



**GEF-6 PROJECT IDENTIFICATION FORM (PIF)**

**PROJECT TYPE: Medium-sized Project**  
**TYPE OF TRUST FUND: GEF Trust Fund**

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**PART I: PROJECT INFORMATION**

Project Title:	Promoting Sustainable Land Management (SLM) in Albania through Integrated Restoration of Ecosystems		
Country(ies):	Albania	GEF Project ID: <sup>1</sup>	
GEF Agency(ies):	UNEP	GEF Agency Project ID:	01416
Other Executing Partner(s):	UNEP Regional Office for Europe, Ministry of Environment in collaboration with Kolonja Municipality	Submission Date:	
GEF Focal Area(s):	Land Degradation	Project Duration (Months)	36
Integrated Approach Pilot	IAP-Cities <input type="checkbox"/> IAP-Commodities <input type="checkbox"/> IAP-Food Security <input type="checkbox"/>	Corporate Program: SGP <input type="checkbox"/>	
Name of parent program:	NA	Agency Fee (\$)	82,420

**A. INDICATIVE FOCAL AREA STRATEGY FRAMEWORK AND OTHER PROGRAM STRATEGIES<sup>2</sup>**

Objectives/Programs (Focal Areas, Integrated Approach Pilot, Corporate Programs)	Trust Fund	(in \$)	
		GEF Project Financing	Co-financing
LD-1 Program 1	GEFTF	347,032	2,260,000
LD-3 Program 4	GEFTF	520,548	3,390,000
<b>Total Project Cost</b>		<b>867,580</b>	<b>5,650,000</b>

**B. INDICATIVE PROJECT DESCRIPTION SUMMARY**

Project Objective: Strengthening capacity and skills of national and local government institutions and promoting sustainable land management practices in Albania through integrated ecosystem restoration <sup>3</sup>						
Project Components	Financing Type <sup>4</sup>	Project Outcomes	Project Outputs	Trust Fund	(in \$)	
					GEF Project Financing	Co-financing
1. Strengthened legal and institutional framework and capacity building for SLM	TA	<p>1.1 Shift from unsustainable to sustainable land use in agriculture and forestry sectors through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinated multi-sectorial land management strategies, plans and programmes</li> </ul> <p>1.2 Capacities and support for sustainable land management strengthened, as measured by</p>	<p>1.1.1 Strengthened policy, legal and regulatory framework in place to support Sustainable Land Management approaches in Albania</p> <p>1.1.2 Functioning inter-ministerial committee enabling coordinated approaches to SLM</p> <p>1.2.1 Relevant ministerial and municipal resource managers capacitated in land use planning,</p>	GEFTF	250,000	2,216,000

<sup>1</sup> Project ID number will be assigned by GEFSEC and to be entered by Agency in subsequent document submissions.

<sup>2</sup> When completing Table A, refer to the excerpts on [GEF 6 Results Frameworks for GETF, LDCF and SCCF](#).

<sup>3</sup> Ecological restoration is the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged or destroyed. It is an intentional activity that initiates or accelerates an ecological pathway—or trajectory through time—towards a reference state. Ecological restoration has as its goal an ecosystem that is resilient and self-sustaining with respect to structure, species composition and function, as well as being integrated into the larger landscape and supporting sustainable livelihoods. Many healthy ecosystems are a product of human endeavors over very long time periods and therefore restoration commonly requires the participation of resource dependent communities. In this respect ecological restoration supports conservation and sustainable development efforts worldwide.

([www.ser.org/resources/resources-detail-view/ecological-restoration-a-means-of-conserving-biodiversity-and-sustaining-livelihoods](http://www.ser.org/resources/resources-detail-view/ecological-restoration-a-means-of-conserving-biodiversity-and-sustaining-livelihoods))

For further review of ecological restoration of farmland and surrounding landscape, see Wade, Mark R, Geoff M Gurr, and Steve D Wratten. "Ecological Restoration of Farmland: Progress and Prospects." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 363.1492 (2008): 831–847. PMC. Web. 14 Apr. 2016. ([www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2610112](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2610112))

<sup>4</sup> Financing type can be either investment or technical assistance.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased score in the Capacity Development Scorecard for GEF Projects<sup>5</sup></li> <li>At least 50 farming households adopt sustainable agricultural / forest practices</li> </ul> <p><i>[Baseline and targets for each will be established during the PPG phase]</i></p>	<p>SLM practices, ecosystem restoration, and use of economic instruments</p> <p>1.2.2 Local land owners / resource users in Kolonja Municipality trained in Sustainable Land Management approaches</p> <p>1.2.3 Stakeholders in Kolonja Municipality aware of land degradation issues and the importance of Sustainable Land Management approaches through education and public awareness activities</p>				
2. Demonstrating and Scaling-up of SLM Best Practices	TA	<p>2.1 Pressures on natural resources in an area covering at least 20,000 hectares are reduced through the application of SLM activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved vegetative cover of at least 120 hectares</li> <li>5 demonstration Integrated Land Use Plans approved and strengthening inter-sectorial coordination</li> <li>Regular application of the LD-PMAT (Land Degradation Focal Area - Portfolio Monitoring and Assessment Tool)</li> </ul>	<p>2.1.1 Integrated land use plans developed and under implementation in Kolonja Municipality</p> <p>2.1.2 Highly degraded forest, pasture and agricultural lands restored in Kolonja Municipality with SLM demonstrations</p>	GEFTF	538,709	3,324,000	
Subtotal						788,709	5,540,000
Project Management Cost (PMC) <sup>6</sup>					GEFTF	78,871	110,000
<b>Total Project Cost</b>						<b>867,580</b>	<b>5,650,000</b>

For multi-trust fund projects, provide the total amount of PMC in Table B, and indicate the split of PMC among the different trust funds here: NA

### C. INDICATIVE SOURCES OF CO-FINANCING FOR THE PROJECT BY NAME AND BY TYPE, IF AVAILABLE

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Amount (\$)
Donor Agency	World Bank	Grants	1,500,000
Donor Agency	Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)	Grants	2,000,000
CSO & National Government	Italian Government	In-kind	500,000
Recipient Government	Kolonja Municipality	In-kind	250,000
Recipient Government	Ministry of Environment (MoE)	In-kind	400,000
Recipient Government	Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration (MARDWA)	In-kind	350,000
Others	Faculty of Forestry, Agricultural University of Tirana	In-kind	200,000
Others	Faculty of Natural and Human Sciences, University of Tirana	In-kind	150,000
Others	Institute for Nature Conservation in Albania (INCA)	In-kind	50,000
GEF Agency	United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)	In-kind	250,000
<b>Total Co-financing</b>			<b>5,650,000</b>

<sup>5</sup> Capacity Development Scorecard will be based on <https://www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/publication/Monitoring%20Guidelines%20Report-final.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> For GEF Project Financing up to \$2 million, PMC could be up to 10% of the subtotal; above \$2 million, PMC could be up to 5% of the subtotal. PMC should be charged proportionately to focal areas based on focal area project financing amount in Table D below.

**D. INDICATIVE TRUST FUND RESOURCES REQUESTED BY AGENCY(IES), COUNTRY(IES) AND THE PROGRAMMING OF FUNDS <sup>a)</sup>**

GEF Agency	Trust Fund	Country/ Regional/ Global	Focal Area	Programming of Funds	(in \$)		
					GEF Project Financing (a)	Agency Fee (b) <sup>b)</sup>	Total (c)=a+b
UNEP	GEFTF	Albania	Land Degradation		867,580	82,420	950,000
<b>Total GEF Resources</b>					867,580	82,420	950,000

a) Refer to the [Fee Policy for GEF Partner Agencies](#).

**E. PROJECT PREPARATION GRANT (PPG)<sup>7</sup>**

Is Project Preparation Grant requested? Yes  No  If no, skip item E.

**PPG AMOUNT REQUESTED BY AGENCY(IES), TRUST FUND, COUNTRY(IES) AND THE PROGRAMMING OF FUNDS**

Project Preparation Grant amount requested: \$45,662					PPG Agency Fee: \$4,338		
GEF Agency	Trust Fund	Country/ Regional/Global	Focal Area	Programming of Funds	(in \$)		
					PPG (a)	Agency Fee <sup>8</sup> (b)	Total c = a + b
UNEP	GEF TF	Albania	Land Degradation		45,662	4,338	50,000
<b>Total PPG Amount</b>					<b>45,662</b>	<b>4,338</b>	<b>50,000</b>

**F. PROJECT'S TARGET CONTRIBUTIONS TO GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS<sup>9</sup>**

Provide the expected project targets as appropriate.

