

MID-TERM REVIEW

Project ID:	9366
Project Name:	Sustainability and Scaling Up Approaches for Transformational Management, Restoration and Conservation of Forests Landscapes and Biodiversity in Cote d'Ivoire (SSATMARC –FOLAB)
Countr(ies):	Cote d'Ivoire
Implementing Agency:	UNEP

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I. Overview

A. Description

Project name

Sustainability and Scaling Up Approaches for Transformational Management, Restoration and Conservation of Forests Landscapes and Biodiversity in Cote d'Ivoire (SSATMARC –FOLAB)

Country

Cote d'Ivoire

GEF ID

9366

Implementing Agency

UNEP

Executing Entity

Ministry of Environment, Urban Sanitation and Sustainable Development,

Trust Fund

GET

Project Type

FSP

Objective

To ensure scaling up and the sustainability of REDD+ financing mechanisms at the national level in order to address deforestation and forest degradation and support effective protected areas management.

B. Key Dates

CEO Endorsement/Approval

10/1/2019

Agency Approval

4/21/2020

Implementation Start

3/9/2020

First Disbursement

3/9/2020

Expected MTR

2/11/2025

MTR Submission

9/12/2025

Actual MTR

5/23/2025

Expected Completion

12/31/2027

II. PROGRESS STATUS AND ISSUES

A. Main MTR Findings

Overall, the project's implementation is rated as moderately unsatisfactory. This is the weighted score for the criteria detailed below. The project performance rating table can be found in the report's conclusion section.

Considering the significant challenges the project faced during implementation, this is an acceptable result. The project faced these challenges due to the emergence of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and the evolution of national rules and procedures for creating and managing national projects, as well as the ongoing administrative constraints for setting up the institutional framework for implementing and managing the project.

Strategic relevance: The SSATMARC-FOLAB project is considered highly strategic for UNEP. It is fully aligned with UNEP/GEF priorities and focuses on biodiversity, land degradation, and sustainable forest management. The project is also highly relevant to global, regional, and subregional environmental policy priorities. The project also aligns well with Côte d'Ivoire's national priorities. These priorities include climate change adaptation and mitigation, sustainable forest management, conservation of protected areas, sustainable management of mangroves, reforestation, restoration of degraded forests, promotion of payments for ecosystem services, and land tenure security.

The quality of the project design: The quality of the project design is satisfactory. It is based on a relevant diagnosis of the situation, and the issues on which the project is based were the subject of specific studies during the project preparation phase. The project was designed in close collaboration with key stakeholders in the relevant areas. Implementation of the project was entrusted to public technical structures, technical support partners, and steering and consultative bodies created to provide technical advice. However, the project was designed with several shortcomings in mind: the low level of allocated resources, the lack of an in-depth analysis of SEP-FEM's capacity to play the role of technical partner for Component, the incomplete logical framework for verifying indicators, including gender indicators, the inadequate arrangements for involving local communities in discussions and validations of products related to the institutional and legal framework, and the rural land tenure issue.

The nature of the external context: The external context is moderately favorable. The project was affected by external circumstances that hindered its progress. The project was slowed down by the introduction of new rules and procedures for managing national projects, as well as the series of barriers and containment measures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Effectiveness: The project's effectiveness is judged to be unsatisfactory given the time that has elapsed since the project began. This performance is a function of the levels of achievement of results and outputs. Overall, with an achievement level of no output has been fully delivered, and consequently no outcome has been fully achieved during the period under review. The indicators show that progress towards the project objective is estimated at. There are a number of factors behind this underperformance: the slow mobilization of the project, the COVID-19 pandemic, the slowness in setting up the institutional framework for implementing and managing the project, in particular in appointing members of the COPIL and the CCTs, the slowness in drawing up the partnership agreements with the technical support partners, the slowness in drawing up the consolidated annual work program and budget, administrative constraints linked to compliance with the new national rules and procedures for implementing national projects, including the slowness of the procedures for appointing the project's financial controller and accounting officer, and inappropriate delays in making GEF resources available. In addition, the assumptions regarding the progress from project outputs to project outcomes, and the drivers to support the transition from outputs to project outcomes are not fully verified; they are ongoing due to the low level of project implementation.

