

TERMINAL EVALUATION

Project ID:	9148
Project Name:	Securing Livelihoods, Conservation, Sustainable Use and Restoration of High Range Himalayan Ecosystems (SECURE)Himalayas
Countr(ies):	India
Implementing Agency:	UNDP

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I. Overview

A. Description

Project name

Securing Livelihoods, Conservation, Sustainable Use and Restoration of High Range Himalayan Ecosystems (SECURE)Himalayas

Country

India

GEF ID

9148

Implementing Agency

UNDP

Executing Entity

Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change

Trust Fund

GET

Project Type

FSP

Objective

To promote the sustainable management of alpine pastures and forests in the high range Himalayan ecosystems that secures conservation of globally significant wildlife, including endangered snow leopard and their habitats, ensure sustainable livelihoods and community socio-economic benefits

B. Key Dates

CEO Endorsement/Approval

6/21/2017

Agency Approval

12/5/2017

Implementation Start

12/5/2017

First Disbursement

12/1/2017

Expected MTR

5/5/2022

MTR Submission

9/24/2025

Actual MTR

12/2/2022

Expected Completion

12/5/2024

Actual Completion

12/31/2024

Actual TE

11/29/2024

TE Submission

9/24/2025

Final Disbursement

C. Disbursements

Project Financing
12,583,169.00

Cumulative Disbursement
11,427,317.65

II. PROGRESS STATUS AND ISSUES

A. Main Terminal Evaluation Findings

The SECURE Himalaya project has achieved remarkable success in advancing biodiversity conservation, sustainable livelihoods, and community empowerment across the high-altitude landscapes of India, exceeding its goals in many areas.

Key findings include: 1. Biodiversity conservation: The project led to improved management of biodiversity in over 3.4 million hectares (including High Conservation Value Areas- HCVAs) using a participatory approach, designation of HCVAs as Biodiversity Heritage Sites, and conservation of keystone species the snow leopard (reflected in the Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India). Through forest management and ecological restoration, the project sequestered 3.76 million tons of CO₂ equivalent, significantly contributing to climate change mitigation.

2. Securing sustainable livelihoods and community empowerment: Enhanced local income of over 2,500 households and promoted women empowerment through green value chain initiatives such as eco-tourism and handicrafts. Strengthened community-led governance and biodiversity management through the establishment of local conservation and livelihood bodies, such as Eco-development Committees and Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs).

3. Reducing Human-Wildlife Conflict (HWC), Mitigating Wildlife Crime, and Advancing Transboundary Collaboration: HWC was mitigated through tools like ANIDERS (which also enhanced community engagement) and faster compensation payments. Policy changes included improved compensation rates, creation of a Local Trust Fund, and transboundary agreements to combat wildlife crime. Its efforts have fostered socio-economic development while preserving critical ecosystems.

4. Knowledge Management: The project produced resources like a high-altitude wetland management guidebook, scientific papers, and knowledge-sharing events to support conservation. Institutional frameworks and a government-led exit strategy ensure long-term sustainability.

While the project faced challenges such as incomplete baseline data, initial financial disbursement issues, and limited marketing support for artisans, these were addressed over time. By integrating conservation with socio-economic initiatives and establishing strong institutional frameworks (local conservation bodies, such as Eco-development Committees and BMCs), the project has laid a solid foundation for long-term environmental and community resilience.

B. Stakeholder Engagement

The project successfully established strategic partnerships with government agencies, local communities, private sector entities, and international organisations, enabling a multi-faceted approach to conservation and socio-economic development. Collaborations with entities like Sutlej Jal Vidyut Pariyojna and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) supported solid waste management and promoted Himalayan crafts while leveraging CSR funds and an Innovation Fund strengthened conservation efforts. Engagement with the

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MOEF&CC) facilitated coordination across central and state departments, NGOs, and local organizations, ensuring effective implementation and policy alignment. Community engagement, including environmental awareness initiatives, participatory discussions, and media campaigns, fostered strong local ownership and commitment, particularly among women, many of whom gained financial independence for the first time. Stakeholder interactions evolved positively through adaptive strategies, overcoming initial challenges and enhancing collaboration. The gender action plan was integral to the project's success, ensuring inclusivity and gender-responsive actions that empowered women and integrated their perspectives in decision-making. Gender-focused strategies, such as inclusive workshops and participatory discussions, promoted meaningful engagement from both men and women, particularly in resource management and community development. By systematically incorporating diverse stakeholder groups, including women's groups, the project ensured broad-based involvement, contributing to its sustainability and long-term success.