Corporate Results	Replenishment Targets	Project Targets
1. Maintain globally significant biodiversity and the ecosystem goods and services that it provides to society	Improved management of landscapes and seascapes covering 300 million hectares	NA
2. Sustainable land management in production systems (agriculture, rangelands, and forest landscapes)	120 million hectares under sustainable land management	20,000 hectares benefiting from the application of SLM practices
3. Promotion of collective management of transboundary water systems and implementation of the full range of policy, legal, and institutional reforms and investments contributing to sustainable use and maintenance of ecosystem services	Water-food-ecosystems security and conjunctive management of surface and groundwater in at least 10 freshwater basins;	NA
	20% of globally over-exploited fisheries (by volume) moved to more sustainable levels	NA
4. Support to transformational shifts towards a low-emission and resilient development path	750 million tons of CO <sub>2e</sub> mitigated (include both direct and indirect)	NA
5. Increase in phase-out, disposal and reduction of releases of POPs, ODS, mercury and other chemicals of global concern	Disposal of 80,000 tons of POPs (PCB, obsolete pesticides)	NA
	Reduction of 1000 tons of Mercury	NA
	Phase-out of 303.44 tons of ODP (HCFC)	NA
6. Enhance capacity of countries to implement MEAs (multilateral environmental agreements) and mainstream into national and sub-national policy, planning financial and legal frameworks	Development and sectorial planning frameworks integrate measurable targets drawn from the MEAs in at least 10 countries	NA
	Functional environmental information systems are established to support decision-making in at least 10 countries	NA

<sup>7</sup> PPG requested amount is determined by the size of the GEF Project Financing (PF) as follows: Up to \$50k for PF up to \$2m (for MSP); up to \$100k for PF up to \$3m; \$150k for PF up to \$6m; \$200k for PF up to \$10m; and \$300k for PF above \$10m. On an exceptional basis, PPG amount may differ upon detailed discussion and justification with the GEFSEC.

<sup>8</sup> PPG fee percentage follows the percentage of the Agency fee over the GEF Project Financing amount requested.

<sup>9</sup> Provide those indicator values in this table to the extent applicable to your proposed project. Progress in programming against these targets for the projects per the *Corporate Results Framework* in the [GEF-6 Programming Directions](#), will be aggregated and reported during mid-term and at the conclusion of the replenishment period. There is no need to complete this table for climate adaptation projects financed solely through LDCF and/or SDCF.

## **PART II: PROJECT JUSTIFICATION**

1. *Project Description*. Briefly describe: 1) the global environmental and/or adaptation problems, root causes and barriers that need to be addressed; 2) the baseline scenario or any associated baseline projects, 3) the proposed alternative scenario, GEF focal area<sup>10</sup> strategies, with a brief description of expected outcomes and components of the project, 4) incremental/additional cost reasoning and expected contributions from the baseline, the GEFTF, LDCF, SCCF, and co-financing; 5) global environmental benefits (GEFTF) and/or adaptation benefits (LDCF/SCCF); and 6) innovation, sustainability and potential for scaling up.

### **1.1 THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS, ROOT CAUSES AND BARRIERS THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED**

#### **Overview**

Land degradation is a significant threat to Albania's socio-economic and environmental wellbeing, and the project is designed to support the widespread adoption of sustainable land management activities in the country by supporting integrated landscape management planning that balances development needs and environmental service, strengthening and harmonising legal and policy frameworks for land and resource management, building capacity and coordination frameworks to undertake SLM practices, and increasing public awareness on land degradation threats. At the site level, the project will demonstrate integrated land use planning and ecosystem restoration approaches that further SLM goals in order to showcase these practices for wider replication. Through these activities, the project will address the key elements of land degradation in Albania, including in particular deforestation, improper soil management and inappropriate crop management, and in doing so will reduce the negative impacts of land degradation, including extensive soil erosion and sedimentation, and mitigate the effects of climate change on the provision of ecosystem services.

#### **Scope & Context**

Albania is a country of 3.2 million people with a total area of 28,750 km<sup>2</sup>, located in the Balkan Peninsula in Southeast Europe. Albania consists of 24.4% agricultural land, 36.6% forest, 14.8% pasture and meadows, and remaining 24.2% is classified as other, including about lakes and waterways, rocky and mountainous land, and urban areas.<sup>11</sup> Only about one quarter of Albania's land is arable; of this, 19% is located in the mountains, 37% in the hills and 44% in the plains. In general, the arable soils situated in the hill and mountain areas are characterized by thin soil profiles, high acidity, low fertility and a high degree of susceptibility to erosion. Sustainable management of natural resources in upland areas is critical to improving livelihoods, conserving ecosystem services, and ensuring reliable erosion and flood control to benefit lowland areas of Albania where the population is rising rapidly. In recent years, Albania has enjoyed strong economic growth (economic growth rates of approximately 6% over the last decade) and a significant decline in poverty (nearly half Albania's poor were lifted out of poverty between 2002 and 2008). However, poverty remains high (almost 30%) in mountainous upland areas like Kolonja Municipality, and continuing migration of the population away from upland areas has led to abandonment of fields and pasture (it is estimated that there are between 120,000 ha and 300,000 ha of abandoned agricultural land nationwide that could be suitable for afforestation and or natural regeneration).

The agricultural sector provides employment for about 60 per cent of Albania's labour force and it accounts for about 25 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP). With the transition to a free market economy in the early 1990s, about 470,000 small family farms were created, with holdings averaging about 0.7 ha; in hill and mountain areas, some land parcels are even smaller, measuring as little as 0.2 ha.<sup>12</sup> Agriculture in Albania remains highly labor intensive and inefficient, with low levels of technological advancement and weak advisory and extension services. Farmers in the productive coastal lowlands are advantaged in terms of marketing, economic opportunity, overall business investment and level of economic activity, whereas in mountain areas where infrastructure is inadequate and marketing opportunities are few, farming is still predominantly at the subsistence level. The country's livestock sector accounts for nearly 50% of agricultural GDP and is highly dependent on pastures and

<sup>10</sup> For biodiversity projects, in addition to explaining the project's consistency with the biodiversity focal area strategy, objectives and programs, please also describe which [Aichi Target\(s\)](#) the project will directly contribute to achieving.

<sup>11</sup> Stocktaking Report on [Land Degradation](#) in Albania: Prepared for The National Capacity Self Assessment (NCSA) Project. September 2005

<sup>12</sup> IFAD Rural Poverty Portal. <http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org>

forests products. Forests are also critical for the residents of rural and upland areas, providing nearly 70% of fuel in winters, building materials, and income from non-timber products such as medicinal plants. Villagers typically manage both agriculture and forestry as part of diverse agro-forestry and silvo-pastoral systems. Within a watershed, villagers typically use the higher and steeper land for forestry (wood supply and erosion prevention) and pasture, and the lower land for agricultural crops.

Environmental protection has become an important priority in the country in the past decade, in part because of requirements to meet EU accession, and the environment gets special attention both in terms of regulatory measures and infrastructure investments: between 2007-2012, protected areas increased from 10.4% to 15.2% of the national territory in 2011, forests and pastures with rehabilitation plans increased by 48%, logging declined by 55%, and erosion / sedimentation was reduced by 200,000 tons.<sup>13</sup> In June 2015, Albania underwent a large-scale territorial reform where more than 350 communes were merged into 61 municipalities. The country's decentralization process is continuing, as 100% of the state forest fund will be transferred to municipal governments for use in forest management. In addition, as of January 2016, forest staff that used to work for the District Forest Services of the Ministry of Environment have been transferred to the municipalities. With these and other changes, issues of agriculture and environment are now the responsibility of the newly formed municipalities, which are now responsible for the management of forests, pasture land, agricultural land, water and irrigation systems, and urban and rural development. As a result of these changes, the 61 new municipalities face huge new challenges and responsibilities, as they are faced with managing larger geographic areas and more types of resources than the previous local government structures (communes).

