PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

Project ID:	11019
Project Name:	Effective Management of Mchinji Ecosystems for Restoration of Upper Bua River Catchment
Countr(ies):	Malawi
Implementing Agency:	UNEP

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I. Overview

A. Description

Project name
Effective Management of Mchinji Ecosystems for Restoration of Upper Bua River Catchment

Country
Malawi

GEF ID	Implementing Agency
11019	UNEP

Executing Entity
Environmental Affairs Department in the Ministry of Natural Resources and Climate Change

Trust Fund	Project Type
GET	MSP

PIR Submission	Fiscal Year , PIR Number
9/16/2025	FY 2025 , 1st PIR

Objective
Project Objective: Effective management of Mchinji forest and supporting local government institutions and communities to enhance conservation and sustainable use of Forest resources to maintain and restore biodiversity and ecosystem services in community forests and communal lands

B. Ratings and Disbursements

Implementation Progress	Development Objective
Moderately Satisfactory	Moderately Satisfactory

Overall risk
Low Risk

Project Financing	Cumulative Disbursement
1,009,050.00	178,302.00

C. Key Dates

CEO Endorsement/Approval	Agency Approval
11/16/2023	11/16/2023

Implementation Start 2/26/2024	First Disbursement 5/1/2024
Expected MTR	Actual MTR
Expected Completion	Actual Completion

II. PROGRESS STATUS AND ISSUES

A. Progress: Information on progress and outcomes of project implementation activities

Rating towards outputs is also satisfactory. The rating for the first year 2025 is satisfactory because all the preliminary activities for laying a foundation for the realization of the key outputs of the project have been conducted. Output 1. Forest management plan for Mchinji forest Reserve is developed and implemented. The Terms of Reference for a Consultant to lead in the process of developing the Forest Management Plan have been developed and validated. The Project Management Unit is facilitating the advertisement for applications from eligible consultants. Outputs 2.1; 2.2 and 2.3: Ecosystem based IGAs and livelihoods of forest dependent communities promoted; New village forest areas are created and natural tree regeneration is promoted in community forests; and Ecosystem based IGAs and livelihoods of forest dependent communities promoted. Activities under this output will be led by Mchinji District Council and a local Non-Governmental Organization based in Mchinji. The process of identifying the local organization is in progress. The project team has since developed Terms of Reference for the local organization and Mchinji District Council is in the process of releasing a call for applications from eligible local organizations. 11 villages have been identified where livelihood interventions and new village forest areas will be created. Output 3.1: A gender-responsive communication strategy to facilitate better understanding of project activities amongst all stakeholders developed and implemented. This output will be implemented together with the Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi; a local organization identified during project development that will help implementation of activities under output 4 of the project. A memorandum of Understanding between the Environmental Affairs Department and the Wildlife Environment Society of Malawi has been developed. Output 4.2: The project exit strategy developed and implemented. The project Management Unit has conducted consultations with all the relevant project stakeholders to consolidate issue that will feed into the Exit strategy. A draft Project strategy has since been developed and a validation workshop with all stakeholders is being planned. Output 4.1 Project gender-responsive Monitoring and Evaluation system developed to track project progress. Under this output, a Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy has been developed. This will help to track progress of the [project activities and outputs. A gender mainstreaming and Action Plan has also been developed. This will guide integration of all gender issues during the project implementation period. Both the M&E framework and the gender target Strategy have been approved by the National Project Steering Committee.

B. Challenges: Information on challenges of project implementation activities

Challenges: Information on challenges of project implementation activitiesDuring the initial stages of the project, organizing joint planning sessions with key stakeholders including community leaders was hindered by conflicting schedules and competing commitments such as voter's registration and registration for subsidy programmes. This led to delays in finalizing implementation of some activities. To mitigate this, the project team adopted a staggered consultation approach, holding smaller, targeted meetings with specific stakeholder

groups, and used district focal points to facilitate coordination. This ensured broad stakeholder input while maintaining project momentum. Furthermore, at the onset of the project implementation, there were noticeable gaps in the representation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities in project structures and activities. To address this, the project applied the Gender Mainstreaming and Action Plan to guide inclusive participation. The Project Management Team took deliberate measures including the inclusion of women and youth to the Project Steering Committee and ensuring gender-disaggregated data collection during all project activities to track participation. These measures have enhanced the inclusion of marginalized groups in decision-making and implementation processes.

