Terminal Evaluation Report

Maintaining and Increasing Carbon Stocks in Agro-silvopastoral Systems in Rural Communities of the Selva Zoque-Sumidero Canyon Complex as a Climate Change Mitigation Strategy

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Cover images: (From left to right) Top row – nursery in Llano Grande, voluntary fire brigade members in Llano Grande, AMBIO staff delivering bee hives in Libertad Campesina; Middle row - Active bee hives in Libertad Campesina (left and middle), mountain view in Libertad Campesina area (same in bottom row left), Bottom row middle - Mushroom production in Libertad Campesina; right - community interview in Libertad Campesina; Photographs by Keith Forbes.

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Acronyms

AMBIO	*Cooperativa Ambio S.C. de R.L.*
CI	Conservation International
CI-GEF	Conservation International Global Environment Facility (GEF) Project Agency
CONANP	*Comision Nacional de Areas Naturales Protegidas* (National Commission for Protected Natural Areas)
EA	Executing agency
FPIC	Free, prior and informed consent
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GHG	Greenhouse gas
IA	Implementing Agency
ISS	Integrated Sustainability Solutions LLC
KI	Key Informant
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MTR	Midterm Review
NPA	Natural Protected Area
OFP	Operational Focal Point
PIR	Project Implementation Report
PLM	Productive landscapes management
QR	Quarterly Report (of CI-GEF)
REBISO	*Reserva de la Biosfera Selva Ocote* (Selva Ocote Biosphere Reserve)
RFP	Request for Proposal

SADER	*Secretaria de Agricultura y Desarrollo Rural* (Secretariat for Agriculture and Rural Development)
SAGARPA	*Secretaria de Agricultura, Ganaderia, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentacion* (Secretariat for Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Nutrition)
SAGIP	*Secretaria de Agricultura, Ganaderia y Pesca* (Secretariat for Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries)
SECAM	Secretaría del Campo (Land Secretariat)
SEDESOL	*Secretaría de Desarrollo Social* (Secretariat for Social Development)
SEMAHN	*Secretaria del Medio Ambiente e Historia Natural* (Secretariat for Environment and Natural History)
SFM	Sustainable forest management
SLM	Sustainable land management
UNACH	*Universidad Autonoma de Chiapas* (Independent University of Chiapas)

I. Executive Summary

Integrated Sustainability Solutions LLC (ISS) implemented the Terminal Evaluation (TE) of "Maintaining and Increasing Carbon Stocks in Agro-silvopastoral Systems in Rural Communities of the Selva Zoque-Sumidero Canyon Complex as a Climate Change Mitigation Strategy" for the Conservation International Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Project Agency (CI-GEF), referred to hereafter as the Selva Zoque-Sumidero Canyon project.

The project was implemented by AMBIO (*Cooperativa Ambio S.C. de R.L.*). The other executing partners were CONANP (*Comision Nacional de Areas Naturales Protegidas*) and SEMAHN (*Secretaria del Medio Ambiente e Historia Natural*). The components of the project are: Component 1: Field demonstrations for maintaining carbon stocks in forests and increasing carbon sequestration in agropastoral landscapes of the Selva Zoque – Sumidero Canyon complex; and Component 2: Building institutional and local awareness and capacity on reducing GHG emissions from the LULUCF sector in Chiapas.

The TE was implemented by Keith Forbes (hereafter consultant or ISS), Founder and Principal of Integrated Sustainability Solutions LLC (ISS). The research was designed to consist of three phases: 1) Desk Research, 2) Field Work, and 3) Analysis and Report Writing. The Selva Zoque-Sumidero Canyon project was implemented in rural communities in the Selva Zoque-Sumidero Canyon Complex, a contiguous group of five natural protected areas (NPAs) in the northwest of the Mexican state of Chiapas. The five NPAs include the Selva El Ocote Biosphere Reserve, La Pera, Villa Allende, the Sumidero Canyon National Park, and Cerro Meyapac. The NPAs together represent an area of 155,238 hectares.

The TE considered the following evaluation elements in rigorous compliance with the Scope of Work – Theory of Change, Assessment of Project Results, Progress to Impact, Quality of Implementation and Execution, Gender and Safeguards, and Sustainability, and provided ratings as per GEF guidance. The evaluation team worked closely with AMBIO, which is based in San Cristobal de la Casas, Chiapas, Mexico. However, it is important to stress that the evaluation maintained complete independence in terms of findings, recommendations, and ratings. The Inception Report (September 1, 2019) and presentation of Initial Conclusions (completed on September 2 and presented via Skype to CI-GEF on September 9) were provided to CI-GEF prior to this report. An informal presentation of the Initial Conclusions was held with AMBIO leadership in Tuxtla Gutierrez on August 30, 2019.

A summary of the ratings is provided below.

Evaluation Theme	**Rating**
Theory of Change	Highly Satisfactory
Assessment of Project Results	Satisfactory
Progress towards Impacts	Satisfactory
Quality of Implementation and Execution	Satisfactory (both)
Gender and Safeguards	Highly Satisfactory
Sustainability	Moderately Likely

II. Introduction: Purpose, Scope, and Methodology

II.1 Purpose and Scope of Evaluation

Integrated Sustainability Solutions LLC (ISS) is pleased to submit to CI-GEF the Terminal Evaluation (TE) of "Maintaining and Increasing Carbon Stocks in Agro-silvopastoral Systems in Rural Communities of the Selva Zoque-Sumidero Canyon Complex as a Climate Change Mitigation Strategy" (hereafter, referred to as the "Selva Zoque-Sumidero Canyon" project).

The Conservation International Foundation (CI) issued RFP No. 002 - 2019 on May 31, 2019, for multiple evaluations including the TE of the Selva Zoque-Sumidero Canyon project. ISS was pleased to have been selected through a competitive bidding process on July 22, 2019, and fully executed the contract with CI on August 8, 2019. The period of performance of the contract was August 7 through October 16 with a total level of effort of 24 days.

The project had an initial duration of three years from August 2015 to August 2018 but received a one-year no-cost extension. The project was implemented by AMBIO (*Cooperativa Ambio S.C. de R.L.*). The other executing partners were CONANP (*Comision Nacional de Areas Naturales Protegidas*) and SEMAHN (*Secretaria de Medio Ambiente e Historia Natural*). The project GEF ID was 5751 and the project was a part of the Climate Change Mitigation GEF Focal Area.

