

Terminal Evaluation Validation form, GEF Independent Evaluation Office

1. Project Data

Summary project data			
GEF project ID	5665		
GEF Agency project ID	GCP/CPR/057/GFF		
GEF Replenishment Phase	GEF-5		
Lead GEF Agency (include all for joint projects)	FAO		
Project name	A New Green Line: Mainstreaming Biodiversity Conservation Objectives and Practices into China's Water Resources Management Policy and Planning		
Country/Countries	China		
Region	Asia, Middle East & Pacific		
Focal area	Biodiversity		
Operational Program or Strategic Priorities/Objectives	BD Objective 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	International Economic and Technical Cooperation and Exchange Centre (INTCE) of the Ministry of Water Resources (MWR) The Nature Conservancy (TNC)		
NGOs/CBOs involvement	Volunteer service agency (NGO): secondary executing agency Women's association: secondary executing agency		
Private sector involvement (including micro, small and medium enterprises) ¹	Consulting companies: consultancy		
CEO Endorsement (FSP) /Approval (MSP) date	12/1/2015		
Effectiveness date / project start date	9/29/2016		
Expected date of project completion (at start)	5/31/2020		
Actual date of project completion	5/31/2023		
Project Financing			
	At Endorsement (US \$M)	At Completion (US \$M)	
Project Preparation Grant	GEF funding	0.1	0.1
	Co-financing	-	-
GEF Project Grant		2.64	2.63
Co-financing	IA own	0.075	0.107
	Government	25.4	35.978
	Other multi- /bi-laterals	-	-
	Private sector	-	-
	NGOs/CBOs	0.5	0.834
	Other	-	-
Total GEF funding		2.74	2.73
Total Co-financing		25.975	36.919
Total project funding (GEF grant(s) + co-financing)		28.715	39.649
Terminal evaluation validation information			
TE completion date	12/1/2022		

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](#))

Author of TE	Adrian Stokes, Liu Shuo
TER completion date	12/13/2023
TER prepared by	Emanuele Bigagli
TER peer review by (if GEF IEO review)	Mariana Vidal Merino

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	HS	S		S
Sustainability of Outcomes		L		L
M&E Design		MS		MS
M&E Implementation		MS		MS
Quality of Implementation		S		S
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 project's objective was "to mainstream biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China's water resources management policy and planning" (TE, p. 9).

3.2 Development Objectives of the project:

The project development objective was "to enable an improved balance between development goals and environmental goals, making it possible for rivers to provide their economic services (energy, industrial and agricultural uses, etc.) in a way that maintains or restores a functioning river ecosystem and conserves river biodiversity" (Prodoc, p. 157).

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)?

To address the recommendations of the MTR, the following revisions were made: (1) revision of the theory of change to clarify vision and mission of the project; (2) drafting of an exit strategy; (3) development of a learning-based M&E system; (4) establishment of an intra and inter-institutional coordination mechanism to establish effective decision-making on Water Resources Management in pilot provinces, districts and prefectures, covering forestry, fishery, environment protection and judicial system; (5) update and implementation of a communication strategy; improvement of reporting on women's participation; and (6) revision of the formulation of the indicators and targets of 10 outputs, as follows (PIR 2021, pp. 57ss):

- Output 1.1.1: increase of the interval of renewal of results from 6 months to 1 year, to allow the observation of meaningful changes for gap analysis;
- Output 1.2.1: revision of the number of national and provincial regulations where biodiversity is mainstreamed from 3 to 2-3, as the original target was too ambitious;
- Outputs 1.4.1, 1.4.2, 2.2.7, 2.3.5, and 3.3.4: replacement of the "Green Line Scorecard" with a wider "River Health Assessment" system into which the former would be integrated;
- Output 2.2.6: removal of reference to fish migration, as not relevant for the Chuan River according to field surveys;

- **Output 2.3.3:** removal of references to specific elements of flow alteration as too specific, and revision of the target of area of habitat environment conservation from 32 ha to 4.4 ha to meet ecological demand;
- **Output 2.3.4:** setting of more realistic targets for: (i) river length (from 75 km to 31.2 km); (ii) the area directly covered by biodiversity mainstreaming (from 30,000 ha to 18,000 ha); and (iii) the area of habitats improved and restored (from 120 ha to 57.6 ha), to meet ecological demand, and correction of baseline information.