C. Stakeholder Engagement

During the reporting period, the project technical team has actively engaged key stakeholders through the activities that have been conducted. The inception meeting brought a total of 71 different stakeholders including from Central government, local government, Traditional Authorities, Members of Parliament, councilors, non-governmental organizations, youth group representatives, women group representatives, the private sector, the media and artists who graced the occasion and composed project relevant songs. This was to all ensure that all relevant stakeholders are well informed and aligned to the project. In addition, the project is subcontracting the local council and local NGOs to support implementation of some of the project activities including engaging Village Natural Resources Management Groups in implementation. The development of work plans has also been done in collaboration with Mchinji District Council and Department of Forestry. The design of the key activities was designed to foster collaboration and alignment with the stakeholders. The Monitoring and Evaluation strategy that has been developed has all responded to the needs of the communities and will be implemented in a participatory nature. The proposed steering committee is also inclusive of government organization, Traditional authorities, women and non-state actors to ensure different perspectives are integrated into the project frameworks. Moving forward, we will continue to prioritize stakeholder involvement to maintain transparency and foster ownership and inclusion throughout the project lifecycle.

D. Gender Equality

The project has prioritized inclusion of gender issues through the development and implementation of a Gender Mainstreaming Strategy and Action Plan. This strategy provides a comprehensive framework to ensure that all project activities are inclusive, participatory, and responsive to the needs and priorities of different gender groups, especially women, youth, and persons with disabilities. The strategy and action plan has outlined practical steps to integrate gender considerations in planning, implementation, and monitoring, including developing a gender disaggregated data collection tool, and capacity building of stakeholders on gender-responsive practices. The strategy also promotes equal access to project benefits and decision-making structures, ensuring that both women and men can meaningfully contribute to and influence conservation outcomes and livelihoods initiatives. By aligning with national policies and GEF guidelines on gender equality, the strategy reinforces the project's commitment to equitable development and environmental sustainability.

In practice, during the reporting period, the project has made deliberate efforts to implement this strategy. For example, youth and women representatives have deliberately been included in the National Project Steering Committee to ensure their voices influence key decisions. Furthermore, during all project activities, attendance lists are used to collect disaggregated data by gender and age group, enabling the project to track participation trends and adjust engagement strategies accordingly. This approach has enhanced the visibility and contribution of women and youth in the project implementation. Moreover, the project manager, project finance manager and the project coordinator at Mchinji District Council are all women.

E. Knowledge Management

Knowledge activities and products	During the reporting period the project Produced two (2) roll up banners, 1 one wall banner and 100 flyers which were distributed during the launch of the project. The products were in Chichewa and English to allow all stakeholders be able to grasp the messages of the project. The information contained in the flyers include the project goals, expected outputs, target area, total financing and location among others. These products were also displayed during the commemoration of the 2025 International Day Biodiversity and the World Environment Day at Chia Lagoon in Nkhotakota District on 5th June. During this event, Environmental Affairs Department raised
	awareness of the project to key government officials including the Minister of Natural Resources and Climate Change who was the guest of Honor at the event. The project management team also conducted a learning visit to Permaculture Paradise Institute with the National Steering Committee Members on board in Mchinji. The visit aimed at understanding and appreciate how permaculture functioning permaculture site allowing both Project Management Team members and the Project Steering Committee observe best practices, innovative techniques, and real-life applications of sustainable land management, appreciate what works on the ground, challenges faced, and success factors. Integrating permaculture principles in farming is one of the key activities under component 2 of the project.
Main learning during the period	The main lesson learnt during the reporting period is the importance of stakeholder engagement in project implementation. Stakeholder engagement and participation has proved to be crucial components of as project implementation. In all the activities, the project has emphasized on stakeholder engagement including the local communities living around Mchinji forest Reserve. This has helped the project to identify local issues and incorporate community and local knowledge in the project. This has strengthened trust and enhanced cooperation. The project is also ensured of sustainable outcomes because risks that come with lack of engagement has been reduced and the legitimacy of the project has been enhanced as it is aligned with existing frameworks. Finally, resource mobilization for co-financing has become easier as stakeholders are helping to identify funding sources and facilitate partnerships but also allowing for skills sharing and capacity sharing.

III: Minor Amendments

CONTEXT	
Result Framework	
Components and Cost	
Institutional And Implementation Arrangements	
Financial Management	
Implementation Schedule	
Executing Entity	
Executing Entity Category	
Minor Project Objective Change	
Safeguards	
Risk Analysis	

Increase of GEF Financing up to 5%	
Co-Financing	
Location of Project Activity	
others	

IV: Geographic Coordinates of Project Activities

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Malawi Central region	-13.49999641	34.09711308	

Location Description:

Activity Description:

V. ANNEX

Uploaded Document

Document Category	Title
M and E Document	11019-PIR-UNEP-2025-Mchinji forest Ecosystems for Restoration