Project Completion Report for GEF Project:

TA 7439-PRC: Management and Policy Support to Combat Land Degradation

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The People's Republic of China (PRC)—Global Environment Facility (GEF) Partnership on Land Degradation in Dryland Ecosystems (the Partnership) covers a 10-year country programming framework which seeks to combat land degradation, reduce poverty, and rehabilitate dryland ecosystems in the western region of the PRC. In 2004, *TA 4357-PRC: Capacity Building to Combat Land Degradation Project* was launched to support the establishment and coordination of the Partnership and was successfully completed in December 2009.

The project on Management and Policy Support for Combating Land Degradation in Dryland Ecosystems was approved by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in December 2009 as the second technical assistance (TA) to provide support for the coordination of the Partnership (*TA 7439-PRC: Management and Policy Support to Combat Land Degradation*). GEF funding for the said project was approved by the GEF Council in April 2009, and the project was endorsed by the GEF CEO on 14 October 2009. Total GEF funding amounted to USD2,728,000, excluding the ADB fee, and co-financing of USD6,200,000 from national and provincial partners, and ADB. The project was implemented in Gansu, Qinghai, and Shaanxi provinces; and Inner Mongolia, Ningxia Hui, and Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous regions (ARs) starting 6 May 2010.

The expected impact of the TA was reduced land degradation in dryland ecosystems in the western region of the PRC through the introduction of innovative sustainable land management (SLM) practices for improved agriculture, rangeland, and forest management. The expected outcome was strengthened capacity in the Partnership to address and manage technical, policy, legal, and institutional barriers in combating land degradation of the drylands of the PRC western region. The expected outputs of the TA included (i) strengthened management and implementation of integrated ecosystem management (IEM) strategies and approaches, (ii) policy support for innovative SLM practices, (iii) comprehensive land degradation monitoring and assessment, (iv) institutional strengthening at the regional and provincial levels, and (v) improved project management.

The objectives and activities of the project were fully in line with the GEF-4 long-term land degradation (LD) focal area objectives. The core objective of the activities were to *develop an enabling environment that will place sustainable land management in the mainstream of the PRC development policy and practices at national, regional, and local levels* (GEF-4 LD focal area strategic objective 1). At the same time, the overall Partnership investment activities were aimed at *upscaling sustainable land management investments that generate mutual benefits for the global environment and local livelihoods* (GEF-4 LD focal area strategic objective 2). The project was also expected to develop new and innovative approaches for SLM and create new scientific and technical knowledge on emerging issues in order to facilitate future strategy discussions for GEF-5 (GEF-4 LD strategic program 3).

II. EVALUATION OF DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

A. Relevance of Design and Formulation

The PRC–GEF Partnership on Land Degradation in Dryland Ecosystems (the Partnership) was initiated in 2002 as a long-term cooperation agreement between the PRC, GEF, ADB, and other development partners to promote the introduction of an IEM approach to combating land degradation in the PRC. The project was consistent with one of the strategic priorities in the country partnership strategy (2008–2010) of ADB's operations in the PRC, namely the promotion of environmental improvement through reversal of natural resource degradation. It also supported the principles of the PRC's 11th Five-Year Plan (2006–2010) to build a harmonious society, a new socialist countryside, and an efficient and environment-friendly society. The project further played a key role in the efforts to improve dryland ecosystems and alleviate poverty in the PRC's western region, which is home to about 75% of the PRC's rural poor. Poverty estimates illustrate the strong linkage between poverty incidence and areas suffering from land degradation.

The project promoted cooperation and coordination with all stakeholders of the Partnership, as well as generated ownership among the relevant governments with the establishment of a fully functioning central project management office (CPMO) and provincial project management offices (PPMOs) tasked with carrying out the project activities and ensuring the delivery of the project outcomes and outputs. The offices acted as focal points for coordination between the Partnership activities and investment projects, other GEF focal areas, various development partners and nongovernment organizations, and relevant international conventions. It is unprecedented in the PRC to have such high-level, cross-sectoral, and provincial-based institutional coordination mechanism, which indicates the high profile given to the Partnership within central and provincial government circles.