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:** threats to biodiversity in China's freshwater resources: flow modification through river regulation and control; insensitive dam operations; water stress; climate change; and pollution.
- **Barriers:** (1) existing water resources management policies, plans, regulations and institutional structures do not integrate biodiversity conservation in river ecosystems; (2) insufficient experience and expertise among water management stakeholders in implementing biodiversity conservation activities on the ground; (3) insufficient information on river ecosystems to serve as basis for identifying, formulating, prioritizing, implementing and measuring the success of biodiversity conservation measures.
- **Strategy:** (1) Institutional and planning framework for mainstreaming biodiversity into water resources management at national, provincial, and local levels; (2) Demonstrate on-the-ground activities for mainstreaming biodiversity in pilot rivers in Chongqing and Yunnan Provinces; (3) Creation of improved information systems and capability to use these systems to inform better and continuously improving water management practices serving enhanced conservation of river biodiversity.
- **Benefits:** sustainable water resources management; improved water quality; sustainable agriculture; biodiversity conservation and mainstreaming (TE, p. 15).

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 overall strategic relevance as Satisfactory, and this review rates it as Moderately Satisfactory. The project was relevant to GEF, FAO, and national priorities and plans, and to the needs of local communities; it was sufficiently well-designed, although with some shortcomings in the results framework and an insufficient consideration of women and ethnic communities.

The project was in line with GEF-5 program strategy and the Biodiversity Objective 2 (*Mainstream Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use into Production Landscapes, Seascapes and Sectors*),

contributing to Biodiversity Outcome 2.1 (*Increase in sustainably managed landscapes and seascapes that integrate biodiversity conservation*) and Outcome 2.2 (*Measures to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity incorporated into policy and regulatory frameworks*). It continues to be consistent with the following GEF replenishments, especially GEF-7 Objective 1 (*Mainstream biodiversity across sectors as well as within production landscapes and seascapes*) and Objective 2 (*Strengthen biodiversity policy and institutional frameworks*; TE, p. 17). The project was in line with FAO's Strategy Framework and 2014-2017 Medium-Term Plan, particularly to Strategic Objective 2 (*Increase and improve provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner*), although the connections with sustainable agriculture and food insecurity were not strong. Also, the project was generally congruent with FAO Country Programming Framework for China, although the latter does not have a significant focus on water resources management (TE, p. 18). At the national level, the project was highly relevant. It was aligned with the 13th and 14th Five-Year Plans, and it was consistent with the China National Biodiversity Action Plan and Strategy 2010-2030, especially in relation to inland terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity conservation, and to the incorporation of biodiversity conservation into sectoral planning and promotion of its sustainable use. The project was also aligned to the new national mission of establishing an "ecological civilization" (TE, p. 17). Finally, the project was very relevant to the needs of local beneficiaries (TE, p. 18).

The project design was based on a detailed analysis of the existing knowledge (TE, p. 19), and was overall suited to deliver its expected outcomes (TE, p. 29). However, there were some shortcomings in project design: (i) several outcomes were poorly worded due to their formulation as outputs or activities, missing a clear description of the changes that would be achieved; (ii) some outcomes were repetitive, indicators were not always SMART and some targets were overestimated (TE, p. 13). Also, despite the fact that women play prominent roles in the villages within the project area, often holding positions as River and Lake Chiefs, the project design did not include any action to address gender issues. There was only one non-quantitative indicator to cover women's capacity building (TE, p. 37). A similar conclusion can be drawn in relation to ethnic minorities. The TE (p. 18) notes that these were initially engaged to inform the selection of pilot sites, and that a more focused consultation was performed with those townships and villages included in the four pilot sites selected. This resulted in the appreciation of the project's underlying concepts by the ethnic minority groups (TE, p. 18). Also, the project document provides background information on ethnic minorities (TE, p. 37). However, the project design did not include specific actions to address ethnic minorities, and had only one non-quantitative target. Also, evidence of their involvement during project implementation is limited (TE, p. 37). Finally, the project design did not address any environmental or social safeguards.

