

GEF-8 PROJECT IDENTIFICATION FORM (PIF)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

GENERAL PROJECT INFORMATION3

 Project Summary4

 Indicative Project Overview4

PROJECT COMPONENTS5

PROJECT OUTLINE9

A. PROJECT RATIONALE9

B. PROJECT DESCRIPTION23

 Project description23

 Coordination and Cooperation with Ongoing Initiatives and Project46

 Core Indicators48

 Key Risks50

C. ALIGNMENT WITH GEF-8 PROGRAMMING STRATEGIES AND COUNTRY/REGIONAL PRIORITIES54

D. POLICY REQUIREMENTS57

 Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment:57

 Stakeholder Engagement57

 Private Sector59

 Environmental and Social Safeguard (ESS) Risks59

E. OTHER REQUIREMENTS59

 Knowledge management59

ANNEX A: FINANCING TABLES60

 GEF Financing Table60

 Project Preparation Grant (PPG)60

 Sources of Funds for Country Star Allocation61

 Indicative Focal Area Elements61

 Indicative Co-financing61

ANNEX B: ENDORSEMENTS62

 GEF Agency(ies) Certification62

 Record of Endorsement of GEF Operational Focal Point (s) on Behalf of the Government(s):62

ANNEX C: PROJECT LOCATION62

ANNEX D: ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL SAFEGUARDS SCREEN AND RATING65

ANNEX E: RIO MARKERS65

ANNEX F: TAXONOMY WORKSHEET65

General Project Information

Project Title

Integrated Management For Ecosystem Services Restoration, Biodiversity Conservation, Sustainable Land, Water Management in Syria

Region	GEF Project ID
Asia	12275
Country(ies)	Type of Project
Syria	MSP
GEF Agency(ies):	GEF Agency ID
UNDP	10365
Executing Partner	Executing Partner Type
Ministry of Local Administration and Environment (MoLAE)	Government
GEF Focal Area (s)	Submission Date
Land Degradation	1/29/2026

Project Sector (CCM Only)

Taxonomy

Stakeholders, Private Sector, Capital providers, SMEs, Individuals/Entrepreneurs, Beneficiaries, Local Communities, Civil Society, Non-Governmental Organization, Community Based Organization, Academia, Type of Engagement, Consultation, Participation, Communications, Awareness Raising, Behavior change, Strategic Communications, Education, Capacity, Knowledge and Research, Learning, Theory of change, Adaptive management, Innovation, Knowledge Generation, Knowledge Exchange, Field Visit, Capacity Development, Enabling Activities, Gender Equality, Gender Mainstreaming, Women groups, Sex-disaggregated indicators, Gender-sensitive indicators, Gender results areas, Knowledge Generation and Exchange, Participation and leadership, Access and control over natural resources, Access to benefits and services, Focal Areas, Biodiversity, Biomes, Grasslands, Tropical Dry Forests, Drylands, Forest, Land Degradation, Sustainable Land Management, Restoration and Rehabilitation of Degraded Lands, Ecosystem Approach, Community-Based Natural Resource Management, Sustainable Livelihoods, Sustainable Pasture Management, Drought Mitigation, Improved Soil and Water Management Techniques, Land Degradation Neutrality, Land Productivity, Carbon stocks above or below ground, Land Cover and Land cover change, Climate Change, Climate Change Adaptation, Least Developed Countries, Climate resilience, Community-based adaptation, Ecosystem-based Adaptation, Livelihoods

Type of Trust Fund	Project Duration (Months)
GET	60
GEF Project Grant: (a)	GEF Project Non-Grant: (b)
4,990,000.00	0.00
Agency Fee(s) Grant: (c)	Agency Fee(s) Non-Grant (d)
474,050.00	0.00
Total GEF Financing: (a+b+c+d)	Total Co-financing

5,464,050.00	12,965,572.00
PPG Amount: (e)	PPG Agency Fee(s): (f)
150,000.00	14,250.00
PPG total amount: (e+f)	Total GEF Resources: (a+b+c+d+e+f)
164,250.00	5,628,300.00
Project Tags	
CBIT: No NGI: No SGP: No Innovation: No Competitive Window: No	

Project Summary

Provide a brief summary description of the project, including: (i) what is the problem and issues to be addressed? (ii) what are the project objectives, and if the project is intended to be transformative, how will this be achieved? (iii), how will this be achieved (approach to deliver on objectives), and (iv) what are the GEBs and/or adaptation benefits, and other key expected results. The purpose of the summary is to provide a short, coherent summary for readers. The explanation and justification of the project should be in section B “project description”. (max. 250 words, approximately 1/2 page)

The project aims to reverse land degradation and strengthen drought-resilient land management in Latakia Governorate, Syria, where prolonged drought, soil erosion, unsustainable land use practices, and weak coordination across sectors have reduced land productivity and increased vulnerability to erosion and fire. These pressures have undermined rural livelihoods, particularly for women and youth, and threaten the sustainability of dryland and production landscapes.

The project will strengthen the enabling environment for land restoration and sustainable land management focusing on LDFA objectives 1, 2 'Reverse land degradation through landscape restoration,' and 3 'Address desertification, land degradation, and drought (DLDD) issues, particularly in drylands’, through improved coordination, planning, and institutional capacity at national and subnational levels. This includes strengthening inter-ministerial coordination arrangements, developing an implementation-oriented Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) strategy that integrates drought-resilient land restoration and sustainable land management and delivering technical guidelines, planning tools, and targeted capacity building for government institutions, civil society organizations, and extension agents. At the landscape level, the project will support community-based restoration of degraded dryland and production landscapes through assisted natural regeneration, soil and water conservation, erosion control, slope stabilization, and water-harvesting measures. The project will reverse land degradation and strengthen drought-resilient land management in Latakia Governorate by restoring 5,000 hectares of forest and forest land (CI 3.2), improving management practices across 5,900 hectares of landscapes to benefit biodiversity (CI 4.1) and applying sustainable land management practices across 4,600 hectares of production landscapes (CI 4.3). These interventions will directly benefit at least 4,000 direct beneficiaries (CI 11), with at least 50% of them women and youth.

To ensure sustainability, the project will integrate land-use planning and livelihood diversification measures that incentivize sustainable land management, including Integrated Land Use Plans (ILUPs), support to community-based land-linked enterprises, access to microfinance and promotion of sustainable biomass use.

Indicative Project Overview

Project Objective

To reverse land degradation and strengthen drought-resilient land management in Latakia Governorate through integrated, community-driven approaches that improve land productivity, ecosystem functions, and sustainable livelihoods.

Project Components

Component 1: Strengthened Policy, Institutional, and Planning Frameworks for Drought-Resilient Land Restoration and Integrated Land Management (ILM)

Component Type	Trust Fund
Technical Assistance	GET
GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)
459,762.00	1,194,605.00

Outcome:

Outcome 1.1: Improved enabling environment in place for effective community-led integrated land management (ILM), drought-resilient land restoration, and sustainable land use.

Indicator:

Inter-ministerial coordination strengthened for land restoration and ILM established and operational

Target: 1

National framework for drought-resilient land restoration and sustainable land management developed and endorsed

Outcome 1.2: Enhanced institutional and technical capacity for drought-resilient land restoration, sustainable land management, and integrated land-use planning.

Indicator:

Number of technical guidelines, planning tools, or operational instruments developed and applied

Target: at least 2 (to be determined during PPG)

Indicator:

Number of government staff, CSOs, and extension agents trained in ILM, GIS-based planning, and drought-resilient land restoration (GEF CI 11).

Target: 300–500 (≥50% women)

Output:

Output 1.1.1

Review of the existing National Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) Programme and development of an implementation-oriented LDN strategy, including a financing roadmap and action plan, aligned with UNCCD commitments and LDFA Objective 3 on DLDD in dryland ecosystems.

Output 1.1.2

Strengthened inter-ministerial coordination arrangements to support implementation of the Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) strategy and improve alignment of land restoration, sustainable land management, and land-use planning efforts across relevant sectors.

Output 1.2.1:

Delivery of capacity-building workshops and technical training for national and subnational institutions, including CSOs and extension agents, on integrated land management (ILM), GIS-based land-use planning and monitoring, drought-resilient land restoration practices, and environmental and social safeguards.

Output 1.2.2:

Design, development, and rollout of a centralized GIS-based platform to support land degradation monitoring, land-use planning, decision-making, and knowledge exchange related to land restoration and sustainable land management.

Output 1.2.3:

Creation of gender-sensitive and conflict-sensitive operational guidelines and toolkits for participatory land-use planning and drought-resilient land restoration.

Component 2: Restoration and Co-management of Degraded Dryland Landscapes

Component Type	Trust Fund
Technical Assistance	GET
GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)
2,650,000.00	6,885,524.00

Outcome:

Outcome 2.1:

Degraded dryland and production landscapes restored to reverse land degradation and strengthen ecosystem functions such as water regulation, soil fertility, and fire risk reduction.

Indicator: Area of forest and forest land under restoration (GEF CI 3.2)

Target: 5,000 ha

Indicator: Improvement in land condition in restored areas (NDVI / productivity proxy)

Target:

By project completion, the restored areas show a minimum 10% increase in mean NDVI relative to baseline, compared to non-intervention control sites.

Outcome 2.2: Landscape connectivity and ecosystem resilience strengthened through improved land restoration and sustainable land management in targeted areas.

Indicator: Area of landscapes under improved practices (GEF CI 4.1)

Target: 5,900ha

Indicator:

Area of landscapes under sustainable land management in production systems (GEF CI 4.3)

Target:

4,600 ha

Indicator:

Number of community land co-management mechanisms legally established and operational

Target:

At least 3 community-based land co-management mechanisms established and fully operational

Output:

Output 2.1.1:

Participatory design of site-specific land restoration plans incorporating assisted natural regeneration (ANR), erosion control, water-harvesting measures, and the use of drought- and fire-resilient native vegetation in **high-priority degraded dryland and production landscapes.**

Output 2.1.2:

Implementation of community-based land restoration activities through cash-for-work programs targeting unemployed youth and women in degraded dryland and production landscapes.

Output 2.1.3:

Establishment and operationalization of women-led local nurseries and seedbanks to supply locally adapted, drought- and fire-tolerant native planting material for land restoration and sustainable land management.

Output 2.1.4:

Creation and training of local land co-management committees with clearly defined roles for ongoing land restoration, monitoring, and equitable benefit-sharing.

Output 2.2.1:

Identification and rehabilitation of priority degraded landscape linkages and buffer areas to improve landscape connectivity, restore land functionality, and strengthen ecosystem functions such as soil stability, water regulation, and fire risk reduction.

Output 2.2.2:

Community-based control of invasive species and slope stabilization activities using soil conservation and water-harvesting techniques in erosion-prone watersheds.

Output 2.2.3:

Development and implementation of pollution control measures, alongside community awareness and education activities, to reduce land and water degradation in surrounding landscapes.

Output 2.2.4:

Community-participatory land condition and restoration monitoring using field-based tools and remote sensing indicators such as NDVI.

Component 3: Integrated Land Use Planning and Resilient Livelihoods for Sustainable Land Management

Component Type	Trust Fund
Investment	GET
GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)
1,405,000.00	3,650,627.00

Outcome:

Outcome 3.1: Integrated land-use planning frameworks strengthened to support sustainable land management and drought-resilient land use.

Indicator:

Integrated Land Use Plans (ILUPs) developed and applied in target areas

Target:

3 – 5 ILUPs

Outcome 3.2: Improved access to sustainable livelihoods through skills training, inclusive finance, and community-based enterprises that support sustainable land management and reduce pressure on degraded lands

Indicator: People benefiting from GEF-financed investments (GEF CI 11)

Target: 4,000 (2,000 male; 2,000 female); including:

- 250 jobs (150 male, 100 female)

- 80 trained

Indirect Beneficiaries

11,500 (50% women)

Indicator:

Number of community-based livelihood initiatives supported

Target At least 5 Initiatives

Output:

Output 3.1.1:

Conducted spatial analysis of land degradation, land productivity, and land-use pressures in communal lands to inform integrated land-use planning.

Output 3.1.2:

Development of conflict-sensitive Integrated Land Use Plans (ILUPs) that promote sustainable land management and are inclusive of all stakeholder groups.

Output 3.1.3

Establishment of small-scale infrastructure to support sustainable livelihoods, prevent further land degradation, combat erosion, enhance water retention, and reduce land and water pollution from sewage and uncontrolled waste disposal.

Output 3.1.4:

Implementation of a knowledge management strategy, including digital tools and documentation and dissemination of best practices related to sustainable land management and land restoration.

Output 3.1.5:

Conducted national and subnational learning exchanges and training-of-trainers, and developed and disseminated technical briefs and field manuals to support sustainable land management and land restoration practices

Output 3.2.1:

Entrepreneurship and vocational training for women and youth in sustainable agriculture, agroforestry, apiculture, and land-based value chains that support sustainable land management.

Output 3.2.2:

Facilitate access to microfinance for community-based enterprises that support sustainable land management in targeted villages.

Output 3.2.3

Development of community-based livelihood diversification models and pilot sites for sustainable agriculture within multi-use landscape mosaics.

Output 3.2.4

Formulation of a community-based strategy to promote sustainable and efficient use of locally available biomass resources for cooking and heating, in ways that reduce pressure on degraded lands.

M&E

Component Type	Trust Fund
Technical Assistance	GET
GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)
237,619.00	617,408.00

Outcome:

Outcome 4.1: Effective monitoring and adaptive implementation

Indicator: TE delivered on time and according to expected quality

Target: TE and PIR independent quality ratings S or better)

Output:

Output 4.1.1: Design and implementation of a results-based M&E system aligned with GEF indicators and core project targets.

Output 4.1.2: Terminal evaluation carried out with clear gender/youth-disaggregated findings.

Component Balances

Project Components	GEF Project Financing (\$)	Co-financing (\$)
Component 1: Strengthened Policy, Institutional, and Planning Frameworks for Drought-Resilient Land Restoration and Integrated Land Management (ILM)	459,762.00	1,194,605.00
Component 2: Restoration and Co-management of Degraded Dryland Landscapes	2,650,000.00	6,885,524.00
Component 3: Integrated Land Use Planning and Resilient Livelihoods for Sustainable Land Management	1,405,000.00	3,650,627.00
M&E	237,619.00	617,408.00
Subtotal	4,752,381.00	12,348,164.00
Project Management Cost	237,619.00	617,408.00
Total Project Cost (\$)	4,990,000.00	12,965,572.00

Please provide justification

PROJECT OUTLINE

A. PROJECT RATIONALE

Briefly describe the current situation: the global environmental problems and/or climate vulnerabilities that the project will address, the key elements of the system, and underlying drivers of environmental change in the project context, such as population growth, economic development, climate change, sociocultural and political factors, including conflicts, or technological changes. Describe the objective of the project, and the justification for it. (Approximately 3-5 pages) see guidance here

The Syrian Arab Republic lies at the heart of the Eastern Mediterranean, bordered by Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey, and the lands to the southwest.

It spans diverse landscapes including desert plains, fertile valleys, mountain ranges, and a Mediterranean coastline. Located in northwestern Syria along the Mediterranean, Latakia Governorate covers about 2,297 square kilometers and borders Turkey and the province of Tartous. It is one of only two coastal provinces in Syria, the other being Tartous. It features forested mountains, river valleys, plains, and rich marine habitats, serving as a vital corridor linking coastal and inland ecosystems. This diverse landscape makes Latakia one of Syria's most biodiverse and climate-sensitive regions, supporting both ecological health and the livelihoods of dense rural populations. Its strategic location and range of habitats underscore its importance for national environmental restoration and integrated landscape management. Latakia Governorate represents a rare convergence of biodiversity richness, coastal vulnerability, and forest-based carbon sequestration potential. Given that Syria's forest ecosystems account for less than 3% of national territory—with Latakia housing nearly 40% of remaining natural forests—the region is both

disproportionately affected and uniquely positioned to deliver high-value restoration impacts. The alarming pace of degradation, 30–35% forest loss in under five years, marks Latakia as a tipping-point landscape for national environmental recovery.



Syria spans a remarkable ecological gradient including coastal wetlands, forested mountain ranges, freshwater systems, and rich marine habitats. Latakia Governorate is one of Syria's ecologically rich regions, home to over 1,086 species of flowering plants as well as marine biodiversity comprising over 1,700 species. Endemic flora such as *Iris damascena* and *Iris antilibanotica* (both critically endangered) exist in isolated patches in Latakia's forested mountains, while its coastal waters are recognized as a nursery for endangered elasmobranchs like the blackchin guitarfish. However, this ecological wealth is under siege. In 2024, approximately 544 ha of forest was lost in Latakia alone, contributing to nearly 93.6 kt of CO₂ emissions. In July 2025, wildfires ravaged 15,000 hectares of forests and farmland, displacing over 1,150 people and accelerating biodiversity loss.

The loss and degradation of forest ecosystems in Latakia have cascading effects across ecological boundaries. Forests in this region serve as critical buffers for coastal wetlands and watersheds, helping regulate sediment runoff, freshwater flows, and nutrient balance that affect both terrestrial and marine biodiversity. As forest cover diminishes, the habitat connectivity required by endemic flora (e.g., *Iris damascena*) and migratory species are disrupted, increasing extinction risk. Moreover, deforestation accelerates erosion and coastal siltation, threatening the productivity of seagrass beds, coral-like habitats, and nursery grounds for species such as the blackchin guitarfish and other marine life. Forest degradation thus amplifies stress on an already fragile biodiversity system, reinforcing the urgency of integrated restoration strategies.