B. Project Outputs

Output 1: Strengthened management and implementation of IEM strategies and approaches.

Project output 1 is assessed as successful. The State Forestry Administration (SFA), as the executing agency, has successfully mainstreamed the IEM concept into the provincial 12th Five-Year Plan (2011-2015), which has led to mobilization of funding to priority projects at provincial level. Using the World Overview of Conservation Approaches and Technologies (WOCAT) methodology, the Partnership also published in 2012 a total of 18 new technologies in Volume II of the WOCAT *Best Practices for Sustainable Land Management in Dryland Areas of the PRC*. The SFA also conducted an evaluation of the 18 pilot sites that were already established in 2006, which involved field visits and questionnaire surveys. The evaluation indicated that land degradation at the pilot sites had been reduced through ecological engineering and technical measures including small watershed management, farmland and riverbank shelterbelts

construction, conservation tillage, application of manure to conserve soil, and sand and wind control. The results of the evaluation have been published in Chinese with a summary in English.

Output 2: Policy support for innovative SLM practices.
Project output 2 is assessed as highly successful. Four thematic studies on carbon sequestration, SLM cost-benefit analysis (CBA), payment for ecosystem services (PES), and public-private partnerships (PPPs) were successfully completed, and technical reports were prepared in English and Chinese languages. In addition, three scientific publications in international journals on carbon sequestration have also been supported by this study. The independent review commissioned by the SFA and ADB in 2013 recommended that the thematic studies must be developed further, tested in the field (where possible), and taken to a stage where mainstreaming and upscaling recommendations can be made.

Output 3: Comprehensive land degradation monitoring and assessment.
Project output 3 is assessed as moderately successful. Two main reports were prepared: (i) an evaluation of national and international land degradation monitoring and assessment systems; and (ii) development of a land degradation and SLM monitoring and assessment indicator system for drylands ecosystems of the PRC.

Output 4: Institutional strengthening at the regional and provincial levels.
Project output 4 is assessed as successful. An assessment report of the impact of the Partnership has been finalized by a team of national consultants, and an international consultant has conducted a review of the entire Partnership; recommendations were provided for the future development of the Partnership. An international conference on “Sustainable Land Management Policies and Practices” was organized in Beijing in May 2013 hosted by the SFA with support from GEF and ADB. The conference was well attended and included participants from the different provinces as well as international partners and scientists, and provided a good opportunity to take stock of and more widely share the accumulated experiences of the first 10 years of the Partnership.

C. Project Costs

The approved total project was equivalent to $8,927,455, of which (i) $2,727,455 equivalent was financed on a grant basis by GEF and administered by ADB; and (ii) $200,000 financed on a grant basis by ADB’s Technical Assistance Special Fund (TASF-Others). The PRC Government financed $1,000,000 in cash and $5,000,000 equivalent in-kind to cover counterpart costs and services including the remuneration and per diem of counterpart staff; training, workshops, and conferences; surveys and studies; miscellaneous administrative support; and office accommodation and transport.

The project cost breakdown and financing plan are presented in the table below:

Item	Total Cost ($'000)
A. Global Environment Facility Financing	
1. Remuneration and Per Diem of National Consultants	
a. Full-time	643.7
b. Part-time	245.7
2. Equipment	248.8
3. Training, Workshops, and Conferences	1,035.1
4. Surveys and Studies	412.7
5. Office Support Staff and Operation	141.5
Subtotal (A)	**2,727.5**
B. Asian Development Bank Financing	
1. Consultants	
a. Remuneration and Per Diem	
i. International Consultants	140.0
ii. National Consultants	32.0
b. International and Local Travel	8.0
c. Reports, Communications, and Translations	2.0
2. Workshops	3.0
3. Contingencies	15.0
Subtotal (B)	**200.0**
C. Government Financing	
1. Cash	1,000.0
2. In-Kind	5,000.0
Subtotal (C)	**6,000.0**
Total (A + B + C)	**8,927.5**

D. Disbursements

As of account closing date on 24 January 2014, the project utilized a total amount of $2,887,821.03, leaving an uncommitted and undisbursed balance of $39, 633.97.