A summary of the biographical information of the project is provided below:

Table 1. Key Descriptors of Project

Item	**Information**
GEF Project ID	5751
Project name	Maintaining and Increasing Carbon Stocks in Agro-silvopastoral Systems in Rural Communities of the Selva Zoque-Sumidero Canyon Complex as a Climate Change Mitigation Strategy
GEF financing	USD 1,009,174
Planned and materialized co-financing	USD 3,962,462 (planned); USD 3,690,540.27 (Co-financing Realized as of June 30, 2019)
Key objectives	To maintain and increase carbon stocks (through avoiding deforestation in natural ecosystems) and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon sequestration

Item	Information
	(adopting sustainable management practices in agro-pastoral systems) in the Selva Zoque-Sumidero Canyon complex
GEF Implementing Agency (IA)	CI-GEF
Project countries	Mexico
Period of performance	August 2015 to September 2019 (after one-year no-cost extension, original end date was July 2018)
Name of the Project Executing Agency(ies)	AMBIO, CONANP, SEMAHN

The outcomes of the project are, for Component 1: "Primary and second-growth forests managed sustainably and production practices in agro-pastoral landscapes improved (to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon sequestration)", and, for Component 2: "Male and female Farmers, community extension workers, NPA technical committees and CONANP and SEMAHN staff members trained on gender-sensitive sustainable forest management (SFM) and improved productive landscapes management (PLM) practices for carbon dioxide capture and storage."

The research consisted of three phases: 1) Desk Research, 2) Field Mission, and 3) Analysis and Report Writing. The field mission was scheduled in accordance with the availability of AMBIO. The dimensions of the project which were evaluated were the usual for a GEF project, which were: Theory of Change, Assessment of Results, Progress to Impact, Quality of Implementation and Execution, Gender and Safeguards, and Sustainability.

The report is structured as follows: I. Executive Summary, II. Introduction: Purpose, Scope, and Methodology, III. Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations, and IV. Key Conclusions and Lessons Learned for Future Such Projects. Chapter II discusses the scope of the evaluation, the methodology, and its limitations. Chapter III presents the findings and conclusions for each of the evaluation themes, makes recommendations, and provides a rating per the GEF six-point system (from Highly Satisfactory to Highly Unsatisfactory) for all the themes except Sustainability. This rating system is detailed below:

- Highly satisfactory (HS): Level of outcomes achieved clearly exceeds expectations and/or there were no shortcomings
- Satisfactory (S): Level of outcomes achieved was as expected and/or there were no or minor shortcomings
- Moderately Satisfactory (MS): Level of outcomes achieved more or less as expected and/or there were moderate shortcomings

- ❏ Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): Level of outcomes achieved somewhat lower than expected and/or there were significant shortcomings
- ❏ Unsatisfactory (U): Level of outcomes achieved substantially lower than expected and/or there were major shortcomings
- ❏ Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): Only a negligible level of outcomes achieved and/or there were severe shortcomings
- ❏ Unable to Assess (UA): The available information does not allow an assessment of the level of outcome achievements.

Sustainability is rated differently, using a four-point scale (Likely to Unlikely) based on an assessment of the likelihood and magnitude of the risks to sustainability. These ratings are defined as follows:

- ❖ Likely (L): There is little or no risk to sustainability.
- ❖ Moderately Likely (ML): There are moderate risks to sustainability.
- ❖ Moderately Unlikely (MU): There are significant risks to sustainability.
- ❖ Unlikely (U): There are severe risks to sustainability.
- ❖ Unable to Assess (UA): Unable to assess the expected incidence and magnitude of risks to sustainability.

Chapter IV integrates the recommendations from Chapter III and focuses on key lessons learned of relevance to future CI GEF projects.

II.2 Methodology

The methodology of the TE consisted of the following steps:

I. Desk research focusing on relevance to the TE (Project Document, Work Plan, Supervision Mission report, Annual and Quarterly Reports, PIR, and the Final Presentation). In 2017, ISS had previously conducted the midterm review (MTR) and was therefore very familiar with the project.

II. Design of evaluation methodology and development of questionnaires for AMBIO, KI (key informant) interviews implemented as small focus groups, and community visits (Llano Grande, Francisco Villa II, and Libertad Campesina)[1]

[1] All interviews with AMBIO, KIs and communities were held in Spanish.

III. Inception Workshop (held September 1, 2019) – a brief Inception Workshop was held at AMBIO's offices prior to the KI interview[2]
IV. Detailed KI questionnaire applied with AMBIO (see Table 2 below), and follow-up conversations during field trips[3]
V. Field visit to Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas, and surrounding areas for grantee KII and field visits (August 26 to August 30, 2019)
VI. Analysis and preparation of Initial Conclusions presentation (presented remotely to CI-GEF on September 9, 2019)
VII. Preparation of Draft and Final reports

The following table provides the questionnaire administered to the entire project staff including leadership at the AMBIO offices on August 26, 2019.

Table 2. Questionnaire for Grantee – AMBIO

Terminal Evaluation - Maintaining and Increasing Carbon Stocks in Agro-silvopastoral Systems in Rural Communities of the Selva Zoque-Sumidero Canyon Complex as a Climate Change Mitigation Strategy
I. Theory of Change
Question 1 – Now that the project is completed, do you think that in order to achieve the goals, the components of the project made sense? Why or why not?
Question 2 – Can you identify any other factors that helped or hurt the project's efforts?
II – Review of Results Framework and M&E systems
Reviewed achievement/non-achievement of indicators and reasons for both (detailed indicator by indicator discussion held separately with Project Manager)
Question 3 – Can you describe how the M&E systems were used in practice, and provide any examples of corrective actions taken based upon insights from M&E?
Question 4 – With the benefit of hindsight, would you agree that the log frame best measured the project? If

[2] The project had its final presentation on August 16, 2019, in Mexico City, in which AMBIO project staff, CI-GEF, partner organizations CONANP and SEMAHN, project beneficiaries from the communities, as well as other stakeholders participated. Due to this having occurred soon before the start of the evaluation, AMBIO leadership did not feel that it was feasible to convene many of the same participants again. Following a discussion between the consultant, AMBIO, and CI GEF staff, it was decided to forego a formal in-person Inception Workshop in Chiapas, and, instead, address the issues via remote communication before the field mission and a brief discussion with AMBIO staff in their offices.
[3] All KII notes are being provided to CI-GEF under separate cover. ISS also provided CI-GEF a link to a Google album of photographs of all the field visits.

not, why, and are there any project achievements which you feel could have been measured in a different way?

III – Progress to Impact

Question 5 – Can you comment on the *Planes Vivos*, Tech Spec and the estimation of C sequestration and credits? When was it completed?

Question 6 – What is the current quantity of carbon sequestered? When was it determined?

Question 7 – How was the sustainable management of forests and the improved management of productive land determined? Were the problems with tree survival resolved?

IV – Sustainability

Question 8 – Can you discuss the permanence of changes in land management for forests and productive lands?

V – Quality of Implementation and Execution

Question 9 – Can you comment on the evolution of the project from project identification, concept preparation, appraisal, preparation of detailed proposal, approval and start-up, oversight, and supervision, to completion.

Question 10 – Please describe the day-to-day implementation of the project?

Question 11 – Can you briefly characterize the hiring processes and how goods and services were procured? Were there any bottlenecks?

