<p>Building on past efforts: The project assists countries in meeting obligations of the Tehran Convention and its protocols, which include the Moscow Protocol to protect the Caspian Sea from pollution stemming from land-based sources and activities (this is the same as the STAP’s “Source-to-Sea approach”) and the Ashgabat Protocol that focuses on the protection, preservation, and restoration of the Caspian Sea’s</p>

that previous projects failed to do, and how. The proponent also should connect with another proposed project (“Integrated Management of Seascapes of the Kazakhstani part of the Caspian Sea and Land Resources of Adjacent Territories”, ID 11524, proposed by UNDP) in order to prevent duplications and harvest the benefits of collaboration and synergies.

biodiversity and ecosystem (this responds to the STAP’s wish for concrete outcomes which the project is producing with three marine protected areas).

Regarding the related UNDP project in Kazakhstan. The team has met with the Kazakh government and the UNDP and have agreed to the following areas of synergy and complementarity:

Areas of Synergy

- **Protected areas management** in the Mangistau Region and the Atyrau Region. The World Bank will support creation/management of the Itbalygy marine protected area (108,00 hectares). UNDP will support the management effectiveness of about 3 million hectares of the protected areas system through development of management plans with finance section, development of eco-tourism strategies, and capacity building.
 - **Support to Scientific Research Institute of the Caspian Sea (KSRICS).** The World Bank will support KSRICS in designing the architecture for pollution monitoring, data storage, data reporting. UNDP will also support the KSRICS in several areas spanning GIS, remote sensing, ecosystem monitoring, and capacity building with focus on biodiversity.

Areas of Complementarity

- **Marine Spatial Planning.** UNDP resources will conduct Marine and Land Spatial Planning for the Zhayik (Ural) - Caspian basin in Kazakhstan. The project will train regional and national state and non-state institutions on Coastal Zone Management and Marine Spatial Planning application towards Blue Economy transformation addressing pollution, climate change and biodiversity.
- **Finance Instruments.** The project will support Kazakhstan with developing new financing instruments for Caspian Sea conservation. UNDP will pilot the use of various finance instrument (e.g., green credit, green/blue bonds, payment for ecosystem services, green guarantees) for pilot projects targeting the sustainable management of land and water resources, alternative nature-friendly livelihood activities and engagement of private sector. Besides, ecosystem services and assets evaluation methodologies will be adapted for the practical utilization by the policymakers and local authorities.

Managing synergy:

- **Principle:** The government decides how to make best use of the GEF finance. Ideally the Kazakh Scientific Research Institute of the Caspian Sea (KSRICS) should have a strategic plan and annual operating budget within which the two project can be listed as financiers (GEF project with an amount of \$2m over 4 years, and UNDP with an amount of tbd \$ over 6 years).
 - **During project preparation:** UNDP can participate in the WB/UNOPS Appraisal Mission to Kazakhstan that takes place on April 24-25 in Aktau, hosted by the MENR and KSRICS. A field visit to the new marine protected area in Tyoleniy Archipelago will be considered to learn about which areas of the METT Score WB and UNDP can

