

Terminal Evaluation Validation form, GEF Independent Evaluation Office

1. Project Data

Summary project data			
GEF project ID		4768	
GEF Agency project ID		GCP/ARG/023/GFF	
GEF Replenishment Phase		GEF-5	
Lead GEF Agency (include all for joint projects)		FAO	
Project name		Strengthening governance for the protection of biodiversity through the formulation and implementation of the National Strategy on Invasive Alien Species	
Country/Countries		Argentina	
Region		Latin America & Caribbean	
Focal area		Biodiversity	
Operational Program or Strategic Priorities/Objectives		BD-2: Improved management frameworks to prevent, control and manage invasive alien species	
Stand alone or under a programmatic framework		Standalone	
If applicable, parent program name and GEF ID		N/A	
Executing agencies involved		Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development of Argentina	
NGOs/CBOs involvement		Association of Argentine Veterinarians, Argentine Association of Botanic Gardens: secondary executing agency	
Private sector involvement (including micro, small and medium enterprises) ¹		N/A	
CEO Endorsement (FSP) /Approval (MSP) date		12/5/2014	
Effectiveness date / project start date		7/15/2015	
Expected date of project completion (at start)		7/14/2019	
Actual date of project completion		6/30/2022	
Project Financing			
		At Endorsement (US \$M)	At Completion (US \$M)
Project Preparation Grant	GEF funding	0.13	0.099
	Co-financing		
GEF Project Grant		3.87	3.831
Co-financing	IA own	0.25	0.25
	Government	17.998	6.848
	Other multi- /bi-laterals		
	Private sector		
	NGOs/CBOs		
Other			
Total GEF funding		4	3.93
Total Co-financing		18.248	14.329 ²
Total project funding (GEF grant(s) + co-financing)		22.248	18.239

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](#))

² The Final PIR 2022 reports two different amount of materialized co-financing as of 30 June 2022: USD 14,329,360.60 (p. 2), and USD 10,504,886 (p. 65). The TE (p. 100) reports a total amount of effective co-financing at the time of evaluation of USD 7,098,398.

Terminal evaluation validation information	
TE completion date	11/1/2022
Author of TE	German Luebert, Gabriela Sbarra, Carolina Turano
TER completion date	8/24/2023
TER prepared by	Emanuele Bigagli
TER peer review by (if GEF IEO review)	Jeneen R. Garcia

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		L
M&E Design		U		HU
M&E Implementation		U		HU
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 was to strengthen the governance framework across the country to allow for an effective protection of biodiversity against the impacts of Invasive Alien Species (TE, p. 5).

3.2 Development Objectives of the project:

The development objective of the project was to reinforce the current and future socioeconomic benefits stemming from conservation and the sustainable use of biological diversity, including natural resources and ecosystem-based services, by appropriately managing the challenge of biological invasions (TE, p. 5).

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)?

Neither the Final PIR 2022 nor the TE report any changes in project objectives or activities during implementation.

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:** presence of Invasive Alien Species introduced by forestry and agriculture, aquaculture, transport related to trade and tourism, import and breeding of pets, and import of ornamental species, which are one of the most significant threats for biodiversity conservation, natural resources and related ecosystem services, exacerbated by climate change (changes in rainfall and temperature) that acts in synergy with biological invasions and reduces the resilience of natural ecosystems.
- **Barriers:** a) The lack of analysis and information on the socio-economic costs and impacts on native biodiversity; b) A wealth of information on invasive alien species, but spread out and not easily accessible; c) The lack of a National Strategy on invasive alien species; d) Lack of knowledge on the invasive alien species problem and ability to apply instruments; e) Weaknesses in communication and awareness-raising on the problem of invasive alien species; f) A disintegrated, non-systematized and incomplete regulatory framework at the national and provincial levels; g) No National Law on Minimum Standards for invasive alien species management; h) Lack of prioritization and actions to control and eradicate invasive alien

species already introduced and established in the country; i) Limited capacity building and lack of a realistic bi-national program for mass eradication and restoration.