Question 12 – What would you say about the link between the internal project organization and workflow and the project outputs? Would other structures have changed the outputs?

VI – Gender and Safeguards

Question 13 – Please describe both the formal (policies and norms) and practical integration of gender into the project?

Question 14 – List the safeguards and accountability and grievance mechanisms. Were any of them triggered, and, if so, please describe how the issues identified were resolved?

In order to overcome the limitation of the tight time frame between fully executing the contract and starting the field mission, which allowed five working days for the planning of all the interviews and community visits, the consultant opted for a system of rolling focus groups for the KIs. This consisted of scheduling groups of two to four individuals over a two-day period, which facilitated obtaining input from a greater number of people than with one-on-one interviews. Given that the evaluation mission was limited to Tuxtla Gutierrez and surrounding areas for field visits, it was not possible to consult with the Operational Focal Point (OFP) in the

Secretaria de Hacienda y Credito Publico, based in Mexico City. Furthermore, this ministry was not involved with the project, making a consultation with them of little value.

Since the questions for all the non-community KIs were the same, the use of rolling focus groups also accommodated scheduling conflicts and delays as individuals were able to join the focus group, respond to the questions being discussed at the moment, and then return to the missed questions later. Having conducted the MTR in 2017, ISS was able to use the MTR KI notes as a resource to identify those interviewees with the greatest knowledge of the project. The questionnaire administered with the KIs was more focused on the dimensions of the project with which they were most likely to be familiar. As such, it omitted the questions on the Results Framework and the Quality of Implementation and Execution (except for question 13). The KI questionnaire is provided in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Key Informant Questionnaire

Terminal Evaluation - Maintaining and Increasing Carbon Stocks in Agro-silvopastoral Systems in Rural Communities of the Selva Zoque-Sumidero Canyon Complex as a Climate Change Mitigation Strategy

I. Theory of Change

Question 1 – Now that the project is completed, do you think that in order to achieve the goals, the components of the project made sense? Why or why not?

Question 2 – Can you identify any other factors that helped or hurt the project's efforts?

III – Progress to Impact

Question 5 – Can you comment on the Planes Vivos, Tech Spec and the estimation of C sequestration and credits? When was it completed?

Question 6 – What is the current quantity of carbon sequestered? When was it determined?

Question 7 – How was the sustainable management of forests and the improved management of productive land determined? Were the problems with tree survival resolved?

IV – Sustainability

Question 8 – Can you discuss the permanence of changes in land management for forests and productive lands?

V – Quality of Implementation and Execution

Question 12 – What would you say about the link between the internal project organization and workflow and the project outputs? Would other structures have changed the outputs?

VI – Gender and Safeguards

Question 13 – Please describe both the formal (policies and norms) and practical integration of gender into the project?

Question 14 – List the safeguards and accountability and grievance mechanisms. Were any of them triggered, and, if so, please describe how the issues identified were resolved?

The list of KIs is provided in Table 4 below.

Table 4. List of Key Informants

1. Adolfo Vidal, CONANP/Parque Nacional Cañón Sumidero
2. Adrian Mendez, CONANP
3. AMBIO Project Team (Questionnaire) – David Hernandez Perez, Sandro Paulo Miranda, Nayeli del Carmen Pale Martinez, Elsa Esquivel Bazan, Esther Miranda, Jorge Cruz, Gilberto Juarez Flores, Jaime Perez Sanchez, Luis Jimenez
4. AMBIO Results Framework – Sandro Paulo Miranda
5. Antonio Mier, UNACH
6. Chris Stephenson, Plan Vivo
7. Eustaquia Mercedes Diaz Solis, Asociación Chiapaneca de Locutores (Chiapas Listener's Association)
8. Felicia Line, Ecometrica
9. Maria del Pilar Jacobo Enciso, CONANP, Mexico City
10. Pedro Sanchez Montero, SEMAHN
11. Roberto Escalante Lopez, CONANP RESBIO

12 - 15. Community interviews – Llano Grande (nursery), Llano Grande (fire brigades), Francisco Villa II, and Libertad Campesina

Community visits were made to Llano Grande, Francisco Villa II, and Libertad Campesina. The former two visits offered mostly ad-hoc interview opportunities with community leaders, technicians, and fire brigade volunteers. At Libertad Campesina, it was possible to conduct a more structured interview with community leaders, technicians, and a large number of community members, including those that had participated in the alternative livelihood activities such as honey and mushroom production. The consultant had the opportunity to view the beehives and mushroom production in Libertad Campesina. ISS provided a Google photos album of all photographs taken during the field visits.

Following the desk research and field visit data gathering phases, the consultant analyzed all the data (literature, AMBIO, KIs, and community visits). The first step of this analysis was to collate all the data in tabular form to facilitate further analysis. The consultant then compared the information obtained from the different sources, highlighting similarities and differences. In the case of the latter, an analysis was conducted to identify the reasons behind the differences

and reconcile them based upon an understanding of the KI's perspectives, their degree of project knowledge, and the consultant's expert judgment.

This analysis of the differences in KI views resulted in a set of findings, which served as the foundation for the determination of conclusions and recommendations. This ensured that the *findings* incorporate the value added from analysis and are not merely a reproduction of the field notes, or essentially a list of *responses.* The findings also omit responses that show an obvious misunderstanding of the question or are off-topic. They can therefore be regarded as the refined and analyzed set of the raw data, the conclusions as statements of expert opinion based upon these findings, and the recommendations as specific actions put forward based upon the conclusions. ISS LLC is known for its focus on *actionable* recommendations and maintained this focus in this evaluation.

The findings, conclusions and recommendations are discussed in Chapter III. GEF requirements stipulate that the following six-point rating system be used – Highly Satisfactory (HS), Satisfactory (S), Moderately Satisfactory (MS), Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU), Unsatisfactory (U), and Highly Unsatisfactory (HU) – to rate the evaluation findings. Each evaluation theme (except for Sustainability, which uses a four-point scale) is therefore also rated according to this scale, and the ratings included in the next chapter. For the Progress towards Results, the traffic light model (red-yellow-green) is used to indicate the degree of progress.

II.3 Limitations of the Evaluation

The key limitations of the methodology were: 1) Timing of the field visit, 2) Length of the field visit, and 3) AMBIO participation in the community visits.

1) The contract for this TE was fully executed on August 8, 2019. Due to preparation and travel associated with the project's final presentation, AMBIO was only able to respond on August 20 to ISS' request for support in planning the evaluation. This left four working days to contact the KIs (with AMBIO support), as the evaluation started on August 26. As such, the TE planning had to be done in a very rushed manner, which led to a lower number of KIs than desirable. However, with the support of AMBIO, ISS was able to mostly overcome this limitation by securing interviews with the potentially most informed KIs. It would have been preferable though to initiate the KI communications two weeks or more prior to the evaluation. As detailed above, the OFP in a ministry with no connection to the project was not consulted, due to the low data value and the time needed for higher data value KIs.

