

Rio Conventions Project

Uzbekistan

Strengthening National Capacity in Rio Convention Implementation
through Targeted Institutional Strengthening and Professional Development

Final Evaluation Report

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Acronyms and abbreviations used

\$	United States Dollar
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASSC	Academy for State and Social Construction
AWP	Annual Work Plan
CACILM	Central Asian Countries Initiative for Land Management
CB/ D	Capacity Building/ Development
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CCC	Convention on Climate Change
CCD	Convention to Combat Desrtification
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CO	Country Office
EF	Republic & Regional Environmental Funds of Uzbekistan
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
eng	in English language
Env.	Environment
EoP	End of Project
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIZ	German Development Cooperation
GRU	Government of Uzbekistan
IR	Inception Report
LDC	Least Developed Country(ies)
LF	Logical Framework
LPAC	Local Project Appraisal Committee
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MFA	Multi-Focal Area
MIS	Management Information System
Mngt.	Management
MYWP	Multi-Year Work Plan
NCSA	National Capacity Self-Assessment
NEX/ IM	National Execution/ Implementation Mode
NPC	National Project Coordinator
OVII	Objectively Verifiable Impact Indicators
PB	Project Board
PCM	Project Cycle Management
PDF	Project Development Facility
PIR	Project Implementation Review/ Report
PM	Project Manager
PMU	Project Management Unit
Q	Quarter (Year)
rus	in Russian language
SCNP	State Committee for Nature Protection
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
SGP	Small Grants Program
SIDS	Small Island Developing State(s)
SPEP/NP	State Program for Environmental Protection/ Nature Protection
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UrSU	Urgench State University
WG	Working Group(s)
WIS	Welfare Improvement Strategy

Rio Conventions Project, Uzbekistan Final Evaluation Report

Summary

1. The Rio Conventions Project in Uzbekistan, formally titled *Strengthening National Capacity in Rio Convention Implementation through Targeted Institutional Strengthening and Professional Development*, was designed in the period from 2006 to 2008, and implemented over 2.5 years, from 2009 to 2011.
2. A Final Evaluation of the Project was carried out in November 2011, including a 5-day mission in Tashkent, by a team of two independent consultants. They worked closely with the Project Manager and team, reviewed all accessible documents, and met with a number of Project Board members including the National Project Coordinator and Chairman of the State Committee for Nature Protection (SCNP), and staff of the United Nations Development Program Country Office (UNDP CO). The Final Evaluation report reviews the design, management, performance and results of the Project against four main criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability, and presents a number of lessons and recommendations for consideration in completing the Project in Uzbekistan, and in developing further similar projects in Uzbekistan and elsewhere.

Project Development Context

3. The Rio Conventions Project was developed as a follow-up to the Uzbekistan National Capacity Self-Assessment (NCSA) completed in 2006. The NCSA formed Pathway I of the Global Environment Facility's (GEF) Strategic Approach to Capacity Building, and was undertaken in over 150 countries. Each NCSA analysed the capacity needs to address the country's priority issues of land and water management, biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, which are raised in the main set of Multi-lateral Environment Agreements¹ established through the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The Uzbekistan NCSA identified the needs for professional development and improved collaboration between the institutions that share responsibilities for governing and managing the country's significant environmental issues. The current Project in Uzbekistan was developed under GEF Pathway III as a dedicated capacity building project to address these specific issues that were common to the three Rio Conventions.
4. The development of the Project took nearly four years from conception to mobilisation, which meant that momentum and continuity with the NCSA were lost, and may have contributed to reluctance by the government (GRU) to take the lead and ownership of the Project. There was apparent conflict between national agencies and a delayed decision to assign the SCNP to be lead agency for the Project, rather than UzHydroMet, which had led both the NCSA and the Rio Conventions Project development process. This was clearly a challenge for the Project management at the outset, given that one of its main objectives was to increase engagement and collaboration among the range of agencies and stakeholders involved in and affected by environmental issues in Uzbekistan.

Project Design

5. The Project design was for a series of capacity building activities aimed at strengthening the key area of coordinated environmental planning, management and financing. A simple design was focussed on strengthening two particular aspects of the environmental management system in

¹ The three "Rio Conventions" are the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC).

operation in Uzbekistan – 1. Environmental planning and management; and 2. Environmental financing. These issues formed the two main components of the Project. Under each component, a narrower specific focus was taken: component 1 was to strengthen the existing mechanism of the State Program of Environmental Protection (SPEP) ; and component 2 was to strengthen the existing mechanism of the Uzbekistan Environmental Fund (EF). For each component Outcome, the design specified just two Outputs, one of policy development and the other of professional skills development: 1.1 Specifications for a stronger SPEP mechanism; 1.2 Training for officials involved in the SPEP mechanism; 2.1 Specifications for a stronger EF mechanism; and 2.2 Training for EF personnel.

6. The Project design was not developed with a single complete framework (such as a logical framework) for Project planning, management and monitoring, and the Evaluation concludes that the design did not provide a clear description of the Project strategy or planned process of change. Instead, a confused array of different planning formats and poorly-worded objectives and indicators was developed, which hindered the efficiency and effectiveness of implementation. Higher-level substantive objectives were not identified; crucial mid-level Outputs were not well-defined; and indicators were either not written or not useful to monitor progress. As a result, little use was made of the Project planning and monitoring tools by either the Project team or the Project Board. Instead, for management, monitoring and reporting, the Project used a set of 23 “main Project Activities”, which had been developed during the Inception phase.

Project Management and Implementation

7. Project implementation was the responsibility of Uzbekistan’s State Committee for Nature Protection (SCNP), with guidance from a Project Board and support from UNDP. A small Project management unit (PMU) was set up at the SCNP, and organised the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of project activities. The PMU organised the planned activities and results diligently and skillfully and made the major contribution to the Project’s efficient implementation, within the set budget and tight timeline. The PMU was a discrete project office, housed in SCNP but working off-line. The Evaluation considers that the Project would have been more effective if the PMU had been made an integral part of the SCNP, working on-line with the units responsible for coordinating and managing the SPEP and national EF.
8. A high-level Project Board was formed and members provided guidance and comment to the Project management in response to reports and plans presented. It is not clear from the records to what extent the Project Board was to fulfil a broader, strategic function.

Country ownership and the role of UNDP

9. UNDP provided administrative and financial management support to the Project Office and team under its general agreement with the Government for nationally-executed projects. In addition, for the Rio Conventions Project UNDP took on a joint supervisory or leadership role, prompted by the disagreements over national agencies’ responsibilities for implementation. The Evaluation considers that an inappropriate degree of authority over the Project was assigned to UNDP, which may have inhibited “country ownership and driven-ness” and detracted from the Project Manager’s and National Coordinator’s abilities to manage and lead the Project effectively and efficiently. Ownership of the Rio Conventions Project by the participating agencies appears to have been relatively weak, which limited its effectiveness as an initiative to build capacity and strengthen the country’s so-called enabling environment, including basic planning, management and financing processes, engagement of stakeholders and collaborative institutional arrangements.

Linkages with other interventions

10. While the PMU organised a number of joint actions in partnership with other interventions, the Evaluation considers that more should have been done to connect the Rio Conventions Project with the large number of relevant programs and projects that have been developed and implemented in Uzbekistan over the same period. These include the series of significant GEF projects, and major programs by bilateral and multilateral donors and the Government itself in the areas of environmental protection, conservation and sustainable development. As envisaged in the GEF Strategic Approach to Capacity Building, greater use could have been made of the Project as a capacity-building resource centre, focal point and coordinating mechanism, in collaboration with each of the other environmental programmes and projects.

Project Timing and Duration

11. The Project plan was for a 30-month period of implementation. The eventual start date and time-frame agreed by the GRU and UNDP was from May 2009 to December 2011. The Project followed good practice by convening an inception phase, but it took a further 6 months to recruit the Project manager and team and to establish the Project office. As a result, the PMU has had only two years, 2010 - 2011, to organise and deliver the Project, which is too short a period for work of this nature to be effective. There has been insufficient time for the Project staff to consolidate the work they have done, and for work on drafting and recommending policy to progress sufficiently to see the policy introduced and applied. At the end of the Project, most actions have not reached the stage of building capacity that will be sustained without further additional support from the executing agencies.

Project Financing

12. The Project funds were a GEF grant of \$ 0.475 million, with in-kind contributions from UNDP and GRU valued at \$ 85,000 and \$80,000 respectively. Further contributions were secured later from UNDP CO (\$ 5,000), a UNDP Czech Trust Fund and the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE, \$ 39,778), giving total funds available of \$ 519,778².
13. The Evaluation considers that it would have been beneficial and appropriate to have secured substantial actual co-financing from GRU for the Project budget. This could have been done by amalgamating the budgets of the SCNP units responsible for managing the SPEP and the EF with the GEF funds for the duration of the Project. In addition, the Project financing plan should have identified the costs incurred by agencies having staff participating in Project activities, receiving training, for example. These accounting measures would have made it clear what total resources were available for the purpose of enhancing management of the SPEP and EF mechanisms, and would have ensured a much closer integration of the Project with the relevant SCNP units.
14. The Project accounts were managed directly by the UNDP CO, using UNDP's ATLAS administrative software. For convenience, the Project office maintained its own parallel record of funds available and expenditure, using Excel spreadsheets. Only the GEF funds (and the \$ 5,000 from UNDP TRAC) were included in either the ATLAS or the PMU accounts. No accounts appear to have been kept of the in-kind contributions. The Project did not prepare or use Outputs- or results-based budgeting, but relied on the ATLAS format of line-item accounts.
15. The GEF funds will have been spent completely by the end of the Project in December 2011. The pattern of expenditure over the life of the Project has not been even: only 10% of the funds were able to be spent in Year 1, and only 50% by the end of Year 2, leaving roughly the remaining 50% (>\$230,000) to be spend in Year 3. This put unreasonable pressure on the PMU to get through the work programme, and reduced the cost-efficiency and effectiveness of the Project activities in 2011. The Project office adopted good practice and maintained a record of expenditure on each Output and Activity even though the budget was not planned to this level.

² The latter amount (\$ 39,778) was not included in the Project accounts.

However, the method of accounting used does not allow evaluation of actual expenditure: the practice adopted was to create and allocate most costs to a general expenditure category of "Project Management", referred to as "Outcome 3", rather than to the substantive Outcomes 1 and 2.

Project Results

16. The Evaluation records that virtually all of the main Project Activities that were planned in the inception workshop were implemented and completed on time and within the overall budget. In the main body of the Evaluation report, TABLE 6 provides a summary of all the results achieved, under each planned Outcome and Output.
17. Supplementary information on the results achieved is in the Report ANNEXES: **ANNEX IV** lists all of the Project and background documents reviewed by the Evaluation, and includes a list of the 40 technical reports and other materials that have been produced by the Project. **ANNEX VII** is a summary table of all of the training exercises organised by the Project under Outputs 1.2 and 2.2. Performance indicators and a Capacity Development ScoreCard developed by the GEF agencies were used to evaluate the Project results.
18. The main results achieved by the end of the Project are summarised as follows:

OUTCOME 1. IMPROVED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT....

