

GEF EO Terminal Evaluation Review Form for OPS4

1. PROJECT DATA				
			Review date:	October 24, 2008
GEF Project ID:	1694		at endorsement (Million US\$)	at completion (Million US\$)
IA/EA Project ID:	GF/2010-03-03; GF/2711-03-4609	GEF financing:	\$0.775	\$0.775
Project Name:	Development of the Econet for Long-term Conservation of Biodiversity in the Central Asia Ecoregions	IA/EA own:	\$0.0	\$0.0
Country:	Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan	Government:	\$1.2	\$6.5
		Other*:	\$0.2	\$0.3
		Total Cofinancing:	\$1.4	\$6.8
Operational Program:	OP 1, OP 4	Total Project Cost:	\$2.16	\$7.6
IA:	UNEP	Dates		
Partners involved:		Effectiveness/ Prodoc Signature (i.e. date project began):		April 1, 2003
		Closing Date	Proposed: April 1, 2006	Actual: June 30, 2006
Prepared by:	Reviewed by:	Duration between effectiveness date and original closing (in months): 36	Duration between effectiveness date and actual closing (in months): 39	Difference between original and actual closing (in months): 3
Josh Brann	Neeraj Negi			
Author of TE:		TE completion date:	TE submission date to GEF EO:	Difference between TE completion and submission date (in months): 10 months
Igor Lysenko		November 2007	September 2008	

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

2. SUMMARY OF PROJECT RATINGS AND KEY FINDINGS

Please refer to document GEF Office of Evaluation Guidelines for terminal evaluation reviews for further definitions of the ratings.

Performance Dimension	Last PIR	IA Terminal Evaluation	IA Evaluation Office evaluations or reviews	GEF EO
2.1a Project outcomes	HS	MS	MS	MS
2.1b Sustainability of Outcomes	N/A	MU	MU	MU
2.1c Monitoring and evaluation	N/S	MS	MS	MS
2.1d Quality of implementation and Execution	N/A	N/A	N/A	S
2.1e Quality of the evaluation report	N/A	N/A	S	S

2.2 Should the terminal evaluation report for this project be considered a good practice? Why?

Yes. This terminal evaluation is clear, authoritative, comprehensive, and realistic. The TE extensively covers the level of achievement of the project under each of the components. Ratings are well-substantiated and justified based on the evidence presented. The evaluator was thorough and covered the relevant evaluation parameters. The evidence is well-balanced. The TE is also, for the most part, well-written.

2.3 Are there any evaluation findings that require follow-up, such as corruption, reallocation of GEF funds, mismanagement, etc.?

None noted.

3. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

3.1 Project Objectives

a. What were the Global Environmental Objectives of the project? Were there any changes during implementation?

According to the MSP brief, v7, the main objectives of the project are “1. To elaborate the scheme of econet development, based on a regionally unified and integrated information management system (GIS), combining existing data on biodiversity and natural resource (at the regional scale), existing system of protected areas, economic development (traditional, recent, planned and probable alternatives), together with newly obtained data through limited targeted research to fill key gaps.

2. To elaborate and achieve agreement for a regional “Econet” development plan implementation.

3. To establish the necessary legal, institutional, technical and financial capacities and mechanisms within the region to allow the effective joint implementation of the Econet plan.”

b. What were the Development Objectives of the project? Were there any changes during implementation? (describe and insert tick in appropriate box below, if yes at what level was the change approved (GEFSEC, IA or EA)?)

No objectives specified other than as described in section 3.1.a.

Overall Environmental Objectives	Project Development Objectives	Project Components	Any other (specify)
			Some shift of project resources from originally planned activities to alternative activities.

If yes, tick applicable reasons for the change

Original objectives not sufficiently articulated	Exogenous conditions changed, causing a change in objectives	Project was restructured because original objectives were over ambitious	Project was restructured because of lack of progress	Any other (specify)
				Some shift in resources apparently took place because it was determined that some originally planned activities were infeasible, and thus the project looked to support alternative productive activities. This was apparently not fully successful, as

				<p>the TE considers some of these alternative funding choices to have been irrelevant and ineffective.</p> <p>According to the TE, “Resources (\$91,132 or 24% of sub-contracts planned, budget lines 2201-2219) were moved from activities planned for Objective 1 (Biodiversity database/GIS), mainly to cater for multiple additional meetings, promotional events and Ecological Codex of Kyrgyzstan, that are referred to in a final budget as line 3300 (Meetings/conferences) and new budget lines 2224-2230. Other activities not initially budgeted (e.g. “Cosmoeconet”) have also consumed a part of the budget for Objective 1 and resulted in an actual reduction of GEF-funded support to planned activities 1.1-1.4 by about \$117,000 or 30% of the originally planned budget.”</p>
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4. GEF EVALUATION OFFICE ASSESSMENT OF OUTCOMES AND SUSTAINABILITY

4.1.1 Outcomes (Relevance can receive either a satisfactory rating or a unsatisfactory rating. For effectiveness and cost efficiency a six point scale 6= HS to 1 = HU will be used)

a. Relevance (of outcomes to focal areas/operational program strategies and country priorities) Rating: S

The project objectives appear to have been relevant to the national level priorities and international obligations of the countries involved. The TE does not explicitly frame the project objectives in the context of specific country priorities and programs. According to the TE, “The project was relevant at the national level for the sustainable development and biodiversity protection objectives of each country involved. The concept of ecological networks and Econet Elements was widely promoted in Central Asia and directly incorporated into the legislation of three CA countries.

