

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

Project ID:	11141
Project Name:	Transforming Policy and Investment through Improving Ecosystem Management and Restoration of Degraded Drylands of Dedoplistskaro Biosphere Reserve in Georgia to Generate Multiple Environmental and Socio-Economic Benefits
Countr(ies):	Georgia
Implementing Agency:	UNEP

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. OVERVIEW	3
A. Description	3
B. Ratings and Disbursements	4
C. Key Dates	4
II. PROGRESS STATUS AND ISSUES	4
A. Progress: Information on progress and outcomes of project implementation activities	4
B. Challenges: Information on challenges of project implementation activities	5
C. Stakeholder Engagement	5
D. Gender Equality	7
E. Knowledge Management	8
III: MINOR AMENDMENTS	9
IV: GEOGRAPHIC COORDINATES OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES	10
V. ANNEX	15

I. Overview

A. Description

Project name

Transforming Policy and Investment through Improving Ecosystem Management and Restoration of Degraded Drylands of Dedoplistskaro Biosphere Reserve in Georgia to Generate Multiple Environmental and Socio-Economic Benefits

Country

Georgia

GEF ID

11141

Implementing Agency

UNEP

Executing Entity

The Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus (REC Caucasus)

Trust Fund

GET

Project Type

FSP

PIR Submission

9/11/2026

Fiscal Year , PIR Number

FY 2026 , 1st PIR

Objective

The project aims to improve biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of ecosystems and restoration of degraded drylands in Dedoplistskaro Biosphere Reserve (BR), located in the south-eastern part of Georgia, in Kakheti Region. The project area is part of the Caucasus Biodiversity Hotspot and harbours many endemic, rare and threatened species of flora and fauna. The project area is also vulnerable to climate change and damaging human activities, such as deforestation, overgrazing and unsustainable land use and agricultural practices, which result in soil erosion, loss of soil nutrients, changes to the water cycle, and disruptions to the carbon and nitrogen cycles. The project will address these problems and barriers by enhancing national legislation, policies, and capacities for sustainable use of biodiversity in Georgia's biosphere reserves (Component 1); applying and demonstrating collaborative management of Dedoplistskaro BR (Component 2); and managing knowledge effectively (Component 3). The project will generate global environmental benefits by restoring 10,000 ha of land and ecosystems, improving practices on 20,000 ha of landscape (excluding protected areas), mitigating 1.7 million MtCO₂ greenhouse gas emissions, benefiting about 5,000 people (of which 53% are women). The project will also be innovative and transformative by establishing the first biosphere reserves in Georgia and in the South Caucasus Region, which will demonstrate a new model of conservation and development that reconciles the protection of biodiversity with its sustainable use. The project will also leverage the support and resources from various sources and partners, such as national authorities, regional and local authorities, local communities, civil society organizations, private sector actors, research, and academic institutions, etc., who will be involved in the governance and management of Dedoplistskaro BR, as well as benefit from the project interventions and outcomes.

B. Ratings and Disbursements

Implementation Progress Satisfactory	Development Objective Satisfactory
Overall risk Low Risk	
Project Financing 3,890,500.00	Cumulative Disbursement 500,000.00

C. Key Dates

CEO Endorsement/Approval 10/8/2024	Agency Approval 10/9/2024
Implementation Start 1/21/2025	First Disbursement 3/13/2025
Expected MTR	Actual MTR
Expected Completion 10/28/2028	Actual Completion

II. PROGRESS STATUS AND ISSUES

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

During the reporting period, the project made substantial progress across all three components, establishing the regulatory, institutional and technical foundations for the integrated management, ecosystem restoration and sustainable development of the Dedoplistskaro Biosphere Reserve (DBR). Under Component 1, a comprehensive package of documents required to establish the gender-responsive governance and management structure of the DBR was developed and submitted to the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture (MEPA) for review. The package includes the conceptual framework for Biosphere Reserve governance and management, proposed legislative amendments, and a draft Government Order establishing the DBR Management Committee and approving its statute.