The proceeds of the GEF grant was disbursed to the PRC Government by ADB in accordance with a memorandum of understanding between ADB and the GEF Secretariat; and the terms and conditions set forth in the financial procedures agreement between ADB and the World Bank, as trustee of the GEF Trust Fund. For the proceeds of the GEF grant, an imprest account was established by the Ministry of Finance (MOF) at a bank acceptable to ADB. The account was managed and replenished in accordance with ADB's Loan Disbursement Handbook (2007, as amended from time to time). MOF disbursed the proceeds of the GEF grant to the CPMO and the six provinces/ARs in accordance with the consolidated annual work and financial plans of the CPMO and the six provinces/ARs. The CPMO was responsible for consolidating and submitting the annual work and financial plans to MOF.

There were no reported delays in the project disbursements for GEF grants.

E. Project Schedule

Due to the engagement of many new consultants for the CPMO and PPMOs, it took time for the new consultants to fully understand the objectives and get familiar with the implementation arrangements for the Partnership. Therefore the TA completion date needed to be extended from the original date of 31 December 2012 to 30 June 2013, and again to 31 October 2013 for the SFA to complete all administrative procedures.

F. Implementation Arrangements

The TA was carried out by the SFA supported by individual consultants. ADB administered the Technical Assistance Special Fund (TASF), while the GEF funds were disbursed following loan disbursement procedures. The SFA, the executing agency, set up a central project management office (CPMO) in Beijing, which ensured interdepartmental coordination. Similarly, the provincial project management offices (PPMOs) were set up in each of the six provinces/ARs.

At the central level, a Steering Committee (SC) was established composed of both national legislative and executive branches from 12 ministries/agencies, including the Commission of Legislative Affairs of the National People's Congress, Ministry of Science and Technology, MOF, Ministry of Land Resources, Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Environmental Protection, SFA, Legislative Affairs Office of the State Council, and Chinese Academy of Sciences. Specific task forces were also established by the provinces/ARs to undertake project activities under the Partnership. Reflecting the multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral features of the Partnership, expert groups were established to guide and advise the implementation of the Partnership.

The SFA engaged 25 full-time and 14 part-time national consultants for the CPMO and PPMOs following ADB's procedures. ADB engaged two technical advisors—an international natural resources management specialist and a national land degradation specialist for a total of 8 person-months each. The TA provided support for consultants and training (about 31% and 30% of total GEF funds, respectively), although the TA also supported the procurement of various equipment for the PPMOs. A fund reallocation was approved on 15 March 2013 at the request of MOF and the SFA to finance the remuneration, per diem, and other expenditures of the CPMO and the PPMO consultants.

G. Conditions and Covenants

A financing agreement for the GEF grant was prepared in accordance with the memorandum of understanding between ADB and the Secretariat of the GEF on Direct Access to GEF Resources dated 4 July 2004.

H. Related Technical Assistance

Not applicable.

I. Consultant Recruitment and Procurement

The SFA was supported by GEF-financed and ADB-financed international and national consulting services. The GEF-financed consultants were engaged by the Executing Agency in accordance with ADB's *Guidelines on the Use of Consultants* (2007, as amended from time to time) using the individual selection method, which is considered appropriate and cost-effective given (i) the organizational structure is already established for the Partnership, and (ii) the participation of the six provinces/ARs in the TA. The ADB-financed consultants were recruited and supervised based on the terms and conditions of the Technical Assistance Framework Agreement executed between the Government and ADB dated 23 December 1996. Equipment purchased under the project was procured in accordance with ADB's *Procurement Guidelines* (2007, as amended from time to time), and their ownership was transferred to SFA upon TA completion.

J. Performance of Consultants, Contractors, and Suppliers

The SFA recruited and supervised consultants to staff the CPMO and PPMOs. As mentioned earlier, 25 full-time and 14 part-time national consultants were engaged for the CPMO and PPMOs. The CPMO full-time consultants occupied the following positions: project manager, deputy project manager, technical officers, financial controller, and project communication and procurement officer. The six provincial governments each maintained a PPMO with a maximum of three full-time consultants occupying the following positions: PPMO manager, deputy PPMO manager, and PPMO financial officer. Among the expertise of the national part-time consultants assigned at either the CPMO or the PPMOs were: dryland management specialists, climate change specialists, environment economists, private sector specialists, land degradation monitoring and evaluation expert, and evaluation specialist. ADB engaged two technical advisors for a total of 8 person-months each —an international natural resources management specialist and a national land degradation specialist.

