MID-TERM REVIEW

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I. Overview

A. Description

Project name	
Seventh Operational Phase of the GEF Small Grants Programme in Malaysia	
Country	
Malaysia	
GEF ID	Implementing Agency
10363	UNDP
Executing Entity	
Others	
Trust Fund	Project Type
GET	FSP
Objective	
To enable community organizations to take collective action for adaptive landscape management in building socio-ecological resilience in i) the Crocker Range Biosphere Reserve, Sabah; ii) the Middle and Upper Baram, Sarawak and iii) the Klang Valley, Peninsular Malaysia for global environmental benefits and sustainable development	

B. Key Dates

CEO Endorsement/Approval	Agency Approval
12/2/2021	4/20/2022
Implementation Start	First Disbursement
4/20/2022	6/30/2022
Expected MTR	MTR Submission
12/2/2024	3/12/2025
Actual MTR	Expected Completion
1/31/2025	4/20/2026

II. PROGRESS STATUS AND ISSUES

A. Main MTR Findings

While the project has met quite a number of its midterm targets, the progress of OP7 has been hindered by several challenges, including the transition to the Upgraded Country Programme (UCP), which required considerable time and effort to set up. Securing government approval for the ProDoc and supporting the National Steering Committee (NSC) in understanding the differences between OP6 and OP7 also caused delays. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the first two years of project implementation, delaying the appointment of strategic grantees and the signing of agreements until March 2023. This slow start caused cascading delays in the regular grant application process, pushing many projects' implementation to mid-2024 and postponing the Midterm Review (MTR).

The bottom-up approach of the SGP, which involves extensive stakeholder consultations and community involvement, particularly in remote areas, further contributed to delays. While some project indicators have already met or surpassed their midterm targets, others, particularly related to renewable energy adoption, have lagged behind. It is an important reminder that the midterm targets are based on approved proposals rather than actual progress toward the end-of-project (EOP) goals, emphasizing the need for adaptive management to keep the project on track for completion before the Terminal Evaluation in 2026.

B. Stakeholder Engagement

As discussed thoroughly in Section 4.1.1. Project Design, local and national government stakeholders are actively engaged and consulted throughout the project implementation process, particularly during the development of landscape strategies and in NSC meetings. Overall, they have expressed support for the project's objectives, and depending on the landscape, they provide advice and on-theground support to varying degrees. While government stakeholders may not participate directly in project decision-making outside the NSC, continuous consultations ensure that the project aligns with existing policies, management plans, and regulations at the project site. This approach does not imply that official approvals from government bodies are required to implement any of the OP7 projects, but it is critical to consider all perspectives to mitigate potential issues and ensure smooth project execution.

Outside of the NSC meetings, federal government bodies have limited direct involvement in project implementation, relying primarily on the CPMU to monitor and report on the project progress. Some NSC members have noted that it is challenging to fully understand how certain projects align with national priorities solely by reviewing written proposals. As a result, they have expressed interest in visiting project sites to observe firsthand, better understand the context, and explore potential ways to support project implementation if challenges arise (case in point, by writing a formal letter to gain the support from the Sarawak state government for the MUBRB landscape project). However, they also acknowledged their ability to attend site visits is often constrained by other priorities and lack of time.

The extent of public awareness and participation in the projects is not fully evident at this stage, as it is not one of the core indicators required by OP7. However, strategic partners such as MNS have taken steps to raise public awareness by promoting their landscape strategy, 'Rangkaian Urban Green Spaces' (RUGS), through various platforms, including a news article17, a radio podcast18, and a dedicated website launched in November 202319. Notably, MNS collaborated with GERIMIS / Creative 126, a women-led group, to curate and design the RUGS website in August 2023. The website serves as a communication tool to provide the public with information, plans, and updates on project activities. Additionally, MNS published a special issue on RUGS in the Malayan Nature Journal in September 2024. These efforts fall under Objective 5 (Knowledge Management) of their strategic project plan (Activity 5.3), which aims to increase public interest in nature-

based recreational activities and attract potential funders, sponsors, and Environmental Social Governance (ESG) partnerships. At this stage, the monitoring and reporting of these objectives have yet to be captured in the second progress report – hence it is not possible to assess whether the public awareness have contributed to the progress towards achievement of the overall project objectives.