2) The field mission was necessarily rapid (5 working days) due to resource constraints. ISS was able to compensate for this limited time period by strategically scheduling a day long interview with AMBIO (morning – entire team, afternoon and evening – project manager regarding the Results Framework), two days of KI focus groups, and two days for community visits; complemented by remote interviews of Ecometrica and Plan Vivo.

3) When making community visits to rural communities, it is not possible for a consultant to appear "*out of the blue*" and ask questions. Thus, AMBIO kindly facilitated the visits and accompanied the consultant. Naturally, the presence of AMBIO, the entity being evaluated, in the community visits, was a source of possible bias, as the community members may have wished to only speak positively about the organization from which they had received extensive support. ISS conducted all interviews with community members without the presence of AMBIO staff, though they were obviously present in the community during the site visits.

III. Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings, conclusions and recommendations for all the evaluation themes are presented in this chapter. The findings are based upon a rigorous analysis of the data as described above. The conclusions reflect further analysis and consideration of the multiplicity of views and opinions and project documents through triangulation. The findings and conclusions are presented together, followed by a set of *actionable* recommendations for each set of findings and conclusions. The recommendations are based upon these findings and conclusions, additional research as needed, and the expert judgment of the consultant.

III.1 Theory of Change

The Theory of Change of a project consists of overall objective(s), and a set of components, outputs, and outcomes, which have been designed to attain the given objectives. Also included in the Theory of Change is the long-term environmental impact of the project that is implicitly or explicitly embedded in the overall objective(s), and the assumptions that underlie the strategy of using the set of components, outputs, outcomes to achieve the objective(s).

According to the Project Document, the project vision is, that by 2020, greenhouse gas emissions from the Selva Zoque-Sumidero Canyon complex have decreased significantly, and carbon sequestration in agro-pastoral systems has increased. The project objective is similar, namely, “to maintain and increase carbon stocks through avoiding deforestation in natural ecosystems and adopting sustainable management practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon sequestration in agro-pastoral systems in the Selva Zoque-Sumidero canyon complex.”

The intended long-term environmental impact of the program includes reduced deforestation rates in natural ecosystems and the adoption of sustainable management practices in forestry and agriculture by a majority of communities and smallholder farmers in the region. In addition, long-term impacts include inverting the trends towards vegetation loss and soil degradation, and better controlling the threats to ecosystems, habitat and plant and animal species with high value for conservation.

The components, outputs, and outcomes are shown below in tabular form.

Table 5. Components, Outcomes, and Outputs of Project

Component	Outcome	Output
1. Field demonstrations for maintaining carbon stocks in forests and increasing carbon sequestration in agropastoral landscapes of the Selva Zoque-Sumidero Canyon complex	Outcome 1: Primary and second-growth forests managed sustainably and production practices in agro-pastoral landscapes improved (to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon sequestration).	Output 1.1: Intervention communities and local project sites identified and validated by stakeholders At least 10,000 ha of production landscapes and seascapes are under effective management, with positive influence on additional 50,000 ha of protected areas nearby through connectivity, buffers or enhanced ecological sustainability provided in target landscapes and seascapes
		Output 1.2: A gender sensitive Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) strategy for maintaining carbon stocks and reducing emissions developed and implemented in project area communities.
		Output 1.3: Field projects under improved productive landscapes management (PLM) practices contributing to carbon sequestration developed and implemented in project area communities.
		Output 1.4: Carbon and greenhouse gas mitigation benefits generated by the project are measured and monitored throughout project life using internationally accepted protocols.
		Output 1.5: A carbon market strategy, to ensure that a maximum of carbon credits generated through the project are properly issued in the voluntary market, is developed and implemented.
		Output 1.6: An agreed upon strategy for scaling up the demonstration field projects within the Selva Zoque-Sumidero Canyon complex and the State of Chiapas and beyond is developed and first implementation steps have been initiated.
2. Building institutional and local capacity on reducing GHG emissions from the LULUCF sector in Chiapas	Outcome 2.: Male and female Farmers, community extension workers, NPA technical committees and CONANP and SEMAHN staff members trained on gender-sensitive sustainable forest management (SFM) and improved productive landscapes management (PLM) practices for carbon dioxide capture and storage	Output 2.1: Capacity needs of male and female farmers, extension workers, NPA technical committees and CONANP and SEMAHN staff members on SFM and improved PLM practices for carbon capture and storage assessed.
		Output 2.2: Capacity building programs and training materials for male and female farmers, extension workers, NPA technical committees and CONANP and SEMAHN staff members on SFM and improved PLM practices for carbon dioxide capture and storage designed (programs will take into account the Strategic Gender Plan).
		Output 2.3: Network of community extension workers established.

		Output 2.4: Capacity building programs for male and female farmers, extension workers, NPA technical committees and CONANP and SEMAHN staff members on SFM and improved PLM practices for carbon dioxide capture and storage implemented (programs will take into account the Strategic Gender Plan).
		Output 2.5: Monitoring and evaluation system to assess acquisition and application of knowledge and skills about SFM and improved PLM practices by male and female farmers, extension workers, NPA technical committees and CONANP and SEMAHN staff members designed and implemented.
		Output 2.6: Field exchanges (including women only and mixed groups) to share lessons learned and promote adoption of best practices for climate change mitigation in agrosilvopastoral landscapes (including food security activities) between project communities and other communities and similar projects located in Chiapas and adjacent states.
		Output 2.7: Public awareness and policies are influenced by lessons learned and know-how generated from the Project.

For the Theory of Change to be valid, certain assumptions have to be made about the activities and outputs. These are summarized below, as elaborated in the Project Document.

Table 6. Project Outcomes and Assumptions

Outcome	Assumptions
Component 1 outcome 1: Primary and second-growth forests managed sustainably and production practices in agro-pastoral landscapes improved (to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon sequestration).	Social cohesion and governance of target communities are sufficiently strong to comply with commitments for sustainable land use practices aimed at climate change mitigation. Communities selected during the PPG phase maintain their engagement in local projects agreed upon with the project team. Involved communities are open towards integration of gender approach into local processes. Sufficient buyers of carbon credits can be found in the voluntary market. Sustainability and biodiversity conservation are increasingly becoming cross-cutting criteria in public policies and programs of non-environmental sectors.
Component 2 outcome 1: Farmers (men and women), community extension workers, NPA technical	Farmers (men and women) and communities participate continuously in training programs.

Outcome	Assumptions
committees and CONANP and SEMAHN staff members trained on sustainable forest management (SFM) and improved productive landscapes management (PLM) practices for carbon dioxide capture and storage.	Farmers and communities are ready to apply knowledge and adopt innovations in forest and agricultural practices transmitted by the project. Members of NPA technical committees are interested in participating in training programs offered by the project. CC mitigation policies and programs at the federal and state level continue to enjoy a high priority. Appropriate communities interested in participating in scaling up program for CC mitigation can be identified.