- Development and introduction of recommendations and guidelines to strengthen the SPEP mechanism
- Organisation and delivery of a range of training exercises to increase knowledge and skills of individuals
- Development and introduction of new course materials in environmental management and finance at the State Academy and higher education institutes.

OUTCOME 2. IMPROVED MANAGEMENT CAPACITY OF ENVIRONMENTAL FUNDS.....

- Development and introduction of recommendations and guidelines for improving administration and operation of the EF
- Design and introduction of an improved EF management information system
- Development and delivery of Training exercises to EF personnel.

Overall Project Objective : more effective environmental management in Uzbekistan.

19. The conclusion of the Evaluation is that the Project has had a positive influence on the system of environmental protection in Uzbekistan, but that the full impact of the Project has not yet been realised. Many of the results from the Project are still in the form of recommendations and guidelines, and it remains to be seen whether and how they are further developed, applied effectively and sustained.
20. Using the Capacity Development ScoreCard (devised by UNDP-UNEP-GEF), the combined Capacity Scores were assessed by the Project team itself to have increased from 13/30 at Project inception to 20/30 at the end of Project, which suggests that there was an overall increase in capacities for effective environmental management over the life of the Project. The Capacity Score of 15/30 assessed by the Evaluation also suggests a slight overall increase in capacities.

Outcome 1 : Improved environmental planning and management

21. The Evaluation concludes that the SPEP process has been improved through the Project's actions. However, as noted above, while the Project has produced recommendations and guidelines for enhancing the SPEP mechanism, there has not been sufficient time or engagement

between the Project and the SPEP management unit for these to become approved and applied policy.

22. Most attention was given to the process of planning the SPEP, and less work was done by the Project to strengthen the subsequent implementation and management of the SPEP. The Project has also prepared guidelines and recommendations on how to improve connection between the SPEP and the EF. Similarly, the Project has developed educational course materials and curricula but the impacts of this work on environmental management will be felt only in the long-term.

Outcome 2 : Environmental Funds management

23. The Evaluation concludes that the Project has achieved valuable improvements in the management and operation of the EF, for both the national and sub-national components. The Project has provided comprehensive advice and recommendations on how the EF may be enhanced, covering revenue-raising, administration, operations and project cycle management for disbursements from the EF; and these have been introduced and accepted by the EF management. A highly-satisfactory result was achieved in fully organising the development and installation of a new Information System for management of the Environmental Fund.
24. The higher objective of the Project was to enhance the overall system by which all forms of environmental protection and conservation are financed in Uzbekistan. The Evaluation considers that with a different Project plan, more could have been done towards this higher objective. By focussing only on the Environmental Fund mechanism as the Outcome, the Project and the Project Board members did not make enough of the opportunity to promote strategic thinking and facilitate development of other potential environmental financing mechanisms, in addition to the EF.

Evaluation Summary

25. A summary Evaluation is presented, based on the main standard criteria used to assess Project performance - Relevance, Efficiency, Effectiveness and Sustainability.

Relevance

26. The Project was relevant for Uzbekistan as it sought to build the basic capacities of the country's institutions to tackle the most serious environmental issues; and the Project was relevant to the GEF because Uzbekistan's national issues of environmental degradation, ecosystem failure and biodiversity loss are occurring at scales that are also of regional and global significance. The Project's small size, relative isolation and limited 'buy-in' and ownership by the country's institutions tended to reduce its relevance.

Efficiency

27. The Project was organised efficiently, in particular through the actions and diligence of the Project Manager and staff, aided by adopting a straightforward implementation strategy. Major series of technical analyses and reports were researched and produced; and impressive ranges of training exercises were organised for their target audiences. The overall cost-efficiency of the Project is not known, as the full costs were not monitored; these included in particular the costs incurred by the participating agencies in supporting staff to attend Project activities. Efficiency was probably reduced in 2011 by being required to spend 52% of the total budget in just one FY; it would have been more efficient and effective to have maintained a more-reasonable, lower level of activity and expenditure, over an extra period of 1 year.

Effectiveness

28. The Project has been moderately effective in progressing towards the overall objective of a strengthened system of environmental protection in Uzbekistan. However, the full impact of the Project has not yet been realised. The Project's results are mainly in the form of

recommendations, guidelines and training courses delivered, and it remains to be seen whether these are further developed and applied effectively, to bring about systemic changes that will endure. Overall effectiveness would have been enhanced if the Project had been better connected to the many other environmental programmes and projects that have been developed in Uzbekistan and its region over the same period as the Project.

29. Outcome 1: The Project was partially effective in achieving Outcome 1 – an improved environmental planning and management system. The Evaluation considers that the Project could have been more effective in this area, by making use of the fact that during the Project period, the 2008-2012 SPEP was in full implementation phase, which could have provided a useful platform for the Project to work on. Instead, because that was what was planned, the Project focussed more on the first part of the SPEP mechanism, the planning of the Program; and less on the second part, managing implementation of the Program. One specific output, a strengthened SPEP mechanism, was achieved with better arrangements put in place for agency collaboration and integrated planning processes, and the skills of professional planners enhanced. Again, the impact of these results were not fully realised by the end of the Project.
30. For Output 1.2, the Project has been effective in developing and delivering a wide range of training exercises and in developing and introducing two higher education course curricula. It is not known what the medium and long-term impacts of these developments will be. The training and education activities under both components (Output 1.2 and to a lesser extent Output 2.2) could have been more effective. Although the Project team did a remarkable job in delivering the broad range of training exercises, especially under component 1, a smaller series of more focused trainings would have been a more effective strategy.
31. Outcome 2: The Project was more effective in achieving Outcome 2, because it was a simpler objective to strengthen a relatively small and discrete part of the system, the Environmental Fund. The Project was able to work more directly with a narrower group of stakeholders, the existing EF managers, to achieve the planned results. The Project was most effective in organising the design, purchase, actual installation and management training for a new Information System for management of the Environmental Fund.

Sustainability

32. The Evaluation considered which of the changes or developments initiated through the Rio Conventions Project are likely to continue beyond Project completion in December 2011. An important factor is the degree to which the changes have been attached to and owned by a permanent institution. The Evaluation concludes that more could have been done to ensure that the capacity building efforts facilitated by the Project will be sustained, by ensuring that the plans, recommendations, guidelines that have been developed and introduced by the Project are adequately handed over and become properly incorporated in the permanent mechanisms, procedures and policies of the Uzbekistan system. This is an important final task for the Project team and especially the NPC and other members of the Project Board to undertake.
33. It seems likely that the educational activities of curriculum development and course delivery under Outcome 1 will be sustained by the Academy (ASSC) and the higher education institutes that worked with the Project. It is less likely that the training exercises organised for officials from the participating government agencies will be continued or replicated once the Project is completed. There does not seem to be a ready-made institutional home for this type of training for professionals in Uzbekistan.

Evaluation Ratings

The following ratings are used:

HU Highly Unsatisfactory, U Unsatisfactory, MS Marginally Satisfactory, S Satisfactory, HS Highly Satisfactory

		<i>HU</i>	<i>U</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>HS</i>
Overall Evaluation Criteria	• Relevance				<i>S</i>	
	• Efficiency				<i>S</i>	
	• Effectiveness				<i>S</i>	
	• Sustainability			<i>MS</i>		
Project Development and Design	Project Concept and Development			<i>MS</i>		
	Project Design			<i>MS</i>		
Project Management and Implementation	Project Management Arrangements				<i>S</i>	
	Stakeholder participation				<i>S</i>	
	Country ownership and UNDP role			<i>MS</i>		
	Implementation Approach				<i>S</i>	
	Project Timing and Duration			<i>MS</i>		
	Project Financing			<i>MS</i>		
	Project Monitoring & Evaluation			<i>MS</i>		
Project Results	Project Objective			<i>S</i>		
	Outcome 1.			<i>S</i>		
	Output 1.1				<i>S</i>	
	Output 1.2			<i>MS</i>		
	Outcome 2.				<i>S</i>	
	Output 2.1				<i>S</i>	
	Output 2.2				<i>S</i>	

Lessons & Recommendations

Capacity Building

- ⁰¹ A strategic approach to capacity development is more likely to be effective than organising diverse activities across many areas. In the Rio Conventions Project, both approaches were used and so can be compared: it was more efficient and effective for the Project Outcome 2 to deliberately select and service the capacity needs of a single cohort of individuals responsible for one part of the system (i.e. the EF managers) than, under Outcome 1, to try to address the wide range of training needs of numerous participants who did not attend consistently, from diverse agencies.
- ⁰² Rather than developing special capacity building projects, it would be more cost-efficient and effective to establish a permanent capacity building mechanism in a suitable agency such as the SCNP, as an integral part of the national system for environmental governance and management. Such a facility would also be more able to deliver a relevant service and to be sustained, especially in countries like Uzbekistan where the constraint is not lack of funding but lack of systemic and organisational capacity.
- ⁰³ For all capacity development activities, it is essential to plan clearly, to write clear objectives and indicators, and to bear in mind the substantive or higher-level aims of the initiative; i.e. to determine what the environmental benefits will be. In the Rio Conventions Project for example, the purpose of a) introducing better planning processes was b) to enable agencies to engage in joint programming on common strategies, in order to c) better tackle, in a concerted manner, intractable water use, agriculture, land, biodiversity and climate issues.
- ⁰⁴ For all aid projects and GEF CB2 projects in particular, it is important for the project to be conceived, developed and implemented in concert with other relevant initiatives, not in isolation. It would be valuable for all stakeholders to formulate a common strategic or programmatic framework to accommodate the range of individual projects and actions. A useful role for the GEF CB2 projects would be to organise a resource centre and coordinating mechanism for the capacity development activities undertaken by all the projects.

Capacity Development ScoreCard

- ⁰⁵ The CD ScoreCard developed by UNDP, UNEP and the GEF Secretariat is a useful device for assessing capacity in a reasonably standardised way. However, it is a rather blunt tool as it relies on just a 4-point scale (0-3) to rate each of the 15 indicators; there is a strong tendency to score 1 or 2 for each indicator (15-30 total) in all but rare instances.
- ⁰⁶ The guidelines for designing future GEF CD projects or CD components of projects should require the project planned objectives (logical framework) to be directly linked to the ScoreCard's 5 sets of capacities; in other words, CD projects or actions should be designed deliberately to build the 5 capacities (as outputs or results). The ScoreCard would thus form the M&E plan for the Project, which would be fully aligned with the Project plan. This requirement would remove the problem that occurs in many projects of having ad hoc objectives unconnected to any clear logic or planned process of change.
- ⁰⁷ The CD Scorecard was mis-applied to the Rio Conventions Project, when only 4 of the capacities were required to be monitored rather than the complete set of 5. Capacities (2) to acquire and use information were discounted, presumably because the Project plan did not include explicit reference³ to building this capacity in Uzbekistan. To use the CD ScoreCard

³ In fact, the Rio Conventions Project did work directly on strengthening this capacity (to use information) by developing a new MIS for the Environment Fund; but the ScoreCard did not record this result.

properly, all 5 capacities should be assessed, not just those thought to be immediately relevant to the project. The 5 sets of capacities work together to enable the overall management system to function adequately. For example, stakeholders (capacity 1) need to be able to acquire and use information (capacity 2) in order to be able to apply it to decision-making (capacity 3). In addition, the project may well have some un-anticipated 'side-effects', which it would be useful to record and understand. Any of the 5 capacities that are not targeted deliberately by the project should still be monitored, as they will serve as a form of 'control': they are not expected to change, but it will be informative if they do.

