

Terminal Evaluation Validation form, GEF Independent Evaluation Office

1. Project Data

Summary project data			
GEF project ID		4526	
GEF Agency project ID		GCP/CPR/049/GFF	
GEF Replenishment Phase		GEF-5	
Lead GEF Agency (include all for joint projects)		Food and Agriculture Organization	
Project name		Securing Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use in Huangshan Municipality	
Country/Countries		China	
Region		Asia, Middle East & Pacific	
Focal area		Biodiversity	
Operational Program or Strategic Priorities/Objectives		BD 1: Improve sustainability of protected area systems BD 2: Mainstream biodiversity conservation and sustainable use into production landscapes, seascapes and sectors	
Stand alone or under a programmatic framework		Standalone	
If applicable, parent program name and GEF ID		N/A	
Executing agencies involved		Huangshan Administrative Committee (HSAC)	
NGOs/CBOs involvement		Paradise Foundation, Green Anhui: secondary executing agency Local NGOs: beneficiaries	
Private sector involvement (including micro, small and medium enterprises) ¹		Participating Villages: beneficiaries	
CEO Endorsement (FSP) /Approval (MSP) date		2/12/2014	
Effectiveness date / project start date		09/17/2014	
Expected date of project completion (at start)		9/16/2019	
Actual date of project completion		5/31/2023	
Project Financing			
		At Endorsement (US \$M)	At Completion (US \$M)
Project Preparation Grant	GEF funding	0.120	0.120
	Co-financing	0.435	0.435
GEF Project Grant		2.607	2.601
Co-financing	IA own	0.238	0.327
	Government	9.834	16.117
	Other multi- /bi-laterals		
	Private sector	0.437	0.125
	NGOs/CBOs		1.726
Other			
Total GEF funding		2.727	2.721
Total Co-financing		10.943	18.73
Total project funding (GEF grant(s) + co-financing)		13.67	21.451
Terminal evaluation validation information			
TE completion date		12/1/2022	
Author of TE		Adrian Stokes, Fan Longqing	

¹ Defined as all micro, small, and medium-scale profit-oriented entities, including individuals and informal entities, that earn income through the sale of goods and services rather than a salary. ([GEF IEO 2022](#))

TER completion date	12/6/2023
TER prepared by	Emanuele Bigagli
TER peer review by (if GEF IEO review)	Ritu Kanotra

Access the form to summarize key project features here: <https://www.research.net/r/APR2023>.

2. Summary of Project Ratings

Criteria	Final PIR	IA Terminal Evaluation	IA Evaluation Office Review	GEF IEO Review
Project Outcomes	S	S		S
Sustainability of Outcomes		ML		ML
M&E Design		MS		MS
M&E Implementation		S		MS
Quality of Implementation		MS		MS
Quality of Execution		S		S
Quality of the Terminal Evaluation Report				HS

3. Project Objectives and theory of change

3.1 Global Environmental Objectives of the project:

The global environmental objective of the project as to “secure the effective conservation and sustainable use of the biodiversity in the mountainous forest ecosystems of Huangshan Municipality” (PIR 2023, p. 4; TE, p. 57).

3.2 Development Objectives of the project:

The TE (p. 10) notes that the specific objective of the project was to "evaluate, adapt and implement relevant ‘best practices’ derived from the successful management of Huangshan National Scenic Reserve to strengthen and upgrade the existing municipal system of protected areas".

3.3 Were there any **changes** in the Global Environmental Objectives, Development Objectives, or project activities during implementation? What are the reasons given for the change(s)?

Before the MTR, the targets of Outputs 2.1.3 and 3.2.2 were revised because too ambitious (PIR 2019, p. 23). In addition, minor changes were made after the MTR (TE, p. 12), which included: some changes in some targets in the results matrix to simplify and rationalize reporting (TE, p. 31), thereby addressing the fact that the project was complicated and very ambitious (TE, p. 29); the revision of the training plan and knowledge management plan; and the preparation of a summary of three best practices (PIR 2022, p. 35).

3.4 Briefly summarize project’s theory of change – describe the inputs and causal relationships through which the project will achieve its long-term impacts, key links, and key assumptions.

- **Problem:** Specific threats to biodiversity in Huangshan: unsustainable use of natural resources; illegal logging; illegal hunting; and fires. Also, there are other constraints and challenges: increasing tourist numbers with poor or non-existent visitor facilities; lack of human and institutional capacity in biodiversity conservation; lack of coordination and collaboration between government agencies; lack of baseline data or scientific monitoring programs (TE, p. 13).
- **Strategy:** (i) Policy, planning, and institutional arrangements; (ii) Improved nature reserve management effectiveness and networks; (iii) Capacity building, environmental education and public awareness; (iv) information dissemination and project M&E (TE, p. 10).