The project was also relevant to the GEF’s operational programs and strategic priorities. The scope of the project falls within the biodiversity focal area of the GEF, and in particular under OP 1 (dryland ecosystems) and OP 4 (mountain ecosystems).

Annex 3 of the project document also includes a brief analysis of project linkages to national priorities – primarily related to biodiversity conservation and protected areas.

A.1. What is the relevance of the project outcomes/results to:

(i) the national sustainable development agenda and development needs and challenges?

<p>The project document contains an annex (Annex 3) which outlines the project relevance to national sustainable development priorities, needs and challenges in each of the involved countries. This is primarily related to objectives for biodiversity conservation through protected areas in each of the countries.</p>	
<p>(ii) the national environmental framework, agenda and priorities?</p>	
<p>The project document contains an annex (Annex 3) which outlines the project relevance to the national environmental framework, agenda and priorities in each of the involved countries. This is primarily related to objectives for biodiversity conservation through protected areas in each of the countries.</p>	
<p>(iii) the achievement of the GEF strategies and mandate?</p>	
<p>The project supported GEF objectives in the Biodiversity focal area, including activities under OP1 (dryland ecosystems) and OP4 (mountain ecosystems). The project supported the GEF's strategic priorities on protected areas – catalyzing the sustainability of protected area systems.</p>	
<p>(iv) the implementation of the global conventions the GEF supports (countries obligations and responsibilities towards the convention as well as the achievement of the conventions objectives)</p>	
<p>The ECONET project supported the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the countries' obligations under the CBD. In particular, the project supported the Protected Areas program of work. The project was also relevant to and supported the objectives of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification.</p>	
<p>A2. Did the project promote of International (Regional and / or Global) Cooperation and Partnership¹</p>	
<p>The project worked with the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development, and made strong progress in ingrainning the ECONET concept into this regional body. Furthermore, according to the TE, the project concepts “are incorporated into the strategically important Framework Convention on Environmental Protection for Sustainable Development in Central Asia that ensures consequent assimilation of Econet into regional agreements and the Regional Environmental Action Plan in particular.”</p>	
<p>b. Effectiveness</p>	<p>Rating: MS</p>
<p>The project made significant and notable achievements in some areas. Some key project outcomes were not realized however, partially due to the project document being too ambitious in some areas.</p> <p>The TE provides an excellent summary of project achievements and shortcomings that is well-substantiated by evidence presented in the evaluation report: “The project intervention resulted in a substantial change in national and regional conservation policies and decision-making. It has facilitated the move away from the practice of setting aside isolated protected areas (“islands in the ocean”) towards the adoption of a well-defined concept of an interlinked ecological network based on biodiversity values, conservation priorities and practical measures. This approach is more likely to ensure long-term sustainability and preservation of biodiversity in the region.</p> <p>Political impact, a successful promotional campaign and participatory approaches were the strongest components of the project. However, the project objectives were overambitious and could not be fully achieved within the timeframe and resources of an MSP. Implementation of technical tasks suffered because of insufficient investment in capacity and training, and because redistribution of funds between project tasks has weakened the development of biodiversity information system. Some key outputs were not delivered. Based on the evidence gathered throughout this evaluation, the project is rated as moderately satisfactory.”</p> <p>As described by the TE, “There was a general consensus among the project executants, experts and officials interviewed that the project intervention resulted in a substantial change in national and regional conservation policies and decision-making. ECONET demonstrated that the traditional practice of establishing and preservation of isolated protected areas (“islands in the ocean”) had become obsolete. The project introduced and widely promoted the concept of the interlinked regional ecological network elaborated and being constantly enhanced through scientific analysis identifying biodiversity values, conservation priorities and practical measures ensuring long-term sustainability of ecosystems and maintenance of species diversity in the region. ECONET initiated important political decisions and catalysed first steps towards accommodation of ecological networks and their elements in the legislative frameworks of</p>	

¹ Please consider for regional and global project only

Central Asian states.”

The first objective of the project was to develop a regional unified and integrated biodiversity and natural resource information management system (GIS based) on extensive existing data together with limited research necessary to fill key gaps. According to the TE, “In the most general terms, objective 1 was partially achieved and, in particular, GIS and capacity developed to the level that allowed timely delivery of a variety of outputs.” The TE notes however that the objective was hampered by insufficient co-financing, and poor planning. According to the TE, “The team of dedicated experts did their best to develop and information management system and managed to overcome some consequences of imperfect planning, unclear directives and chronic underfunding of the activities planned.”