- ⁰⁸ A problem with the Scorecard used in current Project is that the capacity to monitor and evaluate (5) was referred only to the Project, rather than to the (environmental) management system that the Project was intended to strengthen. This led the Project team to score only its own M&E capacities, not those of the SPEP or EF mechanisms. Clearly, the purpose of a capacity building project is not merely to strengthen its own M&E system, but that was what has been monitored in this case.

Project Management

- ⁰⁹ A single complete and clear project Logical Framework is essential, with a clear and meaningful vertical logic and clear tools for planning and monitoring – indicators and sources of verification; baseline condition, targets, assumptions and risks. It should be used consistently throughout the Project to guide the management, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation.
- ¹⁰ Project preparation and project implementation should be managed as much as possible as a single, continuous and consistent process, from conception to inception to closure.
- ¹¹ The Project structure requires careful planning: components should align with distinct strategies; strategically linked outputs and results should not be split between components; it is essential to define one or more clear sets of mid-level Outputs or Results.
- ¹² The duration of the project must be sufficient to enable the systemic changes brought about by the project to be realised; and it is essential to adjust the timing of the project to suit the activity cycle of the system, e.g. the SPEP, which the Project is to strengthen or change.
- ¹³ Country ownership and drivenness are essential. The project should be embedded or integrated with the system in which it is intended to facilitate change. It is not appropriate or effective for the GEF Agency to retain ownership or attempt to lead management of the project.
- ¹⁴ The members of the Project Board or Steering Committee plus any Working Groups are the project's key partners and should share ownership and make good use of the project. Their primary role should be to enable the project to bring about the intended changes in their own home institutions and in the target system as a whole.
- ¹⁵ In order to strengthen country ownership and the strategic management of a project, it is important to secure actual co-financing for the project from within the budgets of the main participating agencies and beneficiaries, and to fully integrate funds from all sources into a single project budget.
- ¹⁶ It is good practice to use outputs or results -based budgeting and financial management. The project cannot be managed effectively or efficiently using only line-item budget and expenditure monitoring as provided for by UNDP's ATLAS system.

Monitoring & Evaluation

- ¹⁷ A good monitoring, evaluation and records (M&E) system should be developed in line with the principal project (logical) planning framework, and should be run as an integral part of the project's management. The M&E system should be organised primarily to provide the project management with essential routine feedback on how implementation is proceeding and what adjustments need to be made ("adaptive management"). It is important for the project manager and team to be recognised as the principal stakeholders in the M&E system and the first "consumers" of the information it generates. The UNDP program framework and ATLAS system should not be used as a substitute for the project logical framework and M&E system.
- ¹⁸ Independent evaluations are also reliant upon the project having a well-run monitoring and records system. In advance of the evaluation, the project's M&E system should generate accurate summary information on the project activities, management and achievements. Otherwise, as occurred in the final evaluation of the Rio Conventions Project, a major portion of the evaluation period can be spent on constructing the project's technical and/or financial records.
- ¹⁹ The bonus reason for organising and maintaining a comprehensive project records system – and linking it to a permanent institutional home – is that this can prove to be the most significant and long-lasting legacy, serving the permanent management system after the project is closed.
- ²⁰ It is good practice to conduct periodic reviews and evaluations during the life of the Project – annually or biennially, or at least at the mid-term; there should not be just one evaluation on completion of the Project. Periodic evaluations should be made under the auspices of the Project Board, and used to make strategic adjustments to project work plans and budgets, in order to strengthen the project's performance, relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and eventual sustainability.

Rio Conventions Project, Uzbekistan Final Evaluation Report

Introduction

The “Rio Conventions Project” in Uzbekistan, formally titled *Strengthening National Capacity in Rio Convention Implementation through Targeted Institutional Strengthening and Professional Development*, is an initiative of the Government of Uzbekistan, implemented from May 2009 to December 2011, with support and funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This report presents the final evaluation of the Project, undertaken in November-December 2011.

The Rio Conventions Project was conceived and developed as a follow-up to the National Capacity Self-Assessment (NCSA), which was completed in Uzbekistan in 2006. The NCSA formed Pathway I of the GEF Strategic Approach to Capacity Building, and was used to analyse the country’s capacity needs relevant to the wide range of environmental protection and management issues raised by the trio of “Rio Conventions” – the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (CCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD)⁴. Uzbekistan’s Rio Conventions Project was developed as a GEF Pathway III project, aimed at building capacity in the country to address priority issues that are common to the three Conventions.

The key issues identified through the Uzbekistan NCSA included (a) the need for the various institutions responsible for aspects of environmental protection and land, water, and biodiversity conservation, to work with closer coordination and integration, both nationally and sub-nationally; and b) the need for all forms of environmental management to be integrated with the country’s ‘mainstream’ sectors of economic and social development. Through the Project development phase, these broad capacity development needs were reviewed and the narrower issues of **coordinated environmental planning, management and financing** were selected as the main objectives for the Project to address.

Evaluation of the Rio Conventions Project in Uzbekistan

A Final Evaluation of the Project was organised by the UNDP Country Office (CO) and the Project management unit (PMU), and carried out in November-December 2011, including a 6-day mission in Tashkent, by a team of two independent consultants, Peter Hunnam and Nodira Mukhammadkulova.

A Final Evaluation upon completion of a project is accepted good management practice and a requirement of UNDP and the GEF. The purpose of the evaluation is to provide an independent professional assessment of the Project, covering the Project design and intervention strategy; management and administration of its implementation and completion; and its achievements in terms of results, outcomes and impacts. The full Terms of Reference for the current evaluation are in **ANNEX I** to this report.

This was the first evaluation of the Rio Conventions Project⁵ and the first comprehensive review of what the Project had done and achieved. The evaluation process involved collation of documentary evidence of the background, history and performance of the Project; combined with interviews and discussions with stakeholders in Tashkent. The scope of the evaluation included the context within which the Project had been conceived, developed and implemented; the planned intervention and

⁴ These “Rio Conventions” are the three global environment conventions established through the Rio Conference on Environment and Development in 1992.

⁵ A mid-term evaluation is made of many GEF projects, but not in this case, apparently because of the short duration of the Project.

implementation arrangements; financing, management and supervision; and the activities and achievements that had been recorded and reported. The evaluation team worked closely with the Project team, reviewed all available project documents, and met with a number of Project Board members including the National Project Coordinator (NPC) and Chairman of the Executing Agency, the State Committee for Nature Protection (SCNP), and UNDP CO staff. Full lists of individuals consulted and of documents reviewed are in **ANNEXES III** and **IV** to this report.

Constraints on the Final Evaluation included insufficient time in country, which meant that there was inadequate consultation with the agencies and individuals who had participated in or benefited from the Project; and there was no opportunity for presenting a draft evaluation report and debriefing the Project Board. Time constraints affected also the ability of the Project office and team to prepare and make available a comprehensive record of the Project's activities and results. A further limitation was the lead evaluator's inability to understand Russian or Uzbek languages in which the majority of the Project's technical products were written.

The evaluation report presents a review of the Project design and management arrangements; documents the reported implementation and results achieved; evaluates Project performance against four main criteria – relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability; and presents a number of lessons and recommendations for consideration in completing the Project in Uzbekistan, and in developing further capacity building activities and projects in Uzbekistan and elsewhere.

Project development context and design

Uzbekistan Environmental Issues and Capacity Needs

The Project, *Strengthening National Capacity in Rio Convention Implementation through Targeted Institutional Strengthening and Professional Development*, was developed as a follow-up to the NCSA, which the Government of Uzbekistan (GRU) had undertaken in the period 2004 to 2006. The NCSA was made available to countries eligible for GEF support, under the GEF Strategic Approach to enhance Capacity-building (GEF, 2003), of which the NCSA was the first phase or Pathway I, with the purpose of assessing the country's environmental governance issues and the capacities needed to address them.

Considerable analysis and discussion went into the Uzbekistan NCSA, to prepare "thematic" analyses, i.e. relating to each of the three main GEF Focal Areas and Rio Conventions – climate change and UNFCCC; biodiversity and the CBD; sustainable land management and CCD; and a "cross-cutting" (multi-focal; relevant to more than one Convention) assessment of capacity needs in the country. Refer to (Government of Uzbekistan, 2006) and to BOX 1.

BOX 1. General conclusions of the Uzbekistan NCSA

The NCSA determined that governmental agencies who are involved in the process of natural resources and environment management do not adequately cooperate, coordinate or collaborate on interventions that are environmentally sound, robust or resilient.

There is no mechanism in place that serves to facilitate or catalyze active involvement of diverse stakeholder representatives to solve problems in a cost-effective way.

This is further exacerbated by the relative low level of understanding among decision-makers and staff of government ministries and agencies on the value of environmental goods and services to sustaining socio-economic development.

The main barriers uncovered by the NCSA to meeting and sustaining global environmental priorities are:

- Inadequate cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation in natural resources management;
- Weak compliance of environmental policy and legal framework with respect to Rio Conventions

requirements;

- Insufficient allocation of financial resources for effective environmental management;
- Inadequate integration of global environmental concerns within national environment and development planning and management processes;
- Outdated systems for environmental monitoring and information management, including the lack of robust impact indicators;
- Relatively poor awareness of environmental values and holistic thinking about environmental sound and sustainable development among key policy- and decision-makers in government and the private sector; and
- Under-realized access to new and innovative technologies and international cooperation to pursue environmentally sound and sustainable development.

The NCSA concluded with a national capacity action plan for Uzbekistan, aimed at a set of four Strategic Objectives for strengthening capacities for environmental management, summarised as follows:

- Improving knowledge, skills and environmental education
- Increasing public awareness and engagement
- Increasing efficiency of common activities – “program documentation, legislation, institutional arrangements, financial and economic measures”
- Inter-sectoral coordination, cooperation and information sharing (government, academics, NGOs, business, local authorities, media).

The GEF Strategic Approach outlined three capacity building strategies for countries to follow subsequent to the NCSA: Pathway II was to build capacity as an integral part of GEF Full- and Medium-size projects; Pathway III was for specially-targeted capacity building actions, either for one or multiple GEF focal areas; and Pathway IV was for support only available to LDC and SIDS⁶.

Pathway II was the principal avenue of GEF support for capacity development available to countries (GEF, 2008). In the period following the NCSA, Uzbekistan developed a substantial series of GEF projects, which were intended, under the Strategic Approach, to adopt Pathway II and to integrate components or actions for enhanced capacity building within the scope of each project. Refer to **ANNEX V** which lists all of Uzbekistan’s GEF projects developed to date.

It is of particular interest for Uzbekistan as an arid and doubly-landlocked country, that its immediate neighbouring countries have implemented comparable GEF Multi-Focal Area (MFA) and Pathway III projects over the same time period as the NCSA and Rio Conventions Project in Uzbekistan; **ANNEX VI** is a list of 18 such national initiatives with total funding of over \$146 million. These have provided the major GEF Agencies – UNDP, UN Environment Program and World Bank – and the 18 sets of national project steering committees, Boards and executing agencies with potentially excellent opportunities for exchange of ideas and cross-learning between neighbouring countries with significant shared interests in a number of critical environmental issues.