- **Outcomes:** (1) an integrated approach to the conservation and management of forest biodiversity supported by a coherent policy, planning and institutional framework; (2) an increase in average management efficiency in 12 project-supported NRs included in the municipal network of protected areas improving the status of protected areas; (3) an increased institutional capacity and public and political support for the conservation of biodiversity in China’s forest ecosystems; (4) evidence that “lessons learned” from the project are being taken up and replicated elsewhere in the non-participating NRs” (TE, p. 12).
- **Impact:** increase and improvement in the provision of goods and services from high-value mountain forest ecosystems in a sustainable manner (TE, p. 13).

4. GEF IEO assessment of Outcomes and Sustainability

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

The outcome ratings (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and overall outcome rating) are on a six-point scale: Highly Satisfactory to Highly Unsatisfactory. The sustainability rating is on a four-point scale: Likely to Unlikely.

Please justify the ratings in the space below each box.

4.1 Relevance	MS
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The TE rates relevance as Satisfactory, and this review rates it as Moderately Satisfactory. the project was relevant to GEF, FAO, national policies and plans, and to local needs; however, there were significant shortcomings in project design.

The project was aligned with GEF-5 program strategies, and supported GEF-5 Biodiversity Objective 1 (Improve sustainability of protected area systems) and Objective 2 (Mainstream biodiversity conservation and sustainable use into production landscapes, seascapes and sectors), directly contributing to Outcome 1.1 (Improved management effectiveness of existing and new protected areas). The project was consistent with the outcomes of the FAO’s Strategic Framework under Strategic Objective 2 (Increase and improve provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner) and with the FAO Programming Framework in China. However, its contribution to FAO’s Strategic Objective 2 was not large, because the connections with sustainability livelihoods and agriculture were not a strong feature of the project design and budget (TE, p. 15). At national level, the project was consistent with the China Biodiversity Partnership and Framework for Action 2011-2017, and the subsequent new national priorities related to the establishment of the “ecological civilization” mission (TE, p. 15). Finally, the project was in line with the needs of local communities.

Local actors were engaged in the design process, ensuring that the project met local needs (TE, p. 34). However, the project design had several shortcomings, which had implications in terms of project implementation: (1) the project was complicated and overambitious. This problem was addressed during implementation, following the recommendations of the MTR (TE, p. 29); (2) the results matrix contained 38 individual indicators, and was too large and confusing, with several output indicators without a clear link to the delivery of the outcome. This problem was addressed by the engagement of the Chief Technical

Adviser (see Section 4.4; TE, p. 29); (3) the long-term work plan was not well tailored to deliver the project outcomes; this contributed to a low level of achievement against the results matrix in the first four years of the project (TE, p. 16); and (4) the fundamental premise of the project was questionable, as the expectations of transferability of the good practices in the Huangshan National Scenic Reserve to the other 70 reserves (Tier-4 reserves), each with different characteristics, were not realistic (TE, p. 16). In addition, the project design contained no actions or reporting addressing gender issues at any level, nor did it consider minority groups, probably because of the fact that there are no ethnic minorities living in the project area (TE, p. 36).

4.2 Coherence	MU
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The TE does not rate coherence, and this review rates it as Moderately Unsatisfactory. The project was aligned with other GEF projects; however, there were substantial shortcomings in the causal logic and alignment among components of the theory of change.

The project design was based on learnings from other GEF projects, particularly the component on Improving Management of Nature Reserves in Guangxi (TE, p. 26). The involvement with the 6 projects being implemented at national level under the umbrella of the national protected area reform agenda and programme were limited (TE, p. 26).

However, there were substantial shortcomings in the project’s causal logic and alignment among the components of the theory of change, which was not prepared in the Project Document and was reconstructed by the MTR and the TE: (1) the situation analysis described in the project document does not point logically to interventions that address the identified threats or barriers. Although the TE does not provide further details, it may be inferred by the present review that this criticism refers to the lack of a comprehensive tackling of the specific threats to biodiversity identified in the reconstructed theory of change (i.e., unsustainable extraction of natural resources, illegal logging, illegal fishing, and fires; TE, p. 13); (2) the limited logical explanation of how the outputs will lead to the defined outcomes. To this respect, the TE does not provide further explanations; and (3) the lack of a comprehensive definition of the aspects of the project addressing alternative livelihoods for communities. In fact, although human impacts were identified as specific threats to biodiversity, and the project addresses community co-management and sustainable production activities in Subcomponent 2.2 and Output 2.13, these aspects were not specifically included as components or outcomes of the project (TE, p. 12).