Because of the number of consultants engaged for the CPMO and the PPMOs, it took more time to complete the administrative aspects of their engagements, and to fully familiarize them with the objectives and implementation arrangements of the project, in particular, and the Partnership, in general. There was also a formidable language barrier to overcome during discussions, negotiations, and reporting.

In the CPMO, the competencies vital to coordinating such an important and innovative Partnership program have not been adequately represented. To address this problem, the CPMO had outsourced various aspects of its work to high-level short-term consultants. The team of consultants in the PPMOs was tasked with implementing the Partnership's component sub-projects. As in the CPMO, trained capacity at the provincial/project level is also lacking.

There is not enough knowledge regarding M&A, the concepts of GEBs, or the ways and means of how best to upscale initiatives.

Despite the delays and the internal glitches, the consultants demonstrated their commitment by working diligently even to the limits of their capacity. The performance of these consultants is thus rated as satisfactory.

K. Performance of the Borrower and the Executing Agency

The SFA's performance is considered satisfactory. The SFA ensured the timely implementation of the TA after all consultants got familiar with the TA. The SFA has experience in implementing ADB TA projects and has an adequate accounting and recording system in place.

L. Performance of the Asian Development Bank

ADB provided timely guidance and support, and efficiently fielded review missions. The performance of ADB is hence assessed as satisfactory.

III. EVALUATION OF PERFORMANCE

A. Relevance

The project was highly relevant to the implementation of national and regional priorities and plans.

Since the ratification of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the PRC has progressively increased its conservation efforts, and recognized the need to combat land degradation as a national development priority. In June 1999, the Government officially launched the Western Development Strategy (WDS) with the objectives of (i) reducing economic disparities between the western and other regions, and (ii) ensuring sustainable natural resource management. The Government expanded its programs to combat land degradation under the 11th Five-Year Plan (2006-2010) addressing reforestation, protection of natural forests, grassland improvement, soil and water conservation, biodiversity protection, and renewable rural energy. The 11th Five-Year Plan also contained significant environmental commitments and related reforms towards building a new countryside. The New Countryside program (2006-2010) placed farmers and countryside development at the top of the PRC's development agenda. The Government has continued to give land degradation and desertification a high priority in its 12th Five-Year Plan (2011-2015).

Through the submittal to the GEF Council of the Partnership Framework Document for the programmatic support in April 2008, the Government demonstrated its long-term commitment to the Partnership recognizing that it (i) provides opportunities to create synergies among land degradation control, carbon sequestration, and biodiversity conservation objectives within the

framework of the WDS; (ii) enhances the scope and new opportunities for catalyzing action, replication, and innovation for IEM; (iii) provides greater opportunities for maximizing and scaling up of approaches that yield both local and global environmental benefits (GEBs); and (iv) helps to create an open and transparent process for interacting with international agencies.

GEBs of the project include new and emerging international concepts and approaches to address global concerns, such as sustainable financing for SLM, adaptation and resilience to climate change, and monitoring of carbon sequestration. The project has also supported deepening of IEM reform and its mainstreaming into relevant policies and sectors. Through consolidation and dissemination of the lessons learned, the project has contributed to further expanding knowledge of innovative and cross-sectoral SLM approaches and technologies that generate multiple global environmental benefits as well as socio-economic benefits.

B. Effectiveness in Achieving Outcome

The project was effective in achieving its outcome of strengthened capacity of the PRC-GEF Partnership to address and manage technical, policy, legal, and institutional barriers in combating land degradation of the drylands of the PRC western region.