The project also supported the preparation of the sub-law regulating territories included in international networks, amendments to strengthen municipal participation in Biosphere Reserve management, and advancement of the draft Law on Sustainable Pasturelands Management and related technical guidelines. Operational guidance for Biosphere Reserve management planning and co-governance and technical guidelines on sustainable pasture management within Emerald Network sites were prepared. The first draft of the Integrated Management Plan for the DBR was developed based on updated biophysical and socio-economic information, thematic maps and coordination with relevant national and local institutions. Capacity-building events on Biosphere Reserve governance, management planning, financing, fundraising and inter-

institutional cooperation were also conducted. Under Component 2, the draft gender-responsive Integrated Action Framework for Ecotourism was prepared, supported by assessments of ecotourism options, market feasibility, site suitability and local branding opportunities. Preparatory work for the DBR Ecotourism Development Plan was completed, including development of its outline and Terms of Reference. Initial steps were taken to develop priority ecotourism products and infrastructure, including bird and gazelle observation facilities, the “Trail of the Shepherd Boy,” the “Culture Meets Nature” museum exhibition, a geo-trail network, the “Alooba” wheat-harvesting festival, community-based cultural products, straw family hotels, and a branding and labelling scheme for selected local products. Progress was also achieved in piloting sustainable agriculture, pasture management and ecosystem-restoration practices. Six climate-smart crop-rotation demonstration plots covering approximately 20 ha were established, combining peas with the traditional wheat variety Tsiteli Doli. Two controlled-grazing demonstration sites covering 256 ha and two green-hay-transfer plots covering 12 ha were established and placed under monitoring. A comprehensive pasture degradation assessment was completed using SDG Indicator 15.3.1 and Trends.Earth methodologies, identifying widespread declines in pasture productivity and extensive land degradation. A GIS-based pasture inventory was developed, and approximately 16,000 ha of registered and unregistered land plots were surveyed or field-verified to support their registration and categorization as pastureland. Development of the DBR Sustainable Pasture Management Programme was initiated using information on livestock, pasture use, transhumance routes and conflict areas. These assessments and inventories provide the baseline and land-tenure foundation for the subsequent implementation and scaling-up of sustainable pasture-management measures.

Under Component 3, gender-responsive capacity-building and awareness activities strengthened stakeholders’ knowledge of ecosystem restoration, sustainable forest and pasture management, biodiversity conservation, climate adaptation and Biosphere Reserve planning. Educational and public-awareness materials were developed and disseminated, including materials on the DBR concept and values, Tsiteli Doli, climate-smart crop rotation and bird identification. School eco-clubs were strengthened through Training of Trainers programmes, environmental education activities and citizen-science initiatives. The “Hour of the Garden Birds” event engaged 118 eco-club members, including 80 female participants, in standardized biodiversity monitoring. Development of the DBR Knowledge Management Hub and the gender-sensitive Communication and Awareness Strategy was also initiated. Overall, the project has established a strong technical, institutional and participatory foundation for achieving its outcomes. Several instruments and plans remain subject to stakeholder validation, formal governmental approval or establishment of the DBR management structure. The next reporting period will therefore focus on formalizing governance arrangements, finalizing and initiating implementation of the principal policy and planning instruments, expanding demonstration activities, and strengthening monitoring and documentation of results against the GEF Core Indicators.