The second objective of the project was “To elaborate and achieve agreement for a regional “Econet” development plan, on the basis of in-depth analysis of the current PA systems, key biodiversity protection needs, regional ecology, natural resource use, and economic development context in the region.” To achieve this objective the project worked with the Interstate Commission for Sustainable Development (ISDC). This is an official body ascribed to by the Central Asian states. The overall indicator for the second objective was for a regional ECONET plan to be approved by the ISDC. This objective was achieved, although over a slightly longer time frame than anticipated. According to the TE, “Although the ECONET plan was not officially endorsed by ISDC by the date specified and the process took longer, there is no doubt that this ambitious target was gradually achieved.” Furthermore, “ISDC decision No 5 of 02.03.2006 gave a preliminary endorsement of the Econet scheme and recommended the development of a full-size project on Econet implementation. 23.11.2006 ISDC decision No 7 officially endorsed Econet scheme and recommended using it as a basis for national PAs system development and land use planning. Gaining this level of official support from an important international body responsible for strengthening and harmonising CA countries’ efforts in sustainable development of the region was crucial for ensuring long-lasting political impact of the project.”

The third objective of the project was “To establish the necessary legal, institutional, technical and financial capacities and mechanisms within the region to allow the effective joint implementation of the Econet plan.” Based on information provided in the TE, as well as the TE’s assessment, the third objective was also partially achieved. According to the TE, “The Econet concept is currently officially endorsed through direct references to ecological network elements in national legislation in three CA countries. Both methodological aspects and the Econet scheme were included in the national Governmental programme of Kazakhstan on PA development for 2005-2008, the National programme to Combat Desertification of Uzbekistan, and the Governmental programme on PAs development of Tajikistan for 2005-2015.” However, “The project was less successful in identifying financial mechanisms to support Econet implementation. The Strategy for Econet Funding Development incorporated into ECONET FR goes no further than providing a short review of previously known potential sources of support for conservation activities, references to names of some major international donors and a two-page brief on economic situation in CA countries.” This portion of the project also supported regional capacity building through training and professional exchanges, although there were some weaknesses in how these were implemented. The TE also notes that “Efficient external communication is one of the strongest components of this project.” Overall, there were a number of important achievements in this area, but this portion of the project was also overambitious, and not all expected outputs were in place by the end of the project.

Paragraphs 190 and 191 of the TE include additional highlighted achievements and shortcomings of the project.

c. Efficiency (cost-effectiveness)

Rating: S

On the whole the project was cost-effective, in large part because it was able to leverage more extensive co-financing than was initially planned, especially in-kind co-financing. The project fell short of fully achieving all objectives, but this was mostly due to the original objectives being highly ambitious. Based on information in the TE, the project management structure appears to have been efficient, effective, and well-structured. There were no significant delays that negatively affected project performance, and the project outputs produced (with minor exceptions) were commensurate with the level of effort, resources, and inputs.

Overall the project efficiency warrants a satisfactory rating. There were some shortcomings, as described below, but these are not sufficient to reduce the project rating to marginally satisfactory. The shortcomings are more specifically related to project effectiveness, and are accounted for in the marginally satisfactory rating for project effectiveness.

Shortcomings: One area in particular where the project could have increased its efficiency is through an improved communication network between project participants/executers. In addition, according to the TE, “A number of separate activities were not entirely efficient; e.g. “A special education tool – simulation game Econet ABC” was reported as an output but was, in fact, developed independently, only a few copies of the leaflet/CD-ROM were used during training and therefore it would be more appropriate to treat it as an input. Some undertakings discussed above (“Cosmoconet”, Ecological Codex of Kyrgyzstan, etc) did not represent a necessary or at least reasonably justified

investment. Development of parallel websites mainly with identical content, as well as several versions of a legal database lead to duplication of efforts and resource dispersal.”

Another area of shortcoming was in component 1, relating to development of the Geographic Information Systems. On the whole the project received much more in-kind financing than originally anticipated, however, this additional support was not in areas related to component 1.

d. To what extent did the project result in trade offs between environment and development priorities / issues (not to be rated)

There was a need to balance conservation priorities with economic development priorities in the implementation of the ECONET concept. As described by the TE, this was accomplished through a participatory process that allowed the goals of stakeholders with conflicting agendas to be met. According to the projects, “Stakeholders with different and often conflicting agendas contributed towards improving the Econet scheme. In particular, extractive industry representatives highlighted a number of areas where economic considerations would certainly dominate any decision-making process. Following this advice, several locations with valuable mineral deposits were excluded from the draft and conservationists came up with alternative suggestions for a final scheme of Econet. The participatory approach has helped to establish positive image of the ECONET in the region and allowed for a reduction in potential complications at the stage of Econet implementation.”