4.3 Effectiveness	S
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The TE rates effectiveness as Satisfactory, and this review concurs. The project achieved almost all targets and contributed towards the achievement of the sought impact.

The project delivered the majority of the outputs and met the majority of the associated indicators (TE, p. 22), despite the initial delays. More details for each component are as follows:

Component 1: Policy, planning and institutional arrangements. All targets were achieved. The project allowed the identification of biodiversity conservation as a priority in local plans, the draft and adoption

of related biodiversity conservation policies and long-term plans, as well as the establishment of a permanent Biodiversity Coordination Committee and of an advisory committee (Outcome 1).

Component 2: Improved nature reserve management effectiveness and networks. All targets were achieved, apart from 2 that were partially achieved. The project reached the targets set for increase in management efficiency of protected areas and of mainstreaming biodiversity conservation. The targets of increase in the population of some species were achieved, while for other species (number of bamboo species, four plant species) they were partially achieved. The Huangshan Scenic Area Biodiversity Conservation Action Plan (2018–2030) was approved, and management plans and framework plans were approved as per the set target. Three Community Conservation Committees were established, and about 4,500 ha of biodiversity-friendly corridors were built (exceeding the target set of 3,800 ha). A total of 17 research grants were issued (against a target of 15), and an integrated monitoring program was established.

Component 3: Capacity building, environmental education and public awareness. All indicators were achieved, apart from 3 that were partially achieved. Although extensive biodiversity-related activities were organized in 10 schools, biodiversity was not formally mainstreamed into curricula (Outcome 3.1). The target of number of visits to Huangshan nature reserves was achieved. Training was provided to all targeted stakeholders, while a public education plan was developed and school readers compiled biodiversity-related material. A biodiversity interpretation center was established, and 80 km of trails were established.

Component 4: Information dissemination and M&E. Five targets were achieved and 1 was partially achieved. The project webpage was established, good practices were published, and consultative workshops were held. However, there is little evidence of Tier 4 nature reserves adopting new approaches generated by the project (Outcome 4.1).

4.4 Efficiency	MS
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The TE rates efficiency as Moderately Satisfactory, and this review concurs. The project was cost-effective; it had significant delays, which were only partly compensated during project implementation.

The project was cost-effective, thanks to the materialized co-financing that exceeded the expectations and the effective partnerships that were formed by the project and added value to the activities (TE, p. 26).

The project experienced several challenges in implementation, which led to a range of delays. The start was slow, because the lack of corporate FAO guidance available on indirect execution caused a lack of clarity in important issues such as fund transfers, responsibilities for quality assurance and evaluation activities, technical oversight responsibilities, and monitoring and management. This led to several revisions of the execution arrangements, which in turn led to major delays in the flow of funds and in the delivery of results (TE, p. 23). Also, reporting requirements under the pre-OPIM modality were complicated and demanding (TE, p. 25). Afterwards, efforts were made to make up for these delays, including the engagement of a technically competent Chief Technical Adviser (TE, p. 24), and efficiency

improved significantly (TE, p. 26). Despite these efforts, a no-cost extension was requested and granted, which was followed by other 2 extensions due to the negative impacts of COVID-19 (TE, p. 25).

4.5 Outcome	S
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The TE rates outcome (“overall rating of progress towards achieving objectives/outcomes”) as Satisfactory, and this review concurs. Despite the significant shortcomings in project design and coherence, and the important delays in implementation, the project managed to fully achieve almost all targets, and made the expected impact across all dimensions, apart from the replication of good practices and lessons learned.

Environmental impacts. The project made a significant contribution to the creation of an integrated approach to the conservation and management of forest biodiversity in Huangshan Municipality, thanks to the establishment of permanent biodiversity committees and the nature reserve network (TE, p. 17). Also, the project made an excellent contribution to the management efficiency of 12 nature reserves, improving their status (TE, p. 39), as well as to the improvement of the management of Tier-4 reserves (TE, p. 17). Moreover, the species monitored remained stable or increased, partly thanks to the reduction in the collection of wild animals and of human impacts entailed by the project (TE, p. 21).

Socioeconomic impacts. The project made an important contribution to mainstreaming biodiversity into planning and policies for socioeconomic development and forest management. More in detail, biodiversity conservation was identified as a priority in both the 13th and 14th Municipal 5-Year Social and Economic Development Plans, issued in 2016 and 2021, respectively, and was mainstreamed into six sector Five-Year Plans. Also, several policies and long-term plans were developed to address biodiversity conservation in forests and nature reserves in the Huangshan Municipality (TE, p. 17).