Apart from that, overall public awareness will be addressed toward the end of the project through the publication of case studies that document best practices and lessons learned from OP7 projects. These case studies will be shared via the SGP website, social media platforms, and direct dissemination channels.

The project design, proposal development, progress reporting, and M&E requirements integrate gender considerations to ensure ongoing engagement with women. Although OP7 does not explicitly target girls due to the nature of the projects, it is expected to produce positive outcomes for both women and men. However, a particular emphasis is placed on empowering women to have a greater role in natural resource management and decision-making. In the urban setting of Klang Valley, three out of five projects are led by women, who actively participate in discussions on natural resource governance with both CSOs and government authorities. This trend is not unusual in Malaysia, where many environmental NGOs are led by women.

As for Sabah, there has been a stronger focus on integrating gender equality and women's empowerment in the development of project proposals in CRBR (based on the 2024 PIR assessment). Field missions revealed that women in these communities play a significant leadership role in guiding the direction and progress of the projects. In communities like Kampung Bolotikun, where an existing committee is in place, task delegation is clearer among the different sub-groups. These include groups managing the two tagals — the community forest and riparian system, both protected and managed for conservation and subsistence purposes — and a separate ecotourism sub-group. The tagal management sub-groups, typically comprising men (there are also some women in the forest tagal), handle the physically demanding tasks that require traveling deep into the forest, while the ecotourism sub-group, led by women, which also include socioeconomic activities such as crafting items for sale.

In contrast, in MUBRB (Sarawak), cultural norms have traditionally limited women's involvement in resource governance or leadership (although women have rights to inherit land from their ancestors). There are exceptions, though, such as in Long Tungan, where women have stepped up to take on leadership roles to ensure that the project remains viable. In general, women in the communities (both in Sabah and Sarawak) tend to take on tasks and responsibilities that keep them close to home, such as farming, tending animals, and germinating seeds in village nurseries. This allows them to balance their participation in the project with household duties and childcare. Nonetheless, women are expected to participate in developing and managing the tagang system20.

The project can further enhance its gender benefits through the advice of the Gender Safeguard Consultant who will be hired to advice the project team on what would be the best way forward.

C. Gender Equality

The project has made significant progress in promoting women's participation and leadership, with many projects emphasizing gender equality and socioeconomic development. Gender balance at the decision-making level, particularly on the Project Board, is slightly skewed towards men. Nevertheless, the newly appointed Chair is a female, who will be serving alongside the existing female co-chair (who also plays the role as the gender focal point in the NSC). The slow start to OP7, impacted by the country's transition to the UCP and the COVID-19 pandemic, has delayed project timelines, with cascading effects on the achievement of end-of-project targets. The bottom-up approach, while beneficial for community engagement, has also

contributed to slower implementation in remote areas, further highlighting the need for adaptive management to keep the project on track.

D. Knowledge Management

The Project Board (NSC) only convenes when there are a sufficient number of project submissions requiring approval. Ahead of these meetings, the board receives reports and updates along with the meeting invitations. However, these meetings are infrequent. Feedback suggests increasing the frequency of updates provided to a quarterly basis, rather than waiting until the NSC meets to address any outstanding issues. When meetings are infrequent, problems can persist for extended periods before they are raised. Although the NSC discusses project risks, this only happens during meetings. Occasionally, the CPMU reach out for feedback and consult with the OFP and the chairperson on how to resolve specific issues. Even at the NSC meetings, it was made known that there is no established feedback loop after providing input or requesting intervention from the federal government. While the CPMU would receive feedback from the projects, it remains unclear whether they are informed by the ministry or receive updates on feedback from the state level, which operates at a higher level of governance.