C. Gender Equality

Gender responsiveness of project design

The present project has effectively addressed gender equality and women's empowerment. An analysis of gender issues on various parameters, like biodiversity conservation, fodder and fuel management, water, food preparation, work on farm land and post harvesting activities, non- farm handloom weaving activities, child care and animal care was undertaken. A gender analysis was developed for the project during the Project Preparation Phase (PPP) . The TE assessed key considerations related to the integration of gender issues into the project design and development as below:

Key considerations	TE assessment
Integration of gender considerations in the project design for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, and development of Gender Action Plan with a specific implementation plan, for the delivery of gender activities.	Recognizing the significant role of women in rural mountain communities and their dependence on natural resources, the project prioritized gender from inception. A Gender Action Plan in the Project Document outlined men's and women's roles and identified six gender-responsive interventions (e.g., fodder banks, LPG stoves, specialized equipment for harvesting, handloom technology, ecotourism, and grassland rejuvenation with solar water lifting). The 'Strategy and Action Plan for Gender Mainstreaming' proposed activities like strengthening SHGs, technical training, capacity-building, and M&E with gender-sensitive indicators. Although budget, timeframe, and responsible agency details were initially missing in the Project Document, these were later specified, and actions were appropriately undertaken.
Project alignment with national policies and strategies on gender equality	Gender equality is a core principle enshrined in the Indian Constitution, which ensures equal rights for women in education and employment and mandates affirmative action to support women's empowerment. This project aligns with the Government of India's "Mahila Shakti Kendra (MSK)" initiative, which focuses on empowering rural women through skill development and employment opportunities.
Integration of gender issues in project strategy, rationale and theory of change, including how advancing gender equality and women's empowerment will advance the project's environmental outcomes. Identification of gaps, if any, in integrating or addressing gender issues in these areas.	The project's strategy follows a landscape approach to resource governance, emphasizing community-driven, bottom-up planning to reflect local priorities. Gender mainstreaming is integral, particularly under Component 4, which promotes gender-responsive conservation practices. Specific gender-oriented indicators (1.3.2, 2.2, 3.1) and gender-responsive indicators (2.3, 4.3) support monitoring and evaluation efforts. Recognizing women as primary resource users and holders of traditional knowledge, the project aims to involve them in decision-making, aligning with national laws to enhance conservation success and ecosystem protection. Gender considerations are also embedded within the Theory of Change, with challenges detailed in the Problem Tree and outcomes projected in the Solutions Tree, addressing both immediate and longer-term impacts. No significant gaps were found in integrating gender issues.
Gender expertise (external consultant and/or internal UNDP capacity) used in the design and development of the project, if any, and its adequacy. Identification of any gaps in gender expertise.	TE team was informed during meeting with UNDP CO that UNDP India Country Office had engaged external independent consultants and subject matter specialists to integrate gender considerations into the project's design during the Project Preparation Grant (PPG) phase. Accordingly, to ensure that the project activities would inclusively benefit both men and women, particularly among local and indigenous communities in the high Himalayan mountain landscapes, a gender-sensitive approach was applied by the Consultant.

The TE team observed that the well-defined Gender Action Plan has effectively fostered attitudinal shifts, such as increased acceptance of men's participation in unpaid household tasks while women engage in income-generating activities. It has also helped dismantle structural barriers to gender participation in project activities and strengthened acceptance of women's leadership roles in decisionmaking bodies like BMCs and SHGs. Details have been discussed later in this Report. The initiative is rated as 'S' (5)

Gender equality and women's empowerment

According to discussions with SPMUs and APR data, gender considerations were meaningfully integrated into Annual Work Plans, with dedicated resources supporting awareness, capacity building, leadership, and income-generating activities for women. To facilitate effective communication and promote women's

involvement, landscape-level fairs and festivals, celebration of specific days, street theatre, and workshops were organized across landscapes, with active participation encouraged from school and college students. Records show that 3,176 individuals, 49% of whom (1,556 individuals) were women, participated actively in these activities. Additionally, men and women from 638 households (gender-wise breakdown not specified), as well as visitors to interpretation centres and other bystanders, attended outreach programs, although these numbers are not included in the reporting.

Gender inclusivity was promoted through the following implementation strategies:

- **Women's Participation in Decision-Making:** The project encouraged and enabled women to actively participate in rural appraisals to develop village-level micro-plans, joining key decisionmaking bodies such as EDCs, JFMCs, SHGs, and BMCs. Notably, an all-women BMC was established in Ladakh, reinforcing women's leadership in conservation.
- **Valuing Ecosystem Services and Traditional Knowledge:** Awareness initiatives highlighted the importance of ecosystems and traditional bio-resources (for food, medicine, etc.) in women's lives, instilling pride in cultural heritage and fostering ownership. This was exemplified by the Kangla basket initiative, which allowed women to lead sustainable processing of seabuckthorn, recognized nationally by the PMO under the 'One District One Product (ODOP)' program.
- **Science and Technology (S&T) Innovations for Reducing Drudgery:** The project introduced S&T-based interventions, including mechanized tools for sea-buckthorn and nettle fibre processing, hazelnut shell cracking, and fuel-efficient cookstoves. These innovations reduced physical labour, freeing women's time for income-generating activities like managing homestays, establishing wool value chains, and promoting handloom handicrafts.
- **Gender-Sensitive Awareness and Skill Development:** Targeted strategies were implemented to raise awareness of gender equality, promoting the acceptance of women's roles in traditionally male-dominated areas like mountaineering, para-taxonomy, and wildlife conservation among others. This shift also led men to participate in tasks traditionally handled by women, such as wool carding and unpaid home care, fostering shared responsibilities.

