

Terminal Evaluation Review form, GEF Evaluation Office, APR 2013

1. Project Data

Summary project data			
GEF project ID		1312	
GEF Agency project ID		1687	
GEF Replenishment Phase		GEF-3	
Lead GEF Agency (include all for joint projects)		UNDP	
Project name		Management and Conservation of Wetland Biodiversity in the Esteros del Ibera	
Country/Countries		Argentina	
Region		LAC	
Focal area		Biodiversity	
Operational Program or Strategic Priorities/Objectives		2- Coastal, Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems	
Executing agencies involved		Fundacion Ecos Argentina	
NGOs/CBOs involvement		Lead executing agency	
Private sector involvement		through consultations	
CEO Endorsement (FSP) /Approval date (MSP)		7/17/2002	
Effectiveness date / project start		9/30/2002	
Expected date of project completion (at start)		09/30/2005	
Actual date of project completion		12/15/2006	
Project Financing			
		At Endorsement (US \$M)	At Completion (US \$M)
Project Preparation Grant	GEF funding	0.025	0.025
	Co-financing		
GEF Project Grant		0.975	0.975
Co-financing	IA/EA own	0.033	0.033
	Government	1.758	UA
	Other*	7.603	UA
Total GEF funding		1.000	1.000
Total Co-financing		9.394	9.951
Total project funding (GEF grant(s) + co-financing)		10.394	10.926
Terminal evaluation/review information			
TE completion date		12/01/2008	
TE submission date			
Author of TE		Miguel E. Pellerano	
TER completion date		12/10/2013	
TER prepared by		Nelly Bourlion	
TER peer review by (if GEF EO review)		Joshua Schneck	

*Includes contributions mobilized for the project from other multilateral agencies, bilateral development, cooperation agencies, NGOs, the private sector, and beneficiaries.

2. Summary of Project Ratings

Criteria	Final PIR	IA Terminal Evaluation	IA Evaluation Office Review	GEF EO Review
Project Outcomes	MS	MS	N/A	MS
Sustainability of Outcomes	U	U	N/A	U
M&E Design	N/A	N/A	N/A	MS
M&E Implementation	N/A	N/A	N/A	UA
Quality of Implementation	N/A	MS	N/A	MS
Quality of Execution	MS	MS	N/A	MS
Quality of the Terminal Evaluation Report				MU

3. Project Objectives

3.1 Global Environmental Objectives of the project:

The Project is designed to strengthen the existing Esteros del Ibera Provincial Preserve, a 1.2 million hectare wetland located in Corrientes Province and the largest protected area in Argentina.

Esteros del Ibera is a globally significant and unique ecosystem. Besides its size, Ibera is also the only major wetland globally whose hydrologic inputs are limited to rainfall. Ibera is one of the few highly acidic wetlands found in tropical regions, more similar to peat moss bogs than other tropical wetlands. Ibera has almost no human infrastructure, thus acts as a reproductive and recovery zone for endangered species.

While it is a relatively untouched and healthy ecosystem, Ibera does not have any comprehensive management or protection strategy that will ensure the ecological vitality of the area in the face of hydropower, plantation forestry, industrial agriculture, and other economic developments along its borders. According to the project document, “the project offers a unique opportunity to leverage the resources of an international conservation group that will purchase the remaining private land holdings within the existing protected area and put them under strict conservation management”. Upon successful implementation a locally supported and comprehensive conservation management strategy for Ibera, these lands will be granted to the appropriate provincial or national conservation agency, effectively placing the entire Ibera wetlands ecosystem and its attendant biodiversity under an organized conservation regime.

3.2 Development Objectives of the project:

The project will implement participatory management for resource use and conservation in the Esteros del Ibera based on a comprehensive regional management strategy. The goal of this strategy is the long-term production of this ecosystem’s goods and services for local, national and global benefits.

This objective will be achieved through the following outcomes:

- (1) A regional management strategy and program of activities available for the Esteros basin,
- (2) Preservation and reintroduction of native threatened species,

- (3) Educational awareness raising and dissemination for stakeholders on sustainable and conservation objectives,
- (4) An alternative livelihood development strategy, emphasizing ecotourism, to diversify sources of income and reduce pressure on resources,
- (5) A financial strategy for meeting the recurrent costs of the Esteros del Iberá Reserve (integrated management program),
- (6) Institutional and legislative framework addressing the region's needs,
- (7) Land acquired and placed under conservation management.