Albania's UNCCD NAP identified the areas most affected by soil erosion, one of which is Kolonja Municipality, where extensive erosion has taken place, related to topographic and geological factors as well as deforestation, overgrazing and unsustainable agricultural practices. The municipality covers an area of 86,406 ha., consisting primarily of pasture lands (43,238 ha.) and forests (33,786 ha.). Kolonja has a population of 19,919 residing in two towns and over 75 villages; the primary economic activities are agriculture and forestry production. Korce region, of which Kolonja district is a part, covers an area of 90,909 ha, of which 49,234 ha is arable land, and produces around 91,000 tons of cereal (13% of Albania's total production), 62,000 tons of wheat (22% of the total production) and 19,000 tons of maize (5% of the total production). Among Albania's 12 regions, the Korce region has the fifth poorest population in the country, and approximately 12.4% of the region's population has real per capita monthly consumption below Lek 4,891 (in 2002 prices)<sup>14</sup>. Compared to other areas in the province/country, Kolonja is a poor, mostly rural area with minimal infrastructure. Forests in the area are highly degraded, and although a partial forest management plan has been developed, it only includes 26 out of the 75 villages.

Kolonja Municipality has been selected as the project site for several reasons. As described in the baseline, there are a number of existing initiatives in the area that provide opportunities for collaboration and building on previous results. The municipality is also an important component of Albania's overall agricultural production, yet at the same time it is part of the Vjosa and Seman river basins, which have the highest levels of erosion in the country<sup>15</sup> as a result of large-scale deforestation and extensive over-grazing of pasture areas<sup>16</sup>, making Kolonja an ideal area in which to evaluate, understand and address the impacts of erosion on Albanian agriculture.

### **Threats**

Albania's dependence on the agricultural and forestry sectors for social, economic and environment development, combined with the on-going degradation of fundamental ecosystem services from agricultural, pasture and forest lands, mean that the need to address sustainable land management is crucial for Albania<sup>17</sup>. According to the UNCCD NAP, the main causes of soil loss and degradation in Albania are unsustainable land use practices such as overgrazing, unsustainable agriculture and forestry practices, inefficient and destructive mining technologies, and improper waste disposal. The Common Country Assessment (2004) identified unsustainable land use practices as a primary national environment and development concern, and concluded that unsustainable management practices in forest, agriculture, and water sectors are the main drivers of land degradation. This is particularly true

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<sup>13</sup> National Strategy for Development and Integration: 2014-2020 (Draft, June, 2013)

<sup>14</sup> Albania: Trends in Poverty, World Bank. 2015. [www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/living-standard/publications/books/2015/living-standard-measurement-survey,-2012-(revised).aspx]

<sup>15</sup> National Environmental Agency, Environmental Report 2013

<sup>16</sup> UNCCD NAP for Albania 2015

<sup>17</sup> Vulnerability of Climate Change Land Degradation in Albania. South-Eastern European Journal of Earth Observation and Geomatics. Vol. 1, No. 2, 2012. Aferdita Laska, Gezim Gjata, Magdalena Cara, Alma Ahmeti

for Kolonja Municipality, where all of these drivers are concentrated in one area: the flooding of rivers Vjosa and Seman contribute to high levels of erosion; poor forestry management practices and inadequate capacities of the newly established Municipal forestry management staff lead to widespread deforestation; and overgrazing is common throughout the agricultural areas of the Municipality.

**Soil Degradation:** Despite the economic and environmental importance of soil for the country, Albania's challenges related to soil management have largely been neglected for years, with serious repercussions on soil quality. Albania is among the most affected countries in the Europe in terms of the extent and intensity of soil degradation, and economic losses from the erosion and compaction in the agricultural area in Albania are at least US\$138.2 million per year or about 5.5% of the agricultural GDP<sup>18</sup>. With little arable soil available for the cultivation, the impact of soil degradation in Albania is significant, particularly in poor rural areas in the northeast and southeast of the country (particularly in Kolonja Municipality). Soil losses in Albania due to erosion are very high, varying from 20-30 tons/ha/year, and in some areas, soil loss is as high as 150 tons/ha/year, whereas the acceptable erosion rate is only 1 ton/ha/year<sup>19</sup>. An evaluation of the potential erosion risk in Albania estimated that 24% of land is under high risk of erosion, 59% is moderate and 17% is under low risk of erosion, with approximately 100,000 ha of agricultural land in the process of desertification caused by poor vegetation cover<sup>20</sup>. Other forms of land degradation include soil compaction, which has increased greatly with the adoption of mechanized agriculture, and now affects most agricultural lands; decline in the area of soil surface rich in organic matter (285,000 ha. or 42% of agricultural land have suffered from the loss of soil organic matter); and declines in soil nutrients, with annual losses of three essential nutrients (NPK) of 69 609 tons, or 40% greater than the amount of fertilizer used. Although soil erosion and other forms of land degradation are due in part to natural climatic conditions and Albania's topography, these factors have been exacerbated by human activities, such as deforestation, overgrazing, cultivation of sloping soils, poor water and irrigation management and unsustainable agricultural practices. A large percentage of the erosion problem in Albania is due to unsustainable forestry practices; even though Albania has a high percentage of forest cover, most of the forest and pasture recently transferred to the communes (approx. 750,000 ha.) is in poor condition. Forests are distributed over most of the country, but predominantly in hilly and mountainous areas with steep and frequently unstable slopes (the 2005 national forest inventory reported that 62.15% of forest sample plots were located on terrain with a slope gradient exceeding 40%). Steep slopes, fragile soils, and unsustainable forestry and agricultural practices mean that soil erosion is a significant problem with currently unknown amounts of sediment being eroded into the rivers, lakes and canals, prior to being washed into the Adriatic. Kolonja Municipality is particularly affected due to its topography, intensive agriculture and forestry production, and vulnerability to water erosion as a result of poor water management.

**Deforestation:** Deforestation is considered another major environmental problem in Albania. According to Global Forest Watch, over the past 13 years tree cover in Albania has declined by 32,760 ha. The forests around villages are generally the most damaged and degraded as villagers cut wood for heating and cooking, but all forests are affected by unsustainable harvesting practices, pests and disease, forest fires, and other activities. Forest fires are a widespread problem, in part because of the traditional practice of burning pasturelands to promote "grass regeneration", and large wildfires have occurred repeatedly over the past several decades. In Kolonja Municipality, illegal logging over the past 20 years has had very negative impacts on forest ecosystems, due to two primary causes: 1) harvesting of wood by the rural population as it is their main fuel source for cooking and heating, as well as for agricultural purposes and construction materials; and 2) illegal logging driven by commercial interests. Wood harvesting is carried out according to immediate needs, without any planning or sustainability. According to the UNCCD NAP, the overexploitation of forest resources in Kolonja Municipality has led to increased deforestation and land degradation, which needs to be urgently addressed.

**Degradation of Hydrological Systems:** Deforestation and land / soil degradation are compromising the capacity of natural hydrological systems to provide, maintain, and regulate critical functions and services, including resilience to climate variability and natural hazards (e.g. regulating floods, ensuring water supply). Upstream land degradation reduces the capacity of hydrologic systems to retain water and regulate water flows, and increases sedimentation and siltation downstream that reduces the water storage capacity of water bodies. This results in

<sup>18</sup> Economic losses from soil degradation in agricultural areas in Albania: *Agric. Econ. – Czech, 60, 2014 (6): 287–293.*

Agim BINAJ, Pirro VEIZI, Enkeleida BEQIRAJ, Fran GJOKA, Elian KASA

<sup>19</sup> National Environmental Agency, Environmental Report 2013

<sup>20</sup> Stocktaking Report on

Assessment (NCSA) Project. September 2005.

excessive runoff during the rainy season, reduced capacity to retain excessive water flows during the rainy season (increasing the threat of flood damage to agricultural production and human infrastructure), and reduced capacity to store water for the dry season.

**Climate Change:** Albania is considered as one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change in East Europe and Central Asia, due to high exposure to extreme weather events (droughts, heat spells, flooding), high sensitivity (great reliance on hydropower and irrigation, a large share of population living in low elevation coastal zones), and low adaptive capacity (income inequality, GDP per capita and institutional capacity). Temperature increases of 1.7 to 2.3 degrees Celsius are expected by the mid-century, along with decreases in precipitation (-6.9 to -5.3 per cent by 2050), which will increase fire risk in forest and pasture areas and of drought impacts on agriculture, and increase the challenge of producing crops without causing degradation of soils and water resources.