	<p>support. The project can participate in appraisal meetings (TBC) of the UNDP project.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During project implementation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Basin plan for adaptation to climate change (BAP) and Basin Council (BC) are the designated platforms for integrated intersectoral cooperation, for planning and activities in the basin. <p>UNDP can participate as observer in the Regional Steering Committee meeting that convene twice a year to approve the project’s annual work plan and budget. UNOPS can participate in the Steering Committee of the UNDP project as observer.</p>
<p>Curiously, the project does not make any reference to the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, adopted in 2018. This instrument and its implementation are likely to shape relations between states in the region generally (hence having a potential impact on the overall conflict/cooperation situation potentially presenting a risk or an opportunity for the project, especially with some issues relating to territorial claims remaining unresolved in the convention), but also with regards to environmental issues more specifically, especially if economic development plans that result from the agreement are implemented (e.g. the new Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline on the seabed).</p>	<p>Legal status of Caspian Sea: The project is not designed for and will not intervene in resolving outstanding territorial disputes among the countries.</p>
<p>While the project mentions the Teheran Convention and the regional protocols under it, the description of the project and its various components does not fully clarify how their implementation will be supported (only that the project will support them in order to address implementation gaps). It is also not clear if supporting the implementation of these protocols is actually at the core of the project (which would make sense given that the Tehran Convention and the 5 protocols are the legal basis of cooperation between states and the institutional mechanism for cooperation) or if the support is only a side product but not at the heart of the project.</p>	<p>Support to implementation of the Tehran Convention and its Protocols is at the core of the project.</p>
<p>The project aims to support blue economy opportunities and development (a long term goal in the ToC), but beyond spatial planning and capacity building, it is not clear what these opportunities are exactly, and how the activities listed under biodiversity protection and pollution management would specifically contribute to blue economy development. Similarly, nature based solutions are mentioned with no explanation for which solutions and how they would be implemented. The same is true for resilience of coastal populations – also a long-term goal in the ToC – but with no engagement (based on the information provided in the document) with these populations, it is unclear how they can benefit and be made ‘more resilient’.</p>	<p>Blue economy opportunities: The World Bank and UNEP see this project as the new entry point for scaled up support to the Caspian Sea countries. As part of this strategic engagement, existing approaches in blue economy, marine spatial planning, innovative financing, job creation, and naturebased solutions to adaptation and development will be introduced.</p> <p>The Bank proposes to invite the STAP to the project launch and witness the strong technical and political commitment to the project.</p>
<p>The indicators beg the question why the terrestrial protected area target is so much higher than the marine areas for a project that spends a significant share of the finances for IW</p>	<p>The project now includes both marine and terrestrial protected areas, recognizing the ecological connectivity between coastal and marine ecosystems of the Caspian Sea. For terrestrial areas</p>

<p>(and not biodiversity). This could potentially make sense in a S2S approach if, for example, the targeted terrestrial protected area was focused on restoration that also served to improve water quality, etc. but without details, it is difficult to follow and therefore needs more elaboration. This is particularly relevant given the large IW component of the project.</p> <p>Overall, the Theory of Change needs to be improved. As currently written, the project components do not explain how they will adequately address the issues/barriers (and why the ones to be addressed have been chosen, as opposed to others) – nor how they relate to the root causes. As currently written, it feels like two separate projects – one that targets pollution and that focuses on biodiversity – thus missing an opportunity for integrated management. This also undermines the claimed upscaling potential to other regions.</p>	<p>(mainly along the coastline), the focus is only on improving management effectiveness of existing sites through the establishment of integrated regional frameworks (under output 3.1.2) and strengthening the capacity for their implementation (under output 3.1.3). For marine areas, the project covers both the creation of new protected areas and the enhancement of management effectiveness of existing ones. This adjustment ensures a balanced and integrated approach while maintaining the primary focus on marine conservation.</p> <p>The theory of change has been reworked to address the comments of the STAP.</p>
<p>Component 1 calls for integrated management, but does not connect well to the topic-specific activities, which remain quite detached from each other. It also is quite unambitious with its focus on workshops, capacity development and a strong focus on national rather than transboundary aspects.</p>	<p>The transboundary element is now reflected under component 3 which will work at regional level to ensure a coordinated transboundary approach, while the national concrete outcomes on pollution monitoring and hectares of marine protected areas is the focus of components 1 and 2.</p>
<p>Component 2 also largely focuses on assessments, inventories and other forms of information collection and management begging the question of how it builds on previous work done e.g. under the Tehran Convention, its protocols and the various groups under it and how this project would be additional and transformative. The same applies to Component 3.</p>	<p>The pollution component has been redesigned to address the feedback from the STAP.</p> <p>The biodiversity component has been redesigned to address the feedback from the STAP.</p>
<p>Gender issues, the engagement of the private sector, and knowledge management are not well described and it is unclear how the project will address these issues, especially given the challenges facing the region (which are mentioned, but for gender aspects only). The lack of stakeholder engagement casts doubt on the extent to which local people will actually benefit from this project and the statement that “the project will foster citizen engagement by reiterating and emphasizing the role and value of local, national, and regional stakeholders in project activities” only heightens these concerns.</p>	<p>Gender, private sector, knowledge management is now better described.</p> <p>See response above related stakeholder engagement and consultations which are part of the Appraisal stage of the project. Engagement and consultation with government and stakeholders have been completed and have confirmed the project design as presented in the Project Appraisal Document (PAD). Under Appendix 6 in the UNEP appendices PPG stakeholder consultations related to component 3 (UNEP activities) are listed.</p>
<p>Finally, it is concerning that this project is meant to align with the World Bank Middle Trade and Transport Corridor project, which seeks to triple the amount of freight traffic across the Caspian Sea, including containers carrying metals and chemical fertilizers and therefore bringing a potential pollution risk to the already vulnerable ecosystem, highlighting a lack of coherence among objectives for the region. The project should explain how these environmental risks will be mitigated.</p>	<p>The project is not designed to mitigate environmental risk from other development projects in the Caspian Sea. Development projects such as those related to oil and gas development or trade corridors would have their own environmental management and preparedness plans. However, the proposed project will support capacity development of national governments so that they are better prepared to address challenges with pollution monitoring and biodiversity planning stemming from other projects in the Caspian Sea.</p>
<p>Specific points to be addressed, and suggestions</p>	