These combined efforts not only empowered women economically but also broadened their roles in sustainable development. Recognition of their work at events like the 'National Geographical Indication Fair - 2022' boosted morale and underscored the project's success in mainstreaming gender sensitivity into conservation and livelihood activities. Further details of this analysis done by the TE team are provided in Annexure 13.

Based on the number and diversity of initiatives undertaken to promote gender equality and mainstreaming in a remote and challenging landscape, the successful implementation of actions proposed in the Gender Action Plan (GAP) has resulted in significant attitudinal changes. While all interventions were implemented, solar water lifting was not substantiated. However, additional initiatives were introduced, such as Sea-buckthorn processing by a 51-member women SHG in HP, a cookie-making enterprise with 35 women, apple processing in UK with 25 women, and training 20 women as para-taxonomists in HP and 15 women as mountaineering guides in UK. Men have increasingly accepted gender equality, while women have gained a stronger sense of self-worth and confidence, the TE Team rates the effort undertaken for Gender Equality at HS (6).

D. Knowledge Management

The project successfully achieved its target, with four policies and strategies approved by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) and one by a state government. These include the Protocol for Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAII), the establishment of the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) Secretariat in New Delhi (offering valuable insights for similar projects across 16 IBCA member countries), a Guidebook for Management of High-Altitude Wetlands (endorsed by MoEF&CC's Wetland Division), and Sikkim's Big Cats Master Plan for long-term conservation. Additionally, a Resource Mobilization Strategy was developed by Himachal Pradesh, and two pilot financial solutions for snow leopard conservation were created in partnership with the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP).

The project successfully documented and shared best practices, including four showcased at international forums (South Africa Global Wildlife Program Annual Conference, Global Wildlife Knowledge Exchange in Mombasa, International Big Cat Alliance, and two UNCCD COP 14 side events in 2019), 11 practices replicable nationwide in similar landscapes, and 16 state-specific practices. This objective has been fully achieved.

The project successfully increased household-level awareness on conservation, sustainable resource management, and wildlife crime prevention across all states and UTs through targeted programs. Although no formal impact studies were conducted, and the indicator was flagged as questionable for specificity and measurability in the MTR, the extensive stakeholder engagement, published materials, and overachieved targets suggest the target has been met and is SMART. National Level:

1. Formal awareness and training programs were conducted for 3,176 individuals across four partner states, with 1,556 women (49%) participating. This excludes public awareness from fairs and events, which were not recorded.
2. In collaboration with the WCCB, species-specific awareness videos on Tibetan Antelope, Asiatic Black Bear, Pangolin, and Musk Deer were launched, inaugurated by the Additional Director General (Wildlife) at a regional meeting in Guwahati.
3. BMC trainings were held on local biodiversity, conservation, sustainable use, equitable benefit sharing of bio-resources, and PBR preparation.

III. Core Indicators

Indicator 1 Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
	2003321	964787	964787

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)

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)

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)
	2003321	964787	964787

Name of the Protected Area	WDP A 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)
Changthang Cold Desert Wildlife Sanctuary	12137	Habitat/Species Management Area		1,468,800.00	400,000.00	400,000.00	22.00	61.00	67.00
Gangotri National Park		Wilderness Area		235,731.00	239,002.00	239,002.00	35.00	64.00	79.00
Govind national Park and Sanctuary		Wilderness Area		76,790.00	103,993.00	103,993.00	25.00	55.00	73.00
Khangchendzonga National Park	689	Habitat/Species Management Area		178,608.00	178,400.00	178,400.00	29.00	69.00	73.00
Sechu Tuan Nalla WL Sanctuary	4566	Habitat/Species Management Area		39,029.00	39,029.00	39,029.00	13.00	60.00	70.00
Shingba Rhododendron Sanctuary	303311	Habitat/Species Management Area		4,363.00	4,363.00	4,363.00	16.00	65.00	74.00

Indicator 3 Area of land and ecosystems under restoration

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
		7267	74682.9

Indicator 3.1 Area of degraded agricultural lands under restoration

Disaggregation Type	Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
Cropland			513.00	8,558.90