### **Barriers**

In response to these threats, the long-term solution is to strengthen the capacity and skills of national and local government institutions and other stakeholders in Albania to undertake sustainable land management approaches. The barriers to the long term solution on sustainable land management include:

- Lack of harmonised legislation between central and local (municipal) levels; the country's decentralization process is continuing and the new duties of municipalities related to natural resource management require new legislation at the local level and revisions at the central level, including changes to the laws on land reform, land tenure and land transaction that are out-dated (from 1991) and do not reflect the current administrative structure or address current threats to forest and agricultural resources.
- Many of the laws and regulations on land management that have been enacted since 1991 are "reactive" and narrowly focused, and thus fail to provide an integrated and comprehensive framework for land management that addresses land use planning, reforms, protections, tenure, transactions and other elements. Existing laws on land reform, land tenure and land transactions need to be revised, coordinated and consolidated into one comprehensive law and pertaining by-laws.
- Responsibility for land and resource management is dispersed and poorly delineated among many institutions and across sectors and levels of government; cooperation mechanisms between the responsible ministries and institutions are inadequate; and policies, strategies and plans developed and carried out for land management and conservation are poorly coordinated, so that most programs do not address priority issues or achieve effective results (for example, the Ministry of European Integration develops strategies and programs on harmonizing national legislation with the EU Legal Framework, while each line Ministry follows its own strategic program)
- Many strategies and plans are undertaken in Albania concerning issues of land protection and land degradation and desertification, but the steps/actions proposed by different strategies and plans frequently differ in terms of both priorities and activities. As a result, sectorial policies are often conflicting, the most pressing needs are often not incorporated into planning processes, and proposed strategies and plans often do not result in actual implementation.
- Albania has few successful models or demonstrations of the sustainable use of resources that produce positive economic returns, sustainable use of resources, and effective protection of land from degradation.
- Extremely limited experience, knowledge, resources and capacity at the local level in applying sustainable land management practices (although institutional reforms in the forest sector were implemented under the World Bank Improved Natural Resources Management Project, Albania's national decentralization strategy has subsequently transferred most responsibilities for forest management to local governments, without yet providing increased staffing and staff training, legislation to support local government management, and budget and resource allocations to municipalities)
- Low awareness among natural resource managers and farmers on the importance of soil and on SLM approaches, and lack of experience and understanding of participatory approaches and opportunities in land management in the context of democracy, decentralization and open markets, which has led to continued neglect of soil management and contributed to the failure to integrate the management of agro-ecosystems at the landscape level

A number of barriers are preventing effective soil management in Albania, including conflicting and poorly harmonized laws and regulations pertaining to soil management, a high dependence on agricultural and forestry production in the local and national economies that leads to overuse of land, and a lack of capacities and resources to tackle these issues. The recent restructuring of the local governments and change in authority over forest,



agricultural and water resources has additionally contributed to reducing the capabilities of the both local and state-level governments to deal with the emerging environmental issues.

## **1.2) THE BASELINE SCENARIO AND ANY ASSOCIATED BASELINE PROJECTS**

### Baseline – National Level

The Government of Albania supports sustainable management practices for forests and water resources and the application of environmentally-friendly agricultural production methods. The government prioritizes recovering, conserving and enhancing ecosystems that depend on agriculture and forestry.

- Ministry of Environment: MoE is responsible for forest and pasture lands. In 2014 a memorandum of understanding was signed between MoE and the Ministry of Education that environmental protection will be included in the elementary and secondary student's curricula.
- Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration: MARDWA is responsible for water issues related to irrigation and drainage.
- MoE and MARDWA together are responsible for implementation of the UNCCD in Albania, and the two institutions have experience in collaborating on activities related to land protection. In 2014 the government initiated the preparation of the National Action Programme (NAP) to Protect Land and Combat Land Degradation and preparation of a 10-year strategy. The NAP evaluates general environmental conditions and sets priorities regarding the country's efforts to meet obligations under UNCCD. The platform on which the NAP is based, aims to be in coherence with principles of the UNCCD, having as important approach participation, awareness raising partnership, methods of planning, etc. The priority issue of the Action Plan was to develop a comprehensive strategy for complex environmental management.
- Several strategies and sectorial action plans have been developed and executed since 1992 to address obligations under the UNCCD and EU Acquis.
- The National Strategy for the Environment (2016-2020) is currently in the process of being updated; this document will represent the basis for national planning on objectives related to land protection
- The country has also developed the National Strategy for Rural Development, which is the plan and program for objectives pertaining to rural development in Albania.

Both MoE and MARDWA share responsibilities when it comes to land management, where MoE is responsible for Forest, Pasture and Protected areas, while the agricultural (rural) land is under MARDWA's responsibility and administration. Both Ministries will contribute for the enabling environment in terms of policies and regulations and local-level SLM demonstrations and capacity building in the respective areas of responsibility that they cover.

The Ministry of Environment (MoE) is the highest government entity responsible for environmental protection and oversees forest and pasture management, protected areas, waste management, including hotspots. The Focal Point for UNCCD lies within the Ministry. Relevant currently implemented projects include Payment for Environmental Services Project (World Bank and SIDA, 2015-2019), Technical Assistance for Strengthening Institutional Capacities of the Ministry of Environment for Law Enforcement on European Environment and Climate (IBEC project 2015-2017), Support for Minimizing Waste and Promoting 3Rs in Albania (JICA 2014-2017), Adaptation to Climate Change in Western Balkans (GIZ 2012-2018). MoE, as one of the two implementing partners of the project will be responsible for creating an enabling environment for project implementation at the national scale through creating the policy, legal and regulatory framework to support Sustainable Land Management approaches in Albania.

MoE along the policy development and control through the National Inspectorate of Environment and Forests also focuses on capacity building and operational management of the new units of forest management that will be created in each municipality.

To assist municipalities in their reforestation programs, the Ministry of Environment has predicted that during 2016 through the Regional Development Fund, a fund of US\$ 814,567 will be transferred to the 61 municipalities exclusively for reforestation.

Additionally, to assist the State Inspectorate of Environment and Forests in the identification of any offense in the forest fund during 2016, a national project to monitor with cameras the main timber transport axes will be implemented. Camera monitoring system of forests will be ready by May 2016.

The budget of the MoE for 2016 has increased by 49% compared to the budget of 2015.



The Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration (MARDWA) is the state-level ministry responsible for water issues related to irrigation and drainage on the state level. The most relevant undergoing projects include Rural Development Programme (IPA 2014-2020), Support to agriculture and rural development (SARD) (GIZ 2012-2016), Country Programming Network (FAO 2015-2017), Water Resources and Irrigation project (World Bank 2014-2018), among others. MARDWA will provide support and assistance on the design of local-level SLM demonstrations and capacity building.

Through the Decision of the Council of Ministers nr.91 on 10.2.2016 the Ministry of Agriculture through the Agency of Rural Development has established a programme to support the farmers and land users in improving the technology used for agricultural production, livestock and agro-processing, in order to increase their capacity for land management and access the grants and loans given by the banks and other EU programmes.

#### Government Baseline – Site Specific

- Kolonja Municipality Administration with its Rural, Environmental, Education Regional Department
- Land Administration Protection departments: LAP departments, which are part of the local government and under the supervision of the State Ministry of Local Government, have been created in 12 regions and in all municipalities. LAPs regulate all forms of land use, including state and private agricultural land; local and private forests and pastures; state forests; riverside land; village and urban land, and unproductive land
- National Agency of Protected Areas – Korca Region: NAPA was recently established by the Government of Albania. NAPA's duties in the Korca region are to secure sufficient, stable and long-term financial resources for protected areas; manage the financial resources effectively to cover the full costs of protected areas; and ensure that the protected areas are managed effectively and efficiently with respect to conservation and other complementary objectives.
- Inter-Ministerial State Committee on Land Protection: The committee coordinates work and activities among MARDWA, MoE, other institutions and local government.