- **Strategy:** (1) Strengthening institutional capacities for managing invasive alien species; (2) Strengthening regulatory frameworks and funding mechanisms in support of the implementation of the National Strategy on invasive alien species; (3) Validation and implementation of protocols for managing prioritized invasive alien species, by taxonomic categories and ecosystems, included in the National Strategy on invasive alien species; (4) Development of the Pilot Program for eradication of the American beaver (*Castor canadensis*) in Tierra del Fuego Province.
- **Medium-term impacts:** Public institutions in the Argentine State are strengthened to address the challenge of invasive alien species management.
- **Long-term Impacts:** Reinforced current and future socio-economic benefits stemming from the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, including natural resources and ecosystem-based services, through an appropriate management of biological invasion challenges.

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	S
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The TE rates relevance as Highly Satisfactory³, and this review rates it as Satisfactory. The project was highly relevant to GEF, FAO, international, and national policies and priorities; its design had some shortcomings, which did not affect the achievement of project outputs and outcomes.

The project was highly relevant to all the three outcomes of the GEF-5 Biodiversity focal area, Objective 2: “Mainstream conservation and sustainable use into production landscapes/seascapes and sectors”. outcome 3, and to FAO Strategic Framework Objective 2 (*Increase and improve the provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner*). It was indirectly and moderately relevant to FAO Strategic Framework outcomes 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4⁴ (TE, p. 15). Moreover, it was pertinent to the objectives related to the control and eradication of alien species threatening ecosystems, habitats, or species of the Convention on Biological Diversity (TE, p. 17). At national level, the project was consistent

³ Executive Summary Table 1 rates overall strategic relevance as Moderately Satisfactory, but other instances of this criteria in the document rate Relevance as Highly Satisfactory, and the qualitative description supports this rating.

⁴ FAO Strategic Framework Outcome 2.2: “Countries developed or improved policies and governance mechanisms to address sustainable production, climate change and environmental degradation in agriculture, fisheries and forestry”; Outcome 2.3: “Countries improved implementation of policies and international instruments for sustainable agriculture, fisheries and forestry”; Outcome 2.4: “Countries made decisions based on evidence for sustainable agriculture, fisheries and forestry while addressing climate change and environmental degradation”.

with 5 of the 6 objectives of the sub-pillar 1.4⁵ of the National Strategy for Biological Diversity, which reflects the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Aichi Targets (TE, p. 16). Finally, the project was highly consistent with the needs of those communities that use ecosystem services provided by the biodiversity threatened by invasive alien species (TE, p. 18).

The project design was developed in a participatory way (TE, p. 40), However, it had some shortcomings in the vertical (activities-outputs-outcomes-objective) and horizontal (indicators, sources of verification, and assumption) rationale of the results matrix. Specifically, the majority of outcome targets were not formulated to be a direct result of project activities; all outcomes (apart from Outcome 2.1) were formulated as general or long-term impact objectives rather than as project outcomes. Furthermore, certain outcome indicators and output targets were not SMART, as they were either not measurable⁶, outside of the project scope⁷, or not specific⁸. Although these deficiencies did not substantially affect progress towards the effects and impacts sought by the project, they conditioned project management and the accountability to stakeholders (TE, p. 38). In addition, there were some flaws in design related to Component 3, which led to the fact that two indicators were not measured. Moreover, no indicators were formulated to account for social, productive, and economic co-benefits of invasive alien species management, which would have supported the adoption of good practices and the definition of future public policy instruments (TE, p. 29). Furthermore, although the project document includes the mainstreaming of gender approach in different components and outputs, no specific plan was designed on the gender perspective, which did not allow to carry out follow-up on the differentiated effects and the narrowing of gaps brought about by project execution (TE, p. 43).

4.2 Coherence	S
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The TE does not rate coherence, and this review rates it as Satisfactory. The project was able to create synergies with similar regional initiatives.

The project was implemented in parallel with a similar project in Chile, allowing the realization of activities scheduled in the second phase of implementation of the Strategic Plan of the beaver eradication project in southern Patagonia agreed upon between Chile and Argentina in 2011 (TE, p. 31).

4.3 Effectiveness	S
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The TE rates effectiveness as Satisfactory, and this review concurs. The project achieved the majority of the set targets and outputs, contributing to the achievement of the global environmental objective.