4.1.2 Results / Impacts² (Describe Impacts) (please fill in annex 1 – results scoresheet and annex 2 – focal area impacts (against GEF Strategic Priority indicators, where appropriate and possible)

4.2 Likelihood of sustainability. Using the following sustainability criteria, include an assessment of risks to sustainability of project outcomes and impacts based on the information presented in the TE. Use a four point scale (4= Likely (no or negligible risk); 3= Moderately Likely (low risk); 2= Moderately Unlikely (substantial risks) to 1= Unlikely (High risk)). The ratings should be given taking into account both the probability of a risk materializing and the anticipated magnitude of its effect on the continuance of project benefits.

a. Financial resources	Rating: MU
<p>According to the TE, “Full implementation of the Econet within a reasonable for planning period, e.g. within a decade, would require a funding increase of several times compared to the budgets currently allocated to conservation agencies... It would be unrealistic to expect national conservation agencies to bear the full cost of Econet implementation in nearest future. GEF assistance will be essential.” Furthermore, “It is obvious that additional resources are required to maintain the momentum created by the ECONET and to ensure a speedy implementation of the scheme developed... Econet implementation in CA will depend greatly on the countries’ ability to access additional resources through international financial mechanisms, in particular GEF, and from other donors, including WWF.”</p> <p>The Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development has expressed support for the development of a proposal for a full-sized GEF project to implement the ECONET concept in the region.</p> <p>Financial resources to sustain the regional data management system (the GIS) have not been secured.</p>	
b. Socio-economic / political	Rating: ML
<p>As summarized by the TE, “National policies of Central Asian countries, the Regional Environmental Action Plan and the Framework Convention on Environmental Protection for Sustainable Development in Central Asia, set up a reliable framework for sustainable development, that considers environmental and conservation issues. Still, development of a comprehensive legislative framework and new land management approaches in countries with economies in transition is an ongoing, unpredictable and highly competitive process influenced by many stakeholders.”</p>	
c. Institutional framework and governance	Rating: ML
<p>The level of support achieved under the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development sets a strong foundation</p>	

² Please consider direct and indirect global environmental results; any unexpected results; local development benefits (including results relevant to communities, gender issues, indigenous peoples, NGOs and CBOs)

for the sustainability of the institutional framework. As previously highlighted, according to the TE, “ISDC decision No 5 of 02.03.2006 that gave a preliminary endorsement of the Econet scheme and recommended the development of a full-size project on Econet implementation. 23.11.2006 ISDC decision No 7 officially endorsed Econet scheme and recommended using it as a basis for national PAs system development and land use planning. Gaining this level of official support from an important international body responsible for strengthening and harmonising CA countries’ efforts in sustainable development of the region was crucial for ensuring long-lasting political impact of the project.”

According to the TE, “positive changes in the political environment, including de-facto new environmental targets on setting up the Econet and public support of ecological networks are among the sustainable long-lasting outcomes of the project.”

The TE does point out multiple potential risks in this area though: “Currently a possibility to recall relevant collective knowledge and information resources depends greatly on the availability and good will of regional coordinators and several key experts, both from CA countries and WWF RPO. It is apparent that the reliance upon individual recall and informal networks is not an optimal way for ensuring continuity of a substantial process.” Further, “The capacity of many national scientific institutions dealing with biodiversity and conservation has deteriorated considerably in recent years due to insufficient funding and the predominantly market-oriented restructuring of national institutional frameworks in the transition economy countries of Central Asia.”

d. Environmental

Rating: L

There are no specific environmental risks to project outcomes. There are multiple, general regional environmental trends, such as the drying of the Aral Sea, climate change, and desertification that have a negative influence on environmental sustainability.

e. Technological

Rating: MU

The sustainability of the GIS system is not secured. As described by the TE, “Mechanisms for sustainable financing and maintenance of the information system were not identified; sustainability of this important project outcome will depend upon further efforts of the executing agency and national governments.”

According to the TE, “Both sustainability of the ECONET information system and its usefulness for monitoring Econet implementation is an issue of major concern. Because of the omissions in the information component implementation noted above, as well as the lack of continuation of ECONET GIS update within the final year of the project implementation and after it completion.”

4.3 Catalytic role³

a. INCENTIVES: To what extent have the project activities provide incentives (socio-economic / market based) to catalyze changes in stakeholders

This was not a significant aspect of the project at this stage. The project was mainly focused on developing and achieving support for the Econet concept, but had little on the ground implementation. If there is a follow-on project to implement the Econet in Central Asia there will likely need to be some incentive mechanisms employed to achieve success.

Regarding private sector involvement, the TE states, “There is no evidence of project interaction with the private sector; it seems that at the current stage of economic transformation in CA countries, there were insufficient incentives for private sector involvement in a broad-scale project. Potential involvement of private sector with maintenance of Econet elements was indicated within the ECONET Strategy document.”

b. INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE: To what extent have the project activities changed institutional behaviors

As described by the TE, “Considering the extent of operational area of the project, the ambitious policy-oriented goal and diversity of legal and socio-economic systems in the region, the level of political impact achieved should be treated

³ Please review the ‘Catalytic Role of GEF: How is it measured and evaluated – A conceptual framework’ prior to addressing this section.

as a great success.”

c. POLICY CHANGE: To what extent have project activities led to policy changes (and implementation of policy)?