Forestry management funds and roles were decentralized on January 1st, 2016. Forestry is now under the jurisdiction of the 61 municipalities. This provides an environment that enables co-management approaches for forest, pasture and protected areas and habitat management at the local level. In addition, in 2015 a new law on Territorial Reform resulted in 373 Local Government Units to having 61 Municipalities.

To respond to the new environmental obligations, Kolonja municipality appointed a staff of 17 environmental specialists. Besides what is mentioned above, the support to the project by Kolonja Municipality will be done through the LAP department, which is the municipal level land administration protection unit and they are under jurisdiction of local government. The LAP department will provide support and assistance in designing and implementing project activities on integrated land use plans in Kolonja Municipality. The LAP department has the responsibility given by the State Ministry of Local Government to regulate all forms of land use, including producing and implementing local strategies and preparing erosion control measures, among others.

Through the Regional Development Fund program (a government programme), Kolonja municipality will implement a forestation programme of US\$ 300,000 to be developed at the end of 2016. With the support of MARDWA through ARDA (the agency of rural development), the local farmers are being encouraged to develop their capacities in IPARD-Like grant applications.

#### Related Projects

A number of projects and initiatives that have been and continue to be implemented in Albania are relevant to the proposed GEF project. The Ministry of Environment, with financing from the BioCarbon Fund and support of the World Bank, implemented the Carbon Sequestration Project for 24 beneficiary areas/plots, one of them in Kolonja Municipality, Barmash village. The project went through two phases: 1) the identification of degraded areas, and 2) the implementation of concrete activities such as reforestation, protecting forest areas from grazing, and forest biomass cutting/improvement in the selected areas. The proposed project will utilize the data and information established on degraded areas, and will seek to use lessons learned on reforestation and forest management.

The Institution Building for Enforcing Environmental and Climate Acquis (IBECA) project will provide assistance to the Ministry of Environment to raise its capacities and to enforce environmental and climate change legislation. The proposed project will collaborate as relevant on changes to the legal and regulatory framework for environment.

The WB-supported Agriculture Services Project, which included the Kolonja area, focused on the development of Land Markets by improving and updating the land registration system, computerizing the land registration process to establish a land market, improving land security, with the goal of facilitating more efficient and sustainable use of agricultural land. Through the existing Environmental Service Project, World Bank will provide co-financing to this proposed GEF project. The objective of the existing project is to support sustainable land management practices and increase communities' monetary and non-monetary benefits in targeted project areas which are mainly in erosion prone rural upland areas. The co-financing will focus on capacity building of Albanian farmers, community organizations, and central and local government institutions on sustainability of land use and natural resources management. This component will also feed into the potential scaling up of the activities on the level of the country.

Contribution by SIDA will take place through the project Connecting Natural Values & People Foundation: Forestry for Local Economic Development (FLED 2014-2018), which has the main goal of improving decentralised and sustainable Communal Forestry providing increased production, service and income to rural communities. Activities leading to Outcome 4: Sustainable Forest Management and practices within communal forestry are to be implemented in cooperation with this GEF proposed project. The activities include identification of best practices on sustainable forest management on the level of the community to make part of the best practices on SLM designated for Kolonja Municipality. The SIDA project will also contribute to scaling up of these SLM Best Practices on the level of the country.

The co-financing from the Italian Government is reflected through the project Strengthening capacity in National Nature Protection - preparation for Natura 2000 network. The focus of the project is on implementing at least five management plans of the many protected areas in Albania (including the Piskal-Shqeri protected area in the Kolonja region), and preparing a preliminary list of Natura 2000 sites in view of their future submission to European Commission by the Albanian authorities, contributing to the alignment process of the country regulatory framework with the EU environmental acquis. This project is developing specific guidelines for Natura 2000 for each municipality in Albania, which is considered to be a valuable contribution to this land degradation project.

Agricultural University of Tirana is the only university providing degree, postgraduate and research programs, training and specialization in agriculture and food. Their fields of research are agronomy, horticulture and plant protection, economy and agrarian policy, agro-environment and ecology, technology agrifood, business husbandry and livestock, aquaculture and fisheries management, engineering forestry, wood processing, etc. In line with the government strategy for environmental conservation, the Faculty of Forestry is developing a research on the biological laboratory to fight and prevent the “economy damaging pests”, such as the pine processionary (one of the most destructive species to pines and cedars in Southern Europe), which was identified as a national priority for the Government in 2015 and employed over 6,000 seasonal workers as part of this initiative. The Faculty of Forestry will support to the project through providing expert knowledge and access to data on state of forests in Albania for the purpose of developing comprehensive Integrated Land Use plans. The Faculty will also contribute to the awareness raising activities and development of educational content on SLM.

Faculty on Natural Sciences (FNS) of the University of Tirana provides degrees, postgraduate, research and training in the field of biology and biotechnology, however the importance of this Faculty lays in postgraduate degree programs and research in field of environmental biology and environmental conservation and its research Centre of Albanian Flora and Fauna. The FNS will provide expert knowledge for the purpose of developing the comprehensive Integrated Land Use plans, but also on demonstrating and scaling up the SLM Best Practices. Any research done by the Faculty on natural resources management will be made available for the project as a valuable source of data, experiences and projections. The FNS will contribute to the awareness raising activities and development of educational content on SLM as well.

The non-governmental organization INCA (Institute for Nature Conservation in Albania) will provide support on training of local farmers and land users, but also in the awareness raising activities through their local networks and expert trainers on sustainable use of natural resources and technology transfers. Their current ongoing projects include Organization of the Regional Sustainable Tourism Training (SEA-Med), Supporting the Long-Term Sustainable Management of Transboundary Lake Skadar, Sustainable Economic Activities in Mediterranean Marine Protected Areas (SEA-Med).

### **1.3) THE PROPOSED ALTERNATIVE SCENARIO, WITH A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND COMPONENTS OF THE PROJECT**

The Government of Albania is requesting GEF support through this project to remove the existing barriers to strengthen the capacity and skills of national and local government institutions and other stakeholders in Albania to undertake sustainable land management approaches. Two components are planned:

**Component 1 - Strengthened legal and institutional framework and capacity building for SLM:** Component 1 will establish an enabling Legal and Institutional Framework for SLM through a comprehensive legal and regulatory framework where existing regulations on land/soil will be strengthened and built upon, while capacity for SLM will be integrated as part of land planning through achieving the following:

#### Outcome 1.1 Shift from unsustainable to sustainable land use in agriculture and forestry sectors

Output 1.1.1 Strengthened policy, legal and regulatory framework in place to support Sustainable Land Management approaches in Albania: The project will undertake a policy and regulatory analysis to identify priority changes to support SLM approaches and local resource management. Following this, existing laws on land reform, land tenure and land transactions enacted since 1991 will be revised, including the *Law on the Creation and Function of Structures on Land Management and Protection* and the *Law on Protection of Agriculture (2004*, which ensures the legal basis for creation and function of a new inspectorate on land protection and land rehabilitation) will be revised, coordinated and consolidated into a comprehensive set of laws and by-laws in order to enable effective management of these resources by municipalities. New legislation will provide clear delineation of responsibilities and coordination for land and resource management among government agencies (vertical and horizontal relationships among central, regional and local institutions)

Output 1.1.2 Functioning inter-ministerial committee enabling coordinated approaches to SLM: The Inter-Ministerial State Committee on Land Protection and Rehabilitation will be capacitated with the goal of coordinating the work undertaken by different relevant institutions (MARDWA, MoE and other relevant national and local authorities), including information sharing on SLM practices and monitoring projects and activities on SLM for documentation of new lessons learned and for reporting on SLM innovations. The Committee was envisaged in the Law on Land Protection (2004) with the mandate of ensuring the legal basis for creation and function of a new inspectorate on land protection and land rehabilitation, and it will be established for the first time by this project. The Committee will also have the responsibility to make sure developed land use plans are consistent with the objectives and methods of sustainable land management.