The impact is considered moderately unlikely because the project's activities have yet to produce noticeable effects. However, REDD+ and payments for ecosystem services are novel concepts with many benefits, which strengthen the prospects for the project's sustainability and scaling up of outcomes.

Financial Management: Financial management is considered moderately unsatisfactory. Initially, the project management unit had difficulty complying with UNEP's financial policies and procedures. UNEP patiently assisted the project team remotely whenever difficulties arose, which helped improve capacities and reach a

satisfactory level. However, the completeness of financial information remained an issue throughout the project. This included the timely production of quality reports and the difficulty of accurately assessing co-financing, particularly due to weak partner reporting. Finally, communication between finance and project management staff was moderately effective.

Efficiency: Efficiency is judged to be moderately unsatisfactory. The financial implementation level is lower than the technical implementation level. There is a difference between the level of implementation of outputs and the cost at which these outputs are produced. Several budget line overruns were observed, which led to a budget revision. Although no output has been fully implemented, the cost-effectiveness ratio is moderately satisfactory because the project has implemented activities at a lower overall cost. Conversely, the planned activities could not be carried out within the planned timeframe.

Monitoring and Reporting: Monitoring and reporting are rated as moderately unsatisfactory. The design and budgeting of monitoring activities are rated as moderately satisfactory. A monitoring and evaluation plan with a budget and a designated person in charge is in place. However, monitoring does not include indicators disaggregated by relevant stakeholder groups, including gender and minority or disadvantaged groups, nor does it include gender-specific indicators. Although the project has developed a monitoring and evaluation manual, the monitoring and evaluation of the progressive results and impacts induced by the project's interventions within the framework of results-based management is not sufficiently reliable. The monitoring system lacks a mechanism for evaluating events based on participant feedback. Reports from various meetings, workshops, and field missions often fail to provide information on disaggregated participation and ensure an inclusive process. Overall, the quality of the reports is inadequate in terms of both form and content.

Exit Strategy and Sustainability: Overall, sustainability is considered moderately likely. However, there is no exit strategy, which would have identified the factors to be addressed during project implementation to strengthen the sustainability of results after the project. Socio-political sustainability is also considered moderately likely, as it depends on social, political, and administrative factors at the national, regional, and local levels. While the Ivorian government has shown great interest, this commitment must be maintained and strengthened to create the conditions for the funding mechanism's success. On the social front, some communities are gradually losing confidence because they cannot see concrete action. The upcoming national elections could undermine this political support. Financial sustainability is considered moderately likely, as the project's results and impact depend on continued financial support, especially for expansion. Facilitating the participation of the private sector by mobilizing more resources for the project is more than necessary and urgent. Institutional sustainability is considered moderately unlikely, as it is unclear which institution will oversee the funding mechanism. Additionally, efforts must be made to strengthen the involvement and ownership of regional and local authorities. The technical and economic sustainability of the beneficiaries is considered likely given the forthcoming actions in their favor.

Factors and Processes Affecting Project Performance: The factors and processes affecting performance, as well as the cross-cutting issues, are considered unsatisfactory. These include the mobilization of the project, which took a very long time; the quality of management and supervision, which had notable shortcomings in applying the institutional framework provided in the project document; and the weak integration of human rights and gender equality. Project management was dysfunctional in terms of COPIL chairmanship, project management unit anchoring, the lack of a decision on when to replace SEP-FEM, the lack of interaction between the project and the CNFEM, and the weakness of financial management, including the slow provision of resources.

The environmental and social safeguards are considered moderately satisfactory. The project is considered medium risk. Therefore, safeguards are regularly monitored in the project implementation reports in accordance with the precautionary principle. Currently, the level of management of this issue is low given the

project's level of implementation. However, the project would benefit from adopting an explicit strategy and plan to monitor environmental and social issues, which would enable it to reduce its environmental footprint.