III.1.1 Findings and Conclusions

Consistency with Objectives – There was consensus among all interviewees that the components of the project were consistent with its objectives, i.e., the Theory of Change was coherent. One observation made by many of the KIs was that the project period was too short given the extensive geographic area and ambitious objectives. It was felt that the project should have been five years and not three, noting that with the no-cost extension, it ended up being a four-year project. While the level of interest of some of the communities and the lands available within their *ejidos* for reforestation were overestimated, the general approach was appropriate. Given the small size of the areas in the *ejidos* available for reforestation, in order to meet the objectives, AMBIO working with UNACH and CONANP, as well as the small landholders was critical.

Other partners needed – Some KIs felt that other institutions should have been involved, such as SADER (*Secretaria de Agricultura y Desarrollo Rural*), which was formerly known as SAGARPA (*Secretaria de Agricultura, Ganaderia, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentacion*) before the change in the federal government; SAGIP (*Secretaria de Agricultura, Ganaderia y Pesca*), which was SECAM (*Secretaria del Campo*); and the *Secretaria de Bienestar* (formerly SEDESOL, *Secretaria de Desarrollo Social*). AMBIO had reached out to SAGARPA and SECAM early in the project's implementation but they did not wish to collaborate. SEDESOL focuses on social issues and not productive activities such as agriculture, coffee, honey, and such, that were the focus of the project.

Public policy component – One KI felt that the project could have amplified its impact had it incorporated a formal public policy component. Since many of the project's activities impacted land management policy, it was felt that formalizing this through outreach and attempts to influence public policy would have capitalized upon these activities. However, as stated above, the near consensus was that the project did not have time to accomplish its original objectives. As such, adding another component would have required more resources and staffing. ISS' impression is that the project staff were already stretched thin, attempting to cover a vast geographic area, often in areas with difficult access, with limited vehicles.

III.1.2 Recommendations

The recommendations regarding the Theory of Change are as follows:

Consistency with Objectives – There are no major recommendations other than a suggestion to discuss the feasibility of project objectives within the determined timeframe with the executing partners, and consider changes as needed. These could either come in the form of extending the project duration or ramping down the objectives.

Other partners needed – No recommendations. Executing partners cannot engage with unwilling institutions.

Public policy component – AMBIO does not have the scale and expertise needed to implement a public policy component, as it is more of a grassroots NGO with expertise in community level development activities. While a public policy component could have been useful, as for almost any such development intervention, it is more likely that it would have distracted project focus from the core objectives.

III.1.3 Rating

Per the rating system of the GEF, "Theory of Change" is considered "Highly Satisfactory."

III.2 Assessment of Project Results

The assessment of project results includes a detailed analysis of the Results Framework followed by an assessment of the project outcomes.

III.2.1 Results Framework

The following table presents the results (or logical) framework and is based on the December 2018 FY18 PIR and the detailed TE interview with the project manager of AMBIO. Comments and suggestions are provided regarding the values of the indicators. The table is color coded using the "traffic light" system of green (achieved), yellow (on target) and red (not on target).

III.2.1.a Results Frameworks – Findings and Conclusions

Table 7. Results Framework – Objective Level Indicators

Objective Indicators	Target	Status at TE	Comments
Indicator a: Number of tons of CO2e avoided in the Selva Zoque–Sumidero Canyon complex (by sustainable management of primary and second growth forests)	132,298 tCO2e	196,245 tCO2e	The 196,245 tCO_2e (cumulative carbon sequestration over a period of 25 years) assumes 8,186 ha of forest managed sustainably (see comments for outcome indicator 1.a). If this assumption is valid, then the target has been exceeded by 48%. However, only 122,790 tCO_2e can be sold based on a more precise estimate. If only considering what can be sold, then the target was short by 7%. However, the indicator is defined only as tons CO_2e avoided and does not specify sales.
Indicator b: 160,989 tons CO2e sequestered in the Selva Zoque-Sumidero Canyon complex after 25 year (by improved production practices contributing to the sequestration of carbon).	160,989 tCO2e	207,523 tCO2e	Target exceeded by 29%
Indicator c: Percentage of families/women/men participating in project activities who perceive an improvement in their communities' natural capital.	70%	70%	Met the target. The 50% reported in the FY18 PIR and at the MTR was based on rough sporadic interviews. Formal surveys done in July 2019 are the basis of the 70% value.

Table 8. Results Framework - Outcome Level Indicators, Baselines, Target, and Comments

Outcome	Output	Indicator	Baseline	Target at end of project	Status at TE	Comments
Outcome 1 - Primary and second-growth forests managed sustainably and production practices in agro-pastoral landscapes improved (to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon sequestration)	Output 1.1: Intervention communities and local project sites identified and validated by stakeholders Output 1.2: A gender sensitive Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) strategy for maintaining carbon stocks and reducing emissions developed and implemented in project area communities. Output 1.3: Field projects under improved productive landscapes management (PLM) practices contributing to carbon sequestration developed and implemented in project area communities. Output 1.4: Carbon and greenhouse gas mitigation benefits generated by the project are measured and monitored throughout project life using internationally accepted protocols. Output 1.5: A carbon market strategy, to ensure that a maximum of carbon credits generated through the project are properly issued in the voluntary market, is developed and implemented. Output 1.6: An agreed upon strategy for scaling up the demonstration field projects within the Selva Zoque – Sumidero Canyon complex and the State of Chiapas and beyond is developed	(Outcome Indicators) a) Number of hectares of primary and second-growth forests managed sustainably for maintaining carbon stocks and reducing emissions	2,624 ha	6,615 ha	8,186 ha	On track to be exceeded by 43% At the end of 2018, per the FY18 PIR, the value was 5,335 ha. The significant increment of 2,851 ha from December 2018 to August 2019 is explained below. In 2017, the project identified areas of *ejidos* with conserved primary and secondary forests (various in Ocote, one in REBISO and one in La Pera) that were threatened by agricultural expansion, illegal timber, and ranching. La Pera was not included because did not meet the criteria of Plan Vivo. In a workshop with communities, SEMAHN, and CONANP, potential threat factors were identified. Based on this information and satellite imagery, the consultant for the Plan Vivo certification determined the threat status and eligibility of

Outcome	Output	Indicator	Baseline	Target at end of project	Status at TE	Comments
	and first implementation steps have been initiated.					additional lands for activities. The activities in the 2,851 ha have not begun and are pending Plan Vivo approval of the corresponding Technical Specification.
		b) Number of hectares of productive landscapes under improved management practices contributing to carbon sequestration	36 ha	722 ha	750 ha	Target exceeded by 4%. At the point of the midterm review, this value was 61.5 ha, and at the end of 2018 per the FY18 PIR, it was 278.25 ha (based on additional activities undertaken from June 2017 to August 2018). Additional reforestation was carried out since then in ranches occupied illegally by neighboring communities, which belong to UNACH and CONANP. As noted above in the discussion of the Theory of Change, the project would not have been available to meet its objectives without the inclusion of reforestation on these lands.