#### Outcome 1.2 Capacities and support for sustainable land management strengthened

Output 1.2.1 Relevant national and municipal resource managers capacitated in land use planning, SLM practices, ecosystem restoration, and use of economic instruments: The project will support municipalities in implementing new laws and regulations, and in building capacities on land degradation. The transferred competencies from central to local government will be followed by comprehensive actions such as capacity building and knowledge and technology transfer for SLM approaches including enhancing water efficiency and soil fertility, prevention of soil degradation through integrated soil fertility management, conservation agriculture, etc. The project also will strengthen institutional capacities to develop policies and programs to support SLM, to ensure public participation, monitoring, assessment and knowledge management, and to support learning by doing strategies for land use and management. In Kolonja Municipality, additional emphasis will be placed on programs to strengthen the capacities of relevant government agencies dealing with land/soil to enable them to develop sustainable land planning strategies and action plans; to design, replicate and scale-up good SLM practices; to work on developing and implementing integrated approaches to the restoration of land within local and national land-use action plans; and to use appropriate and sustainable economic instruments such as valuation of natural resource assets and ecosystem services from production landscapes when creating development strategies and local action plans.

Output 1.2.2 Local land owners/resource users in Kolonja Municipality trained in Sustainable Land Management approaches: One of the purposes of the project is to stimulate public participation and ownership on the issue of land degradation, through education and awareness programs and the participation of local resource users in project activities. Training components on land degradation will be developed and implemented to be used by the local

farmers and land users in Kolonja Municipality in order to build their capacities. Training programs and materials will be included in the education curricula in the local schools, with a possibility of scaling up and replication.

Output 1.2.3 Stakeholders in Kolonja Municipality aware of land degradation issues and the importance of Sustainable Land Management approaches: Public awareness campaigns for SLM developed will target 1) the small-scale farmers and users of affected degraded land in Kolonja Municipality with a possibility to scale up, 2) the resource managers and other government officials responsible for issues of land/soil, and 3) the wider public. Public awareness will focus on increasing understanding of land degradation issues and impacts, stressing the benefits of SLM approaches in increasing production and income and the low cost of SLM-related agricultural and forest practices, explaining the best SLM practices to be implemented on the ground level, and sharing the results of activities undertaken within the project. The project will also establish a platform for the sharing of information and experiences during project implementation.

**Component 2 - Demonstrating and Scaling-up of SLM Best Practices:** Component 2 will lead to scaling-up of SLM Best Practices by wider application of innovative tools and practices of SLM in an area of at least 20,000 ha in Kolonja municipality (these areas are owned by either local governments or small private landowners, with much of the forested area degraded due to illegal logging by local residents and commercial interests). Pilot sites will be selected by the Project Steering Committee in its first meeting. The selection criteria will be based on availability of baseline information, local support/interest/capacities, level of socio-economic impact and level of environmental impact.

The following outputs will lead to the expected outcome of the component 2:

**Outcome 2.1 Pressures on natural resources in an area covering at least 20,000 hectares are reduced through the application of SLM activities:**

Output 2.1.1 Integrated land use plans developed and under implementation in Kolonja Municipality: The project will support the municipality to update its existing forest and pasture management plan to respond to new institutional responsibilities in the context of decentralization, and to integrate all existing sectoral plans for forest, pasture, agriculture and protected areas management. The project also will support careful documentation of the revised plan, the process for its development, and the best practices and lessons learned from developing and implementing the plan, and support dissemination of these findings to other municipalities in order to facilitate replication throughout the country.

Output 2.1.2 Highly degraded forest, pasture and agricultural lands restored in Kolonja Municipality with SLM demonstrations: The project will undertake three small-scale projects for sustainable management and ecosystem restoration of approximately 120 hectares<sup>21</sup> of highly degraded/vulnerable sites on government-owned lands within Kolonja Municipality. The designated area is degraded forest land and pasture, as well as degraded agricultural land, and will best showcase rehabilitation techniques and best SLM practices (possible activities, to be confirmed during the PPG phase, include soil erosion control measures such as mulching, zero-tillage, terracing, and gully stabilization; hedge management and windbreakers; crop diversification; biological controls; restrictions on chemical inputs; etc.). The indirect effect of the three pilot restorations is expected to impact up to 20,000 ha in total (including the surrounding area). In order to increase to replicate the implementation of SLM wider than just the immediate farmers, visits to demonstration sites will be organized for the farmers who experience similar challenges in their practices to further build-up their knowledge and confidence in adopting SLM technology and farming.

#### **1.4. Incremental Cost Reasoning and Expected Baseline Contributions from the Baseline, the GEFTE, LDCF/SCCF and Co-financing**

Scenario without the GEF investment: The baseline for the project rationale is mainly founded on efforts and actions implemented by the government institutions in cooperation with international funds and agencies. Without the GEF investment: national and local policies and strategies regarding land degradation and management will not be harmonized and strengthened with effective SLM approaches in the medium term. In addition, over the

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<sup>21</sup> The number of hectares is approximate; during the PPG phase the municipality will provide concrete information on specific sites.

short/medium term, national plans such as the forest and pasture management plans, agriculture management plans, and watershed and irrigation system management plans will not have objectives that support SLM practices. Staff who have moved from central ministries to local governmental units during the transition phase in early 2016 will not have sufficient capacity to carry out SLM practices. As a result of these shortfalls, soil quality will continue to degrade due to uncontrolled and inadequate land use, and the social and economic consequences of land degradation will continue to adversely impact the livelihood of people in Albania

Scenario with the GEF investment: GEF funds will serve as catalyst to develop a coherent and coordinated approach to reduce pressures on land as a natural resource from competing land uses in forestry and pasture, through reversal of land degradation and development of instruments and mechanisms for integrated land use management and SLM issues. More specifically, the GEF investment will facilitate strengthened policy, legal and regulatory frameworks that will harmonise state legislation with municipal considering the new institutional reforms, and the reduction of pressures on natural resources in pilot area by mainstreaming SLM principles into plans through integrated land use plans. The project also will result in improved institutional and technical capacities at the municipal level, and increased awareness among stakeholders at all institutional levels and the wider public on sustainable land use and soil conservation measures. By the end of the project, project stakeholders will have increased access to environmental information and will be participating more widely in decision-making and implementation of SLM programs (with improved gender equality), and stakeholders throughout Albania will have access to information and lessons learned on integrated land use planning and effective techniques for the restoration of ecosystems at degraded/vulnerable sites. In sum, these various outcomes will reduce pressures on natural eco-systems (especially agricultural, pasture and forestlands), improve management of community resources (e.g. pasture/range, woodlots, forest, wetlands, water resources), and thereby reduce land-use conflicts and improve the well-being of project stakeholders.

The Government of the Republic of Albania as well as bi-lateral donors, NGOs and academic institutions will provide co-financing for the project. The GEFTF and co-finance funding will jointly support the objectives and the outcomes of the project. The project will lead to environmental and social benefits on national, regional and global levels and the incremental cost reasoning will be based on the sliding scale approach. The GEF will contribute with approximately 1,000,000 USD of the overall budget, and the co-finance funding of 5,650,000 USD. Co-finance by the Government and other donors will be provided in-kind.

### **1.5. Global Environmental Benefits (GEFTF, NPIF) and/or Adaptation Benefits (LDCF/SCCF)**

The project will contribute to global environmental benefits primarily through reduced soil erosion, reduced risk of land degradation, and improved land and soil health. Adoption of SLM practices that will reduce land degradation and secure ecosystem services over an area covering at least 20,000 ha in the targeted municipality, which will help to reduce the main threats to ecosystem functions and services in Albania by reducing land degradation due to overgrazing, illegal and unsustainable levels of forest cutting, poor agricultural practices, and uncontrolled use of water resources. Sustainable land use and forest management practices also will help to conserve and restore natural habitats important for biodiversity, and reforestation of degraded lands will increase carbon sequestration and thus contribute to climate change mitigation objectives. Finally, improved land management in mountainous areas has also been identified (in the Mediterranean Action Plan) as a key factor in controlling run-off into the Adriatic Sea and thereby helping to conserve coastal and marine ecosystems. It is expected that through mobilization of resources meant to support the project goals, the implementation of the UNCCD 10-year strategy will be strengthened, especially by creating synergies with the on-going UNCCD NAP alignment process in Albania, and by utilizing its respective outcomes. The project's components support the operational objectives of the UNCCD 10-Year Strategy and the Land Degradation Neutrality target. Albania became a Party of the UNCCD on 2000 April 27 after its accession on December 1999.