Enabling conditions. The project made a good contribution to the increase in institutional capacities and public and political support for the conservation of biodiversity in the forest ecosystems of China, thanks to the implementation of extensive biodiversity-related activities and the development of a high amount of school material, training and capacity building of nature reserve staff, government officials and community members, and the development of a biodiversity interpretation center (TE, p. 18). Moreover, the project satisfactorily documented good practices. However, there is little evidence that the good practices and lessons learned are replicated in the other 70 Tier-4 nature reserves, due to flaws in project design (see Section 4.1; TE, p. 39). Finally, the biological investigations and monitoring generated a high amount of information about biodiversity in Huangshan and its nature reserves (TE, p. 22).

Unintended impacts. The TE does not report any unintended impacts of the project.

4.6 Sustainability	ML
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The TE rates sustainability as Moderately Likely, and this review concurs. Net benefits are more likely to continue; however, there are some risks, which may have some effect on project sustainability.

The project built institutional and individual capacities, mainstreamed biodiversity into planning and policies, and facilitated the sharing of information and good practices (TE, p. 28), ensuring at the same

time technical guidance and oversight across all results (TE, p. 28). As a result, most of the project results are likely to be sustainable (TE, p. 26). However, there are moderate risks to sustainability (TE, p. 28), coming from the lack of progress with the replication in the Tier-4 nature reserves and the lack of a strategy for sustaining and scaling up the work with communities on alternative livelihoods (TE, p. 39).

Financial. While municipal funding is regular, it is not sufficient for all nature reserves (TE, p. 28).

Sociopolitical. There are little or no sociopolitical risks, thanks to the strong support given by all levels of government, as well as to the support by the communities surrounding nature reserves to the project's alternative livelihood activities. Risks may emerge if these communities feel that the support received will not continue (TE, p. 29).

Institutional framework and governance. The project was successful in establishing institutional arrangements and cross-sector partnerships (TE, p. 27). The effective replication and scaling-up of experiences in practice was limited. However, the mechanisms built by the project (e.g., good practices documentation and dissemination, nature reserve network initiatives, and strong partnerships) should assist with replication and scaling up (TE, p. 27). Also, the ownership of the project by the Huangshan Administrative Committee is expected to contribute to project sustainability (TE, p. 28). As a result, there are no significant institutional and governance risks (TE, p. 28).

Environmental. There are no significant environmental risks. The measures put in place by the project are expected to assist managers in addressing the impacts of climate change (TE, p. 29).

5. Processes and factors affecting attainment of project outcomes

Before describing the factors, you may choose to summarize reported outcomes and sustainability here: <https://www.research.net/r/APR2023>.

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, 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?

Co-financing was higher than the amounts committed in the project document, thanks to the additional funds committed by FAO, the executing agency, and the Huangshan Municipal Bureau of Finance, and other funds leveraged by the Paradise Foundation (TE, p. 32) and the NGO "Green Anhui" (TE, p. 33) had a real contribution to the project (TE, p. 26). Co-financing was essential to deliver the first results during the delays experienced at the beginning of the project, which provided a foundation for the following activities when the GEF funds were released (TE, p. 31). The contribution from village producers was lower than the amount committed (USD 124,546 against the planned USD 436,500).

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?

Three extensions were granted for a total of 3 years: (1) a 2-year extension until 17 September 2021, due to delays experienced in the first two years of implementation; (2) a 1-year extension until 17 September 2022, and (3) another 6-months extension until 17 March 2023, both due to COVID-19 that entailed challenges in project finalization and budget expenditure (TE, p. 12).

5.3 Stakeholder ownership. Assess the extent to which stakeholder ownership has affected project outcomes and sustainability. Describe the ways in which it affected outcomes and sustainability, highlighting the causal links.

Ownership is strong (TE, p. 39). Local actors were engaged in the design process, ensuring that the project met local needs, as well as during implementation (TE, p. 34). This contributed to the fact that most stakeholders were positively engaged. Nature reserve staff had a good understanding and ownership of the purpose and components of the project, while villagers had a positive approach to the project (TE, p. 33), although they did not have a high understanding of the project's aims (TE, p. 35). The executing agency had a strong ownership of results, which is expected to contribute to project sustainability (TE, p. 28). There was also strong support to the project at all political levels (TE, p. 34).

5.4 Other factors: In case the terminal evaluation discusses other key factors that affected project outcomes, discuss those factors and outline how they affected outcomes, whether positively or negatively. Include factors that may have led to unintended outcomes.

The TE (p. 25) mentions restrictions and challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemics, which entailed a request for no-cost extension.

6. Assessment of project's Monitoring and Evaluation system

Ratings are assessed on a six point scale: Highly Satisfactory to Highly Unsatisfactory.

Please justify ratings in the space below each box.