Outcome	Output	Indicator	Baseline	Target at end of project	Status at TE	Comments
		c) Number of communities maintaining forest cover and/or improving management practices in productive landscapes	2	15	19	Target exceeded by 27%
		d) Percentage of local processes (field projects, network capacity building) with a gender approach	0%	80%	90%	Target exceeded by 13%

Outcome	Output	Indicator	Baseline	Target at end of project	Status at TE	Comments
Outcome 2 – Farmers (men and women), community extension workers, NPA technical committees and CONANP and SEMAHN staff members trained on sustainable forest management (SFM) and improved productive landscapes management (PLM) practices for carbon	Output 2.1: Capacity needs of male and female farmers, extension workers, NPA technical committees and CONANP and SEMAHN staff members on SFM and improved PLM practices for carbon capture and storage assessed. Output 2.2: Capacity building programs and training materials for male and female farmers, extension workers, NPA technical committees and CONANP and SEMAHN staff members on SFM and improved PLM practices for carbon dioxide capture and storage designed (programs will take into account the Strategic Gender Plan). Output 2.3: Network of community extension workers established. Output 2.4: Capacity building programs for male and female farmers, extension workers, NPA technical committees and CONANP and SEMAHN staff members on SFM and improved	(Outcome Indicators) a) Number of communities and male/female farmers trained for applying sustainable forest management (SFM) and improved productive landscapes management (PLM) practices with a gender perspective	3; 30	15; 375	19; 395	Targets exceeded by 27% and 8%, respectively. Of the 395, 319 were men and 76 women, which Is not ideal, but, given the social characteristics of the communities, represents some progress.

Outcome	Output	Indicator	Baseline	Target at end of project	Status at TE	Comments
capture and storage.	PLM practices for carbon dioxide capture and storage implemented (programs will take into account the Strategic Gender Plan). Output 2.5: Monitoring and evaluation system to assess acquisition and application of knowledge and skills about SFM and improved PLM practices by male and female farmers, extension workers, NPA technical committees and CONANP and SEMAHN staff members designed and implemented. Output 2.6: Field exchanges (including women only and mixed groups) to share lessons learned and promote adoption of best practices for climate change mitigation in agrosilvopastoral landscapes (including food security activities) between project communities and other communities and	b) Number of male/female community extension workers trained for transmitting sustainable forest management (SFM) and improved productive landscapes management (PLM) practices with a gender perspective to communities and individual farmers	3	15	19	Target exceeded by 27%

Outcome	Output	Indicator	Baseline	Target at end of project	Status at TE	Comments
	similar projects located in Chiapas and adjacent states. Output 2.7: Public awareness and policies are influenced by lessons learned and know-how generated from the Project.	c) Number of male/female CONANP and SEMAHN staff members and NPA technical committee members trained on sustainable forest management (SFM) and improved PLM practices contributing to carbon capture and storage with a gender perspective	11	25	38	Target exceeded by 52%

Overall, the project was highly successful in meeting the targets for the various indicators and made considerable progress in rectifying the low level of achievement at the point of the MTR. For outcome indicator 1.a, counting hectares that have been identified for eventual activities, but where these activities have yet to be implemented, is problematic. While there is every indication that the activities will be implemented, pending Plan Vivo approval of the Technical Specification, ISS believes that it is premature to count these hectares without qualification.

On a more general level, the Results Framework is highly quantitative in nature, and, as such, did not capture qualitative outcomes. To illustrate, the project transformed the perspective of land management of the various constituent protected areas from a fragmented approach of separate entities to a unified one, which is a profound shift. Also, AMBIO positioned itself and built strong relationships with CONANP and SEMAHN, which will be of great value in future collaborations. These are important qualitative achievements that should be included in the Results Framework.

III.2.1.b. Achievement of Project Outcomes

Per GEF guidance, the outcomes are analyzed according to 1) Relevance, 2) Effectiveness and 3) Efficiency.

The analysis is presented in tabular form below.

Outcome	Criteria	Analysis
Outcome 1 - Primary and second-growth forests managed sustainably and production practices in agro-pastoral landscapes improved (to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon sequestration) Outcome 2 – Farmers (men and women), community extension workers, NPA technical committees and CONANP and SEMAHN staff members trained on sustainable forest management (SFM) and improved productive landscapes management (PLM) practices for carbon capture and storage.	Relevance - Were the project outcomes congruent with the GEF focal areas/operational program strategies, country priorities, and mandates of the Agencies? Was the project design appropriate for delivering the expected outcomes?	The GEF 5 Focal Area for this project was "Climate Change Mitigation," GEF 5 states that "In countries and regions experiencing large GHG emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, the GEF will promote LULUCF activities aimed at reducing forest emissions and promoting forest conservation, afforestation and reforestation, and sustainable forest management.[4] Land use emissions in Mexico, according to the latest national communication are approximately 15% of national emissions.[5] This outcome, focusing on reducing emissions and increasing sequestration from forests, and building the related capacity at different levels, is therefore aligned with the GEF focal area as well as being significant for national emissions. In terms of national policies, there is alignment with numerous national policies related to climate change and forests. With respect to the IA, CI-GEF funds projects that contribute to global environmental benefits, focusing on four overarching project themes, including "Improving Natural Capital Conservation and Governance" and "Improving Sustainability of Production in Terrestrial and Marine Ecosystems." Outcomes 1 and 2 clearly supported both these themes.
	Effectiveness - The extent to which the project's actual outcomes commensurate with the expected outcomes?	As discussed in detail in the Results Framework section above, the outcomes were met or exceeded in almost all cases.
	Efficiency - Was the project cost-effective?	The project represented good value for money as it essentially contracted what many KIs saw as a 5-year project into 3 years with a one-year no-cost extension.

[4] GEF. 2010. GEF 5 Focal Area Strategies. https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/GEF-5_FOCAL_AREA_STRATEGIES.pdf. Accessed 11/5/19. GEF.

[5] SEMARNAT and INECC. 2019. Sexta Comunicación Nacional y Segundo Informe Bienal de Actualización ante la Convención Marco de las Naciones Unidas sobre el Cambio Climático. https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/MEX_6aNC_Revisada_0.pdf. Accessed 11/15/19.

	How does the project cost/time versus output/outcomes equation compare to that of similar projects?	Including CI, there were a total of twelve co-financing institutions, totaling, per data from the Project Document, approximately 80% of the total project budget. In addition, as a more qualitative observation, it was evident to ISS that the communities were being regularly visited by the project team, which is an additional demonstration of efficiency, as the project managed to regularly visit multiple communities spread over a large area with limited project vehicles (one project vehicle and, in the second half of the project, authorization from CI-GEF for a personal vehicle to be used and expenses covered.) The project also fielded a very large team of individuals and supported the costs of a PMU office, where project staff both lived and used as a base for their field visits.