### **1.6. Innovativeness, sustainability and potential for scaling up**

Scaling Up: Throughout the project, a collaboration scheme is envisioned between the experts engaged during project implementation, local government institutions and departments, the central government, NGOs, and direct beneficiaries, that will help assist in mainstreaming approaches and capacities to diverse stakeholders. Several of the project outputs will help to upgrade the country's land use management, especially through a learning by doing strategy where SLM practices and new technical approaches and capacities will be transferred to other local government units. Scaling up will be ensured through developing the necessary innovative tools and practices for

SLM that will be demonstrated at the three targets sites, and the mainstreamed through the strengthened legal/regulatory framework to allow for further replication in other affected areas in Albania. Additionally, the project will provide training for end-users such as farmers and land owners to be able to individually adopt SLM practices. Finally, the project will facilitate incorporation of best practices in the educational system and school curricula.

**Sustainability:** The project will empower local stakeholders to take more ownership/responsibility for natural resources management, for example through clarifying institutional responsibilities among key agencies and improving coordination through the Inter-Ministerial Committee. The preparation of integrated land use plans and SLM demonstrations will empower communities and local stakeholders to take part in decision making processes through a participative process. The revised and implemented legal and regulatory framework will ensure that SLM practices continue after the closing of the project. The capacities of the key stakeholders, including the relevant authorities and land users will be built in order to be able to continue with the identified best practices. Finally, the project will raise public awareness raising on land degradation issues and SLM approaches, which will additionally contribute to ensuring the continuation of the envisaged activities.

**Innovativeness:** Project activities to strengthen legal and institutional frameworks, to undertake capacity building for SLM, and to demonstrate and scale-up SLM practices all constitute new approaches in Albania. In addition, through project interventions, new data, knowledge products, research area and culture of cooperation will be developed.

**2. Stakeholders.** Will project design include the participation of relevant stakeholders from [civil society](#) and [indigenous people](#)? (yes X /no ) If yes, identify key stakeholders and briefly describe how they will be engaged in project design/preparation.

Stakeholder	Expected Role in Project Preparation
Kolonja Municipality Administration with its Rural, Environmental, Education Regional Department	This agency is one of the two implementing partners for the project, and will be responsible for creating the enabling conditions for implementation of all project activities at the local scale.
Ministry of Environment (MoE)	MoE is one of the two implementing partners for the project, and will be responsible for creating the enabling conditions for implementation of all project activities at the national scale. MoE also will lead the design of project activities related to the legislative and regulatory framework.
Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration (MARDWA)	MARDWA will support and assist the design of the SLM demonstrations and capacity building at the local level.
Land Administration Protection (LAP) departments	The LAP departments will support and assist the design of project activities related to integrated land use plans in Kolonja municipality
National Agency of Protected Areas – Korca Region	NAPA will support and assist the design of project activities related to integrated land use plans in Kolonja municipality
Inter-Ministerial State Committee on Land Protection	The committee will provide guidance on project activities related to strengthening coordinated approaches to SLM
Kolonja Women’s Association	The association will take the lead in developing the baseline gender analysis
Local farmers and farmer associations	Farmers and other local residents and the officers of associations that represent them will be invited to participate in the project design, including participation at the PPG planning and validation workshops.

**3. Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment.** Are issues on [gender equality](#) and women’s empowerment taken into account? (yes X /no ). If yes, briefly describe how it will be mainstreamed into project preparation (e.g. gender analysis), taking into account the differences, needs, roles and priorities of women and men.

The project will place a strong emphasis on addressing gender issues and the challenges faced by women vulnerable to the impacts of soil degradation. The project will offer support to both men and women to adopt SLM practices and trainings will be gender balanced. Stakeholder consultations will be organized around the proposed activities in order to mobilize local communities and enhance the impact of the project at local level, and all stakeholder meetings, workshops, trainings, etc. will take into consideration gender balance and the representation of various ethnic and religious groups. The project will push for equal participation of both women and men in the ecosystem restoration and land use planning activities. In addition, awareness raising activities will highlight the

importance of inclusion of all representative groups. A baseline analysis on gender will be further developed during the PPG phase. The project will promote women's participation on project activities by establishing quotas in training activities, working closely with the Kolonja Women's Association on gender matters.

**4. Risks.** Indicate risks, including climate change, potential social and environmental risks that might prevent the project objectives from being achieved, and, if possible, propose measures that address these risks to be further developed during the project design (table format acceptable).

The following risks have been identified. However, risks will be validated and re-assessed during the PPG:

Risk	Level of Impact	Mitigation Measures
Unclear mandates of institutions, including departments, sectors and groups in these institutions leading to uncoordinated and ineffective implementation of SLM measures	Low	Even though the staff in the municipalities will be transferred from the regional administration who have been in place for more than 20 years, there is always a risk that some duties may be overlapping. In the PPG phase this risk will be monitored closely and precautionary actions will be designed accordingly.
Insufficient knowledge about modern technologies and technical approaches, such as GIS, remote sensing, computer modelling, environmental valuation, cost-benefit analysis, and social impact assessment	Medium	The project will support training and coordination with the central government in order to support the introduction and use of new technology, as well as the transfer of knowledge and skills from the extension services of the central government to the new staff in local (municipal) governments. In addition, the project will pursue coordination and development of training modules with other on-going projects, such as the Environmental Service Project and the Water Cadastre Project.
Unclear roles of stakeholders in the execution of the project may result in lack of commitment/buy-in from local communities and therefore may result in failure of demonstration projects	Medium	A stakeholder engagement plan will be drawn up during the PPG phase, and community stakeholders will be engaged with during the PPG phase to ensure their buy-in into the project. During project implementation, the project will actively engage local communities and will raise awareness through communication campaigns.
Climate change impacts (e.g. increased flooding; more severe droughts; forest fires) may negatively affect project activities for ecosystem restoration and effective SLM practices	Medium	Integrated land use plans will include hazard mitigation measures to minimize the impacts of droughts (e.g. through better water management and adoption of drought tolerant crops), to reduce the risk of forest fires (through education and improved enforcement regarding the intentional setting of fires), and to reduce the threat of flooding (through improved land management and retention / restoration of vegetative cover).

**5. Coordination.** Outline the coordination with other relevant GEF-financed and other initiatives.

The project will build on and coordinate with the following on-going projects, which have a land and soil conservation related focus.

- Albania is currently finalising the alignment of its National Action Programme under the UNCCD through the WB-GEF project Harmonization of National Action Plan to Combat Desertification in Albania and Preparation of National Report. The main objective of the project is the adoption of the NAP with the UNCCD 10-Year Strategy; in addition, the project aims to strengthen human and scientific capacity for NAP alignment; establish and strengthen the policy and institutional framework for NAP alignment and implementation; and establish the finance and technology framework for NAP implementation. The NAP project is providing baseline information on national status on implementation of UNCCD commitments.
- The primary objective of the WB-GEF Environmental Services Project, which started implementation in 2015, is to support sustainable land management practices with the aim of reducing human-induced land degradation, and increasing communities' income, in targeted project areas which are mainly in erosion prone rural areas. This is to be achieved in the short term through generating income from processing and marketing of agricultural and non-timber forest products, and in the long term through the sustainable utilization of wood and the production and sale of environmental services, within an environment where a stable institutional legal framework is in place. More specifically, the project will: i) seek approval of new bylaws on forest and pasture management under a new law on Forest and Pasture; ii) establish a digital Forest Information System, Forest and Pasture land registration, and GIS mapping, and update the forest cadastre to provide correct data on the forest fund and type of land ownership; iii) explore development of carbon sequestration practices and a carbon market; iv) research the impacts of different land uses on



sediment runoff and their impact on downstream water infrastructure, and propose mechanisms for payments to land owners/managers to implement management practices to reduce erosion; v) carry out reforestation, agroforestry on formerly degraded lands, and restoration of degraded pasture; and iv) support community planning mechanisms for wood harvesting in forest areas, capacity building for fire protection, and monitoring of key water bodies. The WB-GEF project will provide valuable information and maps on forest and pasture ownership and uses that can be used by the proposed project. The WB-GEF project also will produce valuable lessons on revising existing laws, developing payment mechanisms, undertaking ecosystem restoration, and capacity building of local populations, which can help in the design of activities under the proposed project. It is important to note that the proposed project will build on these efforts, for example by undertaking a revision of the entire land-related legal framework through establishing a comprehensive Land Code, and by implementing capacity building of the local population in a wide range of SLM practices, rather than focusing specifically on wood harvesting and fire protection.