Moreover, the absence of a dedicated communications resource exacerbates the situation, limiting the team's ability to effectively share the project's successes with a broader audience. This is particularly concerning, given the NSC's frequent requests for more visibility on the project's impact.

There is a request to increase the frequency of communication between the CPMU and the UNOPS Focal Point for UCP throughout the remainder of the OP7 project period. Strengthening this communication allows UNOPS to offer more assistance in addressing potential challenges. Although the time difference between the Malaysia and New York offices has been a key factor limiting regular meetings, it is suggested that rotating the meeting times could be implemented to accommodate both time zones. A commitment to at least monthly check-ins could help ensure more consistent collaboration and problem-solving. The frequency and approach to these meetings are to be mutually determined by both parties.

Regarding external project communication, the SGP Malaysia website24 currently serves as a platform for sharing information about the OP7 programme. However, it is not regularly updated with new content, leaving project progress and the intended public impact unrepresented. To improve transparency and engagement, more consistent updates are needed to showcase ongoing developments and results, allowing the public to better understand the progress and contributions of the OP7 projects. This needs to be considered in view of the current situation where there is no dedicated communications person to manage this task.

III. Core Indicators

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)
1000	1000	3939.15	0

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	1,000.00	500.00	17.00	

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)
	500.00	3,922.15	

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)

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)

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)
43000	43000	24957.57	0

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)
23,000.00	24,000.00	24,957.57	

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)
	8,000.00	0.00	

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)
20,000.00	11,000.00	0.00	

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)

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 6 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Mitigated

Total Target Benefit	(At PIF)	(At CEO Endorsement)	(Achieved at MTR)	(Achieved at TE)
Expected metric tons of CO_2e (direct)	300000	341500	720850	0
Expected metric tons of CO_2e (indirect)	0	26000	0	0

Indicator 6.1 Carbon Sequestered or Emissions Avoided in the AFOLU (Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use) sector

Total Target Benefit	(At PIF)	(At CEO Endorsement)	(Achieved at MTR)	(Achieved at TE)
Expected metric tons of CO_2e (direct)		335,000	720,850	
Expected metric tons of CO_2e (indirect)				
Anticipated start year of accounting		2022	2024	
Duration of accounting		20		

Indicator 6.2 Emissions Avoided Outside AFOLU (Agriculture, Forestry and Other Land Use) Sector

Total Target Benefit	(At PIF)	(At CEO Endorsement)	(Achieved at MTR)	(Achieved at TE)
Expected metric tons of CO_2e (direct)	300,000	6,500	0	
Expected metric tons of CO_2e (indirect)		26,000	0	
Anticipated start year of accounting		2022	2024	
Duration of accounting		20		

Indicator 6.3 Energy Saved (Use this sub-indicator in addition to the sub-indicator 6.2 if applicable)

Total Target Benefit	Energy (MJ) (At PIF)	Energy (MJ) (At CEO Endorsement)	Energy (MJ) (Achieved at MTR)	Energy (MJ) (Achieved at TE)
Target Energy Saved (MJ)				

Indicator 6.4 Increase in Installed Renewable Energy Capacity per Technology (Use this sub-indicator in addition to the sub-indicator 6.2 if applicable)

Technology	Capacity (MW) (Expected at PIF)	Capacity (MW) (Expected at CEO Endorsement)	Capacity (MW) (Achieved at MTR)	Capacity (MW) (Achieved at TE)
Small Hydropower	0.06	0.06	0.00	

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	5,000	5,000	232	
Male	5,000	5,000	332	

Total	**10,000**	**10,000**	564	**0**

IV: Co Financing

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Investment Mobilized	Anticipated at CEO($)	Materialized at MTR($)
GEF Agency	UNDP	In-kind			47582.46
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability (MNRES)	In-kind			80000
Civil Society Organization	Direct co-financing of community projects generally on a 1:1 basis	In-kind			67953.94
Civil Society Organization	Direct co-financing of community projects generally on a 1:1 basis	Grant			30212.16
Civil Society Organization	The Habitat Foundation	Grant			25000
Donor Agency	German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) ICCA GSI	In-kind			200000
Total Co-financing				**0.00**	**450,748.56**