III.2.2 Recommendations

The targets were all met or exceeded. As noted above, it is recommended that outcome indicator 1.a not include hectares for which activities have been planned but have yet to be implemented. A high-level recommendation is the need to diversify the indicators to capture both qualitative and quantitative outcomes. Often, the qualitative achievements can actually be more impactful in the long term serving as the foundation for future projects and accomplishments.

III.2.3 Rating

The Results Framework itself, M&E System and Achievement of Project Outcomes (per the criteria of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency) is rated as "Satisfactory." The rating is lowered because outcome indicator 1.a has yet to be fully achieved.

III.3 Progress to Impact

While the previous section addressed the project's achievements at the more specific level of detail of the objectives and outcomes defined in the Results Framework, this section takes a higher-level view, with a focus on impact.

III.3.1 Findings and Conclusions

Level of Interest of Communities – As discussed in the MTR report, the level of interest of the communities in the regions not part of the original project sphere of action, which had been recommended to AMBIO by CONANP and SEMAHN, had been overestimated. This led to significant delays in project implementation due to the time lost engaging with communities that were either not interested or had very different expectations. This over-estimation of the

level of interest of the communities was also brought up during the TE, indicating that it continued to be considered an issue of concern for the project.

GEF Resiliencia – Numerous KIs indicated that the project's cooperation with the GEF Resiliencia project was of great value. The two projects, both sponsored by the GEF, collaborated both at the strategic and practical levels. The projects shared ideas as well as conducted activities jointly with the communities. Given the large geographic area of the project and the logistical limitations faced by AMBIO in terms of having only two vehicles accessible to the project, the ability to leverage the resources of GEF Resiliencia was of great practical value. Coordinating field visits, as was also done with CONANP, enabled the project to engage more frequently with the communities.

Dedicated AMBIO Staff and Community Technicians – There was consensus among the KIs that training community technicians to guide the activities was of great value. These individuals were able to spearhead activities in each village and will serve as repositories of capacity for new activities such as honey production. Similarly, the use of dedicated AMBIO technicians for each region, who made frequent visits to each community, was valuable; as they were able to develop relationships with the communities through training sessions, routine visits, and working on the activities alongside the communities. A minority view on the use of community technicians was that they had too much control over who participated at the community level, both in terms of disseminating information about the activities within the community and being gatekeepers for who had the opportunity to participate.

A counterpoint to this observation was that the choice of the community technicians itself was made by community leadership in the form of the *Comisariado Ejidal*, treasurer, and the *Consejo de Vigilancia*. The dual presence of the community technicians and the dedicated AMBIO staff helped create a new awareness of SLM and SFM in the communities, as well as introduce alternative sustainable livelihoods such as honey and mushroom production. This made a definite socio-productive impact on the communities. The involvement of women in training sessions, inter-exchanges with other communities, and alternative livelihoods also had a social impact on the communities.

Capacity Building – Some of the KIs that had received capacity building felt that the training received on carbon markets, carbon credits, calculating avoided and sequestered greenhouse gases (GHG), and determining carbon baselines through permanent forest plots was insufficient. A counterpoint to this observation is that this was not the purpose of the capacity building, which was, instead, focused on SFM and SLM. These other topics were contracted to external consultants, and it was never the intention of the project to build the capacity of CONANP and SEMAHN in these areas. Additionally, the lack of continuity of those CONANP and SEMAHN staff who received training was a hindrance, as different individuals were sent for different training sessions, and some who participated lost their positions due to cost cutting within these institutions.

Sustainable alternative livelihoods – Within the scope of the PLM and SLM activities, the project implemented activities related to improved *milpa* (agroforestry system involving cultivation of maize with pumpkins, beans, and other crops; avoiding the use of fire for clearing as well as chemical pesticides and fertilizers); as well as honey, mushroom production, and coffee. These activities were implemented with the use of external consultants, and, as such, their success or failure were heavily dependent upon the quality of these consultants. There was consensus among the KIs with knowledge of these activities that the *milpa* activities were not as successful as the honey and mushrooms. This was related to the difficulty of locating a properly qualified consultant to carry out the trainings for the former. With respect to both the honey and mushroom production, ISS did not note the existence of any plans to facilitate their commercialization beyond at a very small scale within the communities themselves. As such, it is possible that, with the end of the project, these activities will cease to be of interest to the communities, as they are not producing the levels of supplementary income that would appear to be necessary.

III.3.2 Recommendations

Level of Interest of Communities – This issue was raised and addressed in the MTR conducted by ISS. The recommendation made still stands, which was "... expanding the geographic scope of a project … should be preceded by a careful feasibility study .... In this case, AMBIO depended heavily upon guidance provided by CONANP and SEMAHN, which was helpful but insufficient. The lack of a feasibility study for the new PNAs led to communities withdrawing …"[6]

Dedicated AMBIO Staff and Community Technicians – The issue raised by some KIs regarding the apparent excessive control of the community technicians should be considered. One of the reasons for this was that often the community technician was also part of the community leadership. There is, however, little that the executing partner can do when the community technician is seen to be abusing their authority, because, having been chosen by the community itself, to question the choice would be to challenge local governance. This would be an inappropriate action.

Capacity Building – The only recommendation with respect to capacity building is that recipients understand the scope of the training, so that expectations are not unrealistic.

Sustainable alternative livelihoods – One important element of sustainability is economic. In order for sustainable alternative livelihoods to continue, the community members must see an economic return that is proportional to their effort and exceeds the returns from similar effort put into less sustainable activities. In order for this to be true, there must be channels via which the higher-value products, such as honey and mushrooms can be commercialized. Given that

[6] Forbes, Keith. 2017. Midterm Evaluation of "Maintaining and Increasing Carbon Stocks in Agrosilvopastoral Systems in Rural Communities of the Selva Zoque-Sumidero Canyon Complex." Conservation International, Arlington, VA. pp. 15-16.

these communities are in areas of difficult access, significant forethought into the viability of markets, scale of production, and transportation, is needed. ISS recommends that any future projects which involve products that can be commercialized should first involve a market feasibility study, and then determine whether the community level production is adequate to meet the level of demand of nearby and more distant markets. Only then, should the community be engaged in these efforts. Otherwise, it is more than likely that these efforts will not be continued for very long after the end of the project.

III.3.3. Rating

The rating for "Progress to Impact" is "Satisfactory." The rating is lowered because of the over-estimation of community interest and the lack of attention to value chains related to the products of the alternative livelihood activities.

III.4 Quality of Implementation and Execution

This section covers the day-to-day running of the project at CI-GEF (IA) and AMBIO (EA) level, as well as the interactions between AMBIO, CONANP and SEMAHN. Issues such as contracting, procurement, internal organization, workflow, communications and relationships between the various entities involved are considered. The analysis is divided into Quality of Implementation (CI-GEF) and Quality of Execution (EAs).