⁵ "Prevention, control and oversight of related alien species".

⁶ Target 1, Output 3.2.5: "Density and distribution of snails reduced by at least 25% compared to the baseline to be established at pilot programme start-up, applying control, eradication and communication measures".

⁷ Indicator 1, Outcome 4.2: "Bi-national mass beaver eradication programme in implementation within two to five years after completion of pilot programmes in each country".

⁸ Target 4, Outcome 4.1 "Assisted recovery of lenga trees (*Nothofagus pumilio*), cherry trees and Antarctic beeches (*Nothofagus Antarctica*) in progress in areas affected but not flooded by beavers"; and Indicator 1, Outcome 3.2 "3-6 containment, control or eradication protocols for invasive alien species prove their effectiveness through ecosystem and biodiversity recovery indicators on xx hectares."

The project achieved the majority of the identified goals and indicators (TE, p. 47). More details for each component are as follows:

Component 1. Strengthening institutional capacities for managing invasive alien species. All the 17 output targets and outcome indicators were achieved, and 7 of them were exceeded. The main outputs included: the collection and systematization of compiled information on invasive alien species; the SNIEEI; the development of technical and functional capacities; the design of high-quality systems, protocols, strategies and regulatory proposals; and the implementation of a successful project communication strategy that generated lessons learned for the design of a specific National Strategy on Invasive Alien Species strategy.

Component 2. Strengthening regulatory frameworks and funding mechanisms in support of the implementation of the National Strategy on invasive alien species. The project achieved satisfactorily the outcome indicators for this Component, with all output targets achieved and only one output target (Output 2.1.1) that was almost achieved (97%). The project led to the design and adoption of a significant number of legal and regulatory frameworks, which was unprecedented in Argentina (TE, p. 25), and the identification of financing mechanisms for ENEII.

Component 3. Validation and implementation of protocols for managing prioritized invasive alien species, by taxonomic categories and ecosystems, included in the National Strategy on invasive alien species. Almost all the output targets and outcome indicators of this Component were achieved, while 2 indicators (Target 1, Output 3.2.5 "Density and distribution of snails reduced by at least 25% compared to the baseline to be established at pilot program start-up, applying control, eradication and communication measures" and Target 1, Output 3.2.6 "At least 20 hectares under glossy privet control, resulting in a reduction of at least 50% in the density of glossy privet and assisted restoration with at least 1,500 native plants, planted with community and gender participation approach") were not measured because of flaws in project design, rather than because of ineffective compliance (TE, p. 28). In particular, the pilot initiatives that were conducted under this component (involving the red-bellied tree squirrel, giant African snail, American bullfrog, Didymo algae, tamarisk or salt cedar, glossy privet, and the early detection of invasive alien species at ports and in surrounding areas) fulfilled their main purpose, i.e., to test management practices, methodologies and protocols, generate knowledge, place the issue on the public agenda, build capacities, and raise awareness among stakeholders (TE, pp. 26-27).

Component 4. Development of the Pilot Program for eradication of the American beaver (Castor canadensis) in Tierra del Fuego Province. The envisaged outputs were delivered in a satisfactory way; however, there were significant shortcomings in the fulfilment of outcome indicators and one output target (TE, p. 32). In fact, one Outcome indicator was not achieved (80%), and 5 Outcome indicators⁹ were

⁹ Indicator 2. Benthic microhabitats in basin watercourses freed from beavers recovered to similar conditions as those watercourses not affected by beavers; Indicator 3. Less organic matter in the sediments of watercourse beds in the basins freed from beavers; Indicator 4. Streams in the Mimica River area and its surroundings recover their structure to become salmon spawning beds again; and Indicator 5. Assisted recovery of lenga trees (*Nothofagus pumilio*), cherry trees and Antarctic beeches (*Nothofagus Antarctica*) in progress in areas affected but not flooded by beavers.

not measured at the end, due to logistical complications, delays in procurement of equipment, supplies and tools, and poor technical-financial planning (TE, p. 32). The project implemented activities to eradicate American beavers from the province. The activities generated knowledge and retrieved lessons, leading to the design of an evidence-based “Provincial Plan for Reclaiming Environments Affected by Beavers”. However, due to the lack of measurement of the abovementioned indicators, the demonstrative value of the pilot initiatives regarding the environmental benefits of beaver eradication were diminished (TE, p. 32).