4.2 Coherence	MS
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The TE rates the complementarity with existing interventions as Moderately Satisfactory, and this review concurs. The project was complementary with other policies and projects, but had some shortcomings in terms of internal coherence.

The project was designed to be highly complementary with existing policies, activities and other GEF projects in China. However, in practice the complementarity with other international donor projects was

limited. Some complementarity was developed with stakeholders in Vietnam, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Myanmar to improve the protection of shared river basins (TE, p. 19).

The TE (p. 13) identifies some shortcomings in the coherence of the project design. First, the definition of how the results from the pilot activities (in Component 2) would feed back into policies and regulations (in Component 1) was weak. Second, there was a high overlap and interconnection among the several outputs; consequently, the results framework was difficult to understand, and its causal logic was low. These issues made it difficult to plan implementation and reporting and, consequently, project evaluation (TE, p. 29).

4.3 Effectiveness	s
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The TE rates effectiveness as Satisfactory, and this review concurs. The project achieved all the set outcome and output targets.

At the time of the TE (December 2022, i.e., six months before the revised end of the project), the project delivered the majority of outputs and met the majority of the related indicators, making very good progress towards the objective (TE, p. 23). The Final PIR 2023 (p. 4), delivered in June 2023, reports that all the targets of all the outcomes and outputs were achieved.

Component 1: Institutional and planning framework for mainstreaming biodiversity into water resources management at national, provincial and local levels. All targets were achieved. The project conducted a gap analysis, incorporated biodiversity mainstreaming objectives into key water policies and plans (Outcome 1.1). It mainstreamed biodiversity considerations into water resources management regulations, formulated and implemented technical guidelines, and expanded regulations on dams and dam cascades (Outcome 1.2). Moreover, it established new partnerships among government and civil society organizations (Outcome 1.3), and created and agreed on a "River Health Assessment" system (Outcome 1.4). It produced expert assessments on river biodiversity investments, and expanded the number of water management programs that include biodiversity conservation as objective (Outcome 1.5).

Component 2: Demonstrate on-the-ground activities for mainstreaming biodiversity in pilot rivers in Chongqing and Yunnan Provinces. At the time of the TE, all targets were achieved, apart from three that were partially achieved, and which were successfully achieved at the time of the Final PIR 2023 (pp. 15-24). More in detail, the project broadened the alliance of stakeholders and clarified the distribution of responsibilities, strengthening the networks of partners implementing biodiversity conservation measures (Outcome 2.1). Moreover, pilot activities were successfully implemented in Yunnan (outcome 2.2). At the time of the TE, output indicator 2.2.5 on the wetland rehabilitation and tree restoration along the Chuan River was partially achieved, as the specific bird monitoring system was not established and the length of minimal disturbance of key habitats was not reported. This target was achieved after the preparation of the TE (Final PIR 2023, p. 18). While the pilot activities were implemented successfully in Chongqing (Outcome 2.3), the targets of implementing biodiversity conservation measures along the Tang River (Output 2.3.4) and of implementing an aquatic biodiversity monitoring system (Output 2.3.5) were partially achieved at the time of the TE, and were reported as successfully achieved by the Final PIR 2023

(p. 21). Finally, the project compiled and disseminated information and best practices gained from the project (Outcome 2.4).