While national assessments indicate that approximately 41% of Syria's territory experienced land degradation between 2000 and 2015, more detailed analysis under the National Program for Land Degradation Neutralization reported a net loss of 711.14 km² of forest cover over the same period. The greatest decline was observed in medium-density forests, which shrank by 24.51% of their Year 2000 area, followed by light-density forests (–16.19%) and dense forests (–3.17%). Even among forested areas that remained spatially intact (7,839.8 km²), a large proportion showed early or persistent signs of declining

productivity, indicating widespread deterioration in land condition and ecosystem functioning. According to national reporting to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), by 2019, over 53,000 km² of land, representing 22% of Syria's territory was classified as degraded. This degradation has significant socio-economic consequences, affecting more than 4.1 million people, including 27% of the population in Latakia Governorate (291,279 people: 139,814 males and 151,465 females), where 640 km² of land showed continued trends of productivity decline in 2019, characterized by vegetation loss, reduced soil fertility, and increased erosion.^{[1]¹}

The impacts of land degradation are not gender neutral, disproportionately affects women, who are often the primary managers of natural resources for household use, such as water, fuel, and food. In Latakia, recurring wildfires and declining land productivity have increased women's care burdens and restricted their access to critical ecosystem goods and services, further exacerbating socio-economic vulnerabilities.

While Syria's National Strategy for Drought Management and Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) establish a strong framework for action, further progress can be achieved by enhancing institutional collaboration. Strengthening coordination among ministries and aligning policy implementation will help overcome current overlaps and enforcement challenges, enabling more effective integrated land and resource management. Given existing gaps in data standardization and digitization, the absence of a unified environmental monitoring platform, and irregular land and forest inventories resulting in incomplete records to support ongoing sustainment of initiatives. There is a need to develop community participation mechanisms, especially for rural communities that include women and youth, who are facing challenges related to land tenure and often less involved in decision-making processes. It is necessary to call for strengthening fair participation mechanisms to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of ecological restoration interventions.

These findings underscore the urgent need for integrated landscape-scale interventions to restore degraded land, reduce land degradation, and enhance the resilience of both ecosystems and vulnerable communities. The project directly responds to these priorities through nature-based solutions and sustainable land management practices consistent with land degradation neutrality principles. The proposed project will address these root challenges through a targeted and integrated approach to land governance in Latakia. It will enhance institutional coordination and strengthen GIS-based land degradation and restoration monitoring systems. This platform is intended to integrate NDVI-based vegetation productivity data from 2000–2025 and enable real-time tracking of ecological conditions and promote community-led ecosystem restoration and sustainable land use. Restoration plans will be conflict-sensitive and climate-resilient, incorporating fire- and drought-resistant native species. Restoration of 5,000 ha of degraded forest land and the adoption of improved land management practices across surrounding landscapes, covering 10,500 ha, will be supported by capacity building and the empowerment of women and youth through training, targeted support to address structural gender barriers, co-management structures, and nature-based enterprises. This includes facilitating women's leadership roles in community restoration committees, promoting equal pay in green jobs, and improving access to green finance. The project will ensure that about 50% of direct livelihood and enterprise beneficiaries are women and youth,

with tailored capacity-building programs, flexible delivery models, and safeguards to address barriers such as unpaid care work, mobility, and digital exclusion. These efforts will be supported by development of an implementation-oriented Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) strategy that provides a practical framework for coordinating restoration priorities, sustainable land management practices, and drought-resilient land use planning. The Ministry of Agriculture will provide technical implementation leadership, ensuring national alignment.

The project supports Syria's Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets and aligns with GEF-8 priorities under the Land Degradation Focal Area. It contributes to national objectives to restore degraded land and improve land productivity through targeted interventions that emphasize assisted natural regeneration, controlled protection with minimal intervention, and the application of sustainable land management practices in priority dryland and forested landscapes. These actions are designed to address the underlying drivers of land degradation while strengthening the resilience of land-dependent communities in a post-conflict context. Project-level targets are designed to contribute to Syria's national LDN objectives without implying delivery of economy-wide or sector-wide national targets.

Targeted investments in native plant nurseries, agroforestry, and land-based green enterprises will support restoration efforts while providing sustainable income opportunities for vulnerable rural communities. The project will prioritize the inclusion of women and youth in these investments by supporting women-led enterprises and delivering tailored capacity-building to address gender-specific constraints such as time poverty, mobility limitations, and barriers to market access. By aligning livelihood development with land restoration and sustainable land management objectives, the project reduces pressures on degraded landscapes while enhancing long-term sustainability.

The project targets 5,900 ha under improved land management (CI 4.1), 4,600 ha of production landscapes will apply sustainable land management practices (CI 4.3), and 5,000 ha will undergo active restoration (CI 3.2) and about 4,000 direct beneficiaries, with at least 50 percent women and youth, will be targeted (C11). These targets reflect the scale of intervention achievable within an LDN-focused Medium-Sized Project and are aligned with the project's component design and financing structure.

Beyond direct land outcomes, the project strengthens the Water–Energy–Food (WEF) nexus through ecosystem restoration and sustainable land management. Improved vegetation cover and soil condition enhance water regulation by increasing infiltration, reducing runoff, and stabilizing dry season flows. Restored land productivity supports food security by sustaining agricultural outputs and reducing erosion in surrounding farmlands. In parallel, the project will promote sustainable household biomass use practices for heating and cooking, reducing pressure on degraded land resources while meeting basic energy needs. Together, these interventions demonstrate how land restoration and sustainable land management generate multiple ecosystem service co-benefits that support resilient rural livelihoods.

The project will serve as a demonstration at the governorate level for integrated land use planning, land degradation monitoring, and land-based enterprise development. Gender-responsive practices and tools including participatory planning approaches, inclusive financing mechanisms, and women-led restoration enterprises will be documented and shared to inform replication in other degraded landscapes across

Syria. Through this integrated and community-driven model, the project strengthens sustainable land use, diversifies rural economies, and positions Latakia as a practical example of conflict-sensitive land restoration and resilience building under the LDN framework.

Environmental Problems, Climate Vulnerabilities, and Root Causes

Biodiversity Threats in Latakia

Latakia Governorate is one of Syria's most ecologically rich regions, home to over 1,086 species of flowering plants, 243 of which are endemic. The region also supports more than 2,500 terrestrial and freshwater animal species, as well as marine biodiversity comprising over 1,700 species, including endangered elasmobranchs such as the blackchin guitarfish (*Glaucostegus cemiculus*). However, biodiversity is under severe pressure. Habitat loss due to wildfires, deforestation, and land conversion has fragmented forest ecosystems, threatening isolated populations of critical species such as the Iris damascene (*Iris damascene*) and Anti-Lebanon iris (*Iris antilibanotica*). Invasive species, pollution, overgrazing, and erosion have further weakened ecological integrity. These biodiversity impacts are primarily driven by land degradation, wildfire, and unsustainable land use, underscoring the need for land restoration and sustainable land management as the primary entry points for. Without intervention, ecosystem fragmentation will reach a tipping point, leading to accelerated species loss and declining ecosystem services.

Forest Degradation and Vegetation Cover Changes

Latakia has historically contained approximately 38,000 hectares of natural forest, accounting for nearly 19% of its land area. However, this coverage is rapidly shrinking due to anthropogenic and environmental pressures. In 2023, 1,460 hectares were lost, with a further 544 hectares affected by wildfires in 2024. In 2025, wildfire destroyed over 15,000 hectares of forest and farmland equivalent to more than 30% of remaining forest cover. Degraded forests no longer provide effective ecosystem functions such as water regulation and erosion control, and their conversion to agricultural or scrubland leads to permanent biodiversity and productivity losses. Forest plantations, which now make up more than half of Syria's forest estate, are poorly adapted to fire and other stressors, compounding degradation. Additionally, the lack of gender-responsive planning in afforestation strategies has limited women's participation in reforestation value chains and seed selection, missing an opportunity for inclusive and sustainable forest management.

Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Pressures

The health of Latakia’s marine and coastal ecosystems is closely tied to upland watershed condition and land degradation processes. Forest loss and erosion increase sediment and nutrient runoff into the coastal zone, affecting water quality, reducing light penetration, and smothering coral-like structures and seagrass beds. These changes degrade coastal ecosystem functions, including spawning and nursery habitats for commercial and endangered marine species. Pollution from agriculture and untreated wastewater compounds these pressures. The degradation of coastal buffers such as dunes and wetlands leaves marine ecosystems more exposed to environmental variability, including sea level rise and storm surges.

Climate Vulnerabilities

Latakia is highly exposed to climate change, facing increasing frequency and severity of droughts, heatwaves, and wildfires. Rainfall patterns have grown erratic, with prolonged dry spells giving way to intense storms that trigger flash floods and soil erosion. Forested and agricultural landscapes are already under pressure from unsustainable practices and are less able to buffer these extremes, leaving rural populations that depend on land and natural resources especially vulnerable. Since the 1950s, average temperatures in Syria have risen by 1.2 to 1.5°C, with coastal zones like Latakia experiencing more frequent heatwaves and fire conditions. Projections indicate a 20–30% drop in annual precipitation by 2050, and multi-year droughts are reducing soil moisture and recharge rates, particularly in forests and farmland. Wildfires, intensified by prolonged heat and declining forest health, have become more common and destructive; in 2025 alone, over 15,000 hectares were lost to fire in Latakia. Meanwhile, the Mediterranean Sea is rising by approximately 3.3 mm per year, putting coastal ecosystems and infrastructure at risk from erosion and saltwater intrusion. Without adaptation measures, these converging climate risks are expected to deepen food insecurity, accelerate land degradation, and force migration, underscoring the urgent need for ecosystem-based adaptation strategies.

These climate vulnerabilities disproportionately affect women, particularly those in female-headed households, who are overrepresented in informal agriculture and depend on natural resources for food, water, and fuel. Gender norms often restrict women’s and youth’s access to natural resource assets, information, and decision-making forums, reinforcing the urgency of inclusive governance and equitable participation in ecosystem restoration.

Drought Vulnerability and the National Response Framework

Syria is experiencing an increasing frequency and intensity of droughts, driven by climate change, deforestation, and ecosystem degradation. Over 75% of agricultural lands are rain-fed, making rural livelihoods highly vulnerable to rainfall variability and water stress. [\[2\]](#)² According to national reporting to the UNCCD (2016–2019), land productivity is declining across vast areas, with 21.5% of land exhibiting

deteriorating productivity trends and only 11.5% showing improvement.^{[3]³} The National Strategy for Drought Management (2008–2020) outlines a comprehensive framework for forecasting, adaptation, mitigation, and recovery, and is currently being updated to incorporate more integrated, climate-smart approaches. This strategy prioritizes participatory land use planning, ecosystem-based drought mitigation, and institutional capacity strengthening to reduce vulnerabilities and build long-term resilience. The proposed GEF-8 project directly contributes to these national priorities by restoring degraded land and forest landscapes, improving watershed functions, and enhancing local and institutional capacities to manage climate and drought risks. This ensures that addressing climate change, drought, and land degradation are clearly linked helping demonstrate the systemic and integrated nature of the problem, and the solutions.

Governance and Institutional Constraints

Latakia's environmental governance framework benefits from a range of national strategies focused on biodiversity, land degradation, and drought management, and involves several key ministries including the Ministry of Local Administration and Environment (MoLAE), as the national focal point for the Rio Conventions and the Global Environment Facility, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Energy working with local municipalities, scientific research centers, and community organizations. However, weak cross-ministerial collaboration and policy fragmentation continue to hinder effective land, forest, and biodiversity management. Strengthening these partnerships promises more integrated planning frameworks and efficient use of public resources, helping to support the successful implementation of restoration strategies across the region.

Operationally, most agencies rely on outdated land classification systems and fragmented ecological data. Forest inventories, biodiversity assessments, and land degradation records are not digitized or integrated into centralized platforms. The absence of a national GIS-based monitoring and decision-support system limits the ability of national and local institutions to develop spatially targeted interventions or track progress. Data-sharing between agencies and across governance levels is also weak, undermining transparency, accountability, and evidence-based management.

At the subnational level, local authorities, forest rangers, and municipal environment departments are underfunded and face chronic capacity shortages. Their enforcement of environmental laws including forest clearance bans and land use restrictions is often weak or inconsistent. Communities, particularly women, youth, and displaced populations, are typically excluded from decision-making, which undermines restoration outcomes and fails to leverage women's and youth's traditional ecological knowledge and roles in resource management. There is currently no mechanism to ensure women's participation in land use planning, nor are gender-disaggregated data collected in ecological monitoring, which hinders inclusive and evidence-based decision-making.

The legacy of Syria's conflict compounds these governance challenges. Many institutions have experienced staff loss, damaged infrastructure, and reduced operational continuity. Informal land tenure and unregulated land use have increased in areas near displaced communities, exacerbating forest degradation and land disputes. The project will address these gaps by supporting vertical and horizontal governance reforms, building a unified ecological data system, and enabling participatory, inclusive co-management models to ensure community ownership and long-term sustainability. The project will also establish participatory co-management structures with quotas or parity targets for women's representation and build women's leadership in restoration planning.

Root Causes of Degradation and Exclusion

The degradation of ecosystems in Latakia is driven by a complex interplay of ecological stressors, institutional shortcomings, and socio-economic pressures, many of which have been exacerbated by over a decade of conflict. The root causes fall into five interconnected categories:

1. Weak Land and Resource Governance

A key underlying factor contributing to ecosystem degradation in Latakia is the absence of a standardized, enforceable framework for land and ecosystem management. Addressing overlapping mandates among national ministries and enhancing local enforcement offer significant opportunities for improvement. By clarifying land tenure arrangements and introducing comprehensive zoning and restoration guidelines, Latakia can establish a more coordinated and effective approach to sustainable land use and ecosystem stewardship, paving the way for better compliance, planning, and long-term ecosystem health.

2. De-prioritization of Environmental Protection

Despite the issuance of some laws that criminalize the deliberate burning of forests, sustainable land and forest management have historically been low priorities in Syria's policy agenda subordinated to agricultural expansion, urbanization, and post-conflict reconstruction. As a result, forests and coastal ecosystems have been treated primarily as extractive resources rather than valued for their ecosystem services and public goods, with few economic or legal incentives for conservation or restoration.

3. Limited Institutional and Technical Capacity

National and subnational institutions lack the technical staff, tools, and coordination mechanisms required to assess, monitor, and manage ecosystem degradation. Data systems are fragmented and largely paper based. Forest inventories and biodiversity assessments are outdated, and there is no operational GIS-based decision-support platform to track land degradation or restoration outcomes.

4. Exclusion of Local Communities from Decision-Making

Local communities, particularly women, youth, and displaced populations, are not meaningfully involved in land governance or benefit-sharing. This has eroded trust, weakened traditional stewardship practices (often led by women in rural communities), and diminished community stewardship of land and resources. Without explicit measures to include and empower women and marginalized groups, restoration efforts risk perpetuating existing inequalities and becoming unsustainable.

5. Conflict-Driven Pressures and Emergency Resource Extraction

The legacy of Syria's conflict has driven significant displacement and disruption of traditional land-use patterns. Many displaced populations have resettled in or near ecologically sensitive areas, increasing pressure on forests and water resources. In the absence of regulated access, communities often rely on firewood harvesting, overgrazing, and unsustainable farming practices in the absence of regulated access, deepening long-term degradation and undermining restoration prospects.

Objective of the Project

The objective of the project is to reverse land degradation and strengthen drought-resilient land management in Latakia Governorate through integrated, community-driven approaches that improve land productivity, ecosystem functions, and sustainable livelihoods. The project will strengthen ecosystem functionality, enhance drought resilience, and sustain land-based livelihoods by restoring degraded landscapes, promoting sustainable land use practices, and reinforcing institutional coordination and inclusive co-management systems.

The project addresses systemic governance, capacity, and social barriers that undermine effective land restoration in fragile and post-conflict contexts. It explicitly promotes gender equality and women's empowerment by ensuring equitable participation, benefit-sharing, and leadership roles for women and youth in land restoration, sustainable land management, and land-based livelihood activities. Gender-responsive livelihood support, safeguards, and monitoring frameworks will be applied to address structural constraints such as unequal access to resources, poverty, and exclusion from decision-making.

By targeting landscapes where drought risk, environmental degradation, and socio-economic vulnerability intersect, the project supports Syria's recovery priorities by linking land restoration to social cohesion, community resilience, and sustainable development. Through inclusive co-management arrangements and land-based livelihood opportunities that engage women, youth, and displaced populations, the project contributes to peacebuilding outcomes while establishing scalable, LDN-consistent approaches for broader application across degraded landscapes in Syria.

Barriers, Enablers, and Current Baseline

Despite Latakia's ecological importance, the governorate faces persistent systemic, institutional, and socio-economic barriers that constrain effective land restoration and sustainable land management.

Environmental governance is characterized by fragmented mandates across ministries responsible for agriculture, environment, water resources, and local administration, resulting in overlapping responsibilities, policy gaps, and inefficient use of limited resources. Coordination mechanisms for integrated land restoration planning remain weak, particularly at sub-national levels, limiting the effectiveness and sustainability of restoration efforts.

Local environmental authorities and line departments face chronic capacity constraints, including limited budgets, inadequate staffing, and insufficient technical tools. These constraints reduce their ability to implement land use plans, enforce land and forest protection regulations, and support community-based restoration initiatives. Data systems are outdated and fragmented, with land degradation, forest condition, and land productivity data is scattered across institutions and largely non-digitized. The absence of an integrated land degradation monitoring and decision-support system restricts evidence-based planning and adaptive management.