3.3 Were there any **changes** in the Global Environmental Objectives, Development Objectives, or other activities during implementation?

No change in project objectives, outcomes or outputs/activities inputs were reported.

4. GEF EO assessment of Outcomes and Sustainability

Please refer to the GEF Terminal Evaluation Review Guidelines for detail on the criteria for ratings.

Relevance can receive either a Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory rating. For Effectiveness and Cost efficiency, a six point rating scale is used (Highly Satisfactory to Highly Unsatisfactory), or Unable to Assess. Sustainability ratings are assessed on a four-point scale: Likely=no or negligible risk; Moderately Likely=low risk; Moderately Unlikely=substantial risks; Unlikely=high risk. In assessing a Sustainability rating please note if, and to what degree, sustainability of project outcomes is threatened by financial, sociopolitical, institutional/governance, or environmental factors.

Please justify ratings in the space below each box.

4.1 Relevance	Rating: Satisfactory
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The creation of a Management Plan for the Esteros del Ibera Provincial Preserve is consistent with the GEF OP-2 Coastal, Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems.

According to the PD, the Esteros del Ibera region has been a priority for conservation in Argentina for many decades and today is the largest protected in Argentina. The government of Argentina has made repeated efforts to incorporate the area into national park system, although it has remained under provincial control. The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan formulated under the leadership of Argentine Secretariat for Natural Resources and sustainable development recognizes the Esteros as a National Priority Ecoregion. The Argentine-Paraguay Binational Hydroelectric Authority on the Parana River has designated Esteros del Ibera for support as a wetland wildlife reserve in compensation for riverine areas affected by inundation of the area behind the Yacyreta-Apipe dam. Pursuant to its delegation as a Nature Reserve, provincial government authorities are preparing an official request to the Federal Government to seek designation of the Esteros as a RAMSAR site. In support to these efforts the European Union is currently supporting a detailed hydrological and biological study of the Reserve.

4.2 Effectiveness	Rating: Moderately Satisfactory
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According to the TE, most of the outcomes have been achieved. However the effectiveness of the project has been impacted by disagreements and misconceptions among stakeholders about some project outcomes. Two of the seven outcomes have been the focus of discussions, surveys, criticism and conflicts in the Province of Corrientes. These disagreements affected the results of the tasks performed.

The first outcome, “A regional management strategy and program of activities for the Esteros basin”, was contentious because the construction, definition, design and subsequent search for validation and appropriation of the Management Plan was the main reason for the technical and social dispute. This outcome has not been achieved: although the Management Plan has been approved and validated in public forums and through public participation, strong opposition has been encountered from certain landowners and producers who utilize the Reserve for their benefit. The Management Committee has only met twice instead of 6 times minimum due to opposition to the Management Plan. The President of the Committee was one of the first opponents to the Management Plan.

The seventh outcome, “Land acquired and placed under conservation management”, caused problems because the issue of purchasing private lands is associated with doubts and fears about alleged expropriation and foreign ownership of land. For this reason, stakeholders did not trust the Conservation Land Trust and its leader, Douglas Tompkins, and this "stained" the subjective public perception about the ultimate goals of the project, and limited the ability to achieve the expected results.

The design of the project seems to have been inadequately tailored to the needs of the local communities, and was more designed toward the orientation seen as necessary for success in terms of foreign policy. Conflicts arose between local stakeholders and officials during project implementation.

Project effectiveness is rated as Moderately Satisfactory.

4.3 Efficiency	Rating: Moderately Satisfactory
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Efficiency is rated as moderately satisfactory. According to the TE, the magnitude of the task as well as the size, complexity and importance of Ibera Reserve would have justified a full size project in terms of funding and duration. However, this project was approved as a medium-sized project, possibly from a desire to raise funds more quickly, with less administrative steps and institutional consultations. This was not in the best interest of the project, and resulted in a project design that did not properly address the identified problems and achieve the objectives. This design failure

may explain the failure to achieve some of expected outcomes and the difficulties encountered with local stakeholders.