- UNDP-GEF MSP “Establishing Albania’s Environmental Information Management and Monitoring System aligned with the global environmental reporting”. This project is designed to strengthen capacity for environmental monitoring and information management in Albania by establishing an operational environmental information management and monitoring system (EIMMS). Increased capacity in this area will improve reporting to the Rio Conventions and lay the groundwork for sustainable development through better-informed environmental policy. The proposed project will seek to collaborate with the UNDP-GEF project is collecting environmental information relevant to the UNCCD and in applying such information to strengthen the implementation of sustainable land management programs on the ground.
- WB-GEF Natural Resources Development Project (2005-2010) was designed to “reverse severe degradation of upland and mountainous erosion-prone lands, and sediment runoff to the Adriatic Sea, through rehabilitating and sustainably managing natural resources, including globally significant biodiversity.” Among other activities, this project built the capacity of new and existing Forest and Pasture User Associations; trained government resource managers in participatory approaches; strengthened the legal and regulatory framework for forest and pasture management; and developed forest and pasture management plans (CFPMPs) for 251 communes in Albania. Two of these communes that are within Kolonja Municipality -- Barmash and Erseke-Qender – completed forest and pasture management plans for the period of 2005-2015 under this project. The proposed project will use lessons learned on the development of forest and pasture management plans and will update the 2005-2015 plans for Barmash and Erseke-Qender. It also will seek to benefit from models for afforestation, forest improvements and fencing completed under the WB-GEF project, and to adhere to some of the key lessons learned in that project, including utilizing GIS in management planning, clarifying user rights prior to implementation of on-the-ground activities, and undertaking extensive community participatory processes and supporting communal natural resource management.

**6. Consistency with National Priorities.** Is the project consistent with the National strategies and plans or reports and assessments under relevant conventions? (yes X /no  ). If yes, which ones and how: NAPAs, NAPs, ASGM NAPs, MIAs, NBSAPs, NCs, TNAs, NCSAs, NIPs, PRSPs, NPFE, BURs, etc.

The Republic of Albania’s draft National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI), 2014-2020 represents the main national policy document that harmonizes social and economic development strategies, as well integration into the European Union (candidate status to the EU was granted to Albania in late 2013) and the achievement of Millennium Development Goals. The NSDI 2014-2020 is still in draft form, but it identifies several key challenges in the area of forest protection, including: (i) approximate EU legislation in the field of forests and pastures; (ii) build local forest management capacity; (iii) improve forest information system and databases; (iv) strengthen research, technological development and innovation for forests; and (vi) improve regional relations and unification of technologies and methodologies. The proposed project will help Albania to meet these challenges, and it will support Objective 4 of the NSDI, which is to “ensure sustainable and functional development of forest and pasture resources”, and the identified priorities under this objective to strengthen the institutional and legal framework for sustainable management of forest and pasture resources; to implement plant breeding / nursery plans for forests and pastures; to update the National Cadastre of Forests and Pastures, prepare GIS thematic maps, and register 100% of forests and pastures; to undertake rehabilitation of forests and pastures by forage and prevent further erosion of forest and pasture land; and to complete transfer of management over forests and pastures to local government units, and provide technical and legal support to 250 communes to set up their forest and pasture management bodies.

The implementation of sustainable forestry policies and practices is a priority issue for Albania, and the Strategy for the Development of the Forestry and Pasture Sector in Albania: Action Plan (2004) identified the following six main forest policy goals: 1) maintain the integrity of the forests and pastures; resource management; 3) promote the transition to a market-driven economy; 4) transfer management responsibility for selected State forests and production forests and the summer forests and protected areas.

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Albania is a signatory of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification / Land Degradation (UNCCD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Besides the fact that this GEF project is in line with country's legislation, the project is consistent with Albania's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action plan 2015-2020, which identifies soil erosion, deforestation and unsustainable rural land use practices as causes of habitat fragmentation and biodiversity loss which need immediate interventions.

The project is directly in line with the objectives of Albania's UNCCD National Action Programme (NAP) to Protect Land and Combat Land Degradation. The draft NAP on land degradation has identified a number of priority objectives regarding the protection of land, including: 1) harmonization and strengthening of policies at national and local level for land degradation protection and measures; 2) increased financial resources for land management; 3) growth of national consciousness and education of society and institutions for the role and the importance of protecting the soil from erosion; 4) rehabilitation through forestation and reforestation of burned forests and rehabilitation of pasture forage and tree planting to 15% of the forest and pasture surface until 2020; 5) ensure the traditional rights of use / ownership of forests, and setting mechanisms to reduce illegal logging and trading of timber, and fire preventions; 6) pasture improvement for up to 80% of the planned surface; 7) building capacity for the sustainable management and improved functioning of the forest and pasture fund; 8) provide financial mechanisms to improve the status of forests and development of the forest sector; and 9) continue the process of transferring forests and pastures to local government bodies as a step towards the transition of full rights to communities, a process which increase the role of local governments in planning and resource management.

**7. Knowledge Management.** Outline the knowledge management approach for the project, including, if any, plans for the project to learn from other relevant projects and initiatives, to assess and document in a user-friendly form, and share these experiences and expertise with relevant stakeholders.

The proposed project will seek to learn from, and utilise lessons learned and best practices from, several recent and on-going initiatives, including: the data and priorities established in the National Action Programme (NAP) to Protect Land and Combat Land Degradation; data and information on degraded areas, and lessons learned on reforestation and forest management, from the MoE Carbon Sequestration Project; and models established for forest and pasture management plans (CFPMPs), as well as lessons learned on utilizing GIS in management planning, clarifying user rights prior to implementation of on-the-ground activities, and undertaking extensive community participatory processes and supporting communal natural resource management, from the WB-GEF Natural Resources Development Project. In addition, the project will seek to collaborate with the UNDP-GEF project "Establishing Albania's Environmental Information Management and Monitoring System aligned with the global environmental reporting" in collecting environmental information relevant to the UNCCD and in applying such information to strengthen the implementation of sustainable land management programs on the ground. Lessons learned on sustainable land management stemming from this project's interventions will be shared with the relevant stakeholders during trainings and public awareness activities, and reports will be elaborated and sent out with the conclusions and suggestions to relevant government bodies. Furthermore, lessons learned of several of the project outputs such as pilot projects will be scaled up and replicated at other sites in the country. The project will establish a platform for disseminating information and experiences during the project's implementation.

### **PART III: APPROVAL/ENDORSEMENT BY GEF OPERATIONAL FOCAL POINT(S) AND GEF AGENCY(IES)**

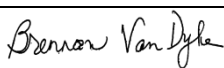
**A. RECORD OF ENDORSEMENT<sup>22</sup> OF GEF OPERATIONAL FOCAL POINT (S) ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT(S):**

(Please attach the [Operational Focal Point endorsement letter](#)(s) with this template. For SGP, use this [SGP OFP endorsement letter](#)).

NAME	POSITION	MINISTRY	DATE (MM/dd/yyyy)
Pellumb Abeshi	General Direction of Environmental Policy and Delivery Unit	Ministry of Environment	16/06/2015

**B. GEF AGENCY(IES) CERTIFICATION**

**This request has been prepared in accordance with GEF policies<sup>23</sup> and procedures and meets the GEF criteria for project identification and preparation under GEF-6.**

Agency Coordinator, Agency name	Signature	Date (MM/dd/yyyy)	Project Contact Person	Telephone	Email
Brennan Van Dyke, Director, GEF Coordination Office, UNEP		April 19 2016	Ersin Esen Task Manager	+254 20 762 4731	Ersin.Esen@unep.org

**C. ADDITIONAL GEF PROJECT AGENCY CERTIFICATION (APPLICABLE ONLY TO NEWLY ACCREDITED GEF PROJECT AGENCIES)**

For newly accredited GEF Project Agencies, please download and fill up the required [GEF Project Agency Certification of Ceiling Information Template](#) to be attached as an annex to the PIF.

NA

<sup>22</sup> For regional and/or global projects in which participating countries are identified, OFP endorsement letters from these countries are required even though there may not be a STAR allocation associated with the project.

<sup>23</sup> GEF policies encompass all managed trust funds, namely: GEFTF, LDCF, and SCCF