According to the TE, “There was a general consensus among the project executives, experts and officials interviewed that the project intervention resulted in a substantial change in national and regional conservation policies and decision-making. ECONET demonstrated that the traditional practice of establishing and preservation of isolated protected areas (“islands in the ocean”) had become obsolete. The project introduced and widely promoted the concept of the interlinked regional ecological network elaborated and being constantly enhanced through scientific analysis identifying biodiversity values, conservation priorities and practical measures ensuring long-term sustainability of ecosystems and maintenance of species diversity in the region. ECONET initiated important political decisions and catalysed first steps towards accommodation of ecological networks and their elements in the legislative frameworks of Central Asian states.”

As described by the TE, “Considering the extent of operational area of the project, the ambitious policy-oriented goal and diversity of legal and socio-economic systems in the region, the level of political impact achieved should be treated as a great success.”

d. CATALYTIC FINANCING: To what extent did the project led to sustained follow-on financing from Government and / or other donors? (this is different than co-financing)

According to the TE, “Within the project timeframe WWF initiated fundraising activities ranging from advice provided to national partners to preparation of concrete project proposals. Funding was generated for a number of projects on particular EE implementation within the timeframe of the project or soon after ECONET was finalised. Similarly, some projects that directly referred to Econet were funded in the region and were implemented by other agencies, e.g. MNPT and UNDP project “Improvement of Protected Areas System in Turkmenistan (ECONET).”

In addition, there has been official support for the development of a follow-on full-sized project for implementation of the ECONET concept that has been developed and achieved political buy-in.

e. PROJECT CHAMPIONS: To what extent have changes (listed above) been catalyzed by particular individuals or institutions (without which the project would not have achieved results)?

According to information presented in the TE, some aspects of the project specifically benefited from the particular expertise and dedication of specific individuals. For example, with regard to the project activities on public awareness, the TE notes, “The highly efficient promotional campaign ensured a gradual increase of official support for the ECONET and the transformation of national ministers, ISDC members and many other decision-makers into strong supporters of the Econet concept. To a large extent the project owes this level of impact to the professional expertise of the Project Coordinator, who is a well-known scientist and conservationist with over 30 years experience of work in the region.”

4.4 Assessment of processes and factors affecting attainment of project outcomes and sustainability.

a. Co-financing. To what extent was the reported cofinancing (or proposed cofinancing) essential to 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 it did, then in what ways and through what causal linkages?

On the whole, the project received significantly more co-financing than was originally anticipated. Despite this unanticipated increase in available resources, the project was not able to fully achieve its expected outputs under all project components. The additional in-kind co-financing received supported protected area development, and not the technical aspects of production of Component 1 (the Geographic Information System), which was the main area of underachievement (as discussed below). Underachievement seems to have been due to technical capacity limitations and shifting of budget resources from this project component to other activities.

Based on information presented in Annex II of the TE, the expected co-financing anticipated at project approval was \$1.385 million. By the end of the project, \$6.76 million in co-financing had been contributed. The majority of these resources (\$6.44 million) are in-kind financing, presumably contributed by the respective government institutions and the executing agency. The TE states that this co-financing breaks down as “both co-funding (\$1,950,000) and associated funding (\$4,450,000 for PAs development). According to the TE, WWF cash co-financing reached

230% of the levels originally planned. The TE draws the figures on co-financing from the project's final report, and notes that the methodology for calculating the in-kind co-financing is not clearly documented or rationalized.

Regarding Component 1 of the project, to develop a regional GIS system, according to the TE, "There is no evidence that the expected \$710,000 governmental co-funding for this objective materialized. As a result, the overall impact of this element of the project was sub-optimal; some of the planned outputs were delayed or not produced; the GIS database accumulated a number of discrepancies that reduced its suitability for practical applications." However, the TE proposes a possible explanation for this: "It is likely that the executing agency has interpreted the supply of data and other invaluable scientific material as cash co-finance instead of recording this as in-kind contribution. If this is the case, it is understandable that the executing agency had problems with accounting of intellectual and information resource costs and why it has applied a little bit artificial but acceptable in accordance with GEF criteria way for planning of and reporting on countries' co-financing through encountering ongoing funding of PAs maintenance and similar baseline activities funded by national conservation agencies."

b. 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 it did, then in what ways and through what causal linkages?

According to the TE, the project had a 3 month extension, which was approved by UNEP. This short delay/extension does not appear to have affected project implementation. As described by the TE, "Extension of the project by three months was an appropriate managerial solution in response to actual political circumstances in the region. By itself, this did not have a negative impact on overall project performance."