Project Concept and Development

- overall rating : *Marginally Satisfactory*

The current Project was developed by UNDP as a GEF Pathway III, CB2-type project, concerned with building the country’s capacities to tackle issues relevant to more than one of the Rio Conventions. The original concept was prepared during the conclusion of the NCSA in 2006. Subsequently a project preparation grant was obtained through UNDP from the GEF Project Development Facility (refer to the PDF ‘A’ Report, July 2006) and a Project Proposal and then a Project Document were

⁶ Countries categorised as “Least Developed”, LDC, and “Small Island Developing States”, SIDS.

compiled by consultant teams and approved eventually in May, 2009.⁷ The Project design and rationale were laid out in the 2009 Project Document.

Following the Project's formal start in May 2009, an Inception phase was used to establish the Project: to appoint the Project Board; recruit the Project team and develop the Project Office within the nominated Executing Agency, the State Committee for Nature Protection (SCNP); and to confirm the Project design, management arrangements, budget and workplans. A major workshop marked the end of Inception phase, and proposed revisions to the Project plan and budget. The Inception Report (IR) prepared in February 2010 was approved by the Project Board. It formed an updated Project Document, confirming and updating the Project design, and was used to guide subsequent Project activities. The IR retained the Project structure and wording of the Outcome and Output objectives, but specified a revised set of Indicators and a revised Logical Framework, and formulated in addition a detailed set of 23 "main project activities". Subsequently, during the life of the Project, no further changes have been made to the Project structure, objectives or management arrangements.

The period from conception to development and mobilisation of the Project lasted nearly four years, which meant that some of the findings of the NCSA and the Project Development (PDF) consultations were out-of-date, and that momentum and enthusiasm for the Project in Uzbekistan must have decreased to some extent. Problems encountered included the PDF process not producing an adequate project plan; apparent conflict between agencies and a delayed decision by the Uzbekistan Government (GRU) to assign the SCNP to be lead agency for the Project, rather than UzHydroMet, which had led both the NCSA and the PDF. These factors affected continuity and engagement in the Project initiative and weakened country ownership. Perhaps because of this situation, UNDP assumed close control over the Project throughout its implementation, to the extent that most respondents to the Evaluation considered it to be essentially a UNDP project. This seems likely to have reduced the Project's effectiveness in the key target area of increasing engagement and collaboration among the range of agencies and stakeholders.

Project Design

- overall rating : *Marginally Satisfactory*

The Project design was for a series of capacity building activities aimed at strengthening environmental governance in Uzbekistan. The key area selected for the Project to address was strengthened coordination of environmental planning, management and financing. A simple design was developed for the Project, focussed on strengthening two particular aspects of the environmental management system in operation in Uzbekistan – 1. Environmental planning and management; and 2. Environmental financing. These issues formed the two main components of the Project.

Under each component, a narrower specific focus was taken: in component 1 the focus was on the existing mechanism of the State Program of Environmental Protection (SPEP)⁸; and in component 2 the focus was on the existing mechanism known as the Republic and regional Environmental Funds (EF). The Project design specified just two Outputs for each component Outcome, one of policy development and the other of professional skills development: 1.1 Specifications for a stronger SPEP mechanism; 1.2 Training for officials involved in the SPEP mechanism; 2.1 Specifications for a stronger EF mechanism; and 2.2 Training for EF personnel. These design decisions were summarised in the overall Project framework of objectives. Refer to BOX 2.

⁷ The evaluation could not obtain any information on the Project development work done in the 2 years between July 2006 and May 2008.

⁸ The State Program of Environment Protection (SPEP) is also translated as the State Program of Nature Protection (SPNP)

BOX 2 Objectives of the Uzbekistan Rio Conventions Project

GOAL - To effectively mainstream global environmental priorities into national development planning and management processes of Uzbekistan.

OBJECTIVE - To build national capacity for more effective environmental management in Uzbekistan, by improved national environmental policy planning and financing.

OUTCOME 1

Improved environmental planning and management to accommodate global environmental objectives.

Output 1.1

A new mechanism for coordinated environmental planning and management is introduced for SPEP and programming from environmental funds

Output 1.2

Professional capacity of the environmental institutions to develop, formulate and evaluate effectiveness of the environmental programmes and environmental plans improved

OUTCOME 2

Improved financial management capacity of the National Environmental Fund for increased global environmental financing.

Output 2.1

Fund management tools introduced for improved operations of the EFs

Output 2.2

Skills and knowledge of the EF personnel improved to effectively manage EF.

The IR recorded two important changes in emphasis for Outputs 1.1 and 1.2, although no changes were made to the wording of the Project plan:

- Comment on Output 1.1: “The latest 5 year SPEP has been recently adopted and it is thus not appropriate to exclusively focus project activities on the actual SPEP planning process. Instead it is proposed to widen the focus of project activities on “environmental policy” more generally, i.e., involving the SPEP as well as other relevant sectoral policies that directly relate to the Rio Conventions.”
- Comment on Output 1.2: “It is proposed to focus not only on upgrading the capacity of “environmental institutions”, but widen the provision of training products to include government officials from other than environmental institutions ...”

Evaluation comments on Project Design

The Project design structure created too much of a separation between environmental programming (planning and management) and environmental financing: placing these two topics in the Project’s two main structural divisions (components) resulted in both the Project team and the work schedule being split along the same lines. As a consequence, the two components worked separately and differently on important capacity issues, for example professional training, educational curricula, information management, which were common to both; and relatively little work was done on the essential links between programming and financing.

The development of the Rio Conventions Project through a series of stages involving different consultants and agencies produced a confused variety of tools intended to guide planning, supervision, management, monitoring and evaluation; the Evaluation notes seven planning tools with different formats and terminology, as listed in the following TABLE 1.

The Evaluation has a number of concerns with the format and wording of the Project design: there was no clear expression of the overall Project logic or change process envisaged; the “vertical logic” or pattern of actions, results and impacts was not spelt out clearly or completely; the Log Frames presented (2009 Prodoc Annex 4; 2010 Inception Report Annex 5) extended only to the 2 major Outcome objectives, not to lower-level Outputs, Results or Activities. The Goal – “to effectively mainstream global environmental priorities into national development planning and management...” was more of a cliché than a useful guiding statement. Many of the objective statements were poorly

focused and contained unnecessary multiple clauses, which made their meaning unclear. For example, the overall Project objective was *“To build national capacity for more effective environmental management in Uzbekistan, by improved national environmental policy planning and financing”*.

TABLE 1. Various Planning & Monitoring Tools for the Rio Conventions Project

Project Planning Tools	Evaluation Comments on Formats
<p>1. Logical Framework (Project Document Annex 4; revised version Inception Report Annex 5)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LF plan is incomplete, with no planned Outputs/ Results, Activities or Actions (or Inputs). Both LF versions specify Objectives – Indicators – Baselines – EoP Targets – SoV – Risks & Assumptions; but only to the level of the two major (Outcome) objectives.
<p>2. Table of “Objectively Verifiable Impact Indicators” (Project Document Table I.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNDP “OVII Table” specifies 1 Goal; 1 “Output” (which is actually Project Overall Objective); and “Actions” (actually planned Outputs). • The Outcomes and Outputs logic is not specified, nor linked to Indicators and Targets. • Inputs details are only to Outcome level (called “Activities”)
<p>3. List of Project Outputs and Main Activities (Inception Report pp 6-8)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The IR text contains a simple list of 23 Main Activities (3-7 for each of the 4 planned Outputs), but these are not linked to any Indicators, Targets, Baseline levels or Budget allocations.
<p>4. Set of Expected Results (Inception Report p.5)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The IR contains a simple table summarising 1 Goal, 1 Objective, 3 Outcomes, 4 Outputs; with no linkage to any Indicators, Targets, Baseline levels or Budget allocations.
<p>5. Multi-year Work Plan (MYWP) and Budget, 2009 to 2011 (Inception Report p.22)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The IR MYWP specifies Objective – Outcomes – Outputs – “Planned Activities” – Year – Partners – Budget line item; • It does not provide Budget detail below Outcome level (i.e. no Output nor Activity budgets)
<p>6. Work Plan for 2010 (Inception Report p.28)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The IR WP for 2010 specifies simply Outcomes (3), Activities (31) and a Q1-Q4 schedule; there are no Outputs nor Indicators; nor Inputs.
<p>7. Annual Work Plans (Rio Project AWP for 2009, 2010, 2011)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main AWP tool specifies 1 “Output” (actually the Project Objective); 2 “Planned Activities” (equivalent to the LF Outcomes); 6 “Actions” (which seem to be new wording); • The AWP is designed in accordance with UNDP’s ATLAS accounting program, using “line-item” rather than “program” budgeting; • The AWP format does not provide adequate linkage between the logical hierarchy of objectives, implementation timetable, and budget.

Presumably, the core logic intended for the Project was a) to strengthen the SPEP mechanism, as a contribution to b) improvement of environmental programming and financing in Uzbekistan; in order to c) address effectively the country’s priority environmental problems or to safeguard the environment. However, these higher objectives were not clearly expressed in the Project documents, and did not seem to be clear or a concern for many of the respondents to the Evaluation.

Indicators, which are crucial for efficient and effective monitoring, reporting, evaluation and adaptive management, were poorly specified; no indicators were set for either the planned Outputs nor the Main Activities, and some indicators were of limited use. For example, for Outcome 1 (Improved environmental planning and management...), Indicator 1 was “Number of national policy makers trained...”. It would have been more valuable to measure (increase in) the number of national plans that integrate environmental protection or conservation measures, which would be an expected outcome of improving planning skills and processes; or the number of key environmental issues addressed in national or sectoral development plans. The poorly-specified indicators made M&E difficult for the Project management team and also for the Evaluation, as is discussed further under Results.

The variety of tools and formats arose presumably to meet the different requirements of the several agencies involved at different stages in the formulation and approval of the Project plan, notably the GEF Secretariat, the GEF Agency, UNDP, and the Project executing agency of the Government of Uzbekistan, SCNP. Unfortunately, none of the formats developed provided an adequate planning tool to facilitate efficient and effective Project management, administration, supervision, monitoring and evaluation. The PMU had difficulties with the multiple formats and inconsistent wording, and in practice during implementation and for monitoring and reporting used only the set of 23 “main Project Activities” developed during the Inception phase – see **ANNEX VIII**.

Project Implementation

Project Management Arrangements

- overall rating : *Satisfactory*

The Rio Conventions Project was managed by a small, dedicated Project team, comprising a full-time Project Manager, two Task Managers (one on each component), and an Administration & Finance Officer; and employed short-term consultants for specific tasks. The Project Office was housed in the offices of the SCNP, the executing agency for the Project.

The Chairman of the SCNP served as the National Project Coordinator (NPC) and maintained liaison with and support to the Project activities. However, the Project office and team were not made an integral part of the SCNP, but remained a discrete unit working off-line from the agency’s substantive functions. In addition, all administration, human resources, procurement and financial management for the Project were organised through the UNDP Country Office. This was perhaps advantageous in terms of remaining dedicated to managing and administering the Project tasks, but the Evaluation considers that it was a disadvantage for the Project to not be made part of the work units within SCNP responsible for environmental planning, management and financing; and specifically those offices that organised and coordinated the State Programme on Environmental Protection (SPEP) and managed the Environmental Fund (EF), the two target areas for the Project.