Community participation in land governance remains limited, particularly for women, youth, and displaced populations. Weak engagement undermines local ownership of restoration initiatives and fails to reflect differentiated roles, needs, and capacities in land management. Gender-specific barriers including unequal access to land and resources, unpaid care burdens, mobility constraints, and limited participation in decision-making further constrain inclusive and sustainable outcomes. In the post-conflict context, unregulated land clearance, overharvesting, and informal land use practices have intensified, exacerbating degradation and increasing pressure on already fragile landscapes.

At the same time, several enabling conditions provide a foundation for transformative land restoration. Syria has established national policy frameworks aligned with Land Degradation Neutrality, including the National Strategy for Drought Management and the LDN Target Setting Programme, which provide strategic direction for integrated land restoration and drought resilience. Recent investments in drought monitoring, ecosystem assessment, and technical capacity development demonstrate readiness to strengthen spatially informed land use planning. The Ministry of Agriculture brings technical expertise in nursery management, assisted natural regeneration, and land restoration practices that can be leveraged for implementation. Existing access to remote sensing data and alignment with UNCCD and GEF priorities further support the operationalization of LDN-consistent approaches.

The ecological and institutional baseline in Latakia reflects ongoing degradation trends within an under-resourced governance environment. National assessments confirm widespread declines in land productivity and vegetation cover, while institutional mechanisms to respond remain underdeveloped. No centralized geospatial system currently integrates land degradation, restoration, and land management data for planning or monitoring purposes. Forest inventories and land degradation assessments are irregular, and national capacity to interpret and act on satellite-based information remains limited. Community-based co-management systems for land restoration are nascent or absent, particularly those that explicitly integrate gender equality and social inclusion.

Satellite-based analyses indicate that more than 17,000 hectares of land including forest and agricultural areas were affected by degradation and wildfire in Latakia between 2023 and 2025, with persistent declines in vegetation productivity observed across multiple land-use types. These trends provide the baseline context for the project's contributions to GEF core indicators related to land restoration, improved land management practices, and direct beneficiaries, consistent with an LDN-focused Medium-Sized Project. This evidence provides the quantitative baseline for the project's contributions to GEF core indicators, including CI 3.2 (5,000 hectares of forest and forest land under restoration, CI 4.3 (4,600 hectares of landscapes under improved land management practices in production landscapes), CI 4.1 (5,900 hectares will apply under improved management to benefit biodiversity), and CI 11 (4,000 direct beneficiaries, with at least 50 percent women and youth), consistent with an LDN-focused Medium-Sized Project and designed to inform scalable and replicable land restoration approaches in Syria.

In the absence of targeted intervention, land degradation and deforestation are expected to continue, exacerbating water scarcity, reducing land productivity, and undermining rural livelihoods. Women and other land-dependent groups are likely to face heightened vulnerability due to declining access to natural resources and limited participation in land governance. To address these challenges, the project adopts an integrated approach that targets root causes through strengthened coordination, capacity development, inclusive governance mechanisms, and sustainable land restoration practices. Lessons from previous GEF interventions in conflict-affected settings underscore the importance of participatory approaches, institutional strengthening, and gender-responsive design to ensure long-term sustainability and resilience.

The project will develop and implement a Gender Action Plan consistent with the GEF Gender Equality Policy, including gender-responsive indicators, participatory gender analysis, capacity-building for implementing partners, and accountability mechanisms. Partnerships with local women's organizations and community networks will support sustained engagement and help embed inclusive land governance practices beyond the project's lifetime.

The project's component structure is deliberately designed to address these interlinked barriers in an integrated manner. Component 1 focuses on strengthening institutional coordination, policy coherence, and land degradation monitoring to address governance fragmentation and data gaps. Component 2 targets field-level land restoration and sustainable land management interventions, coupled with capacity-building and co-management arrangements, to address drivers of degradation and implementation constraints. Component 3 reinforces community participation, inclusive governance, and land-based livelihood opportunities particularly for women, youth, and displaced populations to address social exclusion and sustainability risks. Together, these components form a coherent pathway to overcome structural barriers and translate enabling conditions into durable land restoration outcomes consistent with Land Degradation Neutrality principles.

Alternative approaches to addressing land degradation in Latakia were considered during project design. A purely technical restoration approach focused only on reforestation or erosion control was considered but rejected because it would not address underlying governance gaps, weak coordination across sectors, and the socio-economic drivers of land degradation. A policy-only approach focused on institutional reform was also considered but deemed insufficient to generate tangible land restoration outcomes or livelihood benefits at the landscape level. Finally, a private-sector-led restoration model was considered but is currently constrained by limited investment readiness and market conditions in the post-conflict context. The selected integrated landscape approach combines institutional strengthening, community-led land restoration, and sustainable land-based livelihoods, providing a balanced and feasible pathway to reverse land degradation while strengthening resilience of ecosystems and rural communities.

Alignment with other key initiatives

The project was selected to address the drivers of land degradation and drought vulnerability in Latakia because it complements and reinforces existing national strategies and initiatives, while remaining appropriately scoped as a Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN)–focused Medium-Sized Project. The proposed intervention aligns with Syria's National Strategy for Drought Management, which emphasizes ecosystem-based approaches, sustainable land management, and institutional coordination to restore degraded landscapes and build resilience in drought-prone areas. The strategy also highlights the importance of engaging vulnerable groups, including women, in land governance and drought adaptation processes and priorities that are embedded in the project's design.

The project supports the implementation of Syria's LDN commitments under the UNCCD by demonstrating practical, scalable approaches to land restoration and improved land management at the landscape level. In doing so, the project will restore approximately 5,000 hectares of degraded land and ecosystems and promote improved land management practices across approximately 10,500 hectares of surrounding landscapes, contributing to national LDN objectives without implying delivery of economy-wide or sector-wide targets. These interventions provide a concrete demonstration of how LDN principles can be operationalized in drought- and conflict-affected contexts.

At a technical level, the project will leverage synergies with the National Drought Monitoring Unit, which has initiated spatial analysis and drought-related data collection in selected governorates. Project activities will strengthen the use of existing satellite-based datasets and analytical tools to support land degradation monitoring, restoration planning, and reporting under the UNCCD, including SDG indicator 15.3.1 on land degradation neutrality. Monitoring approaches will be designed to capture land condition changes associated with restoration and sustainable land management interventions, and, where feasible will incorporate sex- and age-disaggregated beneficiary data, consistent with GEF guidance on inclusive monitoring systems.

The project also aligns with the UNDP-supported National Climate and Environment Strategy (2024–2030), which promotes integrated land restoration, nature-based livelihoods, and climate adaptation in conflict-affected areas. By focusing on land restoration and sustainable land management as entry points, the project strengthens adaptive capacity and resilience for land-dependent communities, benefiting an estimated 4,000 direct beneficiaries, with at least 50 percent women and youth. Climate mitigation and biodiversity benefits are expected as co-benefits of improved land condition but are not treated as primary project objectives.

Existing national platforms for forest and wildfire monitoring, including FIRMO, provide valuable data and institutional experience that will inform project-level monitoring and learning. Rather than establishing new national systems, the project will apply and adapt these tools within the project area to improve local decision-making and generate lessons that can inform future national programming.

By focusing on Latakia, an underrepresented region experiencing acute land degradation and drought impacts the project fills critical spatial and thematic gaps in current restoration efforts. It will serve as a governorate-level demonstration of integrated land restoration, inclusive governance, and gender-responsive land-based livelihoods, generating practical evidence and tested approaches that can inform replication under Syria's broader post-conflict recovery and green development priorities.

Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement is critical to the project's success and sustainability. In addition to government leadership, particularly from the Ministry of Local Administration and Environment with cooperation of the Ministry of Agriculture, the project will engage a diverse set of actors, including civil society organizations, local cooperatives, academic institutions, women's network and WLOs, youth groups, and private sector entities. These stakeholders are essential not only for implementing restoration and co-management activities, but also for ensuring inclusive benefit-sharing and adaptive management across forested, agricultural, and coastal zones.

The project recognizes that several women's networks supported by UNDP are not only rights-holders or beneficiaries, but also critical partners in implementation, local mobilization, knowledge dissemination, and facilitating access to communities, including in hard-to-reach areas. Their engagement as co-designers and co-implementers will strengthen gender-responsive governance and ensure that women's leadership is embedded in landscape restoration.

Given Syria's post-conflict context, the project places strong emphasis on rebuilding trust and enabling participatory governance at both national and local levels. Local actors, such as community leaders, displaced populations, and marine resource users will play a pivotal role in land use planning, restoration site selection, and monitoring. Special attention will be given to ensuring women's equal voice and participation in these processes, including through quotas or representation targets in community co-management structures.

Private sector engagement will be further explored during the Project Preparation Grant (PPG) phase through a structured mapping of potential actors involved in sustainable land management, restoration supply chains, and land-based enterprises. This may include local nurseries, agroforestry and non-timber forest product value chains, small-scale ecotourism operators, and microfinance institutions supporting community-based enterprises. While private sector engagement was not undertaken during the PIF stage, the PPG phase will identify practical opportunities for collaboration to strengthen market linkages, improve sustainability of land-based livelihoods, and support restoration-related value chains in the project landscape. Engagement with private sector partners will be pursued in a targeted and context-appropriate manner, consistent with the project's scope and the fragile and post-conflict operating environment. Academic and technical institutions will assist with ecological monitoring, species identification, and restoration planning to ensure science-based decision-making. A detailed stakeholder engagement plan is provided in Annex 1. The project will also leverage existing UNDP-supported platforms such as Women Safe Center (WSC), mobile outreach team, and Youth Empowerment Center (YEC) to enhance community outreach, service linkage, and inclusive participation. WSC and its mobile team provide holistic support, including legal aid, psychosocial counseling, and economic empowerment, which positions them as key entry points for engaging women and girls in restoration governance and benefit-sharing. Similarly, YEC will serve as hubs for mobilizing youth engagement, environmental education, and skills development aligned with nature-based enterprises. These platforms will be integrated into the project's stakeholder engagement mechanisms to ensure safe access, community trust, and meaningful inclusion across diverse social groups.

Capacity development at both national and subnational levels will ensure that environmental authorities, forest rangers, and municipal departments are equipped to coordinate with communities and enforce land use and biodiversity regulations. Capacity-building initiatives will integrate gender mainstreaming tools and prioritize the recruitment and training of women environmental professionals.

Given Syria's status as a fragile and conflict-affected context, the project will apply conflict-sensitive and inclusive engagement approaches throughout implementation. During the Project Preparation Grant (PPG) phase, a conflict and fragility assessment will be undertaken to better understand local dynamics and identify potential risks related to land access, resource use, and social inclusion. Particular attention will be given to consultations with internally displaced persons (IDPs), vulnerable ethnic and religious communities, women, and youth in the project area. These groups will be engaged not only as beneficiaries but also as active partners in participatory land-use planning, restoration activities, and community co-management structures to strengthen ownership and sustainability of project outcomes.

A more detailed stakeholder engagement plan will be elaborated in Section B, including institutional roles, consultation mechanisms, and strategies for meaningful participation of marginalized groups, especially women and youth. This will include tailored outreach approaches and feedback loops to ensure that the perspectives of women, especially from conflict-affected and rural areas, are reflected in planning and decision-making.

[1] Quantitative Metrics provided by the Ministry of Local Administration and Environment

[2] The National Strategy for Drought Management in the Syrian Arab Republic - 2020

[3] National Reporting on the State of Desertification in the Syrian Arab Republic (2016–2019)

B. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project description

This section asks for a theory of change as part of a joined-up description of the project as a whole. The project description is expected to cover the key elements of good project design in an integrated way. It is also expected to meet the GEF's policy requirements on gender, stakeholders, private sector, and knowledge management and learning (see section D). This section should be a narrative that reads like a joined-up story and not independent elements that answer the guiding questions contained in the PIF guidance document. (Approximately 3-5 pages) see guidance here

As Syria advances toward recovery in the post-conflict context of Latakia Governorate, this project is structured around an integrated and participatory approach to address land degradation and restore land productivity in line with Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) principles. The project combines institutional strengthening, improved coordination, community-driven land restoration, and sustainable land management practices to reverse degradation trends while strengthening local stewardship and resilience. A strong gender equality and social inclusion lens is embedded throughout the project, ensuring that women, youth, and displaced populations actively participate in and benefit from land restoration, decision-making, and land-based livelihood opportunities.

Through targeted interventions and capacity-building at national and sub-national levels, the project establishes enabling conditions for effective land restoration and inclusive governance. It demonstrates scalable, LDN-consistent approaches by linking policy coherence, land degradation monitoring, and community co-management within a defined landscape. While biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, and ecosystem services such as improved water regulation, soil fertility, reduced wildfire risk, and enhanced food security are expected co-benefits, the project's primary focus remains on restoring degraded land and improving land management practices in a fragile and drought-prone setting.

Theory of Change

Latakia Governorate has experienced extensive land degradation driven by unsustainable land use practices, wildfire impacts, displacement, weakened enforcement, and prolonged climate stress. These pressures have reduced land productivity and undermined the capacity of landscapes to deliver essential ecosystem functions, including water regulation, soil fertility, erosion control, and reduced wildfire risk. Climate change manifested through recurrent droughts, rising temperatures, and increasing wildfire

frequency further intensifies these challenges. At the same time, limited participation of local communities, particularly women, youth, and displaced populations, in land governance has weakened incentives for stewardship and constrained the sustainability of restoration efforts.

The project responds to these challenges through three mutually reinforcing pathways designed to advance Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) at the landscape level:

1. Institutional Coordination and Land Degradation Monitoring (Component 1):

Strengthened institutional coordination, clarified mandates, and improved access to land degradation and productivity data will create an enabling governance environment for effective land restoration and sustainable land management. By enhancing policy coherence, coordination mechanisms, and spatially informed decision-making, this pathway addresses fragmentation, data gaps, and implementation constraints that currently limit LDN progress. This pathway will include development of an implementation-oriented Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) strategy that provides an operational roadmap for coordinating restoration and sustainable land management interventions.

2. Land Restoration and Sustainable Land Management (Component 2):

Degraded land will be restored through community-driven approaches that combine assisted natural regeneration, soil and water conservation, erosion control, and sustainable land management practices. These interventions focus on restoring land productivity and ecosystem functionality while strengthening local stewardship through inclusive co-management arrangements and targeted capacity-building, particularly for women and youth.

3. Inclusive Governance and Land-Based Livelihoods (Component 3):

Inclusive governance mechanisms and land-based livelihood opportunities will be promoted to reduce pressure on degraded land, diversify income sources, and reinforce incentives for sustainable land use. By supporting land-based enterprises and improving access to skills, finance, and markets, this pathway addresses the socio-economic drivers of degradation while strengthening resilience in land-dependent communities.

These pathways are supported by a results-based monitoring and evaluation system that tracks progress against GEF core indicators and enables adaptive management, learning, and accountability throughout implementation.

The theory of change explicitly integrates gender equality and social inclusion, recognizing that sustainable land restoration requires equitable access to resources, decision-making, and economic opportunities. Women, youth, and displaced populations are engaged not only as beneficiaries but as active participants in planning, implementation, and monitoring.

Causal Logic:

IF institutional coordination and land degradation monitoring are strengthened (Component 1), AND degraded land is restored and managed sustainably through inclusive, community-led interventions (Component 2), AND land governance and land-based livelihoods are made more inclusive and resilient

(Component 3), THEN land productivity and ecosystem functionality in Latakia will improve, contributing to Land Degradation Neutrality outcomes, strengthened resilience to drought and climate stress, and improved livelihoods for land-dependent communities.

Key Pathways of Change, Anticipated Results, and Scalability

- Institutional coordination and land degradation monitoring lead to improved policy coherence, strengthened institutional capacity, and enhanced use of spatial data for land restoration planning and reporting under the UNCCD. This pathway includes development of an implementation-oriented Land Degradation Neutrality strategy and strengthening of inter-ministerial coordination arrangements to guide implementation.
- Land Restoration and Sustainable Land Management result in the restoration of approximately 5,000 hectares of degraded land and ecosystems and improved land management practices across approximately 5,900 hectares of surrounding landscapes and 4,600 hectares under sustainable land management practices in production systems, contributing to improved land productivity and ecosystem functionality.
- Inclusive Governance and Land-Based Livelihoods support approximately 4,000 direct beneficiaries, with at least 50 percent women and youth, through gender-responsive capacity-building, enterprise development, and co-management arrangements that reinforce long-term stewardship.
- Knowledge Management and Adaptive Learning generate practical tools, guidance, and lessons that inform replication of LDN-consistent approaches in other degraded landscapes, while remaining appropriately scoped to a governorate-level demonstration.

Through these interconnected pathways, the project establishes a coherent and scalable model for advancing Land Degradation Neutrality in fragile and drought-prone contexts, supporting Syria's recovery priorities while maintaining strong social inclusion and sustainability principles.

Scalability and Replication:

The project is designed as a governorate-level demonstration of integrated land restoration and sustainable land management in post-conflict and climate-sensitive contexts. A core ambition of the project is to generate practical, transferable approaches that can inform future land degradation neutrality (LDN) programming in other regions of Syria, without implying national-scale delivery. Scalability and replication are embedded through the project's focus on institutional strengthening, inclusive governance models, and evidence-based land restoration practices.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are central to the project's replication strategy. By documenting gender-responsive governance arrangements, women-led land-based enterprises, and inclusive participation mechanisms supported through existing UNDP platforms such as Women Safe Centers (WSCs) and Youth Empowerment Centers (YECs) the project will generate practical guidance for

integrating gender equality into land restoration and sustainable land management initiatives in similar contexts. These approaches are designed to be adaptable to diverse social and ecological conditions.