B. Challenges: Information on challenges of project implementation activities

Project implementation faced several interrelated institutional, legislative and sequencing challenges during the reporting period. Establishing the governance and management structure of the Dedoplistskaro Biosphere Reserve proved more complex and time-consuming than initially anticipated because it requires high-level political endorsement and coordination among multiple national and local institutions. Structural reorganization within MEPA and the municipal elections held in October 2025 affected institutional continuity and slowed decision-making. In addition, the governance model initially envisaged for Biosphere Reserves could not be implemented under the existing legal framework, requiring further analysis and preparation of revised institutional and legislative arrangements. Progress on several activities was dependent on broader legislative processes outside the project’s direct control. Finalization of the sub-law regulating territories included in international networks depends on the draft Law on Biological Diversity, while regulations, technical guidance and local capacity-building activities related to pasture management depend

on finalization and adoption of the draft Law on Sustainable Pasturelands Management. Consequently, awareness and capacity-building activities for local pasture users, including support for establishing Pasture Users Unions, were postponed until their legal status, rights and responsibilities are sufficiently clarified.

The absence of an approved national framework defining the governance, competencies and financing arrangements for Biosphere Reserves also complicated preparation of the DBR Integrated Management Plan. Although the first draft was developed, its institutional arrangements and implementation mechanisms cannot be finalized until the governance structure is agreed. For the same reason, meetings and specialized training for the DBR governing and management bodies, the formal hosting arrangements for the Knowledge Management Hub, and some biodiversity-monitoring capacity-building activities could not yet be initiated.

The Integrated Action Framework for Ecotourism and related assessments were substantially advanced, but additional national and local consultations are required before the Framework can be finalized and adopted. Preparation of the Ecotourism Development Plan consequently commenced later than originally envisaged. Implementation of several ecotourism products and infrastructure investments also requires further feasibility assessment, detailed design, agreement on locations and beneficiaries, and coordination with protected-area administrations, municipalities, the Border Police and other relevant institutions. Some knowledge-management, communication and awareness activities were intentionally rescheduled to ensure their relevance and effectiveness. Knowledge products and media tours will be developed after the demonstration activities generate practical results, while visibility materials will be produced following completion of the stakeholder-awareness assessment. Despite these delays, preparatory, analytical and consultation work continued, and the project established the foundation needed to accelerate formal approval and implementation of key activities during the next reporting period.

C. Stakeholder Engagement

During the reporting period (March 2025 - 30 June 2026), the project engaged a broad range of stakeholders through consultations, trainings and governance meetings. Key activities included: Stakeholder Consultation Meetings on the Conceptual Framework for the Biosphere Reserve Institutional Governance and Management Structures (18 June, 25 July and 28 July 2025), bringing together Dedoplistskaro City Hall, local communities, farmers and REC Caucasus; the Discussion on the Draft Law of Georgia on Pasture Management (8 April 2026) with MEPA, NASLM and other national authorities; the Participatory Mental Mapping for Pasture Identification and Assessment within Dedoplistskaro Biosphere Reserve (20 May 2026); practitioner and eco-club/teacher trainings for local schools and eco-club leaders; and the inter-generational training on biodiversity (13-14 February 2026, Tbilisi), which brought together more than 30 educators and eco-club leaders on Day 1 for capacity-building in biodiversity conservation and environmental education, and 26 participants on Day 2 for reflection and experience-sharing on environmental education activities, including the Hour of the Garden Birds initiative. **The 2nd Project Steering Committee Meeting (29 June 2026)** further engaged government and REC Caucasus representatives on project governance and progress.

The project has delivered the following consultation meetings and workshops for state (national and local) authorities: **the Project Steering Committee 1st Meeting (1 May 2025) and 2nd Meeting (29 June 2026)** (See Annexes Y1-01; Y1-03; Y1-04), Project Inception workshop (See annex Y1-02) three Stakeholder Consultation Meetings on the Conceptual Framework for Biosphere Reserve Institutional Governance and Management Structures (18 June, 25 July and 28 July 2025); the Consultation Meeting with Dedoplistskaro City Hall representatives (19 November 2025); and the Discussion on the Draft Law of Georgia on Pasture Management (8 April 2026), which directly engaged MEPA, NASLM and other national authorities as planned.