The provinces (Gansu, Qinghai, and Shaanxi) and autonomous regions (Inner Mongolia, Ningxia Hui, and Xinjiang Uyghur) covered under this project have successfully established institutional structures and improved regulatory system for IEM implementation. They have mainstreamed IEM plans and strategies into the 12th Five-Year Plan, as well as at the provincial levels where 21 laws and regulations have been revised or reviewed using IEM. At central level, the Law of the People's Republic of China on Water and Soil Conservation was revised in 2011 to incorporate the IEM approach.

The six participating provinces/ARs have likewise analyzed, documented, and tested innovative SLM approaches and tools involving carbon sequestration; CBA for dryland control measures and for sustainable land management; PES and other ecological compensation mechanisms; and PPPs. Each of these six project provinces/ARs have established multi-scale and cross-sectoral land degradation monitoring and evaluation (M&E) indicator system involving agriculture, forestry, water, and grassland sectors; albeit the system has yet to be applied.

C. Efficiency in Achieving Outcome and Outputs

The project was efficient in achieving its outcome and outputs.

In terms of funding, resources to the IEM plans have been mobilized through the implementation of strategic action programs, ecological compensation mechanisms, and priority IEM projects as identified by the six participating provinces/ARs. Financial resources allocated to priority IEM projects in the provincial 12th Five-Year Plan includes 86 projects with a total funding of CNY94.8 billion (US$15.4 billion), representing an equivalent increase of 36.5% in number of projects and 36.4% in total funding as compared to the 11th Five-Year Plan.

The six project provinces/ARs have successfully created an enabling environment for IEM through (i) the reinforcement and consolidation of cross-sector and cross-level coordination mechanism; (ii) establishment of professional management and expert teams, which has greatly enhanced project management and implementation capacity; (iii) strengthening of financial management; and (iv) integration of land degradation information and data sharing mechanism. Pilot studies on carbon sequestration, CBA, ecological compensation, and PPPs were undertaken and have provided solid basis for increasing capacity for SLM against climate change in western PRC.

An evaluation of the IEM pilot sites that were further supported by this project has reported the following environmental benefits: (i) reduction of land degradation at the pilot sites through ecological engineering and technical measures; (ii) general improvement in the environment of the pilot villages, such as greener grassland, increase in number of trees, improved soil fertility, and fewer occurrence of sandstorms; (iii) restoration of productivity of forestland, farmland, and grassland; (iv) reduction of pressures on grassland due to changes in traditional feeding practices, such as promotion of farmyard feeding; and (v) increased environmental awareness among villagers. Among the socio-economic benefits generated by the pilot demonstrations are access to more employment opportunities and increase in farmers' income. The per capita annual income of farmers and herdsmen in the demonstration sites has on average increased by 1-4 times as compared with that in the early stage of construction. Nonetheless, more efforts are needed to identify incentives for community participation as SLM has to generate economic as well as environmental benefits in order to motivate farmers and herders to more actively participate.

Under this project, the Partnership has documented 18 new SLM technologies, which were published in Volume II of the WOCAT PRC Best Practices. These technologies can be grouped into five categories: (i) soil and water conservation; (ii) desertification control (to address wind erosion); (iii) grassland degradation control; (iv) salinization control; and (v) environmental management. For most of these technologies, the long-term benefits in relation to costs are generally positive, but short-term benefits are slightly different. The short-term returns of establishment costs are more negative for soil and water conservation, environment management, and grassland degradation control measures than for desertification control and salinization control. In order to generate economic value from the SLM technologies, especially in the long term (5-10 years), land users will need to be subsidized by the government or benefit from eco-compensation mechanisms for generating ecosystem services.

D. Preliminary Assessment of Sustainability

Financial risks. The mainstreaming of the IEM approach into provincial five-year plans has ensured a continuous momentum of project and partnership activities in participating provinces/ARs where cross-sectoral institutional mechanisms for IEM and SLM implementation are in place and funding for upscaling has been identified from relevant sectors. Awareness has also been created about innovative sources of funding and market-based mechanisms for

upscaling, such as PES, carbon finance, and establishment of PPPs. The main financial risk is related to the central coordination mechanism hosted by SFA, which may not be able to maintain as many staff once GEF funding is finished. However, the Independent Review recommended a restructuring of the central coordination mechanism, with fewer, but more highly qualified staff. SFA should be able to support this new set-up from its core funds.