4.4 Efficiency	MS
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The TE rates efficiency as Moderately Satisfactory, and this review concurs. Although the project was able to spend almost all mobilized funds and achieve the outputs and outcomes with considerably lower co-financing, there were delays in financial execution due to both internal and external factors, which led to two no-cost project extensions.

The GEF funds were sufficient to carry out the activities and achieve the envisaged outputs and outcomes, and the financial execution was close to 100% (TE, p. 47). Co-financing was lower than expected (39%); however, this did not affect the achievement of the project outputs and outcomes. The organizational structure and assignment of responsibilities were appropriate; however, human resources were insufficient to quickly roll out actions (TE, p. 47). Moreover, the FAO procedures for hiring external services and procuring equipment slowed down the technical implementation of some project activities, a factor that was not envisaged in project design (TE, p. 37).

There were delays in financial execution, due to initial project adjustments, problems with the exchange rate (devaluation of the Argentine peso against the US dollar), risk management associated with changes in the government (which required to renew the agreements and update the commitments with the executing partner, and to which the project team did not adapt with the required agility; TE, p. 36), and the emergence of COVID-19. These resulted in delays in budget execution, which required two no-cost project extensions, one in 2019 and one in 2021 (TE, p. 34).

4.5 Outcome	S
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The TE rates both the fulfilment of project outcomes and progress towards achieving project outcomes and objectives as Satisfactory, and this review concurs. The project was highly relevant and, despite some flaws in design and some delays, achieved the large majority of the set targets, contributing significantly to the achievement of the global environmental objective and setting the conditions for the achievement of the development objective.

Environmental impacts. The pilot initiatives allowed to generate and manage the necessary scientific knowledge to support the management of invasive alien species, including e.g., the determination of population densities and the identification of chorus activity and larvae patterns of the American bullfrog, the identification of new species in ports, the identification of taxonomic groups, the preparation of a

baseline on the status, condition and distribution of the tamarisk or salt cedar, and knowledge on the American beaver (TE, p. 27).

Socioeconomic impacts. Although it is not expected that the project will achieve its development objective, i.e., to have the socioeconomic benefits stemming from the conservation and sustainable use of the biological diversity, resulting from the effective management of invasive alien species, the project successfully created the enabling conditions to achieve it (TE, p. 18).

Enabling conditions. The project most clearly contributed to achieving its global environmental objective, i.e., “strengthening the institutional and regulatory framework to effectively protect biodiversity against the impacts of invasive alien species” (TE, p. 18). The project strengthened the legal and regulatory framework and funding mechanism, the capacities of the public institutions to collect and manage information, and the staff’s technical capacities, such that Argentina is now well-prepared to face the challenge of invasive alien species management (TE, p. 18). The pilot initiatives allowed, inter alia, to raise awareness on the problem of invasive alien species among the different stakeholders (TE, p. 26). Despite shortcomings in project design, the gender perspective was successfully mainstreamed in two important project outputs: the National Strategy on Invasive Alien Species and the Communication and Public Awareness-Raising Strategy of the National Strategy on Invasive Alien Species (TE, p. 43). Finally, although indigenous people were not consulted during the process of design of the pilot initiative, nor were they formally informed of their inclusion in the project, they agreed to participate in the initiative during project implementation, ultimately becoming active leading players (TE, p. 44).

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

4.6 Sustainability	L
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The TE rates sustainability as Moderately Likely, and this review rates it as Likely. The achievements of the project are likely to be sustained in the future thanks to project activities, and there are only minor financial, social and institutional risks.

The main project outcomes remain anchored within the Argentine State (TE, p. 44), and there are minor financial, social and institutional risks to project sustainability.

Financial. The capacity of the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development to allocate sufficient resources sets the conditions for the success of the implementation of the National Strategy on Invasive Alien Species in the future. Similarly, the sustainability of the information system on invasive alien species will depend on the financial, technical and human capacities of the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (TE, p. 45). To mitigate financial risks, the project prepared a list of financing instruments that could be used for invasive alien species management. Financial risks to project sustainability may stem from the human and institutional capacity to apply for these funds (TE, p. 46).