Indicator 3.2 Area of forest and forest land under restoration

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
		3,925.00	53,683.40

Indicator 3.3 Area of natural grass and woodland under restoration

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

Natural grass			2,770.00	9,480.60
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Indicator 3.4 Area of wetlands (including estuaries, mangroves) under restoration

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
		59.00	2,960.00

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

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
		3345	141177.32

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

Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
		567.00	13,939.00

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

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

Type/Name of Third Party Certification

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

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

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

Disaggregation Type	Ha (Expected at PIF)	Ha (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Ha (Achieved at MTR)	Ha (Achieved at TE)
Other forest			2,778.00	127,238.32

Indicator 4.5 Terrestrial OECMs supported

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

Documents (Document(s) that justifies the HCVF)

Title

Indicator 11 People benefiting from GEF-financed investments

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

Female		6,250	3,335	6,318
Male		6,250	2,460	6,192
Total	0	12,500	5,795	12,510

IV: Co Financing

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Investment Mobilized	Anticipated at CEO(\$)	Materialized at MTR(\$)	Materialized at TE(\$)
Recipient Country Government	MOEFCC	Grant	Investment mobilized	21,820,000.00	7,430,000.00	21,820,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Gov of Kikkim	In-kind	Investment mobilized	9,000,000.00	570,000.00	6,975,506.00
Recipient Country Government	Gov of Himachal Pradesh	In-kind	Investment mobilized	12,000,000.00	9,430,000.00	13,611,521.00
Recipient Country Government	Gov of Jammu and Kashmir	In-kind		6,000,000.00		
Recipient Country Government	Gov of Uttranchal	In-kind		11,000,000.00		
GEF Agency	UNDP	Grant	Recurrent expenditures	1,000,000.00	540,000.00	1,000,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Government of Uttarakhand	In-kind	Investment mobilized		7,430,000.00	11,694,908.00
Recipient Country Government	Government of Ladakh	In-kind	Investment mobilized		1,300,000.00	1,469,123.00
GEF Agency		In-kind	Recurrent expenditures			

Total Co-financing		60,820,000.00	9,270,000.00	14,164,031.00
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Comments

V: ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL SAFEGUARDS

Overall Project/Program Risk Classification

PIF	CEO Endorsement/Approval	MTR	TE
		Medium/Moderate	Medium/Moderate

Measures to address identified risks and impacts

The SECURE Himalaya project has effectively incorporated social and environmental safeguards by embedding environmental protection and community well-being into its mission. By balancing biodiversity conservation with socio-economic development, the project has enhanced local livelihoods and community resilience, making local communities both active partners and beneficiaries. Key safeguard implementation measures adopted in the project include:

- ☐ **Community Engagement and Participation:** The project provided training to community members, including women and marginalized groups (such as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes who face social, cultural, economic, and sometimes political exclusion), equipping them with skills in sustainable resource management, biodiversity conservation, and alternative livelihoods. Through the creation of Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) and participatory landscape management plans, local communities were actively involved in planning and decision-making, ensuring their knowledge and needs are central to conservation strategies.
- ☐ **Livelihood Support and Socio-Economic Benefits:** The project established fair benefit-sharing mechanisms aligned with the Nagoya Protocol, promoting sustainable livelihoods through initiatives like ecotourism, organic farming, and value-added biodiversity products. This approach reduced dependence on forest resources while expanding income opportunities for local communities.
- ☐ **Cultural Heritage and Indigenous Knowledge:** Awareness campaigns highlighted biodiversity and the value of traditional knowledge, with conservation activities integrating indigenous practices, thus preserving cultural heritage alongside environmental stewardship.
- ☐ **Environmental Impact Management:** The project conducted ongoing monitoring of environmental and social parameters to ensure effective safeguards and address emerging issues swiftly. An independent METT assessment showed significant improvements in protected area management, stakeholder engagement, resource allocation, and community participation.

- ☐ **Conflict Resolution and Grievance Mechanisms:** The project promoted dialogue among stakeholders to address conflicts around resource use and conservation, also establishing accessible grievance redress mechanisms to handle concerns related to project activities.
- ☐ **Gender Equality and Social Inclusion:** Strategies to promote gender equality involved supporting women's participation in decision-making bodies and livelihood initiatives. Marginalized groups, including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and the landless, were intentionally included in project activities to ensure they benefit from conservation and development interventions.

The TE team assessed environmental and social risks, as identified in the project's Social and Environmental Screening Procedure (SESP), which outlined seven SES risks rated from low to moderate, with management measures in place. The Project Implementation Reports (PIRs) revealed that no additional social or environmental risks were identified or escalated beyond those initially noted in the project document. Further details of this assessment are provided in the Annexure 12.

VI. ANNEX

Uploaded Document

Document Category M and E Document	Title CI file
Document Category M and E Document	Title GWP Tracking Tool
Document Category M and E Document	Title TE (GEF 9148 / UNDP 3298)