6.1 M&E Design at entry	MS
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The TE rates M&E design as Moderately Satisfactory, and this review concurs. The M&E plan was generally solid, although there were some weaknesses in the results framework.

The M&EW plan was generally practical and sufficient. It included a dedicated budget, clear responsibilities, a comprehensive results framework, and reporting requirements. However, the results framework was large and confusing (TE, p. 30), with numerous indicators, which created a high monitoring and reporting burden. Also, there were no gender-disaggregated targets or reporting requirements (TE, p. 30).

6.2 M&E Implementation	MS
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The TE rates M&E implementation as Satisfactory, and this review rates it as Moderately Satisfactory. The M&E implementation followed the plan, and tried to address some of, but not all, the shortcomings in M&E design.

M&E implementation followed the plan. This included the preparation of progress reports, the preparation of the Tracking Tools, the MTR, and the TE. Some targets in the results framework were revised to simplify and rationalize reporting; however, reporting against many indicators remained incomplete (TE, p. 31). Also, some informal gender-disaggregated reporting was provided to address shortcomings in M&E design, although this was insufficient to provide a full picture, and the M&E plan should have been amended to formally include this aspect (TE, p. 31).

7. Assessment of project implementation and execution

Quality of Implementation rating is based on the assessment of the performance of GEF Agency(s). Quality of Execution rating is based on performance of the executing agency(s). 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	MS
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The TE rates quality of implementation as Moderately Satisfactory, and this review concurs. project implementation met the expectations, although there were some difficulties at the start of the project, which were addressed in the second half of implementation.

The pre-OPIM indirect execution modality implied some challenges for FAO, including difficulties in providing technical support (TE, p. 28), given FAO's little experience at that stage on these issues (TE, p. 25). Also, the relationship with the executing agency was low. Risk management was inadequate due to the lack of funds, the absence of an execution agreement, and poor relationships (TE, p. 32). This resulted in a weak implementation until 2018 (TE, p. 35). These difficulties were addressed in the second half of the project, when FAO was effective in delivering oversight, supervision and backstopping, with a strong outlook for learning to improve future processes and results (TE, p. 31), and adequate risk management (TE, p. 32).

7.2 Quality of Project Execution	S
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The TE rates quality of execution as Satisfactory, and this review concurs. The performance of the executing agency met the expectations despite some weaknesses that were resolved during implementation.

The Huangshan Administrative Committee executed the project effectively, managing the project's daily activities and ensuring the appropriate use of funds, procurement and contracting of goods and services.

It had a strong ownership of the project (TE, p. 31). This was achieved despite the limited experience and capacity in negotiating and delivering projects through the pre-OPIM indirect execution and with donor-funded projects in general, which entailed difficulties and delays at the beginning of the project (TE, p. 25). Also, the issue of inadequate staffing levels was addressed and staffing levels improved over time, despite the high staff turnover. Finally, HSAC and FAO experienced low trust in each other for several years, an issue that was highlighted by the MTR and then resolved (TE, p. 31).

8. Lessons and recommendations

8.1 Briefly describe the key lessons, good practices, or approaches mentioned in the terminal evaluation report, including how they could have application for other GEF projects. Lessons must be based on project experience.

The TE (pp. 43ss) proposes the following lessons:

- Lesson 1. Indirect execution can build government ownership and capacity, and lead to the increased likelihood of sustainable results. However, the agreements must be clear about respective roles and responsibilities in quality assurance activities and technical support. The negotiation of agreements and implementation of the modality should be supported by an investment in capacity building and human resources in the operational partner (Evaluation Question 5.8).
- Lesson 2. It is important that the FAO and GEF profile is maintained when components of a project are outsourced and during other partnerships as part of projects.
- Lesson 3. It is important that projects address early on how each indicator and target will be measured and reported against, and how success will be measured.
- Lesson 4. Comprehensive and concise reporting against each target should be prepared in a timely manner for both mid-term evaluations and terminal evaluations.
- Lesson 5. Planning for sustainability and the scaling up of project results should commence early and continue through the project rather than being completed at the end of the project.
- Lesson 6. Additional planning that is done during implementation of a project to inform and improve ongoing delivery, such as a gender mainstreaming plan, must be completed with sufficient time to effectively influence project activities and outcomes.
- Lesson 7. To enhance the likelihood that government co-financing materializes and substantively and sustainably contributes to project outcomes, it is important that project design and implementation are strongly anchored in the priorities and needs of the relevant government agencies.

8.2 Briefly describe the recommendations given in the terminal evaluation.

The TE (pp. 40ss) suggests the following recommendations:

- Recommendation 1. The sustainability plan that has been started should be finalized. It should include careful attention to disseminating good practices; supporting Tier 3 and 4 nature reserves to improve management; sustaining and scaling up community co-management and alternative livelihood activities; and learning from the Paradise Foundation and Green Anhui management model in the Jiulongfeng Provincial Nature Reserve (PMO, HSAC).