Sociopolitical. The main social risk that could jeopardize the project’s sustainability is that, under the pressure of influential civil society groups that are against the control and eradication of invasive alien species, state agents may adopt measures contrary to the recommendations of the project (TE, p. 46).

Institutional framework and governance. The project successfully delivered legal and regulatory frameworks (especially the National Strategy on Invasive Alien Species and its Communication and Public Awareness-Raising Strategy) that are anchored formally in institutions and are consequently expected to continue to support the future the management of invasive alien species (TE, p. 44). In parallel, the capacities built in different areas and for a significant number of staff officials will contribute to the sustainability of actions to manage invasive alien species. Moreover, the project established an appropriate governance structure (TE, p. 48), contributing to project sustainability. Technical support of the federal government will be key to the sustainability of the pilot initiatives at provincial level (TE, p. 45). The main institutional risks are posed by potential changes in authorities that may prioritize other issues (TE, p. 46).

Environmental. The TE does not mention any environmental risks to project sustainability.

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?

The Final PIR 2022 reports two different amounts of materialized co-financing as of 30 June 2022: USD 14,329,360.60 (p. 2), and USD 10,504,886 (p. 65). The TE (p. 100) reports a total amount of effective co-financing at the time of evaluation of USD 7,098,398, equal to 39% of the amount committed. All these amounts are lower than the committed co-financing at project formulation, equal to USD 18,247,901 (TE, p. 1). This under-materialization was due to the withdrawal, for budgetary reasons and change in priorities, of the co-financing pledged by the Public Communications Secretariat (USD 8 million), intended to support communication outputs. The project successfully covered this deficit, using digital media. Also, the co-financing from the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development and from regional governments was lower, due to the devaluation of the Argentine peso and the impossibility to execute activities due to restrictions imposed to fight COVID-19. The TE (p. 41) notes that this did not significantly affect the scope and the achievement and quality of outputs of the project, nor the execution of the activities foreseen in the project document.

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

The project had two no-cost extensions, one in 2019 and one in 2021, due to the under-execution of the project's budget because of several problems (see Section 4.4); the granting of these extensions allowed the project to reach a satisfactory level of achievement of project outputs and outcomes.

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.

The involvement of the institutional stakeholders helped towards taking ownership (TE, p. 48). Key stakeholders were engaged in project design, as well as in the formulation of the National Strategy on Invasive Alien Species and its Communication and Public Awareness Raising Strategy (TE, p. x). The support and interest of the authorities is substantial and there are no short-term risks to project sustainability. Indigenous people were finally involved and engaged, ultimately becoming active leading players (TE, p. 48).

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.

COVID-19 entailed strong restrictions on mobility, limiting the possibility to carry out field activities and significantly reducing execution costs, contributing to a low budget execution and the request of the second extension (TE, p. 35). Also, the devaluation of the Argentinian peso against the US dollar, and the changes in government affected project efficiency, contributing to delays in project execution and to the emergence of the conditions that led to the 2 requests for project 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	HU
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The TE rates M&E design as Unsatisfactory, and this review rates it as Highly Unsatisfactory. The project did not prepare an M&E plan.

The project did not have a system for monitoring, follow-up and evaluation with adequate quality standards. Moreover, it lacked specialized staff, standardized instruments for technical follow-up and monitoring of the project’s impact, a management structure, an orderly virtual space for storage and systematization of information and sources of verification linked to each output and outcome (TE, p. 40).

6.2 M&E Implementation	HU
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The TE rates M&E implementation as Unsatisfactory, and this review rates it as Highly unsatisfactory. The absence of an M&E plan was not addressed during implementation; negligible M&E activity was conducted, and reports were insufficient.

The absence of an M&E plan was not addressed during implementation. The quality of the semi-annual and annual reports was insufficient, as these included only a descriptive report of the indicators and most of the time did not reflect the achievement of a given target (TE, p. 40).

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 project implementation quality as Moderately Satisfactory, and this review concurs. Overall, the performance of FAO met expectations, although with some deficiencies in administrative management and routine coordination, which led to delays in project implementation.