Component 3: Creation of improved information systems and capability to use these systems to inform better and continuously improving water management practices serving enhanced conservation of river biodiversity. At the time of the TE, all targets were achieved, apart from two that were partially achieved, and which were successfully achieved at the time of the Final PIR 2023 (pp. 24-28). The project designed and established additional information systems to provide comprehensive river biodiversity analysis (Outcomes 3.1 and 3.2). The target for Output 3.2.1 on the formulation of a strategy for systematic feeding of biodiversity information into the mainstreaming activities under Component 1 was achieved after the preparation of the TE (Final PIR 2023, p. 25). Moreover, the project developed and implement a biodiversity mainstreaming training program for 331 stakeholders (against a target of 30 MWR officials and 60 provincial level officials), 511 water management professionals (against a target of 320) trained in mainstreaming practices, 479 professionals (against a target 400) trained in the implementation of biodiversity monitoring systems, 433 professionals (against a target of 150) trained in "River Health Assessment" implementation. Finally, the target of community-level training to improve understanding of biodiversity was achieved after the preparation of the TE (Final PIR 2023, p. 28).

4.4 Efficiency	S
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The TE rates efficiency as Satisfactory, and this review concurs. The project was cost-effective; it had some initial delays in implementation because of internal difficulties, and was extended twice due to external circumstances.

Overall, the project was very cost-effective, particularly due to the amount of co-financing materialized, which exceeded the initially committed funding (TE, p. 26). GEF funds were well-targeted at interventions that added value to the integration of biodiversity into all components (TE, p. 24). While the TE (p. 34) reports that the project disbursed 82.6% of the GEF grant, which is considered low, especially considering the project extension, the Final PIR 2023 (p. 2) reports a total GEF grant actual expenditure of 99.8%.

This project was one of the first to be implemented through the Operational Partners Implementation Modality (OPIM). This entailed a lack of understanding on some critical matters, including the proportion of the GEF funds that had to be transferred to the MWR; the responsibility for key quality assurance and evaluation activities; the respective responsibilities for technical oversight; and monitoring and management of MWR's performance using a risk-based approach. Consequently, it necessitated a revision of the initial Operational Partners Agreement, with renegotiations that led to delays in the flow of GEF funds (TE, p. 24).

4.5 Outcome	S
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The TE rates the progress towards achieving outcomes as Satisfactory, and this review concurs. The project was relevant and coherent with other interventions; despite its shortcomings in design, it achieved all targets and had a positive contribution towards reaching the set objective.

Commented [MVM1]: I concur with this rating as well. However, the ratings provided to the components (Relevance=MS; Coherence=MS; Effectiveness=MS; and Efficiency=S) would point to an overall outcome rating of Satisfactory. I suggest modifying the effectiveness rating to Satisfactory, on the grounds that since the TE, the project made positive progress in meeting almost all targets (see comment under section "Effectiveness" in this document).

Commented [EB2R1]: I agree. I revised the rating of effectiveness and the wording of this paragraph accordingly.

Environmental impacts. The project activities had long-term positive impacts on the health and monitoring of 304 km of river and of a total watershed area of about 5,000 km², e.g., in terms of the number of fish specimens and fish species (TE, p. 41).

Socioeconomic impacts. Villagers improved their awareness and appreciation of biodiversity (TE, p. 41).

Enabling conditions. The project improved the institutional and planning framework and mainstreamed biodiversity into water resources policy, laws, regulations (TE, p. 41) and management at national, provincial, and local levels (TE, p. 23). It improved cooperation among the different departments responsible for water health protection, and also with other national agencies responsible for water protection across multiple sectors (TE, p. 25). Moreover, the project effectively demonstrated on-the-ground biodiversity activities in pilot rivers and contributed to implementation of the River and Lake Chief System, a new mechanism to improve coordination and communication in water management and protection (TE, p. 26), in the pilot locations. Finally, it successfully improved the knowledge and information systems on river biodiversity, and improved the capacities of many stakeholders (TE, p. 24). On a negative side, the planned feedback of the pilot activities of Component 2 into the update of policies and regulations of Component 1 was limited, as the national guidelines were developed before the finalization of pilot activities (TE, p. 30).