The NPC was also designated Chairman of the Project Board (PB), which was responsible for supervision and strategic oversight of the Rio Conventions Project. The Project Board comprised senior delegates from the various stakeholder agencies; the 2010 Statute on the Project Board specified 8 national government agencies plus the UNDP CO as PB members:

- United Nations Development Program in Uzbekistan
- Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Uzbekistan;
- Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Uzbekistan;
- Ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources of the Republic of Uzbekistan;
- State Committee for Nature Protection of the Republic of Uzbekistan;
- State Committee for Land Resources, Geodesy, Cartography, and State Cadastre...
- Center for Hydro-Meteorological Service under the Cabinet of Ministers of Uzbekistan;
- Academy for State and Social Construction under the President of Uzbekistan;
- Republican Fund for Nature Protection of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The Project Board met five times during the life of the Project – following the Inception workshop; in March and November 2010; in July 2011 and finally in December 2011. The records of these meetings indicate that Board members provided guidance and comment to the Project management in response to reports and plans presented. It is not clear from the records to what extent the Project Board was able to fulfil its broader, strategic purpose, which included “promoting efficient cooperation among the project stakeholders and partners; monitoring and evaluation of the project activities; providing assistance in obtaining information and promoting information exchange

between the PB members and other interested parties; coordination and development of partner relationships with other international, regional and national projects; and promoting the adoption by the government of legal and regulatory documents prepared (by) the project.” The Evaluation considers that the functions of the Project Board were focused too narrowly and tended to encourage micro-management of the Project’s execution rather than strategic guidance and, equally important, extension of the Project into each of the participating agencies.

In addition, two “thematic” Working Groups (WG) were established to advise the work of the two Project components – “to guide the project implementation, build consensus, share decisions and validate process/results” (Government of Uzbekistan and UNDP, 2010) p.3. The proposed members of the two WG were technical experts from sub-sets of the agencies represented on the Board. No records were kept of WG discussions or decisions, or of any extension activities carried out by members in their home agencies to “share decisions” of the Project team or the Project Board. Nevertheless, the Evaluation was advised by the Project team that they had valued the supportive ideas and institutional links that had been provided by a number of individual members of the WG.

Stakeholder participation

Evaluation rating : Satisfactory

Stakeholder participation in the Project has occurred in two main ways: through the Project Board, and through involvement in specific Project activities. The Project management managed to achieve a high degree of stakeholder participation in the activities it organised. Participants in the trainings and in the reviews, assessments and analyses undertaken by both components of the Project were drawn from each of the many agencies and organisations that have interests in the issues being addressed by the Project. The Project has also employed local/ national consultants as much as possible.

However, servicing the broad range of participants in this way was probably not the most efficient or effective capacity-building strategy for the Project to adopt. The Project team expressed concern that there had been inconsistency in participation, as individual representatives of agencies had not always been available to attend specific activities, and there had apparently been little sharing of information and materials between successive participants. The Evaluation concluded that a different approach, for example a) providing an activity/ training/ materials deliberately to a whole unit in an agency; or b) deliberately selecting and servicing a cohort of individuals who would be required to participate in the complete course or activity, would probably have been more efficient and effective for the Project.

Country ownership and UNDP role

Evaluation rating : Marginally Satisfactory

In addition to providing administrative and financial management support to the Project Office and team, UNDP assumed a joint supervisory or leadership role on the Rio Conventions Project. In Project documents and meeting records, there were numerous expressions of UNDP’s ownership and responsibility for “the UNDP Project”. Similarly, the Project Manager and staff were contracted directly by the UNDP CO and all Project materials produced and equipment purchased were considered to be owned by UNDP. This point was reportedly clarified as follows at the first meeting of the Project Board, by the UNDP representative: “... supervision of Project’s activities is *responsibility of the Program Unit of UNDP*. Such a standard management model is being used in all joint projects. The Project Board considers and addresses the issues at strategic level; however the daily control of the correct use and consumption of budget funds, consistency of Project activities to its goals and objectives stipulated in the project document is the *duty of UNDP Program Unit in Uzbekistan and the relevant department of GEF/UNDP in Bratislava*.” (Refer Project Board Meeting Minutes, March 2010).

The UNDP Project Document specified the Project's Management Arrangements as follows:

"The project will be nationally executed (NEX). The executing agency for the project will be determined during the LPAC, and the Minutes of the LPAC meeting will be attached to this document. The strategic management of the project will be implemented by a Project Board ... Annual Work Plans (AWP) and reports *to be approved by UNDP Resident Representative.*" Similarly, the Project's Progress Report for Q3.2011 stipulates that "The project team will closely and continuously monitor the developments (regarding GRU regulation of the EFs) and *inform UNDP and GEF immediately should situation worsen* during the project implementation."

The Project Document also suggested that in addition to being on the Project Board, UNDP's role was "senior supplier" responsible for providing all "program and technical support, knowledge and information, planning and evaluation, financial resources, logistics and other assistance." On top of all this, the Project Board was required to "delegate its controlling functions to the Project Assurance Group", meaning the Head of UNDP's environment section.

Each of these stipulations seemed to assign an inappropriate degree of authority over the Project to UNDP, and to detract from the Project Manager's and National Coordinator's abilities to manage and lead the Project effectively and efficiently. The Project was under National Execution and governed by a Project Board in accordance with the agreed Project Document (and subsequent Inception Report). UNDP was a partner with the GRU in guiding the Project's implementation; UNDP was a member of the Board. It seems excessive for the Project to be presented and promoted as a "UNDP Project"; for accountability to be described as "to the Project Board and to UNDP" given that UNDP was already a member of the PB; and for the Project office and staff to be considered essentially as a UNDP outpost under the control of UNDP's Environment Unit Head.

These arrangements had been put in place apparently because of the conflict between national agencies that had arisen during the Project's planning and development, largely over which agency would lead Project implementation. UNDP was asked to be the conciliator between the conflicting parties.

"Country ownership and driven-ness" are important principles in all aid project management, but especially so for this type of capacity development initiative, focussed on strengthening the country's so-called enabling environment, including basic planning, management and financing processes, engagement of stakeholders and collaborative institutional arrangements. Country ownership of the Rio Conventions Project by the national institutions appears to have been relatively weak, and it was likely that ownership would have been further inhibited rather than strengthened by UNDP assuming this role and degree of management control over the Project. Learning and capacity development are achieved by doing; being made more directly responsible for supervising and managing the Project activities would have provided good opportunities for the participating agencies, Project Board, and executing agency staff and consultants to learn and develop their capacities.

Linkages with other interventions

Evaluation rating : Marginally Satisfactory

The Project office records that it has organised a number of joint actions in partnership with other interventions:

- Joint training/ module development with GEF Small Grants Program (SGP), for Uzbekistan's Academy of State and Social Construction (ASSC) and Urgench State University.
- Joint practical training workshop, for ASSC trainees, in partnership with a Central Asian Countries' Initiative for Land Management program (CACILM) supported by UNDP-GEF-GIZ.
- Joint training workshop for members of the Legislative Chamber of the Uzbek Parliament, also with CACILM, plus a UNDP assistance project on Parliamentary Development.

- Joint working meeting with the GRU and Asian Development Bank (ADB) project developing Uzbekistan's Welfare Improvement Strategy (WIS), 2011-2014.

While these are good initiatives, it is disappointing that there are so few and limited examples, especially compared with the range of major programs that have been underway. Over the past decade during which the NCSA and the current Project were developed and implemented, there has been considerable activity in Uzbekistan and its regional neighbours aimed at addressing prevailing and emerging issues of environmental protection and sustainability. In particular, series of significant GEF-funded projects have been developed and implemented in several of the GEF Focal Areas – refer to **ANNEX V** GEF Projects in Uzbekistan. In addition, a range of bilateral and multilateral donors have developed major programmes and projects in Uzbekistan, and the Government itself has also extended its activities significantly in the areas of environmental protection, conservation and sustainable development, which are the focus of the Rio Conventions Project.

It would have been valuable if the Project had been used more as an opportunity – as a resource centre, a focal point and coordinating mechanism – to strengthen capacities for environmental planning, management and financing, in close collaboration with each of the other environmental programmes and projects that have been developed and undertaken.

It is worth noting also that several of Uzbekistan's regional neighbouring countries have implemented comparable GEF capacity building projects over approximately the same time period. **ANNEX VI** is a list of the GEF Multi-Focal Area (MFA) projects developed in Uzbekistan and its immediate neighbouring countries, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. These include core capacity-building initiatives that are complementary and potential partners to Uzbekistan's Rio Conventions Project; providing UNDP, the GEF and the various project steering committees, Boards and executing agencies with potentially excellent opportunities for exchange of ideas and cross-learning.

Implementation Approach

Evaluation rating : Satisfactory

Project implementation did not start fully until the Project office and team had been established and the inception phase and workshop concluded in November 2010. Over the following two years, the team has organised and completed most of the activities that were planned. Their implementation strategy was relatively straightforward: to organise the series of activities planned in the inception workshop. Each of these required a fairly simple 3-step process: a) Review of existing practices (in environmental planning, management and financing) in Uzbekistan and in other countries. b) Development of recommendations, guidelines and training materials, on ways of strengthening environmental planning, management and financing in Uzbekistan. c) Delivery of the packages of recommendations, guidelines and training materials to the relevant agencies and individual planners and policy makers.

The small Project office and management team appear to have worked diligently and skilfully and to have made the major contribution to the Project's efficient implementation. The Project was successful in completing a busy schedule of activities to a satisfactory quality, within budget and in the limited time available. It has been a bonus that the same individuals have formed the Project team for the duration of the Project.

Unfortunately, the team has had only two years, 2010 and 2011, to organise and deliver the Project, which is too short a period for work of this nature to be effective. The Project team was discouraged from requesting an extension from UNDP, presumably because a previous extension had been granted in recognition of the delay incurred in nominating the SCNP as executing agency.

Project Timing and Duration

Evaluation rating : Marginally Satisfactory

The Project plan was for a 30-month period of implementation. The intended start date was October 2008, following approval of the plan by the GEF CEO. However, the Government of Uzbekistan (GRU) had to first decide on the most appropriate national agency to lead implementation of the Project, and this decision was not made until early 2009. The eventual start date and time-frame agreed by the GRU and UNDP was from May 2009, for a period of 30 months, to December 2011.

Even though the “official” Project start-date was set at May 2009, it took a further 6 months to recruit the Project manager and team and to establish the Project office; thus the substantive Project activities did not start until January 2010 and the effective duration of the Project has been 24 months rather than 30.

The Evaluation’s main criticism of the Project strategy is the duration of the Project, which was inappropriately short for an initiative aimed at building capacity. There was no apparent benefit gained by carrying out the Project activities quickly, under pressure of artificial deadlines from start to finish. While the Project has been implemented in 24 months and the funds have all been spent, there has been insufficient time for the Project staff to consolidate the work they have done, and to move beyond drafting and recommending policy to see the policy introduced and applied. Most actions have not reached the stage of building capacity that will be sustained. These comments apply in particular to component Outcome 1, which was the more complex and open-ended; and which included the additional task of linking together the Project’s two areas of interest, the planning and programming with the financing, which was not achieved – refer to the report section on Results. Component 2 worked in a relatively narrow field, and was successful in seeing its recommendations and guidelines actually applied. Under this component, the Project was also able to go one step further by organising the actual development and introduction of hardware and software for a new EF management information system that it had recommended and designed.