The assessment of country ownership and motivation is moderately satisfactory. MEDDTE initially proposed and designed the project, and UNEP supported the project process to ensure it met GEF requirements. The country took full ownership of the project, but its management encountered difficulties from the beginning. Intense discussions were necessary between the project management unit and the technical partners, which are government branches, to establish a common understanding conducive to the project's success. However, the level of stakeholder ownership varies depending on whether the stakeholder is part of the implementing body or the steering body. As for local stakeholders, their level of ownership appears insufficient, given the lack of concrete interventions, poor communication, and low level of involvement.

Communication and public awareness are inadequate. From the outset, the project did not establish a specific knowledge sharing component. Although communication has been undertaken at the local, community, and regional levels, it remains largely inadequate. Due to the absence of clear guidelines on project communication, no learning and knowledge-sharing activities have been initiated. Currently, a project communication strategy is being adopted.

B. Stakeholder Engagement

The ProDoc devoted a substantial section to mapping and analysing stakeholders, describing the importance of each one in implementing the project. While this mapping is relevant to supporting the project's ambitions, it should be revised or supplemented to take into account other sectors or actors, such as ministries or technical structures responsible for gender, tourism, youth employment, and others, given their importance to the project.

Furthermore, the participation of traditional chiefs, local or regional authorities, local populations, and umbrella organizations representing youth, women, and farmers should not be limited to activities on the ground. As they are absent from the COPIL and CCTs, they do not participate in the development of annual work plans and budgets. However, they could contribute to discussions on the institutional, political, and legal framework, rural land tenure, and financing mechanisms. The technical partners responsible for components related to the PMU will need to organize themselves to facilitate this.

Implementing the SSATMARC-FOLAB project involves a wide variety of stakeholders, who are different structures and institutions with different strategic objectives. Initially, obstacles to implementing the project activities arose due to a lack of shared understanding of the project's objectives and challenges among the various partners. Nevertheless, under the auspices of the PMU, effective cooperation was established between the partners, enabling all meetings and events to be organised with the involvement of the relevant stakeholders. However, cooperation at the central level is limited, as participation from the CNFEM and the Department of Water and Forests remains relatively low despite their expertise in the project's themes.

Despite their genuine willingness to participate, cooperation with stakeholders at the decentralized or local level is mixed. This lack of involvement at the right level could ultimately undermine the sustainability of the results achieved. The potential capacity of local actors is struggling to be realized. It is hoped that a new dynamic will emerge through communication and future field activities.

Efforts are being made to support women's associations for field activities. At this stage, data suggests an inclusive approach involving all disadvantaged groups is favoured, though this is not documented in field mission reports.

Several initiatives or interventions, including those of the GEF, on topics similar to those of the SSATMARC-FOLAB project are underway or have been completed. Although the SSATMARC-FOLAB project operates in different areas, there is potential for cooperation with these initiatives that has not yet been realized. This is due to the SSATMARC-FOLAB project falling behind these projects in terms of progress. Furthermore, data suggests that cooperation with existing projects has not been established, with virtually no knowledge sharing or exchange of experiences. There is no learning process in place.

Overall, the data suggest the following: the project team made limited but effective efforts to promote stakeholder ownership of the process or results; consultation and communication with stakeholder groups was moderate during the project period; collaboration or collective action among stakeholder groups, including sharing of work plans, pooling of resources, and exchange of learning and expertise, was not sufficiently supported; and links to poverty reduction or impact on economic livelihoods were moderately considered and addressed in the project.

In conclusion, the data suggest that stakeholder engagement and cooperation is considered moderately unsatisfactory.

C. Gender Equality

The ProDoc has adopted a human rights-based approach in line with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The project aligns with the United Nations Environment Programme's policy and strategy on gender equality and the environment, particularly through subprograms on ecosystem management and environmental governance. This approach is reflected in ProDoc's gender-related initiatives.