The strategy for scalability is multifaceted. First, the project strengthens institutional and technical capacities at national, sub-national, and local levels, building a cadre of trained government staff, community leaders, and practitioners capable of applying LDN-consistent approaches beyond the project area. Training-of-trainers models and community learning forums will enable the diffusion of technical knowledge, good practices, and participatory approaches to land restoration.

Second, the project develops and applies practical tools and methodologies including land degradation assessment methods, participatory planning tools, and monitoring approaches designed for use within existing institutional systems. Rather than establishing new national platforms, the project demonstrates how available spatial data and monitoring tools can be applied at the local and landscape levels to support decision-making, adaptive management, and reporting under the UNCCD.

Replication is further supported through systematic documentation of implementation experience, including technical briefs, case studies, and operational guidance that capture lessons learned, challenges, and enabling factors. These knowledge products will be shared through national institutions, UNDP-supported networks, and practitioner platforms to encourage peer learning and inform future programming.

To support sustainability, the project promotes land-based livelihood models and financing mechanisms such as access to microfinance and support for small-scale land-based enterprises that reinforce restoration outcomes and can be adapted in other degraded landscapes. These approaches strengthen incentives for long-term stewardship while remaining appropriate to fragile and post-conflict settings.

Key assumptions underpinning the Theory of Change include:

- addressing root causes of land degradation such as weak coordination, capacity gaps, and exclusion will enable durable and resilient restoration outcomes;
- communities, when meaningfully engaged and supported, will act as effective stewards of restored land and sustainably managed landscapes;
- integrating land restoration with locally appropriate, land-based livelihood opportunities will reduce degradation pressures while improving socio-economic resilience; and
- gender equality and youth inclusion can be institutionalized across project components through targeted measures, including representation mechanisms, capacity-building, and gender-responsive planning and budgeting.

Figure 1 illustrates the project's Theory of Change, showing the linkages between project components, outputs, and anticipated outcomes.

The project addresses several persistent barriers that have historically constrained land restoration and sustainable land management in Latakia, including weak institutional coordination and fragmented policy

frameworks; limited technical capacity and outdated data systems; low levels of community participation, particularly by women and youth in land governance and benefit-sharing; high exposure to climate risks such as droughts and wildfires; and unresolved land tenure and post-conflict land use pressures that undermine incentives for stewardship and complicate land use planning.

Figure 1 – Theory of Change



BARRIERS

1. **Policy Misalignment:** Fragmented policies and weak institutional coordination hinder effective cross-sectoral restoration and land management.
2. **Capacity Gaps:** Limited technical capacity and outdated data systems constrain planning, monitoring, and adaptive management.
3. **Community Engagement:** Low community participation—especially among women and youth—reduces ownership and sustainability of restoration outcomes.
4. **Climate Change:** Climate risks such as droughts, wildfires, and floods threaten ecosystem resilience and livelihoods.
5. **Post Conflict Land Tenure:** Informal tenure and post-conflict land pressures undermine stewardship and complicate inclusive land use planning.
6. **Finance Mechanisms:** Absence of sustainable financing mechanisms limits long-term investment in restoration and nature-based enterprises.

Key Assumptions

1) Political and security conditions remain stable enough to allow consistent field implementation and community engagement. 2) Government institutions are willing and able to adopt revised legal and policy frameworks that support restoration and integrated land management. 3) Local communities, including women and youth, are motivated to participate in restoration and co-management when given appropriate incentives and support. 4) Technical capacity can be effectively built at national and local levels to implement and monitor restoration and land use planning. 5) Financing mechanisms (e.g., PES, microfinance, green jobs) can be mobilized to sustain restoration and livelihoods beyond project funding. 6) Access to and use of geospatial and ecological data improves decision-making and adaptive management throughout the project cycle.

Project Components

Component 1: Strengthened Policy, Institutional, and Planning Frameworks for Drought-Resilient Land Restoration and Integrated Land Management (ILM)

This component establishes the enabling environment required to plan, implement, and sustain inclusive land restoration and sustainable land management interventions in Latakia Governorate, consistent with Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) principles. It addresses systemic barriers including fragmented institutional mandates, weak coordination across sectors, limited access to land degradation data, and insufficient integration of gender equality and social inclusion into land governance and restoration planning.

Outcome 1.1: Improved enabling environment in place for effective community-led integrated land management (ILM), drought-resilient land restoration, and sustainable land use.

This outcome strengthens the governance and coordination framework needed to enable effective, community-led land restoration and sustainable land management. It focuses on clarifying institutional roles, addressing policy and regulatory gaps, and strengthening alignment with Syria's Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) commitments and UNCCD obligations, while ensuring that gender equality and social inclusion are embedded in land governance processes. The LDN strategy will integrate drought-resilient land restoration priorities and dryland management approaches to support LDFA Objective 3 on addressing desertification, land degradation, and drought in dryland ecosystems.

A targeted review of relevant policies, legal instruments, and institutional mandates across key sectors (land, agriculture, forestry, environment, and water) at national and governorate levels will be conducted. The review will identify gaps, overlaps, and constraints affecting effective land restoration and sustainable land management, including issues related to informal land tenure, post-conflict land use pressures, and inclusive participation in land governance. These findings will inform a comprehensive review of Syria's National LDN Programme and support development of an implementation-oriented LDN strategy with a financing roadmap and action plan (Output 1.1.1).

Building on this analysis, the LDN strategy will provide an operational roadmap for coordinated restoration and sustainable land management interventions. It will identify priority restoration areas, define practical implementation measures, and outline financing pathways to support sustainable land degradation

management, while integrating drought-resilient and dryland restoration approaches consistent with Syria's UNCCD commitments.

To support coordinated implementation, the project will strengthen inter-ministerial coordination arrangements focused on land degradation neutrality and restoration in Latakia. These arrangements will enhance information sharing, align restoration investments, and coordinate actions among relevant ministries, governorate authorities, and implementing partners. They will also support knowledge exchange and contribute to sub-national reporting and learning under the UNCCD and SDG indicator 15.3.1 **(Output 1.1.2)**.

Outcome 1.2: Enhanced institutional and technical capacity for drought-resilient land restoration, sustainable land management, and integrated land-use planning.

This outcome strengthens the capacity of institutions and stakeholders to assess, plan, and monitor land restoration and sustainable land management interventions using spatially informed and participatory approaches. It will directly contribute to ensuring 4,000 people - 50% women/youth are engaged and reached through awareness, training, and consultation.

Targeted capacity-building will be delivered to national and sub-national institutions, technical departments, CSOs, and relevant stakeholders on LDN concepts, land degradation assessment, use of spatial data (e.g. NDVI and land productivity trends), climate and drought risk screening, and participatory land-use planning. Training will integrate gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive approaches to strengthen inclusive land governance and adaptive management **(Output 1.2.1)**.

The project will strengthen the application of existing spatial data and analytical tools at the project and governorate levels to support land restoration planning, monitoring, and decision-making. This includes improved access to satellite-derived land degradation data and field-based monitoring inputs, without establishing new national systems **(Output 1.2.2)**.

User-friendly toolkits and standard operating procedures (SOPs) will be developed to guide inclusive and conflict-sensitive land restoration planning, community engagement, and monitoring. These tools will be co-developed with local authorities, CSOs, women's organizations, youth groups, and representatives of displaced populations to ensure accessibility, cultural relevance, and practical applicability in fragile and post-conflict settings **(Output 1.2.3)**.

Component 2: Restoration and Co-management of Degraded Dryland Landscapes

This component delivers field-level land restoration and sustainable land management interventions to reverse land degradation and restore land productivity in Latakia Governorate, consistent with Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) principles. It addresses degradation driven by wildfire, erosion, unsustainable land use, and climate stress through inclusive, community-led approaches that strengthen stewardship, improve ecosystem functionality, and support land-based livelihoods in fragile and post-conflict settings.

Outcome 2.1: Degraded dryland and production landscapes restored to reverse land degradation and strengthen ecosystem functions such as water regulation, soil fertility, and fire risk reduction.

This outcome delivers tangible land restoration results through participatory and technically appropriate interventions that restore degraded land, improve soil stability, enhance water regulation, and reduce

wildfire and erosion risks. It contributes directly to GEF Core Indicator 3 and GEF Core Indicator 11. Core Indicator contributions:

- 5,000 hectares of degraded forest land and ecosystems restored (CI 3.2)
- Approximately 250 short-term green jobs created, contributing to CI 11

Degraded and fire-affected land will be restored through site-specific restoration plans co-designed with local communities and authorities. Interventions will apply assisted natural regeneration (ANR), planting of native and climate-resilient species, micro-catchment techniques, and soil and water conservation measures such as terraces and contour structures. Planning processes will be participatory and gender-responsive, integrating traditional knowledge, spatial prioritization, and clear arrangements for post-restoration stewardship (**Output 2.1.1**).

Labor-intensive restoration activities will generate short-term employment opportunities through cash-for-work and similar mechanisms. These opportunities will prioritize women, youth, and displaced populations, while providing basic training in restoration techniques, occupational safety, and environmental stewardship. This approach supports immediate livelihood needs while building local capacity for sustained land management (**Output 2.1.2**).

Community-based nurseries and seed production systems will be supported to supply native and climate-resilient planting material for restoration activities. These initiatives will strengthen local restoration supply chains, reduce costs, and support skills development and livelihood diversification, with targeted support for women- and youth-led groups (**Output 2.1.3**).

Inclusive co-management arrangements will be established at restoration sites to support shared stewardship, conflict resolution, and participatory monitoring. Community representatives, local authorities, and women's and youth groups will be engaged in these structures to strengthen ownership and sustainability of restoration outcomes (**Output 2.1.4**).

Outcome 2.2: Landscape connectivity and ecosystem resilience strengthened through improved land restoration and sustainable land management in targeted areas.

This outcome scales restoration benefits by improving land management practices beyond core restoration sites, strengthening landscape-level resilience and reducing pressures that drive degradation. It contributes directly to GEF Core Indicator 4. Core Indicator contribution:

- 5,900 hectares of landscapes under improved land management practices (CI 4.1) and 4,600 hectares of production landscapes will apply sustainable land management practices (CI 4.3),

Improved land management practices will be applied across surrounding landscapes through participatory land-use planning, soil and water conservation measures, fire-risk reduction practices, and climate-resilient

land management techniques. These interventions reinforce restored areas, enhance ecosystem functionality, and reduce the risk of re-degradation **(Output 2.2.1)**.

Targeted measures will address erosion-prone slopes and degraded catchments through low-cost bioengineering and nature-based stabilization techniques. Communities will be trained in maintenance and post-fire rehabilitation practices to strengthen resilience to climate and disaster risks **(Output 2.2.2)**.

Community awareness and practical measures will be implemented to reduce land-based pollution and degradation pressures, including improved waste handling practices and protection of restored areas. These actions support healthier land systems and improve environmental conditions for surrounding communities **(Output 2.2.3)**.

Participatory monitoring approaches will be applied to track land condition, restoration progress, and management effectiveness using simple field-based indicators and accessible tools. Women and youth will be prioritized for participation in monitoring activities to strengthen local stewardship and accountability **(Output 2.2.4)**.

Component 3: Integrated Land Use Planning and Resilient Livelihoods for Sustainable Land Management

This component strengthens inclusive land-use planning and land-based livelihood opportunities to reduce pressures on degraded land, reinforce restoration outcomes, and improve socio-economic resilience in Latakia Governorate. It addresses underlying drivers of land degradation such as unregulated land use, unsustainable production practices, and limited livelihood alternatives by embedding participatory planning and gender-responsive livelihood support within an LDN-consistent framework.

Outcome 3.1: Integrated land-use planning frameworks strengthened to support sustainable land management and drought-resilient land use.

This outcome ensures that land-use planning processes at the local level are participatory, conflict-sensitive, and aligned with sustainable land management and restoration priorities. Rather than creating new statutory plans, the project strengthens planning practices and decision-making processes that support restored and sustainably managed landscapes.

Participatory land-use assessments will be conducted in priority areas to identify land degradation drivers, erosion risks, land-use conflicts, and opportunities for sustainable land management. These assessments will combine community knowledge with available spatial information to support locally appropriate planning and stewardship **(Output 3.1.1)**.

Inclusive land-use planning processes will be facilitated with local authorities, communities, women's groups, youth representatives, and displaced populations to integrate restoration priorities, sustainable land management practices, and risk-reduction measures into local decision-making. Planning processes will incorporate conflict-sensitive approaches and gender-responsive safeguards to strengthen legitimacy and ownership **(Output 3.1.2)**.

Targeted, small-scale land management measures such as soil and water conservation practices, erosion control structures, and water harvesting techniques will be implemented where appropriate to reinforce restored areas and reduce risks of re-degradation. Designs will build on traditional practices and local knowledge and be implemented through community participation (**Output 3.1.3**).

Knowledge products and practical guidance on inclusive land-use planning and sustainable land management will be documented and shared to support learning and replication within existing institutional and community networks, without establishing new national platforms (**Output 3.1.4**).

National and subnational learning exchanges and training-of-trainers will be conducted to strengthen capacities on sustainable land management and land restoration. These activities will promote peer learning and enable participants to replicate best practices at local levels. Technical briefs and field manuals will be developed and disseminated to provide practical and standardized guidance (**Output 3.1.5**).

Outcome 3.2: Improved access to sustainable livelihoods through skills training, inclusive finance, and community-based enterprises that support sustainable land management and reduce pressure on degraded lands.

This outcome strengthens livelihood opportunities linked to sustainable land management and restoration, reducing reliance on unsustainable practices while improving income security for vulnerable groups. It contributes directly to GEF Core Indicator C11. Core indicator contribution (CI 11):

- Approximately 4,000 direct beneficiaries, with at least 50% women and youth

Targeted skills development and vocational training will be delivered to women, youth, and displaced populations in land-based livelihood activities such as agroforestry, climate-smart agriculture, nursery operations, non-timber forest product processing, and other sustainable land-use practices. Training will be gender-responsive, locally adapted, and linked to viable market opportunities (**Output 3.2.1**).

Access to small-scale finance and business support will be facilitated through partnerships with microfinance institutions and local financial mechanisms to support land-based enterprises. Priority will be given to women-led and youth-led initiatives, complemented by financial literacy training and mentorship to strengthen enterprise sustainability (**Output 3.2.2**).

Community-based livelihood models that reinforce sustainable land use and restoration outcomes will be co-designed and piloted, with clear benefit-sharing arrangements and inclusive governance mechanisms. These models will focus on reducing pressure on degraded land while improving household income and resilience in a post-conflict context (**Output 3.2.3**).

A gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive strategy for sustainable household biomass use (for cooking and heating) will be developed and piloted to reduce pressure on degraded land while meeting basic energy needs, aligned with restoration and sustainable land management objectives (**Output 3.2.4**).

Component 4: Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adaptive Management

Under Outcome 4.1 “Design a project M&E system”. This outcome will establish a robust, results-based M&E system that not only tracks project progress but also informs adaptive management, sustainability planning, and informs national reporting. Gender- and youth-disaggregated monitoring will ensure inclusive impact measurement across all project components (Output 4.1.1). Terminal evaluations (Output 4.1.2) will incorporate gender- and youth-disaggregated data, providing critical feedback for adaptation and sustainability planning.

Coordination and Cooperation with ongoing initiatives and Projects

The project is designed to complement and cooperate with national and international initiatives addressing ecosystem restoration, drought resilience, sustainable livelihoods, and land degradation in Syria. It will work closely with UN agencies, international organizations, and local NGOs to ensure synergy and avoid duplication. A joint coordination committee, including key ministries, partner agencies, and gender focal points will guide strategic alignment, data sharing, and inclusive, gender-responsive restoration.

Gender focal points from key partners, including ministries, UN agencies, and the UNDP team, will be engaged in the committee to promote alignment on inclusive and gender-responsive ecosystem restoration efforts.

Key initiatives for alignment include:

The project is designed to complement and coordinate with relevant national and international initiatives addressing land degradation, drought resilience, sustainable livelihoods, and early recovery in Syria. Coordination will focus on information exchange, alignment of approaches, and avoidance of duplication at the project and governorate levels, while remaining appropriately scoped as a Medium-Sized Project. The project will work with UN agencies, international organizations, and local NGOs to promote synergies and reinforce inclusive, gender-responsive implementation.

Project-level coordination arrangements will be established with relevant government counterparts, partner agencies, and implementing organizations. Designated gender focal points from key partners including line ministries, UN agencies, and the UNDP project team will be engaged to promote alignment on gender equality and social inclusion commitments and to support consistent application of gender-responsive approaches across activities. Coordination mechanisms will emphasize practical collaboration, learning, and alignment rather than the creation of new institutional structures.

Key initiatives for coordination and alignment include:

- **Whole-of-Syria Early Recovery Strategy (ERS, 2024–2028):**

The project aligns with ERS priorities related to local governance, livelihoods, and resilience in post-conflict settings. Coordination will focus on sharing lessons learned from land restoration and land-based livelihood interventions in Latakia and applying ERS targeting and inclusion principles where relevant.

- **UN Joint Programme for Urban–Rural Resilience and Recovery (UNJP 2.0, 2025–2026):**
As a multi-agency programme supporting early recovery and livelihoods, UNJP provides opportunities for coordination at the community level. The project will coordinate community engagement approaches and benefit from existing women’s and youth empowerment hubs for outreach, training, and inclusion, where appropriate.
- **Ministry of Agriculture – Early Warning Unit for Drought and Natural Disasters:**
The project will coordinate with the unit to ensure consistency in the use of drought-related information and risk awareness in land restoration planning. Collaboration will focus on knowledge exchange and capacity strengthening rather than system enhancement, with attention to inclusive access to information for women and youth.
- **General Organization for Remote Sensing (GORS) – Forest and Fire Monitoring Observatory (FIRMO):**
FIRMO tracks forest cover, wildfire incidents, and regeneration. The project will contribute post-fire restoration data and apply FIRMO’s risk modeling to prioritize reforestation in Latakia, reinforcing SDG 15.3 and UNCCD reporting.
- **UNDP-supported Land and Resilience Initiatives:**
Ongoing UNDP work related to land restoration, sustainable land management, erosion control, and livelihoods provides opportunities for technical exchange and harmonization of tools and approaches. Coordination will include joint learning activities, alignment of training materials, and collaboration through existing platforms such as Women Safe Centers to support inclusive outreach and skills development.