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 Likely, and this review concurs. The project benefits are expected to continue, with only some minor risks identified to the sustainability of project achievements.

The results of the project are likely sustainable, thanks to strong government ownership, effective investments in biodiversity mainstreaming at multiple levels, improved partnerships, establishment of long-term monitoring, documentation of best practices, extensive training, and improved information systems (TE, p. 26).

Financial. Although funds are available, there is the risk that they may not be appropriately allocated (TE, p. 27). Also, it is expected that there will be demands to enhance financing for infrastructure at the provincial level (TE, p. 29).

Sociopolitical. The high government ownership, ensured by the establishment of the "ecological civilization", is expected to contribute to the sustainability of project results (TE, p. 26). Moreover, the project focused on extensive training and capacity building, as well as on the documentation and dissemination of best practices (TE, p. 27). The impacts of these efforts are expected to continue after project termination. A potential risk is that county, township and village stakeholders may cease to prioritize biodiversity if the ongoing provision of technical awareness raising and training does not continue (TE, p. 29).

Institutional framework and governance. The project established institutional arrangements and cross-sector partnerships that are likely sustainable (TE, p. 28). In fact, the project realized institutional and

governance-related activities that will continue beyond the end of the project, including mainstreaming of biodiversity into sectors and plans, monitoring and assessment of waters and lakes, and the building of strong partnerships and networks such as those between MWR and water resources agencies at different levels (TE, p. 27). However, it is not clear whether the technical support provided by the project will be available after project completion (TE, p. 27). In addition, although a draft sustainability plan/exit strategy has been developed, it should be revised to address the risks identified by the TE, possibly involving FAO (TE, p. 27).

Environmental. The TE (p. 29) identifies no significant environmental risks to the sustainability of the results of the project.

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 amount of co-financing materialized by all co-financers was USD 36.9 million, i.e., higher than the amount of USD 25.975 million committed at project start (TE, p. 26), and allowed to deliver substantial results (TE, p. 25). The materialized co-financing is a reflection of the fact that the project design and implementation were strongly based on the priorities and needs of the government agencies (TE, p. 35). In particular, the three government agencies contributed USD 35.98 million, i.e., 142% higher than the amount originally committed. MWR funds were used to support core activities, including the construction of water ecological civilization, river and lake management, implementation of the River and Lake Chief System, and rural water conservancy and hydropower management. Yunnan government funds were used for embankment treatments, river cleaning, ecological restoration, fish population management, a sewage treatment plant, and publicity. Finally, Chongqing government funds were used for river cleaning, fish breeding and release (including a fish breeding station), fisheries management, embankment treatments, rural water source renovation, small hydropower station flow rectification, river cleaning, assessment of e-flow discharge, constructing a fish passage, implementing other demonstration works, and training and publicity (TE, p. 34).

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 was granted three extensions for a total of 3 years, i.e., almost doubling the original implementation period of 3 years and 8 months. A 2-year extension was granted to 31 May 2022, due to delays experienced in the first two years. Subsequently, two extensions were granted to 5 September 2022 and to 31 May 2023, due to difficulties associated with finalizing the project and expending the budget in the face of COVID-19 challenges. The latter extension was granted during the preparation of the

TE; this resulted in the fact that the TE evaluated the project well before the six-months period before completion, thus deviating from the GEF guidelines (TE, p. 13).

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.

Government ownership was strong, an element that is expected to ensure project sustainability (TE, p. 26). High government ownership can be attributed to the OPIM modality, which allowed the MWR to work closely with other government agencies (TE, p. 28).

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.

Due to COVID-19, the workplan was adjusted and some meetings and training activities were executed remotely (TE, p.33), entailing lower budget expenditure. The related difficulties in finalizing the project and expending the budget led to the request for two project extensions (TE, p. 34).