Other issues that could be attributed to this design problem include:

- The project has been operationally closed since mid-2006, there has been no project coordinator since then. The opposition from some of the stakeholders has seriously interfered with necessary goodwill by authorities essential to achieving Management Plan approval and implementation. Failure to implement the Management Plan risked the sustainability of project outcomes and also threatened the continued existence of the Esteros del Ibera wetland. As a result, and even though GEF resources and committed co-funding has been virtually all disbursed, the UNDP-Argentina outlined key activities to address this conflict prior to the final project closure to enable a more complete evaluation of the progress made towards achieving the objectives. This included a policy dialogue to ensure the commitment by the governmental authorities to conservation of the Esteros, and support for the technical and political commissions that would analyze the Management Plan of Ibera. These actions, undertaken by UNDP CO along-side the National Secretariat of Environment, the Provincial Ministry of Production and the Local NGO Fundacion Ibera, appear to have been successful.

- The main activities were finalized in the last months of 2006, and the Final Evaluation was the last activity planned for 2007 prior to the financial closure of the project. Even though there was only one main activity left, the Fact that the NGO formally retreated from Corrientes Province also affected the process of implementation in a negative way. It is important to highlight that the two main reasons this activity was postponed were: the retreat of the NGO as explained in the previous paragraph, as well as a financial difference found between UNDPs and the Projects accountability. As of today, even though this difference has already been identified, there are some outstanding debts that have not been refunded to UNDPs accounts. As noted in the last PIR, it is of considerable concern that the executing NGO left the region as soon as GEF resources were disbursed.

4.4 Sustainability	Rating: Unlikely
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The sustainability of this project is rated as unlikely because of the political risks to the project's outcomes. There is a lack of commitment in the Corrientes province official sector, especially after the recent elections. Moreover, there is an opposition to restrictions of productive activities by the private sector who could influence the official sector. There is a possible impact of rising water level as consequence of Yacyreta Dam project in Parana River. There is also new infrastructure in the area developed by the public authorities that could introduce new pressures. Finally there is a negative public image of some partners of the project (e.g. the land conservation trust).

The main issue for the sustainability of the project was the premise of the approach: the expected global biodiversity benefits are unlikely to be sustained without concomitant benefits accruing to

local stakeholders. Initially, the relationship of local communities to the protected area improved due to education and awareness raising activities. Unfortunately, the controversy surrounding the Management Plan and the objections of producer groups had a negative effect on these connections. Due to the opposition of a group of stakeholders to the Management Plan, some outcomes could not be achieved, and therefore the project failed to generate benefits for local stakeholders, or at least the project failed to show local stakeholders the potential benefits from such a project.

5. Processes and factors affecting attainment of project outcomes

5.1 Co-financing. To what extent was the reported co-financing essential to the achievement of GEF objectives? If there was a difference in the level of expected co-financing and actual co-financing, then what were the reasons for it? Did the extent of materialization of co-financing affect project's outcomes and/or sustainability? If so, in what ways and through what causal linkages?

Some co-financing problems were raised in the MTR and in the TE. The Project Document indicates a co-financing commitment by the Conservation Land Trust of nearly \$8.4 million to be used for the purchase of existing private land in the reserve. According to the MTR, this proposition caused many problems. Additionally, the TE notes that the "Letter of Co-financing" was signed by a member of the ECOS Foundation, but later denied, thus this funding did not materialize.

5.2 Project extensions and/or delays. If there were delays in project implementation and completion, then what were the reasons for it? Did the delay affect the project's outcomes and/or sustainability? If so, in what ways and through what causal linkages?

The closing date of project was extended by a year. The Provincial authorities did not accept the Management Plan, which led to a delay in its implementation. A project extension was authorized to provide time for the changeover of Provincial authorities and their introduction to the environmental demands of the wetland. The new authorities appeared to advance on a reasonable path of analysis, acceptance and implementation of the Management Plan and its Executive Decree. This delay in the Management Plan implementation led to a delay in the Evaluation.

5.3 Country ownership. Assess the extent to which country ownership has affected project outcomes and sustainability? Describe the ways in which it affected outcomes and sustainability, highlighting the causal links:

The participation of local stakeholders was particularly important to this project. Corrientes Province is one of the poorest provinces in Argentina, and the only one with management problems severe enough to necessitate management from the national government. To ensure full cooperation and active participation of local communities, the proposed Project was designed to provide direct benefits to the residents of Corrientes, and in particular to the inhabitants of the area immediately surrounding Ibera. However, opinions among sectors were mixed, with political and local producers having highly negative opinions. The Evaluator reports that at the time of the TE, even though the project had long been closed, radio and TV programs continued to harshly criticize the project and reject the project team coordinator, the organizations that supported the project, and UNDP.