- Recommendation 2. For Tier 3 nature reserves, continue providing support to improve their management effectiveness, using the learnings and good practices from this project (Huangshan Municipal Forestry Bureau).
- Recommendation 3. For Tier 4 nature reserves, promote the adaptation of the community co-management approach and the Forest Chief Policy to develop a new model that empowers the community to manage the nature reserves and their natural resources (Huangshan Municipal Forestry Bureau).
- Recommendation 4. Assess the effectiveness of the Paradise Foundation and Green Anhui entrusted management model in the Jiulongfeng Provincial Nature Reserve. If appropriate, explore opportunities to scale up and apply to other communities, forest areas and nature reserves with suitable conditions (PMO, Huangshan Municipal Forestry Bureau).
- Recommendation 5. In future projects using an indirect execution modality, provide enhanced capacity building in the development of agreements and the implementation of required reporting and financial procedures (OPIM team at FAO).
- Recommendation 6. Assess the future needs in Huangshan Municipality for expert advice on biodiversity-related matters after project closure. Consider rationalizing the Project Leading Group, the Biodiversity Conservation Committee, and the Biodiversity Advisory Committee (PMO, Huangshan Municipal Forestry Bureau).
- Recommendation 7. In future FAO-GEF projects, if a project has a strong policy focus, then the operational partner should be a provincial bureau. This could be a provincial grassland and forestry bureau (FAO, national partners).
- Recommendation 8. Consider opportunities to promote the achievements, good practices and innovations of this project at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP 15) in Montreal, Canada in December 2022 (PMO, HSAC).
- Recommendation 9. Explore opportunities to disseminate the achievements, good practices and innovations of this project internationally, including the preparation of materials in languages other than Chinese, if necessary (HSAC, FAO).

9. Quality of the Terminal Evaluation Report

Before rating the quality of the terminal evaluation, click here to summarize your observations on the sub-criteria: <https://www.research.net/r/APR2023>.

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

Criteria/indicators of terminal evaluation quality	GEF IEO COMMENTS	Rating
1. Timeliness: terminal evaluation report was carried out and submitted on time?	The TE was conducted within 6 months from project end	HS
2. General information: Provides general information on the project and evaluation as per the requirement?	The TE provides GEF project ID, lists the executing agencies, and specifies key project milestones, GEF environmental objectives, and the evaluators that conducted the evaluation	HS
3. Stakeholder involvement: the report was prepared in consultation with – and with feedback from - key stakeholders?	The TE identified the key stakeholders and sought their feedback on the draft report; the OFP was not involved in this process	S
4. Theory of change: provides solid account of the project's theory of change?	The TE reconstructed the project's theory of change, presenting the assumptions but not discussing whether they remained valid	S
5. Methodology: Provides an informative and transparent account of the methodology?	The TE lists the documents reviewed, including the interviewees; it describes project sites and activities, and describes the tools and methods used and the limitations of the evaluation	HS
6. Outcome: Provides a clear and candid account of the achievement of project outcomes?	The TE provides a clear and full account of project relevance to GEF, country priorities, and of project design, and of project performance on all outcome targets; it discusses factors that affected their achievement, and reported on timeliness and efficiency	HS
7. Sustainability: Presents realistic assessment of sustainability?	The TE presents a full assessment of project sustainability, including risks, their likelihood and effects, and an overall rating	HS

8. M&E: Presents sound assessment of the quality of the M&E system?	The TE thoroughly assesses M&E design and describes its implementation, including whether information from the M&E was used for project management	HS
9. Finance: Reports on utilization of GEF funding and materialization of co-financing?	The TE reports on the mobilization and use of GEF funds and of co-financing, including their amount and type; it discusses reasons for differences from the amounts indicated in the project document, and how these affected the achievement of project results	HS
10. Implementation: Presents a candid account of project implementation and Agency performance?	The TE thoroughly evaluates the performance of the implementing and executing agencies	HS
11. Safeguards: Provides information on application of environmental and social safeguards, and conduct and use of gender analysis?	The TE reported on the implementation of environmental and social safeguards, and on the conduct of the gender analysis and the implementation of related actions	HS
12. Lessons and recommendations are supported by the project experience and are relevant to future programming?	The TE presents lessons supported by project experience and discusses their applicability; it reports recommendations including content and action taker	HS
13. Ratings: Ratings are well-substantiated by evidence, realistic and convincing?	Ratings are supported with sufficient and credible evidence	HS
14. Report presentation: The report was well-written, logically organized, and consistent?	The TE is written in English; it is easy to read, well-structured and consistent, and makes good use of tables and charts	HS
Overall quality of the report		HS