Socio-political risks. There is strong ownership of the project at all levels: (i) local communities at pilot sites have participated in local decision-making through participatory rural appraisals and therefore feels strong ownership of pilot site activities; (ii) provincial teams also have strong ownership of field activities; and (iii) at central level, there is strong ownership of the more analytical outputs of the project, such as the thematic study reports that have been published by SFA. Given that key stakeholders fully accept and believe in the IEM concept, the IEM approach is therefore highly likely to be sustained.

Institutional framework and governance risks. The project has catalyzed reform to the institutional, policy, and regulatory framework that governs management of natural resources in support of more integrated approaches to ecosystem management. As discussed earlier, a large number of provincial laws and regulations have been formulated or revised in support of the IEM approach and the legal framework is therefore not perceived to pose a risk to the project. However, the capacity to implement complex IEM programs and projects needs further strengthening at all levels and the provincial teams also need technical training on SLM technologies and approaches.

Environmental risks. There are no perceived direct environmental risks to the sustainability of project outcomes. However, the rapid development of the PRC may create unforeseen risks at pilot sites related to construction of new infrastructure, etc.

E. Impact

The expected project impact described in the ADB design and monitoring framework (DMF) is *reduced land degradation in dryland ecosystems in the western region of the PRC*. The project baseline was assessed using the Theory of Change (ToC) approach against which to assess the actual project outcomes and impacts. The ToC recognizes that the project and social, ecological, and economic processes are operating at different timeframes and invariably there will be an intermediate state between completion of a project and the achievement of the impact(s) of the intervention.

The project is assessed to be highly likely to achieve impact. The project's intended outcome was delivered and designed to feed into a continuing process with specific allocation of responsibilities between sectors and ministries involved in integrated ecosystem management after the end of project funding. Progress towards 'intermediate states' is also good as provinces/ARs have put in place institutional structures for IEM, and IEM plans have been mainstreamed into national development frameworks that are under implementation. Moreover, innovative SLM approaches and tools involving carbon sequestration, CBA, PES, and PPPs

have been analyzed, documented, and tested. However, the project has not yet achieved documented change of status of land degradation and dryland ecosystems. Therefore, to demonstrate the impact of reduced land degradation on dryland ecosystems, a clearer strategy for scaling up of investments in SLM is required at all levels together with the development of a comprehensive land degradation and SLM M&E system that can track impact.

Catalytic role. As the project is focused on providing management and policy support to the PRC-GEF Partnership, it has mainly had a catalytic and multiplication effect on the Partnership where IEM plans and SLM best practices supported by the project have been implemented either through mainstreaming into provincial five-year plans or into donor-funded investment projects. The highly catalytic effect of mainstreaming of IEM at provincial level has resulted in total funding to IEM projects of more than USD15 billion. The PRC-GEF Partnership has also had catalytic effects on the generation of economic and environmental benefits in the affected provinces/ARs.

Global environmental benefits. However, the concept of GEBs is poorly understood by the Partnership. Calculations in the Assessment Report undertaken by the project are limited to carbon sequestered under afforestation and grassland management, and carbon savings using alternative energy stoves, omitting carbon sequestered through land brought under sustainable land management practices. This makes it difficult to meet the target set in the GEF Programme Framework Document of 25 million tonnes of carbon sequestered each year. A total Partnership figure of 705,000 tonnes per year given in the Assessment Report is therefore far off the target. Without doubt considerable GEBs are being generated, but these are underestimated and unreported.

IV. OVERALL ASSESSMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Overall Assessment

The overall rating for the project is successful. All expected targets and tasks have been completed, including:

(i) full integration of the IEM concept into both national and provincial planning;
(ii) innovative researches on carbon sequestration, CBA, PES, and PPPs influencing high-level policy making;
(iii) establishment of comprehensive multi-scale land degradation monitoring and assessment system;
(iv) strengthening of land degradation information center in project provinces/ARs, thereby improving data sharing and network system;
(v) achievement of remarkable GEBs particularly in responding to climate change, increasing carbon sequestration of forests and grasslands, and protecting biodiversity; and
(vi) sharing and dissemination of best SLM practices.