However, ProDoc has not yet developed a comprehensive action plan for gender and gender equality that includes performance indicators, targets, and verification methods. The project's results framework does not explicitly set out actions and a budget dedicated to women and young people, nor does it include gender-specific indicators.

The project management unit and relevant technical partners intend to prioritize women, young people, and the elderly for certain activities such as mangrove reforestation, income-generating activities, and management committees for developed sites. During meetings with local communities, women and young people participated at a high level. At this stage of the project, the data suggest that efforts to promote gender equality during implementation have had mixed results. The project team and technical partners must give serious consideration to this aspect of the project and comply with the ProDoc requirements.

Similarly, it is difficult to measure gender equality and equity using figures alone. It is not always possible to control the impact using numbers. The project could consider the following qualitative indicators: testimonials from participants on the inclusiveness and accessibility of activities, particularly for marginalized or vulnerable groups; testimonials and follow-up stories from participants on how they have used the knowledge and skills acquired through project activities to address human rights issues in their communities or at work; qualitative comments from participants on how activities respect and integrate diverse cultural contexts and human rights principles; and comments from participants on the availability and quality of mentoring and networking opportunities during project activities and products.

The COPIL, project management unit, and CCTs do not have an adequate gender balance, particularly in decision-making positions. The data suggest that human rights and gender considerations are rarely, if ever, taken into account during project implementation, when interpreting results, and when allocating project expenditure.

In conclusion, responsiveness to human rights and gender equality is considered unsatisfactory.

D. Knowledge Management

The SSATMARC-FOLAB project comprises three distinct components, one of which is a cross-cutting communication component that has been poorly developed in the ProDoc. Learning and knowledge-sharing between project partners has been limited during the period under review. The authorities and populations of Sassandra have been made aware of the importance of sustainable forest management and forest landscape restoration. The OIPR held conferences for students and teachers at secondary schools in the Abokouamékro and Haut Bandama wildlife reserves. These sessions reached students and educators, raising awareness of the challenges of protected area conservation. Radio programs were also broadcast. Despite these achievements, awareness-raising activities fell short of expectations.

In the absence of clear project communication guidelines, no learning or knowledge-sharing activities were initiated. Communication channels were limited to meetings, which provided opportunities to share information and discuss specific topics. There were no specific communication channels or networks to address the differentiated needs of gender-specific or marginalised groups, nor to facilitate the provision of feedback.

The data suggest a lack of knowledge sharing and an absence of experience exchange, as well as poor communication, due to the project management unit's lack of communication expertise. There is no learning process in place. A project communication strategy is being adopted. Implementing it would require expertise and resources.

In conclusion, the data suggest that communication and public awareness are highly unsatisfactory. Summarizing the scores for the factors and processes affecting project performance gives an overall unsatisfactory score.

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)
	277592	277592	

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)
		Others				

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)
	277592	277592	

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)
Abokouame kro National Faunal Reserve	555547525	National Park		20,430.00	20,430.00		37.00	37.00	
Haut Bandama Fauna and floral Reserve	1293	National Park		122,162.00	122,162.00		34.00	34.00	
Marahoué national Park	722	Habitat/Species Management Area		101,000.00	101,000.00		42.00	42.00	
Parc national du Mont Péko	724	National Park		34,000.00	34,000.00		32.00	32.00	

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)
	151430	13881	

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)
	94,430.00	2,481.00	

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)
	57,000.00	11,400.00	

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 ₂ e (direct)		2562640	275242.8	
Expected metric tons of CO ₂ e (indirect)				

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 ₂ e (direct)		2,562,640	275,242.8	
Expected metric tons of CO ₂ e (indirect)				
Anticipated start year of accounting		2020	2020	
Duration of accounting		20	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 ₂ e (direct)				
Expected metric tons of CO ₂ e (indirect)				
Anticipated start year of accounting				
Duration of accounting				