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 appropriate and sufficient, although there were some shortcomings that resulted in difficulties in its implementation.

The M&E plan was generally practical and sufficient. It defined clear roles and responsibilities, and included details on indicators, information sources, and reporting. However, the associated budget was too high (TE, p. 30). Also, the results framework was large and confusing (TE, p. 30): the majority of indicators were not SMART, some targets were overestimated (TE, p. 14), there were unclear relationships between some outcomes and outputs, qualitative baselines were poorly defined, and gender-disaggregated indicators were absent (TE, p. 31).

6.2 M&E Implementation	MS
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The TE rates M&E implementation as Moderately Satisfactory, and this review concurs. The M&E plan was implemented as expected, although with some cases of insufficient reporting and the inability to revise it to address shortcomings in design.

M&E was implemented according to the plan, with nearly all reports prepared on time apart, except for the PIR for the first year (2017). The project prepared a self-assessment report, which included incomplete or insufficient reporting on indicators (TE, p. 31). A Tracking Tool was developed, but it was not used to

track project's progress as it was prepared after the MTR; another tracking tool, prepared for project termination, did not include explanations of the quantitative measures reported and could not assist the preparation of the TE (TE, p. 32). The M&E plan was not revised to include gender-disaggregated indicators, although some informal reporting was provided for training activities (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	S
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The TE rates the quality of project implementation as Satisfactory, and this review concurs. The performance of the implementing agency met expectations, with only some initial difficulties that were solved during project implementation.

FAO provided effective oversight, supervision and backstopping. The staff was responsive and addressed the challenges related to implementation. However, at the beginning of the project, FAO showed a low capacity to manage the Operational Partners Implementation Modality and the negotiation of the Operational Partners Agreement, which was significantly improved afterwards and was well established at TE. Moreover, FAO was effectively involved in project identification, formulation and approval, providing proactive oversight to project completion and evaluation and effective risk management (TE, p. 32).

7.2 Quality of Project Execution	S
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The TE rates the quality of project execution as Satisfactory, and this review concurs. The performance of the executing agency was without salient weaknesses and met the expectations, with adequate management, use of funds, strong leadership, good support, and identification and management of risks.

MWR was the executing agency of this project. It effectively managed day-to-day activities and ensured the appropriate use of funds for procurement and contracting of goods and services. Moreover, MWR showed strong leadership and provided good support to provincial Project Management Offices (TE, p. 33). In general, MWR was an appropriate operational partner for this project, and met their responsibilities under the Operational Partners Agreement (TE, p. 25). MWR ensured that the project met its priorities avoiding duplication of work done by other projects (TE, p. 25). Staff levels were adequate, while decision-making was transparent. Risks were adequately identified and managed. In a similar way as for the implementing agency, shortcomings were observed at the beginning of the project in relation to the application of the Operational Partners Implementation Modality, an issue that was solved after the establishment of a Project Management Unit and the recruitment of the project manager (TE, p. 33).

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. 46) proposes the following lessons:

- Lesson 1. The Operational Partners Implementation Modality model was successfully applied in this project because the relevant FAO teams now have extensive experience in indirect execution and the Operational Partner had appropriate capacity and capability.
- Lesson 2: The project demonstrated good practice in optimizing cooperation between multiple departments at different levels to improve delivery by enhancing the project's enabling environment.
- Lesson 3: To enable a thorough and accurate evaluation, evaluators require timely and comprehensive reporting against progress, supported by evidence that is logically presented and clearly aligned with indicators and targets.
- Lesson 4: To fully realize the intended benefits from GEF funding of sharing knowledge, finding synergies and building partnerships, it is important that Operational Partners implement the complementarity mechanisms identified and that FAO oversight includes scrutiny of whether such mechanisms are being implemented.