<p>STAP recommends addressing all the issues raised in Section 2; specifically, the proponent should address the points below:</p> <p>The Theory of Change should be revised to consider what actions are ‘necessary and sufficient’ to address the myriad of problems facing the Caspian Sea. See STAP’s primer on Theory of Change for how to do this. If this project targets specific threats, this should be made clear through logical causal pathways that explain how this will be done, starting with the goal and working backwards. If there are critical issues that won’t be covered in this project (fisheries? climate change?), make clear their possible impacts on the goal of this project in the project rationale (including by developing a simple future narrative) and how they will be addressed (or are already being addressed) by other organizations, etc. The ToC should take into account newly emerging challenges, including those stemming from recent legal and economic/investment developments.</p> <p>Consider employing a Source to Sea approach to better integrate pollution and biodiversity that uses spatial planning and management as tools, rather than have those be the main outcome. This type of approach would also allow for greater integration of other issues previously identified (e.g., climate change impacts).</p>	<p>The theory of change, following the guidance from the STAP, has been adjusted with additional information stipulating the challenge, project interventions and outcomes. The ToC is presented in a format compatible with the Bank, UNEP and GEF requirements.</p> <p>The Source to Sea is applied implicitly throughout the project as the context of the project is to assist the countries in meeting obligations under the Moscow Protocol (Source to Sea), and Ashgabat Protocol. For example, under the regional component a transboundary source-to-sea approach will be applied which ensures an integrated approach to tackling biodiversity, pollution and climate change issues. Regional assessments (incl. on land-and sea-based pollution sources and impacts, and river-delta-coast connectivity) under output 3.1.1 will inform the development of several integrated regional frameworks under output 3.1.2 (incl. an Integrated River Basin (IRB), Marine, and Coastal Zone Management Framework; blue economy cooperation framework; and regional blue economy strategy).</p>
<p>Engage with local stakeholders from the beginning (i.e. design) to develop the ToC and causal pathways to be clear about their role, if and how they will benefit (as claimed). This needs to include a broader variety of stakeholders, beyond the government, despite the challenges of doing so in the region.</p> <p>Be more specific about what is meant by a Blue Economy – what does this mean in practice for the Caspian Sea and how does it contribute to potentially competing visions and projects? See STAP’s document on the GEF and the Blue Economy. The same is true for nature-based solutions – be specific about which solutions, where, why and how to avoid using jargon that lacks substance.</p> <p>Clarify how this project builds on lessons learned from 30 years of GEF engagement in this area. Surely by now there has been a history of capacity building and monitoring, etc. that need not be repeated by this project. If these activities are necessary, explain why and how the project builds on past efforts (and/or why they might have failed/have been less successful – and why this project is different). This should also include a fuller explanation of how this project compliments, rather than duplicates, other current activities, e.g. under the various conventions, etc.</p>	<p>Stakeholder engagement: Please refer to previous comments on stakeholder engagement at design and appraisal stages.</p> <p>Blue economy: Please refer to previous comments on blue economy.</p> <p>Lessons: The main lesson from previous projects is that projects have acted in an “advisory” function, whereas this project acts in a “practice” function whereby actual marine protected areas will be created, and pollution will be monitored. The secondary lessons are that previous projects have not had provisions to sustain the achievements whereas this project includes activities for future finance for biodiversity and scale-up of pollution monitoring with private sector.</p>
<p>Council Comment</p>	