FAO ensured a high technical quality of the processes and of the outputs generated, and adequate technical support to the project. This was done despite some deficiencies in project administrative management and routine coordination, which negatively impacted the procurement of goods and services, brought about disagreements with the executing partner, and caused delays in project's technical and financial execution (TE, p. 38). This was due to: the turnover of FAO representatives, which complicated the office's inter-institutional links; the insufficient number of technical and administrative staff and internal bureaucracy, which slowed down the processes more than expected; the lack of orderly, accessible and traceable systems showing the project's technical and financial progress, which hindered the timely access to the record of project expenses; and governance mechanisms that were not standardized or institutionalized, and instead depended on personal will and ways of working, a situation that was corrected during the last year of implementation (TE, p. 39).

7.2 Quality of Project Execution	S
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The TE rates project execution quality as Satisfactory, and this review concurs. Overall, the performance of the executing agency met the expectations, despite some external problems and internal difficulties that were corrected during implementation.

The Ministry for the Environment and Sustainable Development, as co-executor of the project, performed its duties within the established requirements and according to the institutional arrangements required by the GEF and those set forth in the project document. However, it faced difficulties that compromised the optimal fulfilment of its responsibilities: changes in government, which resulted in the replacement of directors and coordinators, and affected the continuity of actions, ownership, interest and knowledge of the project; the lack of a clear distinction between political and executive roles and with FAO, as evidenced by overlap of responsibilities, procedural disagreements, and tensions between governance bodies; and the initial misalignment of decision-making mechanisms, coordination, and inter-party communication channels, which was corrected during the project's last extension (2021-2022).

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 (p. xiii) presents the following lessons:

- If the number of human resources available and FAO's institutional procurement procedures do not offer an agile and satisfactory solution for the procurement of project goods and services to mitigate any potential risks concerning effectiveness, efficiency and quality of the technical implementation, it will be necessary to make timely decisions aimed at overcoming this difficulty (include these time frames in the annual operating plans [POAs] or hire more staff).
- The economic and institutional sustainability of the National Strategy on Invasive Alien Species and the management of invasive alien species at the provincial level will be subject to and will require the establishment of multi-stakeholder agreements that politically and socially support the strategies to be rolled out and the design and implementation of action plans budgeted for the short, medium and long term.
- A bi-national strategic plan is necessary for the effective control of cross-border invasive alien species. The establishment of high-level political dialogue and bi-national inter-institutional technical coordination are key to the above.
- Implementing actions to manage invasive alien species (control or eradication) is, ultimately, a political decision that entails considerations in public budgets and has related social risks--public opinion--and also eventually risks at the judicial level. Given this reality, communication, academic support, evidence-based decision-making, and the endorsement of international commitments are essential for mitigating the costs of this kind of decision.
- Including a specific communications output in the design, and considering an expert in the project team and rolling out a quality strategy was a successful measure that can be replicated in other initiatives implemented by FAO and executed by the Ministry for the Environment and Sustainable Development.
- Having full-time administrative assistance from the very beginning is essential for a project of the size and characteristics of the one evaluated to carry out technical-financial follow-up pursuant to FAO standards and its executing partners' requirements.
- The presence and control of invasive alien species can bring about differentiated effects between men and women. Being aware of and addressing potential gaps to help reduce them--mandatory according to FAO (2013) and GEF (2017)--called for personnel with developed capacities, the preparation of a diagnostic analysis and a specific plan to be implemented throughout the project cycle.
- A part of the projects' success is at stake when dealing with inter-institutional relationships and the proper functioning of the established governance bodies and mechanisms. The latter must be spelled out explicitly, reviewed, and updated if necessary; agreements must be reached on the

responsibilities of each institution, the attributions of each instance, the decision-making procedures, and the communication channels to be implemented.