According to the TE, the delay was due to time spent establishing a multi-national and multi-disciplinary team and elaboration of financial interactions suitable for the national legal and banking systems.

c. 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 countries involved exhibited strong ownership by fully ascribing to the ECONET concept in regulatory and policy frameworks. According to the TE, "Governments of all Central Asian countries thoroughly analysed, commented on and officially endorse the main output of the project – the scheme of Econet." Through the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development, the countries adopted ECONET concept. In addition, in three countries the ECONET concept was integrated into national environmental protection policies. The achievements in this area are admirable, as policy development and adoption normally takes a longer amount of time.

Another indication of ownership is the in-kind co-financing that was received above and beyond what was anticipated at project appraisal.

One shortcoming in this area however, is that no country or government institution has taken ownership of the regional environmental information system (the GIS), and thus, as described by the TE, this project achievement "is dependent on the ability of a small team to identify and secure external support from non-governmental sources."

4.5 Assessment of the project's monitoring and evaluation system based on the information in the TE

a. M&E design at Entry **Rating (six point scale): MU**

The M&E plan/system was not well-designed and had multiple shortcomings.

In some areas, the identified indicators were insufficient. As described by the TE, referring to indicators for project objective 1, "Both this generic indicator and indicators applied in project Logical Framework (LF) for activities and outputs of this component lacked clarity, were not measurable and did not satisfy GEF criteria for monitoring indicators, that are expected to be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Realistic and Trackable (SMART)."

Indicators for other project components were also not appropriate.

The project M&E plan does not mention a mid-term review, which is another important shortcoming.

There was inconsistency in reporting formats because formats were not specified by the implementing agency in the early stages of the project.

According to the TE, "The LogFrame has been the most structured document that allowed some consistency in monitoring of project progress throughout its lifetime."

b. M&E plan Implementation	Rating (six point scale): MS
<p>Financial reporting was conducted on the expected time schedule.</p> <p>According to the TE, “Well-structured formats for reporting and ongoing M&E of project activities, progress and risk assessment was introduced by UNEP about half-way through project implementation. This allowed a more logical link between the new reporting format (PIR) and the project LF structure making easier to monitor progress in the reports.”</p> <p>The TE notes that translation of M&E and GEF terminology from English to other languages (in this case Russian) presented important challenges to project reporting and implementation of M&E plans: “These seemingly insignificant, but multiple, logical and linguistic uncertainties complicate communication between project executants as well as communication between the executing and implementing agencies. As a result, the executing agency had to rely upon various internal formats and procedures for operational M&E. Re-interpretation of this reporting into formats applied by UNEP and GEF was quite time-consuming and burdensome.”</p> <p>The TE notes that the project implementation ratings were slightly optimistic, and in some instances inconsistent. The TE remarks that this was understandable given the limited time available for project managers to do a full assessment of project achievements and shortcomings.</p> <p>In addition, “Omission of a plan and budget for mid-term independent evaluation mentioned in the project LogFrame did not allow timely identification of a number of problems that still remain unresolved and may affect the sustainability of project outcomes.”</p> <p>As noted by the TE, “ The lack of a mid-term evaluation is an apparent omission in the implementation of the project.”</p> <p>According to the TE, the executing agency had a low-level of commitment to a formalized M&E system, and the project team assumed that the responsibility for M&E rested entirely with UNEP and external evaluators. Consequently, the project team did not see M&E as an activity that might require any specific planning, budget or actions beyond provision of the information in accordance with the specified reporting forms and arranging an international audit.</p>	
<p>b.1 Was sufficient funding provided for M&E in the budget included in the project document?</p> <p>There were some funding provisions for terminal evaluation translation and a final international audit, but there were not sufficient resources for project monitoring during implementation.</p>	
<p>b.2a Was sufficient and timely funding provided for M&E during project implementation?</p> <p>According to the TE, the cost of actual M&E activities was covered by the budget for project coordination and administration.</p>	
<p>b.2b To what extent did the project monitoring system provided real time feed back? Was the information that was provided used effectively? What factors affected the use of information provided by the project monitoring system?</p> <p>As described by the TE, “Project implementation would not have been possible without constant monitoring of changing situations in all five countries. It also required a high degree of adaptive management both from the Project Coordinator and national coordinators as well as from the Implementing Agency. All emerging complications were identified in time and handled successfully. The Implementing Agency was regularly updated on arising issues. On each occasion the necessary amendments or rescheduling of activities, including a 3-months extension of the project, were handled in-line with project management procedures.”</p> <p>At the same time, the formal M&E system was not as useful as it might have been due to a relative lack of understanding of an appreciation for the importance and utility of internal monitoring mechanisms. According to the TE, “Many interviewed experts, task leaders and contributors did not acknowledge the importance of these formalised criteria in organising continuous monitoring for improving project performance by informing management decisions.”</p> <p>Furthermore, “Comprehensive financial reporting formats allowed proper financial monitoring for the project as a whole but were not sufficient for timely identification of uneven utilisation of funds among various project tasks and activities. This resulted in reduced completeness and quality of outputs relevant to Objective 1 and insufficiently justified redistribution of resources to other activities closer to project completion.”</p>	

b.3 Can the project M&E system (or an aspect of the project M&E system) be considered a good practice? If so, explain why.