For state, private sector and CSO training, against a target of 5 training sessions (2 for policymakers/decision-makers, 3 for local CSOs and private sector), the project has delivered training on Biosphere Reserve Co-governance, Management, Planning and Development (15-18 December 2025) and on Cooperation Mechanisms and Joint Activity Planning (24 December 2025), alongside the Practitioner Training on Ecosystems Management and Restoration (30-31 October 2025). This represents solid progress against the target, with the SEP's emphasis on strengthening capacity for sustainable practices being reflected in practical, field-oriented sessions.

For private sector participatory assessment, the Participatory Mental Mapping for Pasture Identification and Assessment within the Dedoplistskaro Biosphere Reserve (20 May 2026) directly delivered the SEP's planned participatory workshop on pasture use, degradation and local business challenges, engaging landowners, local population and relevant representatives.

For vulnerable groups (women and young people), engagement has been strong in practice even where the SEP's specific 'document-sharing rounds' have not yet been formally carried out: women represented between 37% and 91% of participants across the reported capacity-building events, and youth-focused activities such as the eco-club trainings and the Inter-Generational Biodiversity Training (13-14 February 2026) directly engaged students and young eco-club leaders alongside teachers, in line with the SEP's intent to ensure diversity of participants informing project progress.

Stakeholder engagement has translated into tangible action: on 5 June 2025, 118 eco-club members (including 80 women) applied training received through the project by conducting standardized bird monitoring under the 'Hour of the Garden Birds' citizen-science initiative. Consultation outcomes have also fed into policy processes, most notably the Discussion on the Draft Law of Georgia on Pasture Management, which directly engaged MEPA, NASLM, Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, National Agency for Public Registry, the Border Police, and other national authorities identified in the SEP's stakeholder mapping. Overall, of the roughly 285 recorded attendances across project meetings, trainings and consultations to date, women accounted for approximately 54%, exceeding the project's 53% target for women beneficiaries and reflecting the gender-responsive approach called for throughout the SEP.

Some elements of the SEP's engagement programme have not yet been carried out as they are scheduled for outside this reporting period, the project team will continuously monitor the delivery and documentation of these elements.

D. Gender Equality

The project continues to apply a gender-responsive approach across its stakeholder engagement and capacity-building activities, in line with the project's Gender Action Plan (GAP). The GAP sets a specific target of at least 40% women's participation across trainings, consultation meetings and workshops (GAP Outputs 1.1.1, 1.1.5 and 2.1.5), distinct from the project's overall beneficiary target of 53% women set out in the Project Description. Across recorded participation in project meetings, consultations and trainings during the reporting period, women accounted for approximately 54% of participants (155 of 285 recorded attendances),

exceeding both benchmarks in aggregate, though performance against the GAP's 40% threshold varied considerably by event.

Female participation was particularly strong in education-focused activities: the Inter-Generational Biodiversity Training (13-14 February 2026) brought together more than 30 educators and eco-club leaders on Day 1, and 26 participants on Day 2, of whom 20 were women (77%), reflecting strong representation of women teachers and eco-club leaders well above the GAP target.

Other key events during the period showed the following gender breakdown against the GAP's 40% benchmark: the Practitioner Training on Ecosystems Management and Restoration (30-31 October 2025) had 11 participants, 10 of whom were women (91%); the Eco-Club Training on Critical Environmental Topics (31 October - 3 November 2025) had 27 participants, 19 of whom were women (70%); the Stakeholder Consultation Meetings on the Conceptual Framework for Biosphere Reserve Institutional Governance and Management Structures (25 and 28 July 2025) had a combined 33 participants, 16 of whom were women (48%); the Training on Biosphere Reserve Co-governance, Management, Planning and Development (15-18 December 2025) had 27 participants, 12 of whom were women (44%); the Discussion on the Draft Law of Georgia on Pasture Management (8 April 2026) had 28 participants, 16 of whom were women (57%); and the 2nd Project Steering Committee Meeting (29 June 2026) had 16 named participants, 10 of whom were women (62.5%), all meeting or exceeding the GAP target.