8.2 Briefly describe the recommendations given in the terminal evaluation.

The TE (p. xiv) presents the following recommendations:

- To FAO. It is highly recommended that projects design and implement robust monitoring and evaluation systems, from the beginning of their execution, aligned with the institutional monitoring and evaluation systems. Monitoring and evaluation should at least have: an organizational structure; instruments for financial and technical follow-up (activities, outputs and indicators) and monitoring of effects; a detailed implementation schedule; standardized annual planning instruments aligned with the results matrix; and an online system for storing information and sources of verification arranged by component, outcomes, outputs and activities.
- To FAO and the Ministry for the Environment and Sustainable Development. Projects with budgetary volumes, dense in activities, territorially spread out and procurement-intensive such as the one evaluated, require teams that can adequately meet these demands. To achieve the above, it would be advisable to consider the incorporation from the beginning of staff providing executive assistance to coordination, in charge of administrative and financial management, and responsible for project monitoring and evaluation.
- Recommendation 3. To FAO, the Ministry for the Environment and Sustainable Development and other stakeholders. As a way to improve inter-institutional coordination and management, for future initiatives it would be advisable that, at project start-up and during their execution, the governance mechanisms be reviewed--and eventually updated or renewed--together with stakeholders. The above should at least lead to defining and sharing the following with everyone: the roles and responsibilities of each institution and each member of the project organization chart; the procedures and instances of operational and strategic decision-making; the channels and forms of internal communication; and the protocols for settling disputes, disagreements, or conflicts.
- To FAO. The mainstreaming of cross-cutting matters throughout the entire project cycle is mandatory for initiatives implemented by FAO and financed by GEF. To improve the response to this demand, it would be highly advisable to systematically and periodically build capacities in the project teams and those of the country office, actively disseminate the set of institutional tools for the mainstreaming of cross-cutting matters, and design a monitoring instrument--a simple one--to check compliance with the standards established by the institutions.
- To the Ministry for the Environment and Sustainable Development and other stakeholders. As a mechanism targeted to quality assurance, permanent updating and sustainability of the National Information System on Invasive Alien Species), it would be advisable to formally establish a cooperation agreement with the Universidad Nacional del Sur including, inter alia: mechanisms to systematically and bi-directionally share data and analyses; also to have the University provide scientific-technical advice to the Ministry for the Environment and Sustainable Development; and,

moreover, ensure mutual integration into national and international academic and state networks.

- To the Ministry for the Environment and Sustainable Development and provincial governments. Given that a large part of the control or eradication of invasive alien species takes place through provincial and inter-jurisdictional actions, it would be beneficial for provincial governments to outline and improve their strategies and invasive alien species management plans. To enhance the possibilities of developing quality instruments, it is recommended that the Ministry for the Environment and Sustainable Development, taking advantage of the project's momentum, implement mechanisms for disseminating the National Strategy on Invasive Alien Species and its Communication and Public Awareness-Raising Strategy, managing the knowledge generated by the project in all the provinces, and supporting the jurisdictions in outlining their plans and strategies.
- To the Ministry for the Environment and Sustainable Development and provincial governments. In order to encourage the participation of the private sector and the community in managing invasive alien species, it is recommended that the Ministry for the Environment and Sustainable Development and the provincial governments in partnership with academic institutions (if necessary) generate, systematize and share evidence on the multidimensional benefits (environmental, economic, social, productive, cultural) that an effective control of invasive alien species entails, in collaboration with the territories, communities and producers affected by biological invasions.
- To the Ministry for the Environment and Sustainable Development, provincial governments, academic institutions and other stakeholders. Given that the project has managed to develop a high-quality Communication Strategy that has allowed an innovative approach to a complex communication agenda such as the one on invasive alien species, it is highly recommended that continuity be provided to the communication challenge and that the impact of the communication pieces, messages, as well as the social perception of the invasive alien species agenda be permanently monitored.
- To the Ministry for the Environment and Sustainable Development. A part of the sustainability of the project's efforts and achievements focuses on the creation and implementation of the Board. Given the foundational nature of this space, it would be advisable to generate collaborative participation mechanisms so that stakeholders can actively participate in their initial outlining that will lay the foundations for the country's public policies in the long term. Likewise, it is essential for the Board to have the necessary budget to be able to operate and ensure the participation of all the institutions involved.
- To FAO and the Ministry for the Environment and Sustainable Development. As a measure aimed at maximizing the possibilities of sustainability and scalability of the projects, it is recommended that FAO and the Ministry for the Environment and Sustainable Development consider the development of advocacy strategies targeted to institutional anchoring and the establishment of agreements between public and private stakeholders within the framework of a sustainability plan included in the projects' design and implemented from the early stages of their implementation.