No. There were multiple shortcomings in the M&E project design, including inappropriate indicators and a lack of planned mid-term review. In addition, the implementation of the M&E system received insufficient attention from the project implementation team.

4.6 Assessment of Quality of Implementation and Execution

a. Overall Quality of Implementation and Execution (on a six point scale): S

b. Overall Quality of Implementation – for IA (on a six point scale): S

Briefly describe and assess performance on issues such as quality of the project design, focus on results, adequacy of supervision inputs and processes, quality of risk management, candor and realism in supervision reporting, and suitability of the chosen executing agencies for project execution.

The project design was far too ambitious for the available time and resources, and the TE notes multiple examples where the project objectives were beyond the possible reach of the project. The TE states, “There were some weaknesses in project planning that included: insufficient utilization of broader international expertise, underestimation of operational complexities at a multi-national level (in particular with respect to information technology and integration of national thematic studies into a uniform system) and stereotypical replication of solutions without re-evaluation of the suitability of the method at a different scale (e.g. “Cosmoconet” model).”

Regarding the first project objective to develop a GIS system, the TE states, “Funding from the GEF was not entirely sufficient for an undertaking of this scale.”

Once the project was underway, the quality of implementation was satisfactory. According to the TE, “The Implementing Agency was regularly updated on arising issues. On each occasion the necessary amendments or rescheduling of activities, including a 3 month extension of the project, were handled in-line with project management procedures.”

UNEP supervision and backstopping was supportive and responsive to the project executing agency. According to the TE, “UNEP staff, including the UNEP Task Manager and DGEF Fund Management Officer were responsive and supportive through the entire project cycle; they provided timely response and clarification to all executive agency enquiries on procedures and reporting details. According to the core project team members, UNEP staff did provide sufficient and quality support and advice to the project, specifically through substantial comments on the content of tangible output.” There were some minor shortcomings in UNEP support, mainly due to constraints on technical capacity related to GEF and Russian language capacity.

c. Quality of Execution – for Executing Agencies⁴ (rating on a 6 point scale): S

Briefly describe and assess performance on issues such as focus on results, adequacy of management inputs and processes, quality of risk management, and candor and realism in reporting by the executive agency.

The project execution was of high quality, with a dedicated and effective project staff and management structure. As described by the TE, “The ECONET project was led by a core team that included a number of WWF RPO staff (including Project Coordinator and Project Administrator), five national coordinators, National Focal Points (NFPs) representing the national conservation authority of each country and a number of thematic experts on particular components of biodiversity, legal issues, GIS and publications. The Project Coordinator maintained communication with national coordinators, who were responsible for engaging additional local staff and volunteers (almost two hundred in total) and implementing activities in their countries.

This hierarchical project management structure and regular meetings, bringing together NFPs (yearly) and national and regional thematic experts, allowed synchronisation of project implementation activities. Leadership provided by an experienced Project Coordinator ensured reasonably coherent functioning of national teams and a timely managerial response to identified problems.”

⁴ Executing Agencies for this section would mean those agencies that are executing the project in the field. For any given project this will exclude Executing Agencies that are implementing the project under expanded opportunities – for projects approved under the expanded opportunities procedure the respective executing agency will be treated as an implementing agency.

5. LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Assess the project lessons and recommendations as described in the TE

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

The TE elaborates multiple lessons, primarily targeted for the GEF and UNEP.

“The planning of strategic interventions supported by GEF will benefit from replacement of the justification for funding on the basis of an Incremental Cost analysis with a “bottleneck resolving” justification, at least for interventions targeting large and continuous geographical regions.”

“Project developers fear to disregard the real or anticipated funding criteria used by GEF leads to “a shotgun effect” through incorporating all the possible targets and approaches copied from successful funding applications in a single proposal. Project developers, especially operating in transition economy countries, shall be encouraged to thoroughly analyse the socio-economy of their region and to expose openly any peculiarities of particular operational conditions. The GEF may facilitate this by amending its proposal and reporting formats, standards and relevant guidelines.”

“International actors, including GEF and UNEP, should critically review the communication aspect of their operations with consideration of the diversity of multi-national audiences that they address, consider the need for simplification of terminology as well as making the corresponding conceptual documentation and guidelines available in main UN languages.”

“The SMART indicators approach needs to be reinforced by the GEF and implementing agencies, including UNEP, through better communication of the approach to project developers and possibly by assigning more weight to the quality of indicators, among other criteria applied for selection of projects for funding. Project proposal developers are encouraged to pay more attention to the clarity of indicators and to apply SMART indicators not only for monitoring and reporting purposes, but also at the proposal design stage - as a tool for testing the quality of the objectives design and the feasibility of project goals.”