Through these coordination arrangements, the project ensures complementarity with ongoing initiatives while reinforcing land restoration and sustainable land management as practical entry points for resilience building and inclusive recovery. Collaboration will strengthen the coherence of interventions in Latakia without duplicating efforts or exceeding the project’s scope.

Potential Key Regional Initiatives and opportunities for alignment include:

At the regional level, the UNDP has initiated discussions with the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) under the “Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership” to promote collaborative approaches for addressing drought, land degradation, and climate vulnerability in fragile contexts. This Syria project has been identified as a potential model for piloting such cooperation, given its strong alignment with national drought management priorities and regional resilience strategies. While no formal discussions have yet taken place with the IsDB at the national level, the project design remains open to future collaboration offering potential to leverage IsDB co-financing or technical support for scaling nature-based drought resilience solutions and ecosystem-based restoration efforts.

Through implementation, the project will engage regularly with relevant partners and line ministries through project-level and governorate-level coordination mechanisms supported under Outcome 1.1. Where feasible, field-level coordination will be pursued through alignment of activities, use of common facilitators or extension agents, and harmonized community engagement timelines. These linkages will maximize synergies, minimize duplication, and contribute to coherent land restoration and sustainable land management efforts consistent with Land Degradation Neutrality objectives.

Contribution to Global Environmental Benefits

The project delivers measurable Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs) by directly addressing the drivers of land degradation in Latakia Governorate through land restoration, sustainable land management, and strengthened land-use governance. By combining field-level interventions with inclusive planning and institutional coordination, the project contributes to Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) objectives while generating durable environmental and socio-economic benefits in a fragile, post-conflict context.

The project's primary environmental contribution is the restoration of 5,000 hectares of degraded land through community-led restoration and sustainable land management practices, directly contributing to GEF Core Indicator 3.2. Restoration interventions including assisted natural regeneration, soil and water conservation, erosion control, and use of climate-resilient native species will improve land productivity, soil stability, and vegetation cover, reversing negative land degradation trends.

In addition, the project will place 5,900 hectares of land under improved management practices, contributing to GEF Core Indicator 4.1 and 4,600 hectares under sustainable land management practices in production systems, CI 4.3. These improved practices reinforce restored areas, reduce the risk of re-degradation, and enhance ecosystem functionality across wider landscapes, particularly in erosion-prone and fire-affected zones. Together, restoration and improved management strengthen key ecosystem services such as water regulation, soil fertility, and landscape resilience to climate variability.

By strengthening inclusive land-use planning processes, institutional coordination, and community co-management arrangements, the project addresses underlying governance drivers of land degradation. These systemic improvements ensure that restoration gains are sustained beyond the project's lifetime and contribute to national efforts to operationalize LDN principles without implying economy-wide target delivery.

The project also generates important socio-environmental co-benefits that reinforce its GEBs. Approximately 4,000 people, with at least 50% women and youth, will directly benefit from project activities (**GEF Core Indicator 11**). Gender-responsive livelihood support and inclusive governance mechanisms reduce pressure on degraded land by providing viable, sustainable alternatives to unsustainable land use, thereby strengthening long-term land stewardship.

Collectively, these outcomes represent a coherent and measurable contribution to Global Environmental Benefits under the Land Degradation Neutrality focal area. The project demonstrates how integrated land restoration, inclusive governance, and sustainable livelihoods can reverse degradation trends, strengthen ecosystem services, and support resilient recovery in fragile settings, while remaining scalable and replicable within Syria's broader LDN framework.

Stakeholders

During the PPG Phase, a comprehensive Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) will be prepared, including customized strategies for engagement of each category of stakeholders and any groups with needs and interests, such as internally displaced persons (IDPs) or various land-or resource-use groups. If stakeholder

groups meeting the criteria for Standard 6 are found in the project area, specific culturally appropriate engagement and consultation mechanisms will be developed and included in the SEP.

The table below provides a provisional list of stakeholders to be consulted in the PPG Phase of the project as part of Stakeholder Engagement.

The table below provides a provisional list of stakeholders to be consulted in the PPG Phase of the project as part of Stakeholder Engagement.

Table 1: Partners and Roles

Entity	Mandate and role in the project
UNDP	As the GEF Implementing Agency under the National Implementation Modality (NIM), UNDP provides technical and administrative oversight, fiduciary monitoring, quality assurance, and accountability for the application of social and environmental safeguards. UNDP also delivers technical backstopping and capacity support to MoLAE and other partners to ensure project activities are implemented in full compliance with NIM requirements and GEF/UNDP standards. UNDP will serve as a member of the Project Board/Steering Committee, providing oversight, strategic guidance, and quality assurance throughout implementation. In addition, UNDP ensures successful delivery of global environmental benefits through nationally led implementation under NIM, while reinforcing institutional capacity, accountability, and alignment with the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the SDGs.
Government (Federal and Federal member states)	
Ministry of Local Administration and Environment (MoLAE)	MoLAE is the lead national Implementing Partner under the National Implementation Modality (NIM). MoLAE is responsible for the execution of project activities, including planning, coordination, procurement, and financial management. MoLAE will convene and collaborate with other ministries (Agriculture, Energy/Water Resources), the Latakia Governorate, NGOs, and the private sector to ensure inclusive and sustainable delivery. MoLAE will chair the Project Board/Steering Committee, providing strategic leadership and accountability for project outcomes. This role strengthens MoLAE’s institutional mandate and capacity to lead biodiversity conservation, forest restoration, and land management under NIM, while enhancing national ownership, inter-ministerial coordination, and sustainable livelihoods in Latakia Governorate.
The Ministry of Agriculture (MA)	The Ministry of Agriculture, as a key technical partner in the project, is responsible for forestry, agroforestry, and reforestation activities, as well as overseeing the management of forests, rangelands, and seedling nurseries. Furthermore, the ministry also carries out assisted natural regeneration (ANR), erosion control, and sustainable agriculture practices. The position also involves operating units focused on drought early warning and ecological restoration. The Ministry will be a key member of the Project Steering Committee and will provide technical implementation teams during the implementation phase of the project.

Entity	Mandate and role in the project
Ministry of Energy (Water Resource Management)	The Ministry of Energy, which encompasses responsibilities for water resource management, will support watershed and soil-water conservation interventions by designing erosion control, water harvesting, and irrigation systems. Additionally, it involves managing aquifer recharge and overseeing hydrological data to ensure the sustainability of water resources.
Ministry of Tourism	The Ministry of Tourism is responsible for the development and promotion of national tourism, including eco-tourism and cultural heritage-based initiatives. In this project, the ministry will contribute to the design and promotion of nature-based tourism activities, particularly in restored forest areas and ecological corridors. It will provide technical input on sustainable tourism practices and visitor infrastructure, help align project activities with national tourism strategies and support the development of community-based eco-tourism enterprises that enhance local livelihoods and conservation outcomes.
Ministry of Local Administration & Environment / Lattakia governorate	<p>Lattakia governorate /District (Latakia Governorate and relevant subnational administrative units):</p> <p>Lattakia governorate and associated districts and municipalities within the project target area (e.g., Al-Furonlok and surrounding communities), will play a vital role in project coordination at Governorate level, support for smooth implementation, play oversight role of the project activities and community engagement. They are expected to facilitate on-the-ground coordination of restoration and land use planning activities, support beneficiary targeting (especially for cash-for-work and livelihood components), and provide technical staff to participate in capacity-building programs. Local authorities will also contribute to participatory land use planning, mobilize local stakeholders, including CSOs and community groups, and help ensure alignment with local development plans. Their proximity to target landscapes positions them as key actors in sustaining restoration gains, enforcing local by-laws, and integrating ecosystem restoration into local governance processes.</p>
Civil Society Organisations	Non-governmental organisations will be engaged in the project as required. Two potential areas of involvement include utilizing the expertise of biodiversity conservation specialists and collaborating with the Syrian Society for Conservation of Wildlife (SSCW).
Community-Based Organizations	<p>Traditional leaders, women, youth, pastoral communities, fisherfolk</p> <p>During the full Design Phase (PPG), community-level stakeholder mapping will be conducted to ensure full representation and participation of community groups in the project. Communities will be actively involved and will participate in biodiversity conservation and restoration of ecosystem services efforts in and around the protected areas, and economic incentives will be provided to offset their dependence on natural resources.</p>
Private sector, professional associations, cooperatives	

Entity

Mandate and role in the project

Private sector

No private sector engagement occurred during PIF development due to time constraints. Private sector participation is planned for the PPG Phase, focusing on:

- sustainable forestry,
- nursery development,
- ecotourism, and coastal enterprises as part of nature-based livelihoods.
- Microfinance – Four Microfinance Banks (MFB)s and 1 Microfinance institute (MFI) now operate in Syria with additional expected. The central bank is currently revising relevant regulations to include also Islamic micro-finance banks. UNDP initiated 4 agreements as a pilot on subsidized interest rate to support access to concessional finance. UNDP will capitalize on these pilots and integrate fit-for-purpose access with 2-finance instruments under this project.

Media

The media will help with awareness raising for environmental conservation and project goals. Throughout the project field activities, training and awareness, the media will be present to provide outreach to not only the beneficiary communities but also to wider public. Additionally, print and electronic/social media will both be engaged for advocacy and education.

Academia

Universities and
Research Institutes

Several universities and research institutes will be engaged during the full Design Phase (PPG) consultation process. They will also play a pivotal role during the project implementation phase, contributing to knowledge generation and advocating for the integration of biodiversity conservation and environmental initiatives. These universities and academic institutions include:

- Faculty of Agriculture, Latakia University
- Faculty of Science, Latakia University
- Forests and Rangelands Institute
- Agricultural Scientific Research Center in Latakia

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

A gender perspective will be systematically integrated across all project components to ensure equitable participation, benefit-sharing, and decision-making. The project recognizes that women and youth play critical but often undervalued roles in land use, natural resource management, and household resilience, while facing structural barriers to land tenure, finance, training, and governance challenges that have been exacerbated by conflict, displacement, and environmental degradation.

In the project area, approximately 70% of the population depends on farm-based livelihoods, with women disproportionately engaged in informal and unpaid activities related to agriculture, forest use, water collection, and caregiving. Despite their central role, women remain underrepresented in decision-making processes and have limited access to productive assets and economic opportunities. In conflict-affected settings such as Latakia, the likely increase in female-headed households further intensifies these constraints, making gender-responsive approaches essential to the sustainability of land restoration and management outcomes.

The project is strongly aligned with the UNDP Gender Equality Strategy and the GEF Gender Equality Policy and is committed to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment throughout design, implementation, and monitoring. A comprehensive gender analysis will be undertaken during the Project Preparation Grant (PPG) phase to assess gender-differentiated roles, needs, constraints, and opportunities in the target landscape. The findings will inform a dedicated Gender Action Plan (GAP) aligned with the project's theory of change, results framework, and monitoring indicators. The analysis will explicitly examine barriers such as time poverty, mobility restrictions, social norms, and land tenure insecurity.

A gender-responsive approach will be applied across all components:

- **Policy and planning (Component 1):**

Women will be actively engaged in consultations and reviews related to land-use planning and restoration frameworks. Legal and policy assessments will consider gender implications of land and forest access and recommend measures to strengthen women's participation and rights.

- **Community-based restoration and land-based livelihoods (Components 2 and 3):**

Gender-disaggregated baseline data will guide equitable access to restoration-related employment, skills development, and livelihood support. The project will target **at least 50% participation by women and youth** across training and livelihood activities and will support women-led groups and cooperatives engaged in sustainable land management and restoration-linked enterprises.

- **Monitoring and evaluation (Component 4):**

Gender- and age-disaggregated indicators will be integrated into the project's M&E framework to track participation, leadership roles, and access to benefits, supporting adaptive management and accountability. Monitoring systems will also track participation and benefits among vulnerable groups, including internally displaced persons and marginalized communities, using sex- and age-disaggregated indicators where feasible.

Across all components, the project will leverage existing UNDP-supported platforms and community networks, including Women Safe Centers and related outreach mechanisms, to facilitate inclusive engagement, consultation, and access to information and services where appropriate. Community governance structures supported by the project will incorporate women's representation and leadership

targets, and capacity-building activities will be designed to accommodate women's time constraints and caregiving responsibilities.

Special attention will be given to vulnerable groups, including female-headed households, displaced women, and rural women in marginalized areas. Communication and knowledge-sharing activities will highlight women's roles as land stewards and agents of change, while lessons learned on gender-responsive restoration in post-conflict contexts will be documented and shared through project learning mechanisms.

By embedding gender equality at the core of its strategy, the project seeks to reduce structural inequalities, strengthen women's agency, and enhance their access to natural resources and economic opportunities. This approach not only promotes equity and inclusion but also strengthens the long-term environmental and socio-economic sustainability of land restoration and sustainable land management outcomes in Latakia.

Knowledge Management

The effectiveness and sustainability of the project depend not only on field-level interventions, but also on the systematic capture, use, and sharing of knowledge generated through implementation. In Latakia, limited access to up-to-date land degradation information, fragmented datasets, and constrained institutional capacity have reduced the ability of institutions and communities to plan, implement, and sustain land restoration and sustainable land management (SLM) interventions. The project addresses these constraints through a focused, project-level knowledge management approach that supports adaptive implementation, learning, and replication.

A project-level knowledge management strategy will be developed to document lessons learned, good practices, and practical tools emerging from implementation. Knowledge products will be disseminated through accessible digital and non-digital formats, experience-sharing workshops, and targeted learning events. These activities build directly on capacity strengthening under **Outcome 1.2** and support adaptive management under Component 4, without establishing new national systems.

The project will generate and share applied knowledge products including restoration and SLM toolkits, gender- and conflict-sensitive guidance notes, technical briefs, and short case studies drawn from field experience. These materials will be tailored to the needs of local authorities, technical staff, civil society organizations, and community groups and will focus on practical application rather than policy formulation. Where feasible, materials will be integrated into existing training and extension mechanisms to support continuity beyond the project period.

Learning and exchange will be promoted through structured workshops, field demonstrations, and training-of-trainers activities to facilitate peer learning within Latakia and enable replication of effective approaches in similar contexts. Special attention will be given to documenting inclusive and gender-responsive practices that strengthen community stewardship and reduce pressures on degraded land.

Lessons learned from restoration and sustainable land management interventions will be documented and shared with relevant global knowledge platforms and regional initiatives. In particular, the project will contribute to knowledge exchange among GEF-financed land restoration projects and will support reporting

of restoration outcomes through the UNCCD PRAIS reporting system where appropriate. Sustainable land management practices demonstrated through the project will also be documented and shared through the WOCAT global database to support broader learning on effective restoration approaches in dryland and post-conflict contexts.

Knowledge management activities will be closely linked to the project's results-based monitoring and evaluation framework. Monitoring findings, mid-term and terminal evaluation results, and periodic reflection sessions will be used to inform adaptive management and continuous improvement during implementation. Gender- and youth-disaggregated data will support learning on inclusion and equity dimensions of land restoration and livelihood interventions.

By the end of the project, stakeholders involved in implementation will have improved access to practical knowledge, tools, and lessons that support sustainable land management and restoration in fragile settings. The project will demonstrate how focused, project-level knowledge management can strengthen learning, accountability, and replication of LDN-aligned interventions without creating parallel national systems or long-term institutional obligations.

Innovation and Scaling up toward wider transformation

The project introduces a set of practical and context-appropriate innovations designed to address persistent land degradation challenges in a fragile, post-conflict setting. These innovations are institutional, social, and operational in nature, and focus on improving how land restoration and sustainable land management (SLM) are planned, implemented, and sustained rather than on introducing new technologies or national systems.

A key innovation lies in the project's use of applied, project-level spatial and land condition information to inform restoration planning, prioritization, and adaptive management. By combining available remote-sensing data, field observations, and community knowledge, the project strengthens evidence-based decision-making at the governorate and site levels. This approach improves targeting of restoration and SLM interventions without establishing new national platforms or long-term system obligations, while demonstrating how existing data sources can be used more effectively in LDN-aligned implementation.

Institutionally, the project introduces structured, project-level coordination mechanisms that bring together relevant actors from environment, agriculture, and local governance to support integrated land restoration and management decisions. In a context characterized by fragmented mandates and weak coordination, this approach represents an important innovation in how institutions collaborate around land degradation challenges. The emphasis is on practical coordination, shared problem-solving, and learning and creating models that can be replicated in other governorates without requiring new national bodies or reforms.

At the field level, the project pilots community-led land restoration and co-management approaches that integrate assisted natural regeneration, soil and water conservation, and sustainable land management practices. These approaches are designed to be low-cost, climate-resilient, and socially inclusive, with a strong focus on engaging women, youth, and displaced populations. By demonstrating restoration of 5,000 hectares of degraded land and improved management across 10,500 hectares, the project generates field-tested practices that can be adapted and replicated in other degraded landscapes with similar conditions.