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 identifies the key stakeholders, but did not apparently seek their feedback on the draft report, only mentioning the use of a participatory methodology	MS
4. Theory of change: provides solid account of the project's theory of change?	The TE describes thoroughly the project's logical framework and the causal links and mechanisms to achieve the intended impact, including the assumptions of the theory of change, although it does not discuss whether the latter remain valid	S
5. Methodology: Provides an informative and transparent account of the methodology?	The TE lists the documents reviewed, including information on interviewees, project sites and activities, 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,	HS

	their likelihood and effects, and an overall rating	
8. M&E: Presents sound assessment of the quality of the M&E system?	The TE briefly assesses M&E design and implementation, indicating whether information 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 the reasons for differences from the amounts indicated in the project document, and specifies how these affected the achievement of project results	HS
10. Implementation: Presents a candid account of project implementation and Agency performance?	The TE comprehensively assesses the performance of the implementing and executing agencies, including challenges and how these were addressed	HS
11. Safeguards: Provides information on application of environmental and social safeguards, and conduct and use of gender analysis?	The TE reports 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

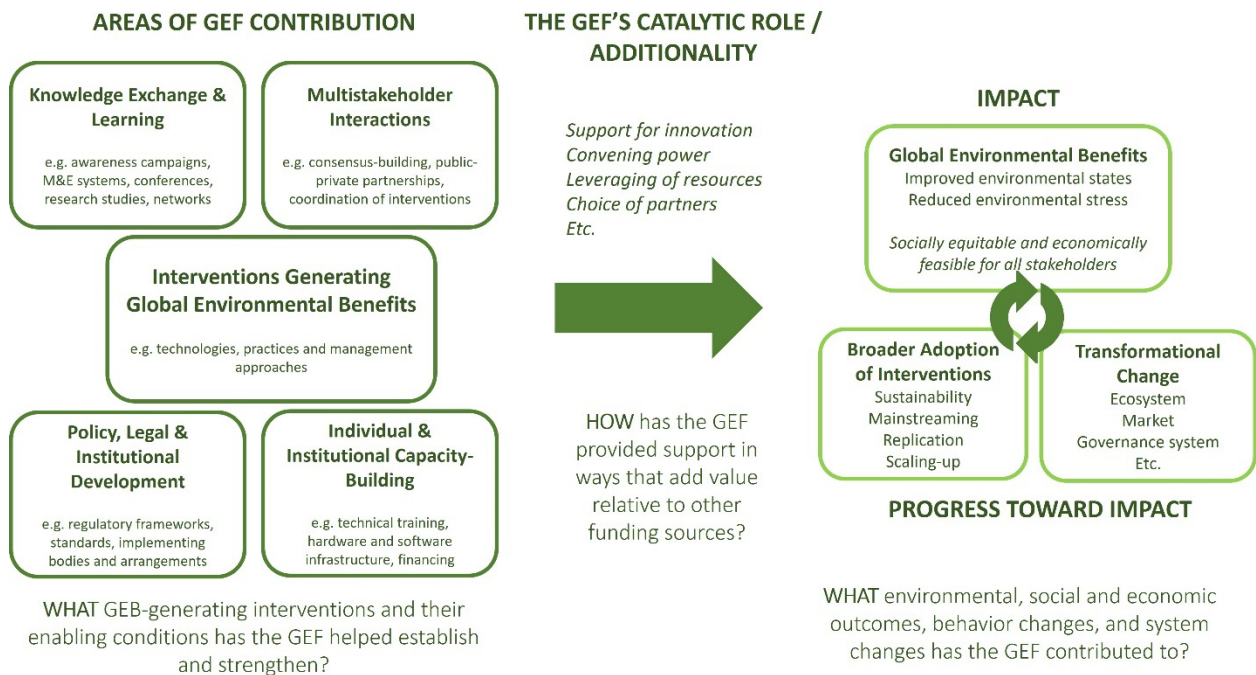


Figure 1. The GEF IEO's updated Theory of Change Framework on how the GEF achieves impact

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