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)
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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		1,000	1,000	
Male		1,500	1,500	
Total	0	2,500	2,500	0

IV: Co Financing

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Investment Mobilized	Anticipated at CEO(\$)	Materialized at MTR(\$)
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development	In-kind		1,000,000.00	6,000,000.00
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development	Grant		2,000,000.00	1,065,455.00
Recipient Country Government	OIPR	In-kind		500,000.00	
Recipient Country Government	OIPR (including AFD C2D project)	Grant		2,000,000.00	
Donor Agency	EU- REDD +Support project	In-kind		5,000,000.00	
Donor Agency	GIZ – PROFIAB Project	In-kind		500,000.00	
Beneficiaries	Village of Nakara	In-kind		35,000.00	
Beneficiaries	Belier Region	In-kind		55,000.00	

Recipient Country Government	SODEFOR	Grant		3,217,000.00	
Private Sector	Les Plantations PORQUET	Grant		1,000,000.00	
GEF Agency	UNEP - West Africa Office	In-kind		250,000.00	
Total Co-financing				15,557,000.00	7,065,455.00

Comments

V: ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL SAFEGUARDS

Overall Project/Program Risk Classification

PIF	CEO Endorsement/Approval	MTR	TE
		Medium/Moderate	

Measures to address identified risks and impacts

The Environmental, Social and Economic Review Note in Annex M of ProDoc classifies the SSATMARC-FOLAB project as medium risk. Safeguards are regularly monitored in the project implementation reports in accordance with the precautionary principle. The appendix contains recommendations relating to the precautionary principle—the project will take precautionary measures even if certain cause-and-effect relationships have not been fully scientifically established and there is a risk of causing harm to people or the environment—and human rights principles—the project will endeavor to include all potentially affected stakeholders and particularly vulnerable and marginalized groups in decision-making processes that may affect them, and avoid negative impacts that are unfair or discriminatory with regard to the quality or access to basic resources or services for affected populations, particularly people living in poverty, or marginalized or excluded individuals or groups.

The project structurally strives to achieve positive environmental and social outcomes by focusing on three components: establishing a national institutional, policy, and legal framework that supports REDD+ and the payments for ecosystem services; creating a national financial mechanism and piloting the payments for ecosystem services in mangrove areas; and strengthening national institutional, technical, and coordination capacities for protected area management, biodiversity conservation, and ecosystem services management. It also links the three components together in a positive narrative.

These concerns do not appear to be critical at this stage of the project. However, the project management unit and technical partners must remain vigilant when applying the triggered safeguard standards. A

checklist and selection tool have been provided to help monitor environmental and social risks. Implementing an environmental and social management plan could help anticipate and manage these risks.

Minimizing the project's environmental footprint is another specific environmental issue that needs to be addressed. By focusing on local implementation, the project has concentrated most of its activities at the local level, thereby minimizing its environmental footprint. Activities such as income-generating activities, mangrove reforestation or restoration, and ecotourism will have a positive impact. Feasibility studies of mangrove restoration and conservation activities carried out in Sassandra and Grand-Béréby have enabled the environmental and social impact of these activities to be assessed. They demonstrate that these activities will help to preserve the environment by increasing the amount of carbon captured by the mangroves, reducing the erosion of village land, and expanding the area of well-preserved mangroves. This will preserve the habitats of fishery resources. On a social level, these activities generate additional resources for the local population, integrate young people and women into society, and reduce the loss of habitable land.

In summary, the data suggest that safeguarding considerations are present in the project's implementation. Substantial efforts are needed to minimize the project's environmental footprint from a cost-effectiveness perspective rather than from strategic and operational management perspectives. The project would benefit from an explicit strategy and a plan to monitor environmental and social issues, which would help to reduce its environmental footprint.

In conclusion, ESS are considered moderately satisfactory (MU).

VI. ANNEX

Uploaded Document

Document Category
M and E Document

Title
Rapport_RMP_FOLAB_final_23052025_EN