Three events fell short of the GAP's 40% benchmark: the Training on Cooperation Mechanisms and Joint Activity Planning for the Biosphere Reserve (24 December 2025) had 19 participants, 7 of whom were women (37%); the Participatory Mental Mapping for Pasture Identification and Assessment within Dedoplistskaro Biosphere Reserve (20 May 2026) had 21 participants, 7 of whom were women (33%); and most notably, the Consultation Meeting with Dedoplistskaro City Hall representatives (19 November 2025) had 20 participants, only 1 of whom was a woman (5%). This reflects the male-dominated composition of local government representatives in that instance and is consistent with the GAP's own baseline finding that women's participation in public life in Dedoplistskaro is constrained by 'deeply rooted perceptions on defined gender roles.'

Gender-disaggregated attendance data continues to be collected at all trainings and consultation meetings to inform ongoing gender mainstreaming. Consistent with the GAP's emphasis on gender parity at all levels of project implementation (Area 2), the project team recognizes that attendance figures alone do not capture meaningful participation in decision-making, and continues to adapt facilitation methods, such as targeted outreach ahead of state-authority consultations, to encourage women's substantive engagement in the events where their representation currently falls below the GAP target, rather than relying on aggregate participation figures alone.

E. Knowledge Management

Implementation of the Knowledge Management and Learning approach approved at CEO Endorsement progressed through the preparation and dissemination of knowledge products, capacity building, environmental education, technical exchange and participatory learning. These activities support the approved objective of ensuring that stakeholders apply increased knowledge and take action on integrated land-use planning, biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration and ecosystem services in the Dedoplistskaro Biosphere Reserve (DBR).

Development of the gender-sensitive Communication and Awareness Strategy for the DBR was initiated in parallel with the DBR Integrated Management Plan to ensure consistency between the two documents. An assessment of stakeholder awareness and communication needs is underway through semi-structured interviews and key-informant interviews with representatives of local authorities, schools and colleges,

regional offices of national agencies, local civil society organizations, agricultural businesses and Telavi State University. The assessment will identify existing levels of understanding of the Biosphere Reserve concept, stakeholders' potential roles in DBR management, priority information needs and the most appropriate gender-responsive communication channels and methods.

A range of educational and awareness-raising products was developed and disseminated. These include an introductory project leaflet; a brochure explaining the Biosphere Reserve concept and the principal biodiversity, cultural and socio-economic values of the DBR; a leaflet promoting the conservation and sustainable cultivation of the traditional wheat variety Tsiteli Doli; a brochure on climate-smart crop rotation using peas and Tsiteli Doli; and a comprehensive bird-identification guide for the steppe and semi-desert ecosystems of the DBR. These materials translate technical information into accessible formats for farmers, school eco-clubs, local communities and visitors.

Knowledge exchange and capacity building were implemented for practitioners, government and municipal representatives, educators, young people and other stakeholders. Training covered Biosphere Reserve governance and management planning, sustainable agriculture, financing, fundraising, branding and communication. Training of Trainers programmes strengthened the capacities of eco-club coordinators, teachers and students to disseminate environmental knowledge among their peers. Practical learning was also supported through visits focusing on sustainable sourcing, organic agriculture and local-product branding.

The KM approach has already contributed to the practical application of knowledge. The "Hour of the Garden Birds" citizen-science event engaged 118 eco-club members, including 80 female participants, in standardized biodiversity monitoring. An environmental essay competition encouraged students to analyse the interconnections between climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, and the role of the Goitered Gazelle as a flagship species. Farmer consultations and technical exchanges supported the establishment of climate-smart crop-rotation plots and sustainable grazing and pasture-restoration demonstrations, which will also serve as practical learning sites for wider replication.