The project also innovates by explicitly linking restoration outcomes with land-based livelihood support that reduces pressure on degraded land. Skills development, enterprise support, and access to small-scale finance are designed to complement restoration activities and strengthen incentives for long-term stewardship. The focus on gender-responsive livelihood pathways, particularly for women and youth addresses structural drivers of degradation while supporting inclusive recovery.

Scaling up is pursued through replication and learning, rather than national system expansion. Practical tools, guidance notes, and lessons learned will be documented and shared through training-of-trainers approaches, peer learning, and collaboration with existing recovery and land management initiatives. This enables successful approaches to be transferred to other locations without increasing project scope or institutional complexity.

Together, these innovations demonstrate how integrated land restoration, inclusive governance, and sustainable livelihoods can be operationalized under Land Degradation Neutrality principles in fragile contexts. The project provides adaptable models that support wider transformation by strengthening local capacity, improving coordination, and embedding learning, creating a foundation for future replication through national and partner-led programs beyond the project's lifetime.

Resilience to Conflict and Climate Risk

The proposed project has been carefully structured with explicit consideration of Syria's fragile and evolving context, recognizing that future trajectories may be shaped by a combination of socio-political volatility, economic uncertainty, and climate-induced pressures. To ensure the robustness of project outcomes, the initial design, which will be further elaborated and developed in the PPG Phase, incorporates principles of flexibility, decentralization, and adaptive implementation. Three plausible scenarios have been considered to stress-test the viability of the proposed interventions:

Scenario 1: Prolonged Institutional Weakness and Low-Intensity Conflict

Despite relative stability in some areas, state institutions remain under-resourced and fragmented, and intermittent conflict persists in peripheral zones. In this context, local delivery systems, including CSOs, municipalities, and community committees, become the primary implementers. The project's emphasis on community co-management structures, cash-for-work models, and decentralized restoration planning ensures that interventions can proceed even if national-level institutions face constraints. Women-led Organizations (WLOs) and local facilitators, especially those linked to existing Women Safe Centers, will be engaged to strengthen service delivery, ensure inclusive participation, and safeguard women's access to restoration benefits and information.

Scenario 2: Macroeconomic Instability and Resource Constraints

Worsening economic conditions lead to reduced public investment in environmental management, rising unemployment, and heightened pressure on natural resources. Under this scenario, the project's investments in green enterprise development, microfinance mechanisms, and nature-based livelihoods (e.g., agroforestry, ecotourism, seed banks) serve as vital coping strategies for communities. These activities both reduce dependency on degraded landscapes and generate local income opportunities,

thereby supporting both restoration goals and social stability. Gender-responsive livelihood activities, including those targeting female-headed households, will enhance women's economic agency and reduce their vulnerability to negative coping mechanisms during economic downturns.

Scenario 3: Intensified Climate Impacts (e.g., Droughts, Wildfires, Flooding)

Climate variability continues to intensify, with longer drought periods, more frequent wildfires, and flash flooding affecting ecological and agricultural systems. To address these risks, the project embeds nature-based climate adaptation throughout its components such as erosion control infrastructure, drought-tolerant native species for reforestation, and water harvesting technologies. These measures are informed by climate vulnerability mapping and designed to enhance long-term ecosystem and community resilience. Site-level risk assessments will integrate gender-specific exposure to climate shocks (e.g., women's reliance on water and forest resources), and targeted adaptation measures will ensure that women and youth can participate in, and benefit from, climate-smart planning and risk reduction efforts.

Resilience Across Plausible Future Scenarios

The project has been designed with explicit consideration of Syria's fragile and evolving context, recognizing that implementation conditions may be influenced by socio-political uncertainty, economic stress, and increasing climate variability. To ensure the robustness of outcomes, the project adopts principles of flexibility, decentralization, and adaptive management. These design features will be further refined during the Project Preparation Grant (PPG) phase. Three plausible scenarios have been considered to stress-test the resilience of the proposed interventions.

Scenario 1: Prolonged Institutional Weakness and Low-Intensity Insecurity

In this scenario, public institutions remain under-resourced and fragmented, with localized insecurity affecting implementation capacity in some areas. The project is designed to function under such conditions by relying on decentralized delivery arrangements, community-level implementation, and partnerships with civil society organizations and local authorities. Community co-management structures, labor-intensive restoration approaches, and participatory planning processes enable activities to proceed even when higher-level institutional engagement is constrained.

Women-led organizations, community facilitators, and existing UNDP-supported outreach mechanisms will play an important role in sustaining inclusive participation, maintaining communication with communities, and safeguarding women's access to project benefits. This decentralized approach reduces dependency on centralized systems while strengthening local ownership and continuity.

Scenario 2: Macroeconomic Instability and Resource Constraints

In the event of continued economic deterioration, reduced public spending, and rising livelihood insecurity, pressure on land and natural resources is likely to intensify. The project mitigates these risks by linking land restoration and sustainable land management activities with land-based livelihood support that provides short-term income opportunities and longer-term skills development. Restoration-related employment,

skills training, and support for small-scale land-based enterprises help reduce reliance on unsustainable land use practices while strengthening household resilience.

Gender-responsive livelihood support particularly for women, youth, and female-headed households enhances economic agency and reduces vulnerability to negative coping strategies. By embedding livelihood opportunities directly within restoration and land management activities, the project reinforces environmental objectives while contributing to social stability under constrained economic conditions.

Scenario 3: Intensified Climate Impacts (Droughts, Wildfires, and Extreme Rainfall)

Climate variability and extremes are expected to continue intensifying, increasing risks to land productivity, water availability, and rural livelihoods. The project integrates climate-resilient land restoration and sustainable land management practices across all components, including soil and water conservation, erosion control, use of drought-tolerant native species, and water retention measures. These interventions are designed to reduce vulnerability to drought, wildfire, and flooding while enhancing ecosystem functionality.

Site-level planning and implementation will incorporate climate risk considerations and adaptive measures appropriate to local conditions. Particular attention will be given to gender-differentiated climate vulnerabilities, recognizing that women and youth often bear disproportionate burdens related to water collection, fuel use, and food security. Inclusive planning and targeted capacity building will ensure that women and youth can participate in, and benefit from, climate-resilient land management and risk reduction efforts.

While the detailed scenario analysis and contingency planning will be conducted during the PPG Phase (PPG), the proposed project has been deliberately structured to provide the design team with flexibility to address a range of plausible future conditions in Syria. This includes uncertainty related to scenarios 1, 2, and 3 described above.

Initial analysis indicates that, should institutional fragility or localized insecurity persist, project implementation can rely on community-based delivery mechanisms, local governance structures, and civil society partners to sustain progress on the ground. In the event of continued economic instability, the project's emphasis on restoration-linked employment, skills development, and land-based livelihood activities will help buffer shocks and reduce pressure on degraded land. Should climate impacts intensify, such as more frequent droughts, wildfires, or flooding, the project's focus on climate-resilient land restoration, soil and water conservation, and adaptive land management practices will enhance both ecological functionality and community resilience.

The design team will build on this foundation during the PPG Phase by exploring specific risk scenarios and aligning delivery systems and safeguards to ensure long-term robustness of project outcomes under multiple futures. Through this scenario-informed lens, the project ensures that core outcomes such as land under restoration, biodiversity conservation, and livelihoods diversification are not only achieved but remain durable and adaptive under a range of future stress conditions.

Coordination and Cooperation with Ongoing Initiatives and Project.

Does the GEF Agency expect to play an execution role on this project?

If so, please describe that role here. Also, please add a short explanation to describe cooperation with ongoing initiatives and projects, including potential for co-location and/or sharing of expertise/staffing

The project is designed to support Syria's ongoing efforts to address land degradation and strengthen ecosystem resilience in post-conflict rural areas, with a clear focus on Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) objectives. It is aligned with relevant national frameworks, including the National Programme to Neutralize the Effects of Land Degradation, Syria's LDN targets under the UNCCD, and the findings of national assessments such as the National Reporting on the State of Desertification (2016–2019) and the LDN Target Setting Programme Final Report (2020), which identify Latakia Governorate as an area facing significant land degradation pressures.

The project complements national drought and land management priorities by translating policy intent into practical, field-level interventions that restore degraded land, improve land management practices, and strengthen inclusive land-use governance. Its activities contribute to national objectives by demonstrating how community-led restoration, sustainable land management, and coordinated institutional action can be operationalized in fragile and resource-constrained contexts, without implying delivery of economy-wide or sector-wide national targets.

At the institutional level, the project supports project-level and governorate-level coordination mechanisms under Outcome 1.1, facilitating regular engagement among relevant line ministries, local authorities, and implementing partners. These mechanisms are intended to improve alignment, information exchange, and sequencing of activities related to land restoration and sustainable land management, while avoiding duplication with existing initiatives.

Under Outcome 1.2, the project will strengthen the use of applied spatial and land condition information for planning, monitoring, and adaptive management within the project area. This will build on available data sources and existing institutional capacities to support evidence-based decision-making at the project and governorate levels, without establishing new national systems or formal reporting obligations.

At the local level, the project will coordinate with ongoing community-based initiatives and UNDP-supported platforms operating in Latakia to enhance outreach, participation, and service delivery. Partnerships with civil society organizations, women-led organizations, and youth groups will support inclusive implementation of restoration and land-based livelihood activities, particularly in areas affected by displacement and livelihood disruption. Where feasible, alignment of community engagement timelines, shared facilitators, and co-location of field activities will be pursued to improve efficiency and local ownership.

While the project does not formally depend on other donor-funded programmes, opportunities for coordination with complementary national and subnational initiatives working on land rehabilitation, sustainable land management, and early recovery will be explored during implementation. Such cooperation will focus on practical collaboration, learning, and replication of effective approaches rather than institutional integration.

Through these alignment and coordination measures, the project reinforces coherent action on land degradation in Latakia, strengthens institutional and community capacity, and contributes to sustainable land management outcomes that are resilient to environmental shocks and institutional fragility while remaining appropriately scoped as a Medium-Sized Project under the Land Degradation Neutrality focal area.

Implementation Modality and Institutional Arrangements

The Ministry of Local Administration and Environment (MoLAE) will execute the project and act as a key partner engaged at the national level and will act as chair of the Project Board. UNDP will act as the GEF Implementing Agency and, in this role, will provide technical and administrative oversight, quality assurance, and social and environmental safeguards accountability. The Ministry of Agriculture will be a key technical partner supporting implementation of the project. In addition, the Ministry of Energy, who has responsibility for Water Resource Management will support soil-water conservation interventions and Ministry of Tourism will be key supporting partner to the project.

Latakia Governorate/District (Latakia Governorate and relevant subnational administrative units): Local governments, particularly the Latakia Governorate and associated districts and municipalities within the project target area (e.g., Al-Furonlok and surrounding communities), will play a vital role in project implementation, oversight, and community engagement as well as other UN entities and civil society organizations through existing multi-stakeholder platforms and those that will be created by the project.

A Project Management Unit (PMU) will be established within MoLAE to manage day-to-day operations, including planning, coordination, financial management, procurement, monitoring, and reporting. The PMU will consist of a project coordinator, a National Project Manager, a Finance/Administrative Officer, and technical staff as required. The PMU will report to a Project Board, which will be chaired by MoLAE and include representatives from UNDP, the Ministry of Agriculture, other relevant line ministries, and civil society. The Project Board will provide strategic guidance, approve annual workplans and budgets, and oversee progress toward results.

In line with UNDP's NIM guidelines, project funds will be transferred to MoLAE to execute project activities, with UNDP maintaining financial oversight and responsibility to the GEF. A Harmonized

Approach to Cash Transfers (HACT) assessment of MoLAE will be finalized during the Project Preparation Grant (PPG) phase to confirm fiduciary readiness, and tailored capacity-building support will be provided where gaps are identified. All expenditures will be subject to annual audits in accordance with UNDP’s NIM audit requirements, complemented by spot checks and assurance activities undertaken by UNDP. Procurement and recruitment will be undertaken by MoLAE following national procedures, provided these meet UNDP minimum standards; where gaps exist, UNDP will provide technical assistance to ensure compliance with UNDP’s Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures (POPP), Social and Environmental Standards, and GEF requirements.

By adopting the National Implementation Modality (NIM), the project directly embeds responsibility for execution within the Ministry of Local Administration and Environment (MoLAE). This ensures that institutional capacities for project management, fiduciary control, and technical delivery are strengthened throughout the life of the project, and that results are fully aligned with national systems and priorities. Government ownership will be reinforced through the Project Board and integration of project methodologies into MoLAE’s policy and planning processes. The capacity-building activities foreseen under the project, including fiduciary management, procurement, and monitoring will equip MoLAE and partner institutions to continue ecosystem restoration and sustainable land management interventions after project closure. The use of national procedures, subject to UNDP assurance standards, will further institutionalize approaches, enabling a smooth transition from GEF-financed activities to government-led implementation, supported by domestic budgets and partnerships with civil society and the private sector.

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)
5000	0	0	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)

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)
5,000.00			

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)
10500	0	0	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)
5,900.00			

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)
4,600.00			

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 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	2,000			
Male	2,000			
Total	4,000	0	0	0

Explain the methodological approach and underlying logic to justify target levels for Core and Sub-Indicators (max. 250 words, approximately 1/2 page)

The quantitative targets for the core indicators were determined based on detailed assessments of the current situation (baseline) in Latakia Governorate, taking into account available implementation capacities and lessons learned from similar restoration projects. For example, the target of restoring 5,000 hectares of degraded forests was set based on a survey of degraded lands and the availability of suitable native plant species. The primary data sources include the Syria Land Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme (LDN TSP), UNCCD reporting (2016–2019), national forest and biodiversity inventories, and NDVI-based productivity trends between 2000 and 2025. The area targeted for intervention, 10,500 hectares, was selected based on land degradation trends, restoration suitability, and the need to reinforce restored areas through improved land management practices that enhance ecosystem functionality and resilience across the wider landscape in Latakia.

GEF Core Indicators were calibrated as follows:

- CI 3.2 (5,000 ha of forest and forest land under restoration):

Reflects the planned restoration of degraded forest land through community-led restoration and sustainable land management interventions, including assisted natural regeneration (ANR), soil and water conservation measures, erosion control, and planting of climate-resilient native species.

- CI 4.1 (5,900 ha under improved management to benefit biodiversity and (CI 4.3) 4,600 ha of production landscapes will apply sustainable land management practices):

Represents the area of surrounding landscapes where improved land management practices will be applied to reinforce restoration outcomes and reduce the risk of re-degradation. These practices include sustainable land-use planning, soil and water conservation, fire risk reduction, and community co-management arrangements. The target reflects the scale at which improved management is necessary to sustain restored areas and achieve sustainable land management.

- CI 11 (4,000 direct beneficiaries):

Reflects the estimated number of individuals expected to directly benefit from project-supported restoration, sustainable land management, and livelihood-related activities, based on population size and engagement potential in target communities. The indicator includes at least 50% women and youth and encompasses participants in restoration-related employment, skills development, training, and community co-management activities. Targets are calibrated to implementation capacity and the scale of field-level interventions within the project area.

These targets are developed based on available evidence and are consistent with national LDN and biodiversity commitments.

Key Risks

	Rating	Explanation of risk and mitigation measures
CONTEXT		
Climate	Substantial	Risk: The project area, including Latakia, is increasingly exposed to climate shocks such as prolonged droughts, extreme heat events, and devastating wildfires (e.g., in 2023–2025).