Project Financing

Evaluation rating : Marginally Satisfactory

The Project was financed with a GEF grant of \$ 0.475 million⁹. GRU made an in-kind contribution valued at \$ 80,000, for office premises, equipment and support services. UNDP undertook to provide \$ 85,000 of complementary financing to the project, from an existing UNDP project that was develop an Uzbekistan environmental information service, plus a series of publications on environment and development. During implementation, additional contributions were obtained of \$ 39,778 from the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and a UNDP Czech Trust Fund, to support a joint training exercise on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and the Project’s study tour to the Czech Republic; plus \$ 5,000 from UNDP Uzbekistan to purchase computer hardware for the Environmental Fund (component 2). Total funds available were thus \$ 519,778 in cash plus \$ 165,000 in kind.

For the Project proposal (2008) it was calculated that the total Project budget would be \$3,140,000, and that this would include the funds available in the EF, which was around \$ 2.5 million at that time. These were described as “the baseline or parallel co-financing that the project’s successful implementation will depend on.” This was an important point and made it clear that the Project would need to implemented as an integral part of the EF system that it was designed to strengthen.

In practice, none of these actual EF funds appear to have been considered by or linked to the Project. No further consideration seems to have been given to “co-financing” since the Project proposal was written. Financially, the Rio Conventions Project has remained a discrete entity,

⁹ All financial figures in this report are in USD, with the symbol \$

managed quite separately from the regular work of managing the SPEP, the EF or the professional development of their staff.

The Evaluation considers that it would have been beneficial and appropriate to have identified substantial actual co-financing for the Project from within the GRU budget. Specifically, it would have been useful for the budgets of the SCNP units responsible for managing the SPEP and the EF, the subjects of the two Project components, to have been amalgamated with the GEF funds for the duration of the Project. In addition, the Project financing plan should have identified the costs incurred by any GRU or other agencies having staff participating in Project activities, including those paid as managers to provide strategic advice and direction, and those staff who were beneficiaries of the Project, receiving training, for example. These measures would have made it clear what total resources were available for the purpose of enhancing management of the SPEP and EF mechanisms, and would have ensured a much closer integration of the Project with the relevant SCNP units.

Project Budget and Accounts

Although the Project was nominally managed by the national government under UNDP's National Execution/ Implementation Mode, the Project accounts were managed directly by the UNDP CO¹⁰, using UNDP's ATLAS administrative software for workplans, accounts and reports. For convenience, the Project office maintained its own parallel record of funds available and expenditure, using Excel spreadsheets. The Evaluation was advised that only the GEF funds (plus \$ 5,000 UNDP TRAC funds) were included in either the ATLAS or the PMU accounts; the additional cash contributions were not integrated with the Project accounts, but managed by the respective donor offices with expenditure advised to the Project. No reports were made available on the GRU in-kind contribution, nor the complementary financing from the UNDP environmental information project.

The Project did not prepare or use Outputs- or results-based budgeting, but relied on the ATLAS format of line-item budgets. Throughout the Project, the budget appears to have been planned only to Outcome level. Even the detailed Work Plan for 2010 that was prepared laboriously in the inception phase did not plan nor allocate funds to the 23 specific Activities or 4 specific Outputs; it simply identified the funds allocated each year to each of the two Outcomes, to spend on the standard UNDP account codes or line items – consultants, travel, etc..

Expenditure

The Project records show that the GEF funds would be spent completely by the end of the Project in December 2011. TABLE 2 shows the annual expenditure achieved, compared to the original annual budget plan. The pattern of expenditure over the life of the Project has not been as planned. The plan had been to spend 80% of the funds in Years 1 and 2, leaving just 20% (<\$ 100,000) for completing and closing the Project in Year 3.

TABLE 2. Project Budget and Expenditure, Annual

	US\$	2009	%	2010	%	2011	%	Total
Budget - original		192,900	41	186,900	39	95,200	20	475,000
Budget - additional						5,000		5,000
Expenditure		<u>45,459</u>	9	<u>198,154</u>	41	<u>236,161</u>	49	<u>479,774</u>
Balance		147441		-11,254		-137,200		226

¹⁰ The Evaluation was advised by the CO that the GoU had specifically requested this arrangement, although this is not clear from the inception report (2010), which agreed more simply to apply regular monitoring and reporting.

The reality was that only 10% of the funds were able to be spent in Year 1, and only 50% by the end of Year 2, leaving roughly the remaining 50% (>\$230,000) to be spend in Year 3. This put unreasonable pressure on the Project management team to get through the work programme, and reduced the cost-efficiency and effectiveness of the Project activities in 2011. The Evaluation considers that the slow start-up and expenditure in Year 1 (2009) should have triggered an extension of the Project at no-added cost over a full 4th year, which would have allowed a more thorough and considered conclusion to the Project.

The Project office adopted good practice and maintained a record of expenditure on each Output and Activity even though the budget was not planned to this level. TABLE 3. is a summary of expenditure on each Output against the original planned budget (specified only to Outcome level). **ANNEX VIII** shows a more detailed list of the final expenditures on the 4 Outputs and 20+ Activities carried out.

TABLE 3. Summary of Project Plan, Budget and Expenditure

Project Plan	BUDGET	%	EXPENDITURE	%
Output 1.1 Env. planning and mngt. mechanism			38,842	8
Output 1.2 Professional capacity..... Improved			67,359	14
OUTCOME 1. IMPROVED ENV. PLAN AND MNGT.	130,000	27	106,201	22
Output 2.1 Improved EF management....			54,592	11
Output 2.2 Capacity development of EF staff			66,072	14
OUTCOME 2. IMPROVED EF MANAGEMENT	303,000	64	120,664	25
PROJECT MANAGEMENT	42,000	9	252,910	53
Totals	475,000		479,775	

The Project plan had anticipated Outcome 1 receiving 27% and Outcome 2 receiving 64% of the budget, whereas, as indicated in TABLE 3, by the end of the Project, expenditure was 22% and 25% respectively. However, the difference is due largely to the method of accounting: it was easier to record expenditure under a general category of Project Management, referred to as "Outcome 3", rather than to assign it to one or other of the substantive Outcomes or Outputs. Thus for example Project staff salaries: in the Budget column of TABLE 3, all or most staff costs appear to have been included in Outcome 2 (presumably for administrative convenience, staff costs were not allocated equally between Outcomes 1 and 2), while in the Expenditure column staff costs are listed under Project Management. The main drawback of not allocating costs to the substantive Outcomes and Outputs, was that it was difficult to practice results-based management of the budget, which would have been useful to facilitate adaptive management during the Project.

Project Monitoring & Evaluation

Evaluation rating : Marginally Satisfactory

The Project proposal (2008) specified a monitoring and evaluation plan, which was confirmed in the Project Document (2009) and in the Inception Report Annex 6 (2010). The main elements of the M&E Plan are listed in TABLE 4. All three documents stressed that both the Project plan and its M&E plan were based on the Logical Framework, which included baseline, targets and indicators (the latter were revised in the Inception Report); and in addition employed a "Capacity development monitoring and evaluation scorecard", which had been designed for GEF CB2 projects by UNDP, UNEP and the GEF Secretariat, in line with the GEF results-based management framework.

Of the 17 M&E elements planned, the Evaluation is aware of 12 (in **bold** in TABLE 4) having been implemented during the Project; some of the elements were merged and others were no longer required under UNDP or GEF policy.

ANNEX IV is a full list of the planning documents and reports which have been reviewed by the Evaluation.

TABLE 4. M&E Plan for the Rio Conventions Project

The M&E plan specified the following elements; **bold text** indicates those that were implemented:

Meetings

- a. Project **inception workshop** and **Inception Report**
- b. Annual Tri-Partite Review Meetings
- c. Steering Committee/ **Project Board meetings** and 6 monthly Reviews
- d. Quarterly management meetings
- e. **Field visits by UNDP staff and NPC**

Plans

- f. **Annual Work Plans and Budgets**
- g. **Annual Plans of Action**
- h. Quarterly plans

Reports

- i. **Annual Project Implementation Reviews (PIR)/ Reports**
- j. **Annual Review Reports (ARR)**
- k. **Data entry into UNDP ATLAS system**
- l. Periodic technical reviews and reports
- m. **Budget reviews**
- n. **Quarterly Progress Report**
- o. **Project Terminal Report**

Audit and Evaluation

- p. Annual external audit
- q. **Capacity Development Scorecard**
- r. **Final evaluation**

The foundation of the M&E system was the Logical Framework. However, for the Rio Conventions Project, the Logical Framework was poorly- and incompletely-developed: in particular, objective and indicator statements were not clearly expressed, and were provided only for the overall Project and two major Outcomes. This created a difficulty for the Project manager and team, and it is apparent that the Logical Framework was not adequate as the guiding framework for either project implementation or for M&E. In practice, the main monitoring activities have been to maintain a record of implementation of the Main Activities and of production of technical reports; to complete the PIR in 2010 and 2011; and to present plans and reports to and receive endorsement from the Project Board.

The M&E Plan was designed to meet the needs of UNDP as the IA and the GEF itself; there seemed to have been much less attention given to enabling the Project manager, NPC and EA to achieve effective and efficient management of the Project. There appeared to have been little or no effort made to create an M&E system for the Project that would be readily linked to a mechanism in use or to be developed by SCNP or any other Uzbekistan agency. The Evaluation considers this to have been a wasted opportunity; the Project plan and its M&E system would have been more relevant to the participating agencies if they had been used as models for strengthening the country's own program planning, management and M&E mechanisms.

The Capacity Development ScoreCard was used to monitor progress by the Project team and was included in the PIR. A set of 15 indicators and rating criteria are included in the ScoreCard template, with the highest possible score set at 45. The ScoreCard results obtained for the Project – at Inception, end of 2010 and end of Project – are discussed in the Results section below.

The Scorecard was designed to track the following 5 inter-connecting capacities that together constitute a functioning management system:

1. Capacities for stakeholders to engage
2. Capacities to generate, access and use information
3. Capacities for (planning and decision-making) strategy, policy and legislation development
4. Capacities for management and implementation
5. Capacities to monitor, evaluate (and gain feedback).

Project Results

This section reviews the results achieved by the Project. Following the inception phase and establishment of management arrangements, the Project team undertook a busy 2-year programme to implement the activities planned in the inception workshop. Despite the short time frame, most of the activities that were planned have been organised and completed in a diligent and efficient manner, on time and within budget.

Attainment of Objectives

The Project framework specified 4 tiers of objectives, headed by an overall Goal and Project Objective, followed by two planned Outcomes and four Outputs. TABLE 5. presents a summary of the main results achieved by the Project and a performance rating by the Final Evaluation, for each of the objectives that were planned.