Preparation of KM products directly documenting ecosystem-management and restoration practices was intentionally aligned with the implementation and monitoring of the demonstration projects so that the products can communicate verified experience, results and lessons learned. For the same reason, media tours are planned after the pilot activities have generated demonstrable results. During the next reporting period, priority will be given to finalizing the Communication and Awareness Strategy for the DBR, expanding the DBR Knowledge Hub, documenting results and lessons from demonstration activities, producing additional technical KM products, and establishing long-term institutional arrangements for knowledge-platform management.

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
01-TPA	41.1985	46.5580	

Location Description:

Vashlovani National Park

(IUCN Cat. II)

Activity Description:

Measures aimed at improved management of terrestrial protected area

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
08-TPA	41.3161	45.9055	

Location Description:

Chachuna Managed Reserve[\[1\]¹](#)

(IUCN Cat. IV)

Activity Description:

Measures aimed at improved management of terrestrial protected area

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
09-TPA	41.3187	45.8536	

Location Description:

Chachuna Managed Reserve[\[1\]²](#)

(IUCN Cat. IV)

Activity Description:

Measures aimed at improved management of terrestrial protected area

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
10-TPA	41.3471	45.8251	

Location Description:

Iori Managed Reserve[\[1\]³](#)

(IUCN Cat. IV)

Activity Description:

Measures aimed at improved management of terrestrial protected area

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
11-TPA	41.2454	45.8446	

Location Description:

Takhti-Tepa Natural Monument

(IUCN Cat. III)

Activity Description:

Measures aimed at improved management of terrestrial protected area

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
12-TPA	41.4894	46.0981	

Location Description:

Eagle Canyon Natural Monument^{[1]⁴}

(IUCN Cat. III)

Activity Description:

Measures aimed at improved management of terrestrial protected area

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
13-TPA	41.4862	46.1353	

Location Description:

Eagle Canyon Natural Monument^{[1]⁵}

(IUCN Cat. III)

Activity Description:

Measures aimed at improved management of terrestrial protected area

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
14-TPA	41.3553	46.6516	

Location Description:

Alazani Floodplain Forest Natural Monument

(IUCN Cat. III)

Activity Description:

Measures aimed at improved management of terrestrial protected area

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
15-TPA	41.3553	46.6516	

Location Description:

Samukhi Multiple Use Area

(IUCN Cat. VI)

Activity Description:

Measures aimed at improved management of terrestrial protected area

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
04-TPA	41.2209	46.1481	

Location Description:

Chachuna Managed Reserve [\[1\]⁶](#)

(IUCN Cat. IV)

Activity Description:

Measures aimed at improved management of terrestrial protected area

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
02-TPA	41.2001	46.4403	

Location Description:

Vashlovani State Nature Reserve [\[1\]⁷](#)

(IUCN Cat. I)

Activity Description:

Measures aimed at improved management of terrestrial protected area

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
05-TPA	41.1870	46.0987	

Location Description:

Chachuna Managed Reserve^{[1]⁸}

(IUCN Cat. IV)

Activity Description:

Measures aimed at improved management of terrestrial protected area

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
06-TPA	41.2076	45.9233	

Location Description:

Chachuna Managed Reserve^{[1]⁹}

(IUCN Cat. IV)

Activity Description:

Measures aimed at improved management of terrestrial protected area

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
07-TPA	41.2274	45.9586	

Location Description:

Chachuna Managed Reserve^{[1]¹⁰}

(IUCN Cat. IV)

Activity Description:

Measures aimed at improved management of terrestrial protected area

Location Name	Latitude	Longitude	GeoName ID
03-TPA	41.1322	46.6040	

Location Description:

Vashlovani State Nature Reserve [\[1\]](#)¹¹

(IUCN Cat. I)

Activity Description:

Measures aimed at improved management of terrestrial protected area

V. ANNEX

Uploaded Document

Document Category	Title
M and E Document	11141_PIR_UNEP_2026-September-11 (1)