<p>Canada Comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the project taken into consideration migratory species given that the region provides a critical habitat for many threatened migratory birds? 	<p>Migratory species: The project establishes marine protected areas the benefit migratory Caspian seal and migratory birds.</p> <p>The Absheron National Park (Azerbaijan) consists of coastal, marine, wetland and semi-desert areas. The park is an</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We are curious why this project aims to create/improve 50,000 ha of terrestrial protected areas and only 10,000 ha of marine protected areas (which is less than 1% of the Caspian) <p>Sea surface area that is under the jurisdiction of participating countries)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project could be further strengthened if it takes into consideration ecological <p>connectivity and resilience to climate change impacts as part of the cross-border cooperation</p>	<p>important resting and feeding point for migrating waterfowl. The park is home to terns, cormorants, ducks, herring gull, whooper swan, red-headed goose, scaup, green-headed duck, white-eyed black duck, tufted grebe, great white wagtail, sandpiper, grebe, and marsh grebe. The Caspian seal is the main endangered species frequenting the park southernmost tip of the park, Suiti Burnu, as an extension of the Shah Dili area, is one of the main places where seals seasonally stay and feed.</p> <p>The Caspian Itbalygy State Nature Reserve (Kazakhstan) is the main area for migrating seals for calving and initial feeding of baby seals. The area is also important for sturgeon and migratory waterfowl.</p> <p>The proposed Garabogaz coastal-marine protected areas (Turkmenistan) is central as an ornithological area for migratory, wintering and nesting birds of Eurasia in addition to resting site for Caspian seals migrating south from Kazakhstan in the spring. The territory is a migration, wintering and nesting site for about 300 bird species. Of these, 34 species are listed in the Red Book of Turkmenistan (2024), 50 species are listed in the IUCN Red List, and 20 species are listed in CITES.</p> <p>Marine-Terrestrial: The project now includes both marine and terrestrial protected areas, recognizing the ecological connectivity between coastal and marine ecosystems of the Caspian Sea. For terrestrial areas (mainly along the coastline), the focus is only on improving management effectiveness of existing sites. For marine areas, the project covers both the creation of new protected areas and the enhancement of management effectiveness of existing ones. This adjustment ensures a balanced and integrated approach while maintaining the primary focus on marine conservation.</p> <p>Regional climate change: The project, through the UNEP/TCIS-led regional activities, engages with the outmost critical climate adaptation issues: that of Caspian Sea level decline. For example, under output 3.1.1, a Regional Assessment and Projection of Coastal and Marine Climate Vulnerability, covering sea level fluctuations, warming trends, and extreme weather events including basin coast environmental flow and delta resilience diagnostics will be developed, while under output 3.1.2 a several regional frameworks will be developed that address transboundary climate impacts (e.g., the Integrated River Basin (IRB), Marine, and Coastal Zone Management Framework and the Regional Climate Adaptation Framework for the Caspian Sea).</p>
<p>Germany Comments</p> <p>Germany approves the PIF in the work program but requests that the following comments are taken into account:</p> <p>Germany requests that the following requirements are taken into account during the design of the final project proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Germany suggests making the objectives more precise and potentially more ambitious than the current focus 	<p>Refined objective: The PDO has been refined “to strengthen (i) pollution monitoring and biodiversity planning in targeted sites within the Caspian Sea in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, and (ii) coordinated action on pollution control, biodiversity conservation, and climate adaptation in the Caspian Sea region.”</p> <p>Support to Tehran Convention: The project serves to assist the countries in meeting their obligations related to the Tehran</p>