The institutional coordination and capacity in the Partnership to address and manage technical, policy, legal, and institutional barriers has also been strengthened. Sustainability of the Partnership however remains weak as most staff of the CPMO and PPMOs are still engaged as temporary consultants, rather than permanent government staff.

B. Lessons Learned

Experiences under the project show that it takes time to fully establish adequate project monitoring, evaluation, and assessment systems. The lack of systematic data collection from project pilot sites made it difficult to quantify the impact of the project as well as the Partnership that it coordinates. It is an urgent priority for the Partnership to continue its efforts to establish a stronger monitoring and assessment system to better track and document the impact of the Partnership.

There is enough evidence to suggest that considerable GEBs have been generated from the project's IEM and SLM practices. Yet, GEBs are poorly understood by members of the Partnership despite them being a fundamental element of GEF. As a result, GEBs have not been systematically monitored and measured under the Partnership.

Upscaling of IEM/SLM best practices has been established within the project boundary; however, upscaling and mainstreaming of these technologies and ideas beyond the confines of the pilot demonstration sites have been rather slow.

C. Recommendations

1. Project-related

During the implementation of the project, it was acknowledged that there is still a need to (i) focus on replication and upscaling of the achievements of the Partnership, with a strong emphasis on investments at the provincial level; (ii) target capacity development and its linkage to demonstration and investment activities; and (iii) develop a broader financial resource mobilization strategy, taking into consideration government, private sector, and development partner resources, as well as innovative mechanisms such as eco-compensation programs. These activities will be addressed in a follow-up GEF-financed TA that is expected to be approved in the last quarter of 2014.

- **Institutional Set-up**

The SFA's CPMO has achieved much in terms of project management and administration, but it has been unable, as yet, to establish a comprehensive M&A system or to manage adequate cross-learning between projects. In the future, CPMO should function more clearly as a coordinating nexus, and be smaller and comprise of higher qualified staff. The SFA, as the executing agency, must ensure appropriate staffing. The PRC-GEF Partnership should have a stronger link with the PRC National Action Plan for the United Nations Convention to Combat

Desertification (UNCCD) and close alignment with the secretariat of the PRC National Committee for implementation of the UNCCD in the SFA.

- **Partnership database and monitoring & assessment (M&A) tracking system**

Data from the field must regularly and systematically be collected under a dedicated M&A system, and collated for analysis as evidence of impact. These data will include the area under specific IEM/SLM technologies and will measure environmental and socio-economic indicators against targets. The database must be regularly updated and gender aspects must be integrated.

- **Global environmental benefits**

GEBs should be better estimated using the data already available under the Assessment Report (2013) prepared by the SFA consultants, Li Zhou and Ke Shuifa, and through the establishment of a systematic M&A system. Priority must be given to estimating carbon sequestered through land brought under SLM practices.

- **Dissemination of project outputs**

The SFA through the CPMO should develop a strategy to ensure that the Partnership provides for exchange of ideas between agencies and between subprojects either through regular meetings and/or exchange visits. A number of useful and relevant publications have been produced under the Partnership. Thus, a clear publication and distribution policy needs to be established. There should also be a systematic use of international peer review for major documents. In addition, the various technical studies carried out under the Partnership must be developed further, tested in the field, and taken to the stage where firm mainstreaming and upscaling can be undertaken.

- **Upscaling of IEM/SLM best practices**

A strategy and plan of action needs to be urgently developed to encourage upscaling of IEM/SLM best practices through extension and achieve wider adoption of these practice beyond the pilot sites. Complementary approaches could involve further mainstreaming of successful practices into land use planning, as well as mobilization of new and innovative sources of funding through, for example, carbon financing, PES, and PPPs.

2. General

The PRC-GEF Partnership is an innovative and sound initiative which has a firm institutional foundation. As such, a plan of action is required to more firmly document the Partnership's impact, and to address specific areas that need to be improved to enhance effectiveness. Likewise, the pioneering programmatic approach of the Partnership should be further developed and enhanced through a strategically designed continuity phase with a broader regional scope, and mainstreamed for far-reaching benefits.