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
9/15/2026	FY 2026 , 2nd 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	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 12/31/2026	Actual MTR
Expected Completion 6/30/2029	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 second year 2026 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 Forest Research Management Instititute is leading the development of the Forest Management Plan. This includes the work on conducting biodiversity studies and inventories for informing the management plan.

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 are being led by Mchinji District Council and a local Non-Governmental Organization based in Mchinji. 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 and a work plan to be implemented by WESM was approved.

Output 4.2: The project exit strategy developed and implemented. The project Exit strategy is developed and available and elements of the project that need sustainability activities prior to project end are identified for implementation

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. It is being used 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 activities

Some project activities have progressed more slowly than anticipated. The project has so far generated limited tangible income-generating results, partly reflecting delays in implementing field-level livelihood activities. Field activities have also been constrained by inadequate transport and mobility for forestry personnel, limiting effective field operations. The project has addressed this by procuring motorcycles, while servicing existing vehicles and strengthening support to forest guards. An Acceleration Plan has been developed to December 2026, with a plan to prioritise income-generating components and strengthen implementation monitoring to ensure that planned activities translate into visible benefits for participating communities.

Forest encroachment remains a challenge, partly due to limited enforcement capacity and community-based monitoring. The project is strengthening enforcement, using key informants and community structures to report encroachment, and assess its extent to inform the Forest Management Plan.

C. Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement has continued to strengthen during the reporting period, with active involvement of government institutions, district authorities, traditional leaders, community structures and technical stakeholders. Village Development Committees (VDCs), Village Natural Resource Management Committees (VNRMCs) and Village Forest Area (VFA) committees have been strengthened and oriented on forest management, participatory decision-making, gender inclusion and restoration. Twenty-six VFA committees have been established and trained, while 21 VNRMCs have received training on governance, silvicultural practices and forest management.

The project has also strengthened institutional collaboration through signed MoUs with key implementing institutions. WESM was engaged by the project team to champion the communication and education component. An MoU and inception workplan have been developed, covering stakeholder consultations, communication strategy development, documentation of best practices, database development and capacity building. FRIM was also engaged by the PMU to support development of the Mchinji Forest Reserve Management Plan. Stakeholder engagement has consequently improved ownership and provided a foundation for participatory forest management. The main challenge remains that some consultations and validation activities depend on completion of the Forest Management Plan; these will be undertaken as the plan progresses.

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 : Implementation of the project's knowledge management approach has progressed through establishment of systems for communication, documentation, learning and dissemination. The project has developed an interactive M&E system and gender-responsive dissemination plan, providing a foundation for systematic collection, analysis and sharing of project information. The project has also initiated development of the communication and awareness component through engagement of the Wildlife and Environmental Society of Malawi (WESM). WESM has developed an inception workplan covering stakeholder consultations, communication strategy development, documentation of best practices, database establishment and capacity building.

Knowledge sharing has also been promoted through field-based learning. A Steering Committee field visit to two project sites including a Village Forest Area and an encroached area in the forest reserve provided practical exposure to implementation approaches, challenges and benefits that communities are generating from the project. This enhanced knowledge sharing and learning among the communities.

Main learning during the period : A key lesson from the reporting period is that early and sustained engagement of community structures is critical for effective implementation and long-term sustainability. Strengthening VDCs, VNRMCs and VFAs has provided an important platform for community participation in forest management, restoration, monitoring and enforcement. The establishment of 26 VFA committees and training of 21 VNRMCs demonstrates that implementation can be accelerated where district and community structures take ownership.

The project also learned that practical exposure and demonstration are effective mechanisms for knowledge transfer. The Steering Committee's visit to an operational permaculture food forest improved understanding among technical staff and stakeholders of how sustainable land management and livelihood approaches can be adapted to local conditions. Another important lesson is the value of adapting implementation arrangements where necessary. For example, Mchinji District Council assumed direct responsibility for establishing VFAs rather than engaging an NGO, resulting in 26 committees being established and trained.

The project has also learned that gender considerations need to be integrated from the outset and tracked through disaggregated data, rather than treated as a stand-alone activity. These lessons are informing the accelerated implementation approach and future community and livelihood interventions.

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:

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Chinjira	-13.760833	32.912482	

Location Description:

Activity Description:

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID

Malizani	-13.738148	32.9122	

Location Description:

Activity Description:

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Kachinjiri	-13.632317	32.90636	

Location Description:

Activity Description:

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Lazaro	-13.615412	32.872088	

Location Description:

Activity Description:

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Chiwoko	-13.61563	32.874302	

Location Description:

Activity Description:

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Chikwawe	-13.591643	32.848988	

Location Description:

Activity Description:

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Chikuta	-13.560912	32.810153	

Location Description:

Activity Description:

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
Kapunula	-13.587553	32.780937	

Location Description:

Activity Description:

V. ANNEX

Uploaded Document

Document Category	Title
M and E Document	11019_PIR_UNEP_2026