		<p>These phenomena can damage young forest plantations, erode restoration sites, and disrupt planting cycles, undermining years of progress in a single season.</p> <p>Mitigation: Restoration interventions will be designed using drought- and fire-resilient native species, combined with soil and water conservation measures such as mulching, contouring, and erosion control structures to improve moisture retention and site resilience. Activity scheduling will be aligned with seasonal climate patterns to avoid high-risk periods. Site selection and adaptive management will draw on available climate risk information and field-level observations to adjust interventions as needed. Restoration approaches will emphasize assisted natural regeneration and low-cost, flexible techniques that allow for rapid recovery and replanting where localized climate impacts occur.</p>
Environmental and Social	Moderate	<p>Risk: Due to Syria’s protracted conflict and weak service delivery in rural areas, communities may be skeptical of new government- or donor-led projects. There is also a risk of social exclusion if women, youth, and marginalized groups are not intentionally engaged, particularly in traditionally male-dominated land and forestry sectors. Mitigation: The project will apply inclusive, transparent stakeholder engagement strategies with participatory planning and mapping. Gender quotas (minimum 50% participation) will be established for co-management committees and livelihood activities. Trusted local facilitators and CSOs will lead initial outreach, and visible community benefits (e.g., jobs, assets, services) will be delivered early to build trust.</p>
Political and Governance	Substantial	<p>Risk: Continued political instability or changes in government priorities may affect project implementation. Mitigation: The project will emphasize broad-based ownership and decentralized implementation, building strong working relationships with relevant line ministries, governorate authorities, local councils, civil society organizations, and community groups. By anchoring delivery at the community and local institutional levels and maintaining flexible implementation arrangements, the project can continue to advance core activities even under changing political conditions. Alignment with relevant sectoral frameworks and technical priorities will be maintained where feasible, without reliance on formal integration into national development plans.</p>

INNOVATION

Institutional and Policy	Moderate	<p>Risk: Environmental responsibilities are divided across ministries (MLAE, MA), and mandates often overlap. This fragmentation can delay implementation, cause inefficiencies, or create competing claims over land use planning and restoration leadership. Mitigation: The project will strengthen inter-ministerial coordination with formal TORs and regular joint planning sessions. The PPG phase will conduct a functional review of agency roles to inform coordination protocols. Policy support will build on existing LDN, NDC, and CBD processes to ensure alignment.</p>
Technological	Moderate	<p>Risk: Limited institutional capacity and experience with the applied use of spatial and land condition data may constrain effective uptake of geospatial information for planning, monitoring, and adaptive management within the</p>

		<p>project. Mitigation: The project will rely on simple, applied spatial tools and existing data sources rather than establishing or transferring responsibility for a new national system. Targeted, hands-on technical support and training will focus on practical use of land condition and climate risk information for site selection, restoration planning, and progress tracking at the project and governorate levels. Tools and outputs will be designed for accessibility by non-specialists, emphasizing decision-support rather than system management. Knowledge transfer will be embedded within project implementation to ensure that capacity gains are directly linked to on-the-ground activities and can be sustained through existing institutional arrangements. Risk: While GIS and remote sensing tools are widely used globally, Syria has limited national-level experience with integrated ecological data systems. There is a risk that the GIS platform may not be fully utilized or maintained beyond the life of the project.</p>
Financial and Business Model	Moderate	<p>Risk: Community-based livelihood activities supported by the project such as agroforestry, nurseries, and sustainable land-based production may face constraints related to access to working capital, market linkages, or business experience. These constraints could limit the viability or sustainability of livelihood activities if not adequately addressed. Mitigation: The project will focus on low-risk, capacity-oriented livelihood support linked directly to restoration and sustainable land management activities. Where appropriate, small-scale, catalytic support may be provided using existing UNDP modalities to help initiate or pilot livelihood activities, without creating long-term financing obligations. Targeted training will strengthen skills in basic business planning, financial literacy, marketing, and enterprise resilience. The project will also facilitate practical market linkages through engagement with local cooperatives, community networks, and buyers, where feasible. These measures are designed to improve viability while keeping livelihood activities proportionate to the project's scope and implementation capacity.</p>

EXECUTION

Capacity	Moderate	<p>Risk: Local and national institutions may face challenges in absorbing the technical, administrative, and monitoring demands associated with project implementation particularly in participatory land-use planning, restoration monitoring, and coordination of land-based livelihood activities. In addition, limited fiduciary, procurement, and financial management capacity within MoLAE, as Implementing Partner under the NIM modality, could delay implementation if not adequately addressed. Mitigation: The project will apply a graduated and proportionate capacity-strengthening approach aligned with its MSP scope. Capacity support will focus on core functions required for project delivery, emphasizing practical skills transfer and institutional learning rather than parallel systems. A targeted capacity and risk assessment of MoLAE will be conducted during the PPG phase to identify priority gaps in fiduciary, procurement, and technical functions. Based on this assessment, tailored capacity-building measures will be implemented, including hands-on training, clear standard operating procedures, and limited embedded technical</p>
----------	----------	---

		support where necessary. Project staffing will combine national and local expertise to strengthen institutional ownership and reduce reliance on external consultants. UNDP will apply its standard assurance and oversight framework under NIM, including regular monitoring, spot checks, and audits, to ensure fiduciary compliance and timely identification of implementation risks. This approach ensures that institutional capacity is strengthened incrementally while safeguarding project delivery and accountability.
Fiduciary	Moderate	<p>Risk: Syria's post-conflict public financial systems remain fragile, with risks related to financial accountability, audit capacity, and internal controls.</p> <p>Mitigation: UNDP will provide oversight role on financial transaction including spot check, supported by quarterly financial reporting, third-party audits, and transaction traceability. Capacity-building for financial officers in implementing agencies will be delivered alongside fiduciary risk assessments.</p>
Stakeholder	Moderate	<p>Risk: Sustained engagement of key stakeholders particularly at the community level may be challenged if participants perceive limited influence over decisions or delays in tangible benefits. In parallel, shifts in political priorities could reduce the level of attention given to the project by national stakeholders. Limited engagement of private sector actors may also constrain market linkages and the longer-term viability of land-based livelihood activities.</p> <p>Mitigation: The project will implement a structured and inclusive Stakeholder Engagement Plan that clearly defines roles, expectations, and feedback mechanisms for all stakeholder groups. Community members will be actively involved in co-design, implementation, and monitoring of activities, with regular communication on progress and results to reinforce ownership and trust. Early delivery of visible, locally relevant benefits such as restoration-related employment and skills development will help sustain engagement at the community level. Engagement with national stakeholders will be maintained through regular technical coordination and information sharing linked to project implementation milestones, rather than reliance on formal advisory bodies. This approach supports continuity despite political changes and keeps engagement focused on practical delivery. Private sector engagement will be targeted and proportionate, focusing on practical linkages for land-based livelihood activities where feasible. The project will engage local enterprises, cooperatives, and buyers through consultations and pilot activities to strengthen market access and learning, without creating dependency on large-scale private sector participation for project success.</p>
Other	Moderate	<p>Resource Competition and Land Tenure Ambiguity Risk: In some areas, restoration may compete with informal grazing rights, smallholder farming, or contested land claims. These tensions could escalate into local disputes or reduce the sustainability of investments. Mitigation: Participatory land-use planning will include conflict sensitivity assessments and incorporate inclusive land eligibility criteria. Restoration areas will be selected</p>

		transparently, and community dispute resolution mechanisms will be supported or strengthened.
Overall Risk Rating	Substantial	The overall project risk is rated as Substantial. The project operates in a complex post-conflict setting, where climate shocks, institutional fragmentation, and capacity limitations present real but manageable risks. The most significant risks include droughts and wildfires, weak coordination across ministries, and limited technical capacity for GIS and ecological monitoring. These are mitigated through adaptive restoration design using climate-resilient species, the establishment of a national inter-ministerial coordination mechanism, and embedded technical support for planning and monitoring systems. Social risks—such as community mistrust or exclusion of women and youth—are addressed through participatory planning, a gender action plan, and early delivery of tangible benefits.

C. ALIGNMENT WITH GEF-8 PROGRAMMING STRATEGIES AND COUNTRY/REGIONAL PRIORITIES

Describe how the proposed interventions are aligned with GEF- 8 programming strategies and country and regional priorities, including how these country strategies and plans relate to the multilateral environmental agreements.

Confirm if any country policies that might contradict with intended outcomes of the project have been identified, and how the project will address this.

For projects aiming to generate biodiversity benefits (regardless of what the source of the resources is - i.e., BD, CC or LD), please identify which of the 23 targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework the project contributes to and explain how. (max. 500 words, approximately 1 page)

The proposed project is fully aligned with GEF-8 programming priorities under the Land Degradation focal area, supporting the operationalization of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) in fragile and post-conflict contexts. The project responds directly to GEF-8's emphasis on integrated landscape restoration, sustainable land management, and inclusive governance by addressing the root causes of land degradation through field-level restoration, improved land management practices, and strengthened institutional coordination, including for addressing drought.

At the national level, the project is aligned with Syria's LDN targets under the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and is informed by key national assessments, including the National Reporting on the State of Desertification (2016–2019) and the LDN Target Setting Programme, which identify Latakia Governorate as an area experiencing significant land degradation pressures. The project translates these national priorities into practical, governorate-level action, without implying delivery of economy-wide or sector-wide national targets.

Alignment with the GEF-8 Land Degradation Focal Area

The project is aligned with the Land Degradation focal area objectives as follows:

- **Objective 1: Avoid and reduce land degradation through sustainable land management (SLM)**

The project supports the adoption of improved land management practices across 10,500 hectares, reducing erosion, improving soil stability, and strengthening land productivity. These practices reinforce restored areas and reduce the risk of re-degradation through participatory land-use planning, soil and water conservation, and community co-management approaches.

- **Objective 2: Reverse land degradation through landscape restoration**

The project directly contributes to the reversal of land degradation through the restoration of 5,000 hectares of degraded land using assisted natural regeneration, erosion control, and climate-resilient restoration techniques. Restoration interventions are designed to improve ecosystem functionality, enhance water retention, and stabilize degraded landscapes under increasing climate stress.

- **Objective 3: Address desertification, land degradation, and drought (DLDD) issues, particularly in dryland**

Given the dryland context and high drought vulnerability of the target areas, the project will support implementation of Syria's Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) Programme through development of an implementation-oriented LDN strategy and coordinated land restoration interventions. The strategy will incorporate drought-resilient land restoration priorities, climate-resilient land management practices, and dryland restoration approaches that address desertification, land degradation, and drought risks in accordance with LDFA Objective 3.

Through these interventions, the project contributes to GEF Core Indicators CI 3 (land restored), CI 4 (land under improved management), and CI 11 (direct beneficiaries), while supporting integrated implementation of LDFA Objectives 1, 2, and 3 under the Land Degradation focal area. GEF resources are programmed primarily under LDFA Objectives 2 and 3, with investments directed toward landscape restoration (Component 2) and strengthening enabling conditions for drought-resilient land management and LDN implementation (Component 1), ensuring coherence between financing and intended global environmental benefits.

The project also contributes to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), particularly Target 2 on restoring degraded ecosystems and Target 10 on ensuring sustainable management of agriculture and forestry systems. By restoring 5,000 hectares of degraded forest landscapes and promoting sustainable land management practices across 10,500 hectares of surrounding production landscapes, the project strengthens ecosystem functionality, soil stability, and habitat connectivity in Latakia Governorate. The project also contributes to GBF Target 8 by supporting ecosystem-based adaptation through drought-resilient restoration practices and improved landscape management that enhance resilience to climate variability.

Contribution to Country and Regional Priorities

The project supports national priorities related to drought resilience, land rehabilitation, and sustainable rural livelihoods by strengthening inclusive land governance and community-based implementation capacity in Latakia. Its focus on decentralized delivery, gender-responsive approaches, and adaptive land management aligns with Syria's recovery and resilience needs in post-conflict rural areas.

While the project may generate ancillary ecosystem and livelihood co-benefits, it is explicitly framed as an LDN-focused intervention, with environmental benefits measured through land restoration and improved land management outcomes rather than biodiversity conservation targets or climate mitigation accounting. This ensures coherence with the project's scope, scale, and MSP modality.

The project contributes directly to SDG 15 (Life on Land) by restoring 5,000 hectares of degraded land and applying improved sustainable land management practices across 10,500 hectares within Latakia Governorate. These interventions address land degradation drivers by improving soil stability, vegetation cover, and land productivity, while strengthening ecosystem functionality and resilience in forested and agricultural landscapes affected by drought, erosion, and wildfire risk.

The project also supports SDG 13 (Climate Action) through climate-resilient land restoration and sustainable land management practices that enhance adaptive capacity to climate variability. By promoting soil and water conservation, erosion control, drought-tolerant restoration approaches, and fire-risk-sensitive land management, the project reduces vulnerability of land systems and rural livelihoods to climate shocks, contributing to climate adaptation and resilience outcomes without reliance on quantified mitigation or carbon accounting.

In addition, the project advances SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) by strengthening collaboration among relevant line ministries, local authorities, civil society organizations, and communities in the planning and implementation of land restoration and sustainable land management activities. Through inclusive coordination mechanisms, co-management arrangements, and community-level partnerships, the project enhances institutional cooperation and collective action in support of Syria's Land Degradation Neutrality objectives under the UNCCD.

At the national level, the project is designed in alignment with the following strategies and commitments:

- **National Strategy for Drought Management in Syria (2008–2020)**

While the formal policy period has concluded, the project aligns with and reinforces the institutional mechanisms established under the strategy, such as drought early warning systems, remote sensing units, and monitoring protocols housed within the Ministry of Agriculture. Project interventions will contribute by improving vegetation cover and soil moisture retention in drought-prone hillslopes, supporting forest regeneration through native species planting, and strengthening rural resilience. The establishment of a GIS-based ecological monitoring platform will feed into these operational systems, enhancing data flows for early warning, planning, and national reporting.

- **National Programme to Neutralize the Effects of Land Degradation (2018-30)**

Although no recent update of this programme has been published, its core objectives remain valid and are reflected in ongoing land rehabilitation and policy efforts. The project supports the programme's intent by addressing key drivers of land degradation such as deforestation, erosion, unsustainable land use, and declining land productivity through participatory land-use planning, assisted natural regeneration, agroforestry, and improved sustainable land management practices across more than 10,500 hectares of high-priority landscapes.

- **Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) Targets under the UNCCD (2020)**

Syria's LDN targets remain active and continue to guide national restoration, monitoring, and reporting efforts. The project is directly aligned with these targets by contributing to land restoration, improved land productivity, and sustainable production practices. The use of spatial indicators (e.g. NDVI trends, soil condition proxies) and participatory planning processes ensures that project interventions contribute measurably to LDN implementation while strengthening long-term institutional capacity for UNCCD reporting, including through PRAIS-4.

- **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement (2018)** Syria's NDCs emphasize ecosystem restoration, sustainable agriculture, and improved land and water management as core pillars of climate adaptation and resilience. The project contributes to these priorities by restoring degraded lands, reducing vulnerability to drought, erosion, and wildfire, and embedding climate-risk considerations into land-use planning and community-led restoration interventions in climate-vulnerable rural landscapes. These ecosystem-based approaches strengthen adaptive capacity and reduce climate-related risks to livelihoods and land systems, consistent with Syria's adaptation-focused NDC commitments.

No national policies or legal frameworks have been identified that contradict the intended outcomes of the project. On the contrary, the project complements and reinforces emerging efforts to modernize land-use governance, land degradation monitoring, and restoration financing. Potential institutional overlaps or unclear mandates will be addressed through the strengthening of inter-ministerial coordination under Outcome 1.1 and targeted policy and capacity-building measures.

Through alignment with these national strategies and commitments, the project is positioned to deliver durable land restoration and resilience outcomes while supporting Syria's obligations under the UNCCD and broader Rio Convention frameworks.

D. POLICY REQUIREMENTS

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment:

We confirm that gender dimensions relevant to the project have been addressed as per GEF Policy and are clearly articulated in the Project Description (Section B).

Yes

Stakeholder Engagement

We confirm that key stakeholders were consulted during PIF development as required per GEF policy, their relevant roles to project outcomes and plan to develop a Stakeholder Engagement Plan before CEO endorsement has been clearly articulated in the Project Description (Section B).

Yes

Were the following stakeholders consulted during project identification phase:

Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities: Yes

Civil Society Organizations:

Private Sector:

Provide a brief summary and list of names and dates of consultations

An extensive consultation process was carried out in the Fronloq Area (Rabia, Rihana, Kastal Mouaf, Aliman and Almishrfa) during the preparation of the PIF during the period 4th June 2025 until August

20th. Due to time constraints, the consultation carried out a combination of in-person and virtual meetings with community stakeholders in Latakia and representatives of key stakeholders: technical departments at the Ministry of Local Administration and Environment, Ministry of Agriculture and forestry departments, and Ministry of Water Resources.

The consultations began on June 4th with the Ministry of local administration and environment, with Deputy minister for Environment Affairs, Head of Internal National Corporation Department, Heads of Biodiversity and Land Degradation Departments, followed by two technical meetings to discuss all details related to components, anticipated outcomes and outputs on July 16th and 27th, while data collection and further discussions occurred regularly during June 16th and August 4th. On August 4th, an extended meeting with all stakeholders, through which components, outcomes, outputs, and relevant indicators were verified. In addition, the in-kind co-financing was discussed with the representatives of the national stakeholders.

During the period of August 18-20, Community consultations were conducted in person in Rabia and Qastal Maaf (Latakia Governorate) to ensure that the project design reflects local priorities and capacities. Two focus group discussions were held with 32 participants, including youth (18 participants; 10 males, 8 female) and women from diverse age groups (14 participants). The consultations explored environmental challenges, community perceptions of proposed activities, and training and livelihood needs. Further details are included in the stakeholder engagement plan in Annex I. Additionally, further extensive community engagement is planned for the PPG Phase.

The list of stakeholders' representatives is as follows:

Ministry of Local Administration and Environment:

- Dr. Yousef Sharaf, Deputy Minister for Local Administration and Environment and GEF Operational Focal Point
- Mr. Ahmad Sandeh, Minister Consultant for Local Administration and Environment Affairs
- Mr. Mohammed AlSaqqa, Director of International Cooperation Directorate
- Mr. Ahmed Bakaya, Head of the Coordination Department at the International Cooperation Directorate
- Eng. Belal Al-Hayek, Director of the Biodiversity and Land Directorate
- Eng. Ratib Ramadan, Director of the Environment Safety Department
- Mr. Eid Nabbouty, Director of Legal Affairs Directorate
- Eng. Farouk Aleter, Head of Chemical safety Department – Environmental safety Directorate
- Eng. Mayada Saad, Head of the Protected Areas Department- Biodiversity Directorate
- Eng. Imad AlMaree, Head of the Soil Protection Department- Biodiversity Directorate
- Eng. Aida Mohammed, Environmental Safety Directorate/Head of Waste Department
- Eng. Kawthar Issa, Data Analyst/Biodiversity Directorate
- Chemist, Rawan El Azem, Climate Change Department, Environmental safety directorate

Ministry of Agriculture:

- Mr. Belal Hmaidan, Director of Decision Support/State Property and Forestry Commission.
- Eng. Majed Salman, Director of Forestry Directorate
- Eng. Omar Zraik, Head of Biodiversity Department

- Eng. Somar Marim, director of AI - Foronloq Protected Area

Ministry of Energy /General Commission for Water Resources)

- Geologist Abdullah Al-Qate'a
- Director of Integrated Water Resources Management

UNDP

- Abir Achi, Team Leader, Energy, Climate and Environment Pillar
- Hayan Saffour, National Senior Technical Advisor
- Abir Zeno, Senior National Environment and Climate Change Expert

(Please upload to the portal documents tab any stakeholder engagement plan or assessments that have been done during the PIF development phase.)

Private Sector

Will there be private sector engagement in the project?

Yes

And if so, has its role been described and justified in the section B project description?