8.2 Briefly describe the recommendations given in the terminal evaluation.

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

- Recommendation 1. Replicate the activities and practices developed in the project in other counties and rivers in the pilot provinces (Yunnan and Chongqing) to improve the results achieved under this project. (MWR, Yunnan Department of Water Resources, Chongqing Department of Water Resources)
- Recommendation 2. Replicate the activities and practices developed in the project in other provinces, using approaches designed for the relevant provinces' situations and needs. (MWR)
- Recommendation 3. Revise the project's sustainability plan to identify how replication of activities and practices within and beyond the pilot provinces should be progressed, document how sustainability challenges relating to financing and technical support will be addressed, and indicate FAO's role in implementation of the plan. (PMO, MWR, FAO)
- Recommendation 4. For future projects, ensure that project reporting and evidence clearly address a project's targets and indicators to ensure accountability and maximize transparency for project donors. (MWR, FAO).
- Recommendation 5. For future projects, prepare comprehensive and concise reporting and evidence against each target (including documents, data, tracking tools and other information) in a timely manner for MTRs and TEs. (MWR, FAO).

- Recommendation 6. For future projects, adopt a systematic and transparent approach to the regular reassessment of environmental and social impacts to ensure that projects do not continue to operate according to assessments that are dated and do not meet current expectations. (FAO, PMOs)
- Recommendation 7. Establish a bird monitoring system along Chuan River in Jingdong County, Yunnan Province. (PMO)
- Recommendation 8. Share experiences and lessons learned in indirect project execution in China with other FAO country offices and teams that are planning and implementing OPIM projects. (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 not conducted within 6 months from project end, because of a last-minute project extension	S
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 the evaluators, and specifies key project milestones and GEF environmental objectives	HS
3. Stakeholder involvement: the report was prepared in consultation with – and with feedback from - key stakeholders?	The TE identifies the key stakeholders and sought and included their feedback on the draft report, but not that of the OFP	S
4. Theory of change: provides solid account of the project's theory of change?	The TE describes the project's theory of change and its assumptions, but does not discuss whether or not the latter remained valid	S
5. Methodology: Provides an informative and transparent account of the methodology?	The TE lists the documents reviewed, including information on 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 provides 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 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, discussing 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 both the implementing and executing agency, 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 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

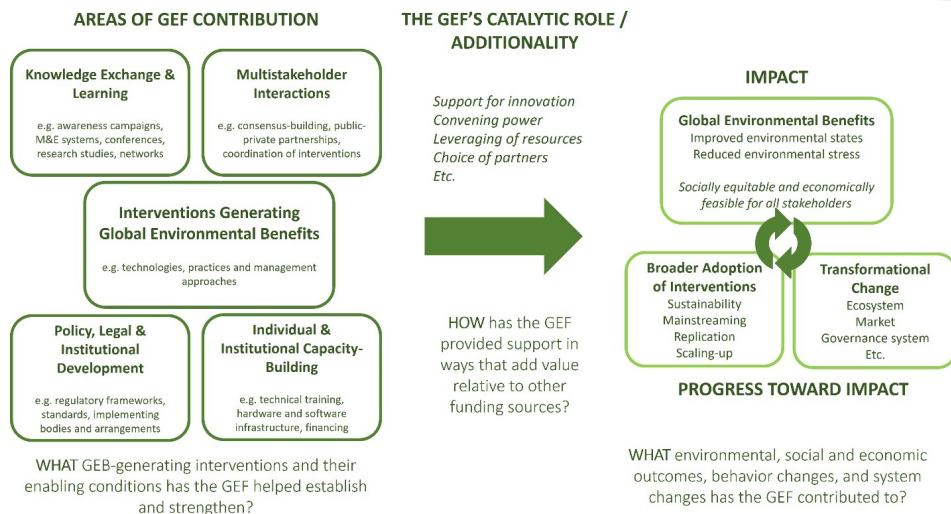


Figure 1. The GEF IEO's updated Theory of Change Framework on how the GEF achieves impact

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 OPS5 (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