6. Assessment of project's Monitoring and Evaluation system

Ratings are assessed on a six point scale: Highly Satisfactory=no shortcomings in this M&E component; Satisfactory=minor shortcomings in this M&E component; Moderately Satisfactory=moderate shortcomings in this M&E component; Moderately Unsatisfactory=significant shortcomings in this M&E component; Unsatisfactory=major shortcomings in this M&E component; Highly Unsatisfactory=there were no project M&E systems.

Please justify ratings in the space below each box.

6.1 M&E Design at entry	Rating: Moderately Satisfactory
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M&E design at entry was not rated in the Terminal Evaluation. The only information available comes from the Project Document. The Fundacion Ecos was directly responsible to GEF, UNDP, and the Argentine National Foreign Office for financial and overall management of the project. This foundation also coordinated the conservation and management committee that was to meet on a monthly basis to take management decisions and provide for Monitoring and evaluation of the project activities. Two workshops were to be convened each year to bring in all participants for evaluation of the ongoing work. Finally some external evaluation missions by UNDP experts should have taken place at the mid-term and end of the project.

This M&E plan seems adequate for this project. However, no funds were specifically budgeted for the M&E activities, and very little details on how the M&E activities would be implemented are described in the PD, the M&E activities were very vague. In light of these short commings, the M&E Design at Entry is rated as Moderately Satisfactory.

6.2 M&E Implementation	Rating: Unable to Assess
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The TE has very few information about the M&E implementation. It seems that this part of the report stayed at a draft stage. The Terminal Evaluator only noted:

- A lack of final report
- A lack of literature using the projects' products
- A lack of digital files.

7. Assessment of project implementation and execution

Quality of Implementation includes the quality of project design, as well as the quality of supervision and assistance provided by implementing agency(s) to execution agencies throughout project implementation. Quality of Execution covers the effectiveness of the executing agency(s) in performing its roles and responsibilities. In both instances, the focus is upon factors that are largely within the control of the respective implementing and executing agency(s). A six point rating scale is used (Highly Satisfactory to Highly Unsatisfactory), or Unable to Assess.

Please justify ratings in the space below each box.

7.1 Quality of Project Implementation	Rating: Moderately Satisfactory
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The quality of project implementation is rated moderately satisfactory for the following reasons:

- good quality and timeliness of inputs from UNDP-Buenos Aires
- good role of some key NGOs (mainly FVSA).

However, according to the TE, there was no adequate and/or sufficient coordination with the national government (ministry of Environment and Sustainable development), there was a complex relationship with EBY and difficulties with the permanent institutional and legal/provincial regulatory framework.

The project design included the budget for each activity and the indicators to be measured. However, the implementing agency failed to take into account the high risk of local stakeholders not participating in the project. The PD describes risks but those are mostly emphasized on the environmental risks. The institutional risks were described as “awareness and consciousness rising for public and political support of the area are a key component of the project and will ensure not only local support but also regional and national support to the area. Already burgeoning public enthusiasm for the area is demonstrated by the increase in visitors to the Ibera, which thus far has been limited only by the scare facilities and lack of adequate access roads.” Therefore the main shortcoming of the project design is that the risk of local stakeholders not supporting the project has not been assessed and expected.

Another shortcoming was the choice of the Executing Agency. The TE wonders if the ECOS Foundation was the right choice as Executing Agency. The executing agency of the project did not belong to the province or region and this aroused greater resistance from local stakeholders.

7.2 Quality of Project Execution	Rating: Moderately Satisfactory
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Most of the outcomes have been achieved, therefore the execution of the project has had positive results. However, the following shortcomings only allow for a Moderately Satisfactory rating.

Extraneous circumstances, which originate in the institutionalization of the Park and Reserve, created a politically difficult situation with the authorities and some stakeholders. The execution approach failed to take into account, and in some respects underestimated, the complexities related to the socio-political context of the province of Corrientes.