TABLE 5. Project Main Achievements and Evaluation Rating

	Planned Objectives	Objectives Attained	Rating ¹¹
PROJECT	To build national capacity for more effective environmental management in Uzbekistan, by improved national environmental policy planning and financing.		S
OUTCOME 1.	IMPROVED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT....		S
OUTPUT 1.1	New mechanism for coordinated environmental planning and management.....	Development and introduction of <u>recommendations and guidelines</u> to strengthen environmental planning and programming	S
OUTPUT 1.2	Professional capacity..... improved	Organisation and delivery of <u>range of training exercises</u> to increase knowledge and skills of individuals Development and introduction of <u>new course materials</u> in environmental management and finance at State higher education institutions	MS
OUTCOME 2.	IMPROVED MANAGEMENT CAPACITY OF ENVIRONMENTAL FUNDS.....		S
OUTPUT 2.1	Improved Environmental Funds management.....	Development and introduction of <u>recommendations and guidelines</u> for improving administration and operation of the EF Design and introduction of an improved <u>EF management information system</u> .	S
OUTPUT 2.2	Skills and knowledge of the EF personnel improved.....	<u>Training</u> developed and delivered to EF personnel	S

¹¹ The following 5-point scale is used to give a rating of achievement under each Output and Outcome: *HU Highly Unsatisfactory, U Unsatisfactory, MS Marginally Satisfactory, S Satisfactory, HS Highly Satisfactory*

Summary of Project Results

TABLE 6 provides a summary of all the results achieved, under each planned Outcome and Output. Supplementary information on the Project's achievements are in ANNEXES to the Evaluation Report:

- **ANNEX IV** lists all of the **Project and background documents** reviewed by the Evaluation, and includes a list of the 40 **technical reports** and other materials produced by the Project.
- **ANNEX VII** is a summary table of all of the **training exercises** organised by the Project under Outputs 1.2 and 2.2.

TABLE 6. Summary of Project Results

OUTCOME 1.	IMPROVED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT....
OUTPUT 1.1 PLAN	New mechanism for coordinated environmental planning and management.....
OUTPUT 1.1 RESULTS	Development and introduction of <u>recommendations and guidelines</u> for strengthening environmental planning and programming
ACTIVITY RESULTS	1.1 Assessment of current national policy and institutional coordination mechanisms 1.2 Planning ways to strengthen SPEP mechanism 2.1 Review made of institutional mechanisms in Belarus, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Bulgaria and Latvia 3.1 Round table discussion with main agency stakeholders 4.1 Review of modern planning instruments; recommendation on application in Uzbekistan 4.2 Guidelines on strengthening national planning system 5.1 Report on new indicators for monitoring Rio Conventions implementation 5.2 Manual on application of indicators for Rio Conventions 6.1 Recommendations on harmonization of SPEP formulation and EF programming
OUTPUT 1.2 PLAN	Professional capacity..... improved
OUTPUT 1.2 RESULTS	Organisation of a <u>range of training exercises</u> to increase the knowledge and skills of individual officials in the agencies responsible for environmental protection Development and introduction of <u>new course materials</u> in environmental management and finance at State higher education institutions
ACTIVITY RESULTS	8.1 Training materials on integration of Rio Conventions into national policies 9.1 Induction training on Rio Conventions – for 20 government officers 9.2 Training on identification and preparation of project proposals for GEF-5 9.3 Meeting on integration of environmental priorities into proposed WIS, 2011-2014 9.4 Training workshop on environmental issues – for 80 members of Legislative Chamber 9.5 Training workshop on modern environmental planning tools 9.6 Training workshop on SEA and EIA – for Heads of RCNPs 9.7 Joint training workshop with UNECE on development of SEA and EIA in Uzbekistan 10.1 ASSC Training material on “Environmental issues and responsibilities of GRU officials” 11.1 Pilot workshop on Rio Conventions – for 56 participants at ASSC 11.2 Practical training course on land and water management – for 60 trainees at ASSC 12.1 Presentation of new course module to ASSC and H.E. Institutes 13.1 Introduction of Environment course to Urgench State University (UrSU) 14.1 Study Trip to Czech Republic - on SEA
OUTCOME 2.	IMPROVED MANAGEMENT CAPACITY OF ENVIRONMENTAL FUNDS.....
OUTPUT 2.1 PLAN	Improved Environmental Funds management.....
OUTPUT 2.1 RESULTS	Development and introduction of <u>recommendations and guidelines</u> for improving administration and operation of the EF mechanism. Design and introduction of an improved <u>EF management information system</u>.
ACTIVITY RESULTS	15.1 Assessment of current management of EFs 15.2 Review of existing PCM in EFs 15.3 Report on methods to assess and calculate environmental damage

	16.1 Assessment of current environmental financing market in Uzbekistan
	17.1 Consultant review of environmental funds management in Croatia, Czech, Poland
	18.1 Recommendations prepared for upgrading EF operations
	20.1 New procedures drafted to implement recommendations on EF management
	20.2 Design, development and introduction of new EF MIS
OUTPUT 2.2 PLAN	Skills and knowledge of the EF personnel improved.....
OUTPUT 2.2 RESULTS	Training developed and delivered to EF personnel
	21.1 Training material developed— on “Rio Conventions and financing mechanisms”.
	22.1 Training workshop on Rio Conventions and environmental financing mechanisms
	22.2 Training workshop on upgrading EF management
	22.3 Training workshop on new EF management procedures, regulations, PCM and e-MIS
	22.4 Training in use of new e-MIS – for 21 Regional EF staff (Bukhara city, Nov. 2011)
	22.5 Training in use of new e-MIS – for 21 Regional EF staff (Fergana city, Nov. 2011)
	23.1 Study tour of EF operations in Croatia – for 5 EF staff

Measurement of Performance Indicators and ScoreCard

This section assesses the degree to which the planned objectives have been attained, by reviewing the indicators set for each objective in the Project plan, together with the Capacity Development Scorecard for measuring performance of GEF capacity development activities.

TABLE 7. Measurement of Indicators

Objectives	Proposed Indicators	Achieved Indicators
Goal		
To effectively mainstream global environmental priorities...	None proposed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not measured
Project Objective ...more effective environmental management in Uzbekistan...	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Improved and adequately modified SPEP development process..... Enhanced EF management and operations capacity..... CD Scorecard.... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impacts appear to have not reached this stage yet Recommendations given but are not yet adopted as planning policy. Improvements to EF revenue-raising and operating procedures; and to MIS. CD Score increase from 13/30 to 20/30.
Outcome 1: Improved environmental planning and management...	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Number of national policy makers trained... Better harmonized SPEP implementation and EF programming Issues related to national and global environmental priorities are integrated into curricula... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14 specific trainings delivered to planning and policy staff. Total no. Outcome 1 trainees is 479 Recommendations made for linking EF with the SPEP. New course curricula have been developed and introduced at ASSC and education institute(s)
Outcome 2 Improved management capacity of the Environmental Funds...	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Availability and use of information on best international practice in EF management Number and quality of proposals and recommendations to upgrade the operational performance of the EF accepted and introduced in EF rules Number of specific trainings on operational management of EF and number of EF staff successfully completed these trainings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advice on potential improvements given to EF management, drawn from review of EF practices in other countries. Recommended changes to EF management have been accepted and introduced. New EF MIS system has been developed and introduced 5 specific trainings delivered to EF staff. Total no. Outcome 2 trainees is 184

TABLE 7. shows the proposed and recorded indicators for the major objectives. Even though the majority of Activities have been implemented as planned, it is not clear whether the Project has made satisfactory progress towards its objectives. Difficulties for the Evaluation are that (i) *Indicators 1* and *2* are not useful Project Objective indicators, but may be used as Outcome indicators; (ii) there are no Output indicators; and (iii) some of the Outcome indicators are not suitable: *indicators 4* and *9* are simple indicators of the extent to which the training Activities have been carried out; they do not indicate whether the training has been effective, nor whether Outcome 1 or 2 has been reached. Similarly, *indicator 6* is not a reasonable indicator for Outcome 1, and would be more suitable as an indicator for an Output concerned with enhancing the quality of higher education. *Indicators 5, 7* and *8* are reasonable indicators for the Outcomes.

Indicator 3 is the changes recorded using the UNDP-UNEP-GEF Capacity Development Scorecard. The Scorecard has been applied 3 times by the Project team – at the Project start, the end of year 1, and the end of year 2/ end of Project (EoP). An EoP score was given also by the Evaluation team. The results are summarised in TABLE 8. and discussed for each objective in the following sections. Refer to **ANNEX IX** for the full Scorecard completed for the Rio Conventions Project.

TABLE 8. Scores recorded by the Project, using the Capacity Development Scorecard

Capacities of the target system	Maximum Score	EoP Target	Assessment by PMU			Evaluation EoP
			Start	End Y1	EoP	
1. Capacity for stakeholder engagement	9	4	2	3	4	3
2. Capacity to generate, access and use information and knowledge ¹²	(15)	-	-	-	(6)	(6)
3. Capacity to develop policy and legislation	9	6	3	5	6	5
4. Capacity for management and implementation	6	4	3	3	4	4
5. Capacity to monitor and evaluate	6	6	4	5	6	3
Combined Scores	45	20	13	16	20	15

Overall Project Objective – More effective environmental management

Evaluation rating : S

It is difficult to assess progress towards this process objective; *Indicators 1* and *2* are not suitable measures. A more useful overall Objective would have been “(more effective) Environmental Protection”, with a suitable indicator to signal whether substantive protection and conservation had been enhanced.

The combined Capacity Scores awarded by the Project team increased from 13/30 at inception to 20/30 at the end of Project (refer to Table 8), which suggests that there was an overall increase in capacities for effective environmental management over the life of the Project. The EoP Capacity Score of 15/30 given by the Evaluation also suggests an overall increase in capacities.¹³

¹² Note that this Capacity (2) was not measured at the start or middle of the Project, and so cannot be compared with the score given at the End of the Project (EoP).

¹³ The differences between the Capacity Scores given by the Project team and the Evaluation team (refer to Table 8) are due in part to the subjective nature of the scoring process, but more significantly to the Project team being misled by the ScoreCard guidelines (refer ANNEX IX) to assess Capacity 5 for M&E as the Project’s capacity for M&E, rather than the capacity for M&E of the overall system in Uzbekistan that the Project is striving to improve. The Project team gave itself an M&E capacity score of 6, for the former, whereas the Evaluation gave a score of 3, for the national system.

Overall, the Evaluation considers that Project has had a positive influence on the system of environmental protection in Uzbekistan, but that the full impact of the Project has not yet been realised. Many of the results from the Project are still in the form of recommendations and guidelines, and it remains to be seen whether and how they are developed further, applied effectively and sustained.

Outcome 1 – Improved environmental planning and management

Evaluation rating : S

No single useful indicator was set for this Outcome, but the overall objective *Indicator 1* (Improved SPEP...) is applicable: the Evaluation concludes that the SPEP process has been improved through the Project's actions. However, as noted above, while the Project has produced recommendations and guidelines for enhancing the SPEP mechanism, there has not been sufficient time or engagement between the Project and the SPEP management unit for these to become approved and applied policy.

A concern of the Evaluation is that Outcome 1 has focused only on the SPEP and has not facilitated strengthening of the wider system of strategic planning and management, which is needed for fuller consideration to be given of environmental issues – land, water, air and biodiversity – in social and economic development planning in Uzbekistan.