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

ANNEX 1. GEF IEO THEORY OF CHANGE FRAMEWORK

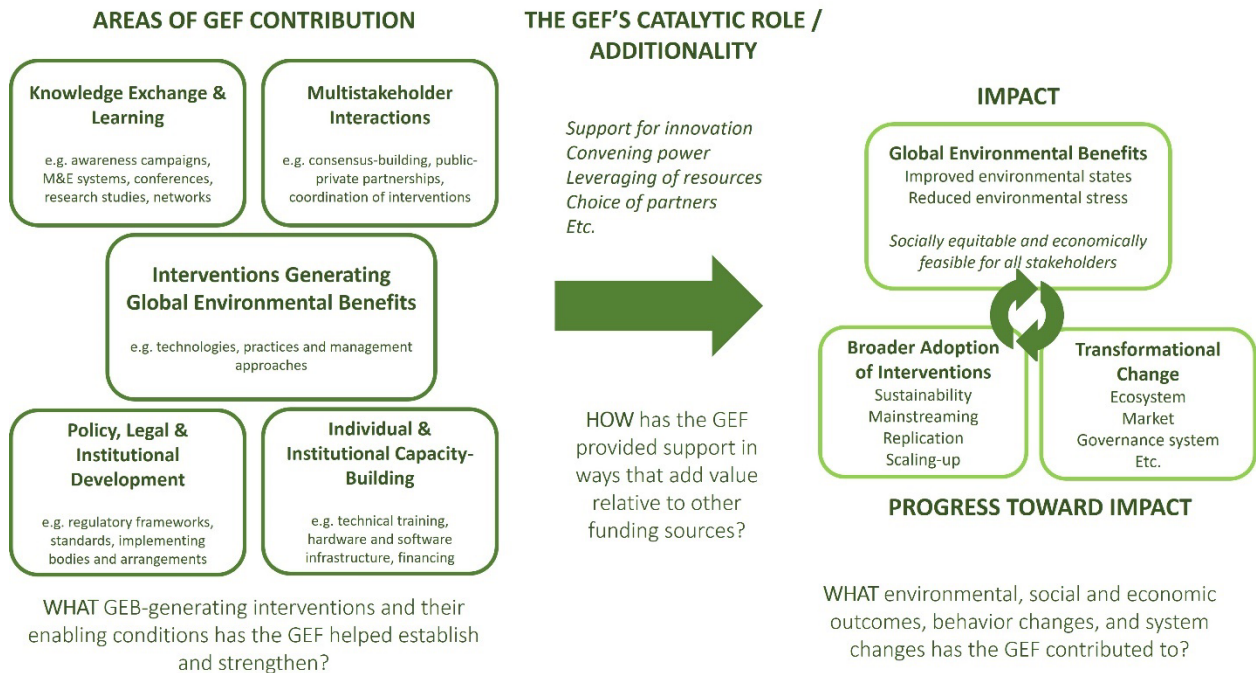


Figure 1. The GEF IEO's updated Theory of Change Framework on how the GEF achieves impact

The general framework for the GEF's theory of change (figure 1) draws on the large amount of evaluative evidence on outcomes and impact gathered over the years by the GEF Independent Evaluation Office. The framework diagram has been updated to reflect the IEO's learning since OPSS (GEF IEO 2014, p. 47-50) about how the GEF achieves impact, as well as the evolution of the GEF's programming toward more integrated systems-focused and scaled-up initiatives.

The framework outlines the three main areas that the IEO assesses in its evaluations: a) the GEF's contributions in establishing and strengthening both the interventions that directly generate global environmental benefits, and the enabling conditions that allow these interventions to be implemented and adopted by stakeholders, b) the GEF's catalytic role or additionality in the way that the GEF provides support within the context of other funding sources and partners, and c) the environmental, social and economic outcomes that the GEF has contributed to, and the behavior and system changes that generate these outcomes during and beyond the period of GEF support.

The circular arrow between impact and progress toward impact, as before, indicates how bringing about positive environmental change is an iterative process that involves behavior change (in the form of a broader group of stakeholders adopting interventions) and/or systems change (which is a key characteristic of transformational change). These three areas of change can take place in any sequence or simultaneously in a positively reinforcing cycle, and are therefore assessed by the GEF IEO as indicators of impact.

Assessing the GEF’s progress toward achieving impact allows the IEO to determine the extent to which GEF support contributes to a trajectory of large-scale, systemic change, especially in areas where changes in the environment can only be measured over longer time horizons. The updated diagram in particular expands the assessment of progress towards impact to include transformational change, which specifically takes place at the system level, and not necessarily over a long time period.