<p>on capacity development and workshops, leveraging the transboundary nature of the project. While the problems facing the Caspian Sea are described concisely, the Theory of Change and the objectives themselves remain rather vague. It does not become clear how the proposed activities will address existing barriers. For example, the project description states that implementation of the Tehran Convention will be supported, but it remains unclear how this will be achieved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similarly, the description of how stakeholder involvement will take place is not very detailed, especially in the case of gender equality and private sector involvement. Germany recommends working with a broad network of relevant local stakeholders right from the start, not only government, but also civil society and the private sector to achieve a more balanced and possibly more sustainable project. This should be reflected in the activities and be described further in the project description. • With regards to marine pollution, Germany recommends looking more into a source-to-sea approach to prepare objectives and activities. <p>Lastly, another project is currently being designed by UNEP in the same area (Integrated Management of Seascapes of the Kazakhstani part of the Caspian Sea and Land Resources of Adjacent Territories, Project ID = 11524). Germany recommends looking into possible synergies between the two projects.</p>	<p>Convention Moscow Protocol (pollution) and Ashbagat Protocol (biodiversity).</p> <p>Stakeholder engagement: Please see detailed above.</p> <p>Source to Sea: Please see detailed above.</p> <p>Relation to the UNDP Kazakhstan GEF project. The World Bank, UNDP and the government of Kazakhstan have agreed to complementarities between the concerned projects. Furthermore, UNDP will be invited as observer to the project's Regional Steering Committee meetings as observer.</p>
<p>Switzerland Comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is more exactly the potential number of direct and indirect beneficiaries of the Project in the country/region and how is the currently rather low number of 8'500 for direct beneficiaries derived • Which are the experiences and lessons learned from past endeavours applying an integrated ecosystem-based approach in similar contexts and problem areas. Insights from comparably multi-faceted endeavours in their identification, deployment and monitoring would be a valuable addition to the Project Identification Form • What are the reasons for focusing on SLM practices in the component 2 (pilot) while not addressing more specifically also water resources management aspects when speaking about an integrated management approach? • What could be opportunities and challenges for bringing the achievements in Kazakhstan such as in policy, planning and management practices as well as financial incentives/instruments to other littoral states and for envisaging a transboundary component of the Project? 	<p>Beneficiaries: The primary beneficiary is the ecosystem and the species it supports as part of the Global Environmental Benefit sought by the GEF-financing. The secondary group of beneficiaries are the people. But as the marine protected areas are remote, in the case of this project, the exact number of people that are beneficiaries is limited. A project focusing on people as beneficiaries would be a difference design and purpose, and it equally if not more important, and could be proposed as a second phase with a focus on livelihoods and jobs stemming from tourism and leisure benefits.</p> <p>SLM Practices: Such lessons are no longer relevant for the refined project design applied in the project.</p> <p>Opportunities for bringing learning to other littoral states. The instrument and activity for learning is provided in connection with the Steering Committee Meeting and the actions for learning that will stem from progress made in the project. Under output 3.1.4, the Caspian Environmental Information Centre will be strengthened to serve as a knowledge sharing platform between all littoral states and the wider Caspian stakeholders. All key knowledge products will be made available on this platform. Under output 3.1.3, regional roundtables and training sessions will provide opportunities for transboundary learning. Non-beneficiary littoral states will be engaged throughout component 3, in consultation and validation meetings, roundtable and capacity building sessions.</p>

	This will be supported through co-finance.
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