Similarly, although the Outcome was aimed at improved planning and management, it seems that most attention was given to the planning or developing the SPEP, compared to relatively little work done by the Project to strengthen the subsequent implementation and management of the SPEP. The objective of "SPEP implementation and EF programming (being) better harmonized" (*Indicator 5*) has not yet been achieved, but the Project has prepared guidelines and recommendations on how this might be done. The Project has recorded useful progress in curriculum development (*Indicator 6*), but this would be more useful as an Output indicator. Clearly, it is hoped that curriculum improvement will contribute eventually to the Outcome of better management, but there is a series of crucial intervening steps to be achieved.

Outcome 2 – Environmental Funds management

Evaluation rating : S

The Project Outcome 2 objective was to improve management of the Environmental Fund, which the Evaluation considers was not sufficiently high as an Outcome, but would have been more relevant as an Output. A more useful Outcome 2 objective would have been to improve the system of financing of environmental protection and conservation measures in Uzbekistan, with one Output being to strengthen the Environmental Fund. The Project was a valuable opportunity to address the broader objective, but was not designed or used to do so. The Evaluation considers that by working only narrowly on the Environmental Fund mechanism, the Project has kept its vision too low. The central purpose of this Project was to enhance the Government's existing systems for programming and financing for environmental protection and conservation in the country. It would have made better use of the Project as a capacity building opportunity – and of the high-level Project Board and wide-reaching technical Working Groups – to have also paid attention to all other relevant mechanisms in Uzbekistan for environmental financing, existing and potential, in addition to the EF. The Project has made valuable achievements in strengthening the EF operations, but it seems to have had limited impact on strategic thinking or development of the overall system by which all forms of environmental protection and conservation are to be financed in Uzbekistan.

Indicator 2 was not suitable for the overall Project objective, but can be used at this Outcome level: the Project reports that enhancements have been made to the revenue-raising, administration and operations of the EF. The Project has provided comprehensive advice and recommendations on how operation of the EF may be enhanced, and these have been accepted and introduced (*Indicators 7*

and 8). The Evaluation concludes that management and operation of the EF have been improved, for both the national and sub-national components, by the Project's efforts.

Outputs 1.1 and 2.1 – Strengthened SPEP and EF mechanisms

Evaluation rating : S

No Output indicators were set, although as noted above, some of the indicators set for higher objectives would have been more suitable as Output indicators: the Project Objective *Indicator 1* can be applied to Output 1.1 – see notes under Outcome 1. above; and the Project Objective *Indicator 2* can be applied to Output 2.1 – see notes under Outcome 2. above.

Outputs 1.2 and 2.2 – Improved professional capacities, skills and knowledge

Evaluation rating : MS and S

The Evaluation concludes that both Project components organised impressive ranges of training exercises for their target audiences, and that these were carried out diligently and efficiently. However, the impacts of these trainings on the quality of environmental planning, management and financing in Uzbekistan are largely unknown.

Indicators 4 and 9 (numbers of training exercises and trainees) can be applied to Outputs 1.2 and 2.2 respectively. The numbers are impressively high (totals of 19 training exercises and 663 trainees from numerous agencies and organisations – refer to **ANNEX VII**), although they are measures only of activity not of results or impacts. The Project and the main agencies in which it worked do not appear to have attempted to measure any influences which the trainings may have had on the performance of an agency or a part of the overall system.

Evaluation Summary

This section draws together the findings of the Final Evaluation and presents a summary set of conclusions and evaluation ratings for each of the main standard criteria used to assess Project performance. Refer to **ANNEX I** Evaluation Terms of Reference, and the GEF M&E Policy (GEF, 2010).

Relevance

Evaluation rating: Satisfactory

The Rio Conventions Project was a relevant initiative for Uzbekistan, as it sought to build the basic capacities of the country's institutions to tackle the most serious environmental issues, in response to the needs identified through Uzbekistan's NCSA. Relevance was heightened by the Project management guiding the attention of participants onto Uzbekistan's actual priority environment issues, rather than relying simply on the notion of compliance with the Rio Conventions, which had been implied by the Project design. The Project was relevant to the GEF because Uzbekistan's national issues of environmental degradation, ecosystem failure and biodiversity loss are occurring at scales that are also of regional and global significance.

The Project's small size, relative isolation and limited 'buy-in' and ownership by the country's institutions tended to reduce its relevance. It would have been valuable for the Project concept and strategy to have been promoted and 'sold' more rigorously to the GRU; for the Project design to have been formulated through a more thorough participatory process; for the Project to have been made an integral part of the institutions and system responsible for environmental governance in Uzbekistan; and for stronger connections to be made with other projects and programs. The lengthy Project development period and the loss of momentum following the NCSA did not help in this regard. Relevance would also have been raised by more careful elucidation of the specific results that were sought from the Project's activities.

Efficiency

Evaluation rating: Satisfactory

The Rio Conventions Project was organised efficiently, in particular through the actions and diligence of the small Project management team, aided by the relatively straightforward implementation strategy. Both Project components organised major series of technical analyses and reports, and an impressive range of training exercises for their target audiences. These tasks were carried out diligently and efficiently; the technical products were created with cost-efficient use of human resources and time.

The overall cost-efficiency of the Project is not known, as the full costs were not monitored; these included in particular the costs incurred by the participating agencies in supporting staff to attend Project activities. It is likely that costs could have been reduced and efficiency increased further if the Project had been properly integrated with its Executing Agency, SCNP, rather than remaining a separate, off-line entity. Provision of administrative support services by UNDP was also not the most efficient strategy, because the Project office was obliged to partially duplicate the Service Centre's work by maintaining its own set of records and accounts.

The efficiency and effectiveness of the Project were probably reduced in 2011 by being required to spend 52% of the total budget in just one FY; it would have been more efficient and effective to have maintained a more reasonable, lower level of activity and expenditure, over an extra period of 1 year. The Project's efficiency was also reduced by the need to work in 2 to 3 languages: Project development was done mostly in English; implementation was mostly in Russian or Uzbek; monitoring was conducted mostly in Russian or Uzbek; reporting and evaluation were done mostly in English. Relatively few of the key planning and reporting documents have been translated and used in more than one of these languages, which has also reduced the effectiveness of the Project's work.

Effectiveness

Evaluation rating: Satisfactory

The Project has been moderately effective in progressing towards the overall objective of a strengthened system of environmental protection in Uzbekistan. However, the full impact of the Project has not yet been realised. The Project's results are mainly in the form of recommendations, guidelines and training courses delivered, and it remains to be seen whether these are further developed and applied effectively, to achieve systemic changes. The NCSA and the PDF analysis identified a number of critical capacity issues in the Uzbekistan system, including the country's complicated arrangement of agencies responsible for different aspects of environmental protection, land and water use management, nature conservation, pollution control, and sustainable development. Solutions required include a strong collaborative planning mechanism, and resolving the overlapping responsibilities of agencies. The Project worked on these issues, but it is not clear that the Project has been able to do enough towards getting the solutions established and bringing about systemic changes that will endure.

The Project was partially effective in achieving Outcome 1 – an improved environmental planning and management system. One specific output, a strengthened SPEP mechanism, was achieved with better arrangements put in place for agency collaboration and integrated planning processes, and the skills of professional planners enhanced. The Project has also introduced ways to improve the linkages between the SPEP and the EF programming. Again, the impact of these results will not have been fully realised by the end of the Project.

The Project focussed more on the first part of the SPEP mechanism, the planning of the Program; and less on the second part, managing implementation of the Program. The Evaluation considers that the Project could have been more effective in this area: during the Project period, the 2008-

2012 SPEP was in full implementation phase, which provided a useful platform on which the Project could have worked, rather than 'waiting' to be able to influence the start of the next (2013-2017) SPEP cycle. Significantly, the fact that the Project was not going to be in synchrony with the planning of the new SPEP (because of start-up delays) was raised in the inception workshop, but unfortunately this did not result in an adequate revision of the Project plan.

For its second output (1.2), the Project has been effective in developing and delivering a wide range of training exercises and in developing and introducing two higher education course curricula. What the medium and long-term impacts of these developments will be is unknown; clearly, the hope is that enhanced skills and knowledge among individual professional practitioners will lead eventually to the outcomes of better management and protection of the environment; however, there is a series of crucial intervening steps to be achieved.

The Evaluation considers that the training and education activities under Output 1.2 (and perhaps to a lesser extent under Output 2.2) could have been organised to be more effective. A wide range of training and education topics was tackled and large numbers of individuals from numerous agencies participated in the program. The small team did a remarkable job in delivering the broad range of training exercises, especially under component 1. However, it may have been more effective to have done a smaller series of more focused trainings, for example by deliberately selecting a specific group of individuals and organising participatory action learning on a specific aspect of environmental planning or management in which they are engaged. Appropriate Indicators of success would relate to strengthened planning or management rather than the amount of training delivered.

Overall effectiveness of the Project would have been enhanced if it had been better connected to – and used as a resource centre, focal point and coordinating mechanism for – the many other environmental programmes and projects that have been developed in Uzbekistan and its region, over the period of the NCSA, the PDF and the Project.

The Project was more effective in achieving Outcome 2, which was a simpler objective to strengthen a relatively small and discrete part of the system, the Environmental Fund. The Project was able to work more directly with a narrower group of stakeholders, the existing EF managers, to achieve the planned results of enhanced revenue-raising, additional financing sources, and strengthened programming and management of EF disbursements on environmental projects. The Project was most effective in organising the design, purchase, actual installation and management training for a new Information System for management of the Environmental Fund.

Sustainability

Evaluation rating: Marginally Satisfactory

The Rio Conventions Project was a small-budget and short-lived intervention to strengthen environmental planning, management and financing in Uzbekistan. This section discusses which of the changes or developments initiated through the Project are likely to continue beyond its closure in December 2011.

An important factor is the degree to which the changes have been "institutionalized", i.e. attached to and owned by a permanent institution. The Evaluation concludes that it is questionable whether the Project results – plans, recommendations, guidelines that have been developed and introduced – have been adequately handed over and become properly incorporated in the permanent mechanisms, procedures and policies of the Uzbekistan system. More could have been done to ensure that the capacity building efforts facilitated by the Project will be sustained. There is an important final task for the Project team and especially the NPC and other members of the Project Board in their permanent positions to ensure that this "hand-over" and institutionalization take

place before and following closure of the Project, and that the incorporation of the key sets of results is continued within the relevant agency offices, even though the Project office is closed. The answer is for the participating agencies represented on the PB to assume responsibility for the Rio Conventions Project's results.

It seems likely that the educational activities of curriculum development and course delivery under Outcome 1 will be sustained by the Academy (ASSC) and the higher education institutes that worked with the Project. These activities are an essential part of the regular functions of these institutions, and the Project provided them with a short-term boost of capacity to develop and introduce the new materials. It is less likely that the training exercises organised for officials from the participating government agencies will be continued or replicated once the Project is completed. There does not seem to be a ready-made institutional home for this type of training for professionals in Uzbekistan. It would have been more effective and would have enhanced sustainability if the Project had been developed as an initiative to facilitate establishment of a permanent, in-service training facility within SCNP, rather than to organise an ad hoc series of training exercises.

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- GOVERNMENT OF UZBEKISTAN & UNDP 2010. Inception Report "Strengthening National Capacity in Rio Convention Implementation through Targeted Institutional Strengthening and Professional Development" Uzbekistan