“Wherever the specialised high-tech or scientific resources are expected to appear as a defined final or interim project output, the likelihood of their long-lasting impact should be thoroughly analysed at the development stage. Structuring, documenting and dissemination of relevant informational material should be treated (planned and budgeted) with consideration of their value, potentially going beyond their application to or relevance for a particular project.”

“The further refinement of UNEP reporting formats is needed in order to make them suitable not only for M&E at the level of implementing/executing agencies communication but also for a better structured day-to-day monitoring of project progress that would help improve project performance by better informing management decisions.”

“UNEP and its regional offices can increase sustainability of project outcomes if some type of end- or post-project analysis of opportunities for a follow up was incorporated into project management procedures and conducted with participation of UNEP Task Managers and other international experts upon the completion of the intervention.”

b. Briefly describe the recommendations given in the terminal evaluation

“Strategic interventions supported by GEF would benefit from replacement of the Incremental Cost analysis with a “bottleneck resolving” justification, at least for large-scale projects.”

“Formats, standards and GEF recommendations for project design should explicitly allow and stimulate proposal focusing on a limited and well-justified subset of directions covered by various eligibility or selection criteria.”

“It is recommended to elaborate, publish and periodically update the guideline on the main GEF principles, terminology and recommendations for project proposal compilation in the main UN languages.”

“It is recommended to reinforce the requirement for ‘SMART’ indicators in project proposals, in particular through promotion of the ‘SMART’ approach not only as an instrument to facilitate monitoring and evaluation, but also as a tool suitable for testing quality of project objectives design and the feasibility of project goals at the stage of proposal development.”

“The structure of future projects has to be analysed at the development stage in order to identify sizeable high-tech or specialised scientific components and evaluate a potential value and long-lasting impact of their expected outputs.”

“It is recommended to amend the structure of UNEP formats for project reporting, management and evaluation. In particular, to enforce consistency in numbering of activities in LF and PIR forms. It is suggested to replace lengthy Logframe tables with a set of individual sub-activity “worksheets”, that will be updated quarterly by adding (instead of editing) information on activity status, funds spent, outputs delivered and leave the space for ranking each activity implementation.”

“ It is recommended that UNEP and WWF, through consultation and joint actions with ISDC encourage national governments to identify financial and organisational solution for utilising the capacity created by the ECONET at the host institution (LGIBP) for the purpose of continuous monitoring of Econet implementation.”

“It is recommended that WWF and national governments work together to identify means to support ECONET outputs update and publication in order to ensure project’s long-lasting impact and follow up.”

“Considering that sustainable implementation of the Econet requires resources far exceeding those available from the national governments in a foreseeable future, it is recommended to UNEP and national governments support a WWF initiative endorsed by ISDC for the development of a proposal for a full-sized project for Econet implementation.”

6. QUALITY OF THE TERMINAL EVALUATION REPORT

6.1 Comments on the summary of project ratings and terminal evaluation findings based on other information sources such as GEF EO field visits, other evaluations, etc.

None.

Provide a number rating 1-6 to each criteria based on: Highly Satisfactory = 6, Satisfactory = 5, Moderately Satisfactory = 4, Moderately Unsatisfactory = 3, Unsatisfactory = 2, and Highly Unsatisfactory = 1. Please refer to document GEF Office of Evaluation Guidelines for terminal evaluations review for further definitions of the ratings. Please briefly explain each rating.

6.2 Quality of the terminal evaluation report	Ratings
a. To what extent does the report contain an assessment of relevant outcomes and impacts of the project and the achievement of the objectives?	S
b. To what extent the report is internally consistent, the evidence is complete/convincing and the IA ratings have been substantiated? Are there any major evidence gaps? The TE contains extensive and well-documented evaluative evidence. The TE discusses in detail the achievements and shortcomings under each component of the project, and internally consistent. The TE has the impression of having been written by someone with authoritative knowledge of the topics covered (in particular on GIS technology), and experience with GEF projects. For example, the TE notes that in some areas the project failed to heed lessons that had been learned in other GEF projects. Another example is the nuanced discussion of protected area categories and classifications between national and international frameworks, found in paragraph 137.	HS
c. To what extent does the report properly assess project sustainability and /or a project exit strategy?	S
d. To what extent are the lessons learned supported by the evidence presented and are they comprehensive?	S
e. Does the report include the actual project costs (total and per activity) and actual co-financing used? The TE includes a table indicated actual resources spent at the project activity level of detail. This is much more specific and detailed than most terminal evaluations, and is useful for the sake of transparency.	HS
f. Assess the quality of the reports evaluation of project M&E systems?	S

7. SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR THE PRERATATION OF THE TERMINAL EVALUATION REVIEW REPORT EXCLUDING PIRs, TERMINAL EVALUATIONS, PAD.

None.

8 Project stakeholders and Key Contacts (Names, addresses, emails etc – mandatory for field visit countries)

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9. Information Gaps (for Field visit countries only)

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