The executing agency of the project did not belong to the province or region, which aroused greater resistance. The fact that the foreign Conservation Land Trust was to pay for the most controversial and contentious initiatives of the project-the purchase of private lands- was a source of tension. Adding to this tension, the executing NGO left the region as soon as GEF resources were disbursed, which affected the process of execution in a negative way. There were also a financial difference found between UNDPs and the Projects accountability. According to the last PIR, "as of today, even though this difference has already been identified, there are some outstanding debts that have not been refunded to UNDPs accounts". Finally, the approach for the development of the Management Plan, a key product of the project, was more focused on the technical aspects than on participation in the construction process.

8. Lessons and recommendations

8.1 Briefly describe the key lessons, good practices, or approaches mentioned in the terminal evaluation report that could have application for other GEF projects.

No lesson is described in the Terminal Evaluation. Three main lessons are given in the last PIR:

- (1) When designing institutional legislation and regulations potentially affecting local producers and landholders, always initiate consultations where a potential economic bias exists. Also, work as closely as possible with government authorities and hire local technical and scientific personnel.
- (2) Local stakeholders and affected parties must be included from the very inception and startup of the project, and must have active participation.
- (3) Maximum care should be taken in reevaluating limits and size of the protected area in order to avoid needlessly affecting areas that have no biodiversity value.

8.2 Briefly describe the recommendations given in the terminal evaluation.

No recommendations are given in the TE, but several are given in the last PIR:

- (1) Project activities should concentrate efforts on Management Plan and educational activities and set aside poaching and invasive infrastructure controls and claims.

- (2) Management Plan elaboration should broaden its operation base becoming less individualistic thereby involving a broader technical and stakeholder base. Workshops in response were held in all the communities plus at key government institutions.
- (3) Studies should be carried out to determine whether the increase in wild animal population could be utilized on an industrial base.
- (4) A digital and real library including imagery should be installed including all the technical, educational and scientific outputs of the project. This is gradually being carried out with Fundacion Ibera.
- (5) A present day in depth evaluation of the Park and Reserve operation should be carried out with active participation of the staff.
- (6) The Management Committee should be strengthened and institutionalized. Due to negative feedback from certain key elements in the Provincial Government, especially the acting President of the Committee this could not take place.
- (7) A conservation project of this size should involve a longer execution period such as 5/7 years and funding matching these needs. This is the reason it has been so necessary to comply with the demands of lengthening the project from original termination date.
- (8) The project should continue with its very successful Ecos Escuelas programme involving 11 rural schools and 1500 students in the communities surrounding the wetland. The Ministry of Education of Corrientes offered to fund a new program but there was no remaining infrastructure to execute it.
- (9) Recommendations were also made to continue promoting ecotourism, including the incorporation of Ibera as a World Heritage Site, and different workshops aimed at informing and debating the Management Plan in different venues, and audiences.

9. Quality of the Terminal Evaluation Report

A six point rating scale is used for each sub-criteria and overall rating of the terminal evaluation report (Highly Satisfactory to Highly Unsatisfactory)

To what extent does the report contain an assessment of relevant outcomes and impacts of the project and the achievement of the objectives?	Outcomes and impacts are well described. However, the report does not include clear sections on effectiveness, efficiency and relevance.	MS
To what extent is the report internally consistent, the evidence presented complete and convincing, and ratings well substantiated?	The report is consistent. However it focuses on the problems among stakeholders, and very little on what the project achieved. There were no overall ratings for any of the categories.	U
To what extent does the report properly assess project sustainability and/or project exit strategy?	Project sustainability is well assessed, and the exit strategy is also described. The risks are mentioned and well explained with convincing evidence.	S
To what extent are the lessons learned supported by the evidence presented and are they comprehensive?	No lessons learned are described in this evaluation.	HU
Does the report include the actual project costs (total and per activity) and actual co-financing used?	This TE does not include anything about project costs, or actual used financing.	HU
Assess the quality of the report's evaluation of project M&E systems:	The M&E system is still a draft section, the Evaluator only provided very short bullet points with no explanations or evidence.	U
Overall TE Rating	The TE does not adequately cover several areas. Several categories should be developed further.	MU

TE rating = $(0.3*(4+2)) + (0.1*(6+1+1+2)) = 2.8 = \text{MU}$

10. Note any additional sources of information used in the preparation of the terminal evaluation report (excluding PIRs, TEs, and PADs).