Yes

Environmental and Social Safeguard (ESS) Risks

We confirm that we have provided indicative information regarding Environmental and Social risks associated with the proposed project or program and any measures to address such risks and impacts (this information should be presented in Annex D).

Yes

Overall Project/Program Risk Classification

PIF	CEO Endorsement/Approval	MTR	TE
Medium/Moderate			

E. OTHER REQUIREMENTS

Knowledge management

We confirm that an approach to Knowledge Management and Learning has been clearly described in the Project Description (Section B)

Yes

ANNEX A: FINANCING TABLES

GEF Financing Table

Indicative Trust Fund Resources Requested by Agency(ies), Country(ies), Focal Area and the Programming of Funds

GEF Agency	Trust Fund	Country/ Regional/ Global	Focal Area	Programming of Funds	Grant / Non- Grant	GEF Project Grant(\$)	Agency Fee(\$)	Total GEF Financing (\$)
UNDP	GET	Syria	Land Degradation	LD STAR Allocation: LD-2	Grant	2,599,900.00	246,991.00	2,846,891.00
UNDP	GET	Syria	Land Degradation	LD STAR Allocation: LD-1	Grant	885,400.00	84,113.00	969,513.00
UNDP	GET	Syria	Land Degradation	LD STAR Allocation: LD-3	Grant	1,504,700.00	142,946.00	1,647,646.00
Total GEF Resources (\$)						4,990,000.00	474,050.00	5,464,050.00

Project Preparation Grant (PPG)

Is Project Preparation Grant requested?

true

PPG Amount (\$)

150000

PPG Agency Fee (\$)

14250

GEF Agency	Trust Fund	Country/ Regional/ Global	Focal Area	Programming of Funds	Grant / Non- Grant	PPG(\$)	Agency Fee(\$)	Total PPG Funding(\$)
UNDP	GET	Syria	Land Degradation	LD STAR Allocation: LD-2	Grant	50,000.00	4,750.00	54,750.00
UNDP	GET	Syria	Land Degradation	LD STAR Allocation: LD-1	Grant	50,000.00	4,750.00	54,750.00
UNDP	GET	Syria	Land Degradation	LD STAR Allocation: LD-3	Grant	50,000.00	4,750.00	54,750.00
Total PPG Amount (\$)						150,000.00	14,250.00	164,250.00

Please provide justification

Sources of Funds for Country Star Allocation

GEF Agency	Trust Fund	Country/ Regional/ Global	Focal Area	Sources of Funds	Total(\$)
UNDP	GET	Syria	Biodiversity	BD STAR Allocation	3,000,000.00
UNDP	GET	Syria	Climate Change	CC STAR Allocation	1,000,000.00
UNDP	GET	Syria	Land Degradation	LD STAR Allocation	1,628,300.00
Total GEF Resources					5,628,300.00

Indicative Focal Area Elements

Programming Directions	Trust Fund	GEF Project Financing(\$)	Co-financing(\$)
LD-1	GET	885,400.00	3038855
LD-2	GET	2,599,900.00	6707241
LD-3	GET	1,504,700.00	3219476
Total Project Cost		4,990,000.00	12,965,572.00

Indicative Co-financing

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Investment Mobilized	Amount(\$)
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Local Administration and Environment	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	6256000
Recipient Country Government	Ministry of Agriculture	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	6609572
Donor Agency	UNDP	Other	Investment mobilized	100000
Total Co-financing				12,965,572.00

Describe how any "Investment Mobilized" was identified

The project has secured strong national commitment from key Syrian ministries.

The Ministry of Local Administration and Environment has pledged an in-kind contribution of USD 6,256,000. This will comprise logistical support for implementation, engagement of ministry technical staff in ecosystem and biodiversity-related interventions, and the provision of physical assets and infrastructure for activities related to ecosystem restoration, biodiversity conservation, land rehabilitation, and water management.

The Ministry of Agriculture has confirmed an in-kind contribution of USD 6,609,572. This contribution will include logistical support for project activities, the engagement of technical staff to participate in surveys and technical interventions, and the use of ministry infrastructure and physical assets to facilitate ecosystem restoration, conservation, land rehabilitation, and water management activities.

In addition, the UNDP Syria Country Office will provide a cash contribution of USD 100,000 to support project implementation and coordination, supplementing national contributions.

The in-kind contributions from the Ministry of Agriculture (USD 6,609,572) and the Ministry of Local Administration and Environment (USD 6,256,000) qualify as investment mobilized. These represent tangible commitments of government staff time, infrastructure, and resources specifically allocated to support ecosystem restoration, drought management, and land rehabilitation interventions that would not otherwise be deployed at this scale without the GEF project.

ANNEX B: ENDORSEMENTS

GEF Agency(ies) Certification

GEF Agency Type	Name	Date	Project Contact Person	Phone	Email
GEF Agency Coordinator	Nancy Bennet	1/27/2026	Nancy Bennet		nancy.bennet@undp.org
Project Coordinator	Min Htut Yin	1/27/2026	Min Htut Yin		min.htut.yin@undp.org

Record of Endorsement of GEF Operational Focal Point (s) on Behalf of the Government(s):

Name	Position	Ministry	Date (MM/DD/YYYY)
Yousef Sharaf	Deputy Minister	Ministry of Local Administration and Environment	

ANNEX C: PROJECT LOCATION

Please provide geo-referenced information and map where the project interventions will take place

Description of the Target Zone

The project's target zone encompasses approximately 10,500 hectares in Latakia Governorate, located within and between three important protected areas: Fronloq PA, Solas PA, and Um Al-Toyour PA. The landscape includes Mediterranean evergreen forests, montane and riparian transition zones, seasonal wetlands, and surrounding agroforestry and production systems. These land systems are critical for

maintaining vegetation cover, soil stability, watershed regulation, and rural livelihoods in one of Syria's most environmentally stressed regions.

The target zone was selected for its ability to function as an integrated restoration landscape, linking degraded forest areas, buffer zones, and production systems where land degradation pressures are concentrated. Significant portions of the area overlap with the three protected areas, where forest degradation, encroachment, and uncontrolled use have created an urgent need for improved management and participatory co-management approaches. Additional sections of the target zone were severely impacted by the July 2025 wildfire, which destroyed approximately 15,000 hectares of forest in Latakia Governorate, further increasing erosion risk, vegetation loss, and livelihood vulnerability.

The intervention area aligns with national land restoration priorities and contributes directly to Syria's Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) commitments under the UNCCD, focusing on restoring degraded land, improving sustainable land management practices, and strengthening landscape resilience.

Based on current assumptions, the project will:

- Place 5,900 hectares within the three existing protected areas connecting with buffer zones and managed under improved management to benefit biodiversity (GEF CI 4.1);
- Support sustainable land management on 4,600 hectares of production landscapes through agroforestry and soil and water conservation practices (GEF CI 4.3); and
- Restore 5,000 hectares of degraded forest land through assisted natural regeneration and climate-resilient restoration measures (GEF CI 3.2), spanning both protected areas and buffer zones.

The precise spatial boundaries and sequencing of interventions will be finalized during the Project Preparation Grant (PPG) phase, using participatory planning and spatial analysis.

The target zone includes multiple rural communities that depend heavily on land and forest resources for subsistence and income, including fuelwood collection, livestock grazing, rainfed agriculture, beekeeping, and non-timber forest product use. These communities face increasing vulnerability due to land degradation, droughts, forest fires, and soil erosion, which undermine food security and livelihood stability. Many areas are characterized by limited infrastructure, unclear land tenure arrangements, and weakened governance capacity following years of conflict.

Despite these constraints, the area presents strong potential for nature-based and land-positive livelihoods, including agroforestry, community nurseries, sustainable forest product value chains, and small-scale ecotourism linked to restored landscapes. These opportunities remain underdeveloped due to limited investment, technical capacity gaps, and weak market linkages, which the project will address through integrated restoration and livelihood support.

The project will apply a gender-responsive and socially inclusive approach across the target zone. Women play central roles in household resource management, reforestation activities, and small-scale farming but face constraints in access to land, finance, and decision-making. Youth similarly face high unemployment and limited participation in governance structures. The project will actively promote their engagement in co-management arrangements, training programs, and enterprise development to enhance equity, ownership, and sustainability of outcomes.

In summary, the target zone was selected for its high land degradation risk, restoration potential, and community engagement opportunities, offering a strategic entry point to deliver durable LDN outcomes through improved land management, strengthened livelihoods, and inclusive governance in Latakia Governorate.

Targeted Area Location in Latakia

Area	GEO-ID Code	Longitude	Latitude
Um Al-Toyour	TBD	35.841855° E	35.841855° E
Solas	TBD	35.995130°E	35.995130°E
Fronloq	TBD	35.999563° E	35.999563° E

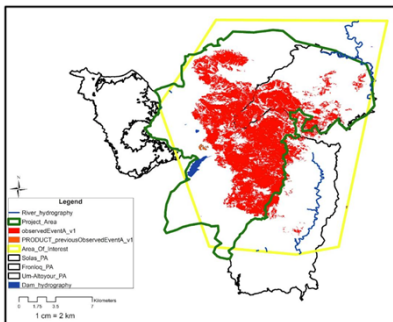


Table 2 – High Level Description of the three existing PAs in Latakia

Protected Area	Current Estimated Area (ha) of PA	Habitat Type	Overlap with Project Zone	Primary Threats
Fronloq PA	~2,500	Mediterranean evergreen forest, oak-laurel dominated; biodiverse understory	High (significant overlap in ecological corridor)	Encroachment, uncontrolled firewood collection, grazing pressure, past fires

Solas PA	~1,800	Pine and mixed coniferous forest; riparian and montane transition zones	Moderate (forms northern node of corridor)	Forest fire risk, land conversion, erosion on slopes
Um Al-Toyour PA	~1,600	Open woodland, shrubland, seasonal wetlands; high avian diversity	Moderate to low (southern anchor of corridor)	Habitat degradation, water stress, illegal bird capture, weak enforcement

ANNEX D: ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL SAFEGUARDS SCREEN AND RATING

(PIF level) Attach agency safeguard screen form including rating of risk types and overall risk rating.

Title

Syria_GEF PIF Pre-SESP_REV_7April2026
Stakeholder Engagement Report and Plan

ANNEX E: RIO MARKERS

Climate Change Mitigation	Climate Change Adaptation	Biodiversity	Land Degradation
No Contribution 0	Significant Objective 1	No Contribution 0	Principal Objective 2

ANNEX F: TAXONOMY WORKSHEET

Level 1
Influencing models

Level 2
Transform policy and regulatory environments
Strengthen institutional capacity and decision-making
Convene multi-stakeholder alliances
Demonstrate innovative approaches
Deploy innovative financial instruments

Level 3

Level 4

Stakeholders

Indigenous Peoples
Private Sector

Capital providers
Financial intermediaries and market facilitators
Large corporations
SMEs
Individuals/Entrepreneurs

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
		Non-Grant Pilot Project Reflow	
	Beneficiaries Local Communities Civil Society	Community Based Organization Non-Governmental Organization Academia Trade Unions and Workers Unions	
	Type of Engagement	Information Dissemination Partnership Consultation Participation	
	Communications	Awareness Raising Education Public Campaigns Behavior Change	
Capacity, Knowledge and Research	Enabling Activities Capacity Development Knowledge Generation and Exchange Targeted Research Learning	Theory of Change Adaptive Management Indicators to Measure Change	
	Innovation Knowledge and Learning	Knowledge Management Innovation Capacity Development Learning	
Gender Equality	Stakeholder Engagement Plan		
	Gender Mainstreaming	Beneficiaries Women groups Sex-disaggregated indicators Gender-sensitive indicators	
	Gender results areas	Access and control over natural resources Participation and leadership Access to benefits and services Capacity development Awareness raising Knowledge generation	
Focal Areas/Theme	Integrated Programs	Commodity Supply Chains (Good Growth Partnership)	Sustainable Commodities Production Deforestation-free Sourcing Financial Screening Tools High Conservation Value Forests High Carbon Stocks Forests Soybean Supply Chain Oil Palm Supply Chain Beef Supply Chain Smallholder Farmers Adaptive Management
		Food Security in Sub-Sahara Africa	Resilience (climate and shocks) Sustainable Production Systems Agroecosystems Land and Soil Health Diversified Farming Integrated Land and Water Management Smallholder Farming Small and Medium Enterprises

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crop Genetic Diversity Food Value Chains Gender Dimensions Multi-stakeholder Platforms
		Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainable Food Systems Landscape Restoration Sustainable Commodity Production Comprehensive Land Use Planning Integrated Landscapes Food Value Chains Deforestation-free Sourcing Smallholder Farmers
		Sustainable Cities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrated urban planning Urban sustainability framework Transport and Mobility Buildings Municipal waste management Green space Urban Biodiversity Urban Food Systems Energy efficiency Municipal Financing Global Platform for Sustainable Cities Urban Resilience
	Biodiversity	Protected Areas and Landscapes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Terrestrial Protected Areas Coastal and Marine Protected Areas Productive Landscapes Productive Seascapes Community Based Natural Resource Management
		Mainstreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extractive Industries (oil, gas, mining) Forestry (Including HCVF and REDD+) Tourism Agriculture & agrobiodiversity Fisheries Infrastructure Certification (National Standards) Certification (International Standards)
		Species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Illegal Wildlife Trade Threatened Species Wildlife for Sustainable Development Crop Wild Relatives Plant Genetic Resources Animal Genetic Resources Livestock Wild Relatives Invasive Alien Species (IAS)
		Biomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mangroves Coral Reefs Sea Grasses Wetlands Rivers Lakes Tropical Rain Forests Tropical Dry Forests Temperate Forests Grasslands Paramo Desert
		Financial and Accounting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Payment for Ecosystem Services Natural Capital Assessment and Accounting Conservation Trust Funds Conservation Finance
		Supplementary Protocol to the CBD	Biosafety

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
			Access to Genetic Resources Benefit Sharing
	Forests	Forest and Landscape Restoration	REDD/REDD+
		Forest	Amazon Congo Drylands
	Land Degradation	Sustainable Land Management	Restoration and Rehabilitation of Degraded Lands Ecosystem Approach Integrated and Cross-sectoral approach Community-Based NRM Sustainable Livelihoods Income Generating Activities Sustainable Agriculture Sustainable Pasture Management Sustainable Forest/Woodland Management Improved Soil and Water Management Techniques Sustainable Fire Management Drought Mitigation/Early Warning
		Land Degradation Neutrality	Land Productivity Land Cover and Land cover change Carbon stocks above or below ground
	International Waters	Food Security	
		Ship Coastal Freshwater	Aquifer River Basin Lake Basin
		Learning Fisheries Persistent toxic substances SIDS : Small Island Dev States Targeted Research Pollution	Persistent toxic substances Plastics Nutrient pollution from all sectors except wastewater Nutrient pollution from Wastewater
		Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis and Strategic Action Plan preparation Strategic Action Plan Implementation Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction Large Marine Ecosystems Private Sector Aquaculture Marine Protected Area Biomes	Mangrove Coral Reefs Seagrasses Polar Ecosystems Constructed Wetlands
	Chemicals and Waste	Mercury Artisanal and Scale Gold Mining Coal Fired Power Plants Coal Fired Industrial Boilers Cement Non-Ferrous Metals Production Ozone Persistent Organic Pollutants Unintentional Persistent Organic Pollutants	

Level 1

Level 2

Level 3
Land degradation 2

Level 4

Desertification / Land Degradation (Score: 2 – Principal objective)

The principal objective of the project is to reverse land degradation and advance Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) in Latakia Governorate. The project focuses on restoring degraded land, improving soil stability, vegetation cover, and watershed function, and promoting sustainable land management practices across forested, buffer, and production landscapes. Core interventions including assisted natural regeneration, erosion control, agroforestry, and integrated land-use planning directly address the drivers of land degradation identified under Syria’s UNCCD and LDN frameworks. The project’s results are explicitly tracked through GEF Land Degradation Core Indicators (CI 3.2, CI 4.1, CI 4.3), confirming desertification and land degradation as the principal Rio objective.

Although land restoration activities may result in incidental carbon sequestration benefits, these outcomes are not the basis for project design, financing, or monitoring. Accordingly, Core Indicator 6 (GHG emissions mitigated) is not applied in this project

Climate Change Adaptation (Score: 1 – Significant objective)

While not the principal focus, the project makes a significant contribution to climate change adaptation by enhancing the resilience of land systems and rural livelihoods to climate stressors such as drought, extreme heat, erosion, and wildfire. Climate-resilient restoration approaches, soil and water conservation measures, drought-tolerant native species, and fire-risk-sensitive land management are embedded across project components. These interventions strengthen adaptive capacity at landscape and community levels, delivering adaptation co-benefits without constituting a standalone climate adaptation project.

Climate Change Mitigation (Score: 0 – Not targeted)

The project does not target climate change mitigation as an objective. Although land restoration activities may result in incidental carbon sequestration benefits, these outcomes are not the basis for project design, financing, or monitoring and are not tracked as a formal mitigation contribution. Accordingly, climate change mitigation is not targeted for Rio marker scoring.

Biodiversity (Score: 0 – Not targeted)

Biodiversity conservation is not a targeted objective of the project. While improved land management and restoration may generate positive biodiversity co-benefits, the project does not pursue biodiversity outcomes as a principal or significant objective, nor does it align with CBD targets or biodiversity-specific indicators. Biodiversity gains are treated as secondary outcomes arising from land degradation neutrality interventions.

Climate Change Mitigation	Climate Change Adaptation	Biodiversity	Desertification
Climate Change 0	Climate Change Adaptation 1	Biodiversity 0	Desertification 2