Comments

Based on the co-financing monitoring table (Table 5), the delivery of both committed grant and inkind funds has been slow, despite the project being halfway through its implementation. As a result, it is difficult to determine whether co-financing is being utilized effectively to support the project's objectives. During field missions, some grantees reported receiving additional funding that complements the SGP project, but they did not realize that this could be reported as co-financing. Guidance to improve the co-financing reporting from the grantees could help address this gap in cofinancing delivery. The CPMU regularly contacts co-financing partners for updates on their contributions, but responses have been inconsistent. For partners uncomfortable with formal documentation, an alternative approach has been to document discussions about co-financing contributions in meeting minutes. While this method offers a practical way to track and acknowledge support, it was not encouraged based on feedback received during this MTR draft review. The GEF requirements explicitly mandate that co-financing partners submit formal letters to update their contributions. As a temporary measure, using meeting minutes as a reference could still be helpful when following up on the formal letter submissions.

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

Social and Environmental Screening Procedure, SESP (Annex 5 of the ProDoc) – all identified as having "Moderate" impact and probability:

Risk 1	Vulnerable or marginalized groups, including indigenous peoples, might be excluded from fully participating in decisions regarding priority actions on lands claimed by them and including utilization of natural resources; and there may be a heightened risk of vulnerability due to a prolonged or recurrent outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic or similar crisis.
Risk 2	Project activities and approaches might not fully incorporate or reflect views of women and girls and ensure equitable opportunities for their involvement and benefit; and there is a risk that a prolonged or recurrent COVID-19 pandemic would exacerbate gender inequality and possibly also increase gender-based violence.
Risk 3	Poorly designed or executed project activities could damage critical ecosystems, including through the introduction of invasive alien species during land or forest rehabilitation or restoration, or result in human-wildlife conflicts.
Risk 4	Micro hydropower installations may alter environmental flows, possibly resulting in adverse impacts to local ecology.

Risk 5	Project interventions, e.g., involving the installation and use of renewable energy and energy efficient technologies, may result in release of pollutants to the environment and in the generation of hazardous waste.
Risk 6	Climatic unpredictability, periodic droughts, changes in rainfall distribution, altered frequency of extreme weather events, rising temperatures may affect project results, including agroecological practices, rehabilitation of degraded terrestrial and coastal-marine ecosystems, etc.; and a potential economic downturn as a result of a prolonged or recurrent COVID-19 pandemic (or similar) may increase the vulnerability and coping capacities of local communities.
Risk 7	Local community members involved in project activities may be at a heightened risk of virus exposure, e.g., stakeholder meetings, workshops and trade fairs, community field work, etc.

The risks listed in the Social and Environmental Screening Procedure (SESP) and the risk factor assigned to it are still relevant to various degree. There may be a need to revisit Risk 4 and 5, which are related to the possible adverse environmental impacts from the RE projects within the community. Reason because there are no projects currently that contributes to Indicator 821 and Indicator 922 at the moment despite various calls for proposal submissions. Risk 6, particularly concerning climatic unpredictability, should be revised, as heavy rainfall has caused significant issues such as landslides and road damage, hindering access to project and nursery sites in the short and medium term. The likelihood of heavy rainfall patterns is expected to increase in the near future. For instance, the project at Long Moh is facing difficulties accessing the site in Nawan due to the complete collapse of its only access road after a heavy downpour. The alternative route involves a complex arrangement: traveling by river, trekking through the forest, and then taking another boat to reach the site. This route is not feasible for most villagers involved, as some have physical limitations and cannot make the round trip within a day. Additionally, transporting tree seedlings via this route is challenging, as it limits the number that can be carried and the risk of damage to the seedlings also increases. The CPMU and the strategic partner are in discussion with the regular grantees to find the best way forward to navigate this issue, which will likely cause delay to the project progress.

VI. ANNEX

Uploaded Document	
Document Category M and E Document	Title MTR Malaysia (GEF 10363 / UNDP 6477)