The updated diagram also more explicitly identifies the link between the GEF’s mandate of generating global environmental benefits, and the GEF’s safeguards to ensure that positive environmental outcomes also enhance or at the very least do not take away from the social and economic well-being of the people who depend on the environment. Thus the IEO assesses impact not only in terms of environmental outcomes, but also in terms of the synergies and trade-offs with the social and economic contexts in which these outcomes are achieved.

ANNEX 2. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Intervention	Any programmatic approach, full-sized project, medium-sized project, or enabling activity financed from any GEF-managed trust fund, as well as regional and national outreach activities. In the context of post-completion evaluation, an intervention may consist of a single project, or multiple projects (i.e. phased or parallel) with explicitly linked objectives contributing to the same specific impacts within the same specific geographical area and sector. https://www.gefio.org/evaluations/gef-evaluation-policy-2019
Activity (of an intervention)	An action undertaken over the duration of an intervention that contributes to the achievement of the intervention’s objectives, i.e. an intervention is implemented through a set of activities. E.g. training, (support to) policy development, (implementation of) management approach.
Outcome	An intended or achieved short- or medium-term effect of a project or program’s outputs. https://www.gefio.org/evaluations/gef-evaluation-policy-2019
Impact	The positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a project or program, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. https://www.gefio.org/evaluations/gef-evaluation-policy-2019
Environmental outcomes	Changes in environmental indicators that could take the following forms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress reduction: reduction or prevention of threats to the environment, especially those caused by human behavior (local communities, societies, economies) • Environmental state: biological, physical changes in the state of the environment http://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/ieo/evaluations/ops5-final-report-eng.pdf
Social and economic outcomes	Changes in indicators affecting human well-being at the individual or higher scales, e.g. income or access to capital, food security, health, safety, education, cooperation/ conflict resolution, and equity in distribution/ access to benefits, especially among marginalized groups.
Synergies	Multiple benefits achieved in more than one focal area as a result of a <i>single intervention</i> , or benefits achieved from the interaction of outcomes from at least two separate interventions in addition to those achieved, had the interventions been done independently.

	http://www.gefio.org/evaluations/evaluation-multiple-benefits-gef-support-through-its-multifocal-area-portfolio-map-2016
Trade-offs	A reduction in one benefit in the process of maximizing or increasing another benefit. http://www.gefio.org/evaluations/evaluation-multiple-benefits-gef-support-through-its-multifocal-area-portfolio-map-2016
Broader adoption	The adoption of GEF-supported interventions by governments and other stakeholders beyond the original scope and funding of a GEF-supported intervention. This may take place through sustaining, replication, mainstreaming, and scaling-up of an intervention and/or its enabling conditions (see definitions below). http://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/ieo/evaluations/ops5-final-report-eng.pdf
Sustainability	The continuation/ likely continuation of positive effects from the intervention after it has come to an end, and its potential for scale-up and/or replication; interventions need to be environmentally as well as institutionally, financially, politically, culturally and socially sustainable. https://www.gefio.org/evaluations/gef-evaluation-policy-2019
Replication	When a GEF intervention is reproduced at a comparable administrative or ecological scale, often in different geographical areas or regions. http://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/ieo/evaluations/ops5-final-report-eng.pdf
Mainstreaming	When information, lessons, or specific aspects of a GEF initiative are incorporated into a broader stakeholder initiative. This may occur not only through governments but also in development organizations and other sectors. http://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/ieo/evaluations/ops5-final-report-eng.pdf
Scaling-up	Increasing the magnitude of global environment benefits (GEBs), and/or expanding the geographical and sectoral areas where they are generated to cover a defined ecological, economic, or governance unit. May occur through replication, mainstreaming, and linking. http://www.gefio.org/evaluations/evaluation-gef-support-scaling-impact-2019
Transformational change	Deep, systemic, and sustainable change with large-scale impact in an area of major environmental concern. Defined by four criteria: relevance, depth of change, scale of change, and sustainability. http://www.gefio.org/evaluations/evaluation-gef-support-transformational-change-2017
Additionality	a) Changes in the attainment of direct project outcomes at project completion that can be attributed to GEF's interventions; these can be reflected in an acceleration of the adoption of reforms, the enhancement of outcomes, or the reduction of risks and greater viability of project interventions. b) Spill-over effects beyond project outcomes that may result from systemic reforms, capacity development, and socio-economic changes. c) Clearly articulated pathways to achieve broadening of the impact beyond project completion that can be associated with GEF interventions. https://www.gefio.org/sites/default/files/ieo/council-documents/files/c-55-me-inf-01.pdf