III.4.1 Findings and Conclusions

III.4.1.a. Quality of Implementation

Document review – With respect to the interactions with the CI-GEF Project Agency staff, the EA reported that the only issue was with the workflow and frequency of reporting. Otherwise, they reported positively on the CI-GEF Project Agency staff. The EA indicated that the document review process of CI-GEF was occasionally unwieldy and repetitive. Quarterly reporting was seen as being overly burdensome and taking time away from the implementation of activities. One KI mentioned "Do they want us to write reports or implement activities?" It was observed that, given the time needed to go back and forth between the EA and IA on quarterly reports, by the time one quarter's report was finalized, the next report was already due. Also, it was noted that there was often not much different to report between quarters, and that reporting

twice yearly would have been more appropriate. However, it is unclear what latitude CI-GEF has to change the frequency of reporting.

III.4.1.b. Quality of Execution

Organization – There was consensus among the KIs that the project was well organized, both at the level of relationships between AMBIO, CONANP and SEMAHN, as well as with respect to the community level work. Good relationships were developed between SEMAHN-AMBIO and CONANP-AMBIO. In some cases, there were minor issues raised related to the logistics of community visits involving CONANP and AMBIO, but these were quickly resolved.

Contracting consultants – The project had some challenges with contracting consultants. This was most seriously the case with the process for contracting Plan Vivo consultants, which took a long time and caused delays in the implementation of the project. The project also had difficulties in locating a suitably qualified consultant for the improved *milpa*, with direct consequences on the quality of the training, and the success of the activity. The first consultant for the honey production was also seen by community KIs to be ineffective, and a replacement needed to be hired, which again caused delays in project implementation.

Marketing – One KI mentioned that the project should have "marketed" itself better in order to amplify its impact. This is a conundrum faced by most projects operating at community level and there is a natural tension between the need to work intensely at community level and the need to communicate/promote the project at broader scales. While such marketing can amplify the policy impact of the project, it can also backfire and lead to misunderstandings at higher levels of government that can impede progress. *Sometimes, it is wise to keep a low profile!* That said, the project did disseminate its efforts through an email bulletin, a website, national and international forums, and exchanges with other projects.

Location of the Ocozocoautla de Espinosa (Coita) PMU – Having the project management located in Coita, close to the protected areas and communities was very useful to the project, as it facilitated the community visits. Both San Cristóbal de la Casas, where AMBIO is based, and Tuxtla Gutierrez, the state capital, are considerably more distant from the areas of project actuation.

III.4.2 Recommendations

III.4.2.a. Quality of Implementation

Document review – CI-GEF should consider less frequent reporting in cases where the incremental difference in project activities between quarters is small. This assumes that doing

so lies within the actionable universe of CI-GEF. While reporting itself is a flow-down provision of the GEF, the workflow of the review process is within the domain of CI-GEF, and, as such, CI-GEF should consider using a more streamlined process that is less time-consuming for the EA.

III.4.2.b. Quality of Execution

Contracting consultants – In future such projects, the executing agencies should make more stringent efforts to procure consultants with recognized competency in a timely manner, to deliver the professional services required. Should consultants for specific activities not be available, this is something that should be determined at the stage of the project proposal, and the related activities should not be included in the project.

III.4.3 Rating

The Quality of Implementation is rated as "Satisfactory," because the grantee indicated that the review process for documents submitted was overly time consuming and took time away from the implementation of activities.

The Quality of Execution is rated as "Satisfactory." The rating is lowered given the contracting difficulties with the Plan Vivo consultant and the contracting of ineffective *milpa* and honey production (initial consultant) outside experts. These issues caused direct impacts on the timely implementation of project activities and the effectiveness and sustainability (see section below) of the SLM/PLM activities.

III.5 Gender and Safeguards

What follows is the review of the relevant project policy documents as well as gender and safeguards within the implementation context. Gender and Safeguards were assessed both at the level of AMBIO as well as for the beneficiary communities. Per the Project Document, three of the CI-GEF Project Agency Environmental and Social Safeguards were triggered by this project: a) Indigenous Peoples, b) Stakeholder Engagement, and c) Gender mainstreaming.

III.5.1 Findings and Conclusions

Indigenous Peoples – The project developed an Indigenous People's Plan for the project area, which included 15 localities and 50% of the communities are indigenous, of the Tzotzil ethnic group. This plan provides background socioeconomic information (areas, agricultural lands,

etc.) as well as information on the ethnic makeup of the project's target communities. There is also a discussion of the communities' understanding of their social, human, financial, physical and natural capital. Community participation was assessed based on the results of a workshop conducted with the directors and technical staff of the Selva El Ocote Biosphere Reserve, Parque el Canon del Sumidero, Villa de Allende and administration of the Chiapas State reserves of Meyapac and La Pera. This workshop used multiple criteria to identify likely communities. AMBIO and CONANP then visited the communities to further assess interest.

Following this, AMBIO visited the communities, in cooperation with CONANP and SEMANH, to obtain their Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), using the Plan Vivo methodology. AMBIO has 15 years of implementing the Plan Vivo methodology of which the FPIC process is a part. The final yes/no decision regarding the project was decided in the ejido assembly consultations, without any project EAs participating. The more detailed technical aspects of the community level activities were encapsulated in the Planes Vivos, which were co-designed by AMBIO and ejido authorities. Participation in the project was open to the entire community, and, since the project followed the Plan Vivo standard, the benefits from the ex-ante carbon credits were equitably assigned at both communal and individual levels.

ISS finds that the inclusion of indigenous peoples in the project was done with the greatest care and respect for their self-determination and territorial rights. In addition to a detailed plan, following a recognized carbon standard, and the inclusion of regional AMBIO coordinators that were Tzotzil themselves, conferring great language and cultural sensibility, it was evident to the consultant during the site visits that there was a great degree of mutual respect and consideration between the AMBIO staff and the communities, regardless of particular communities' ethnic composition.

Stakeholder Engagement – The project also developed a Stakeholder Engagement Plan. It identified the main actors as the farmers from involved communities, and the focal partners as CONANP and SEMANH. As described above, FPIC was used in the development of project activities. AMBIO brought 17 years of community level experience to the project. Technical and Steering Committees were created to manage the project and maintain partners informed. AMBIO and CONANP met with a vast array of state and federal government agencies, and, in a joint workshop with protected area institutions and communities (as mentioned above). The stakeholder participation plan detailed what and how information would be shared with different stakeholders at various stages of project implementation.

During the MTR and TE KI interviews, it was very evident to the consultant that the project was known to government, academic and civil society organizations, and well regarded. With the exception of issues raised in section III.3.1 above, regarding some feeling that the community technicians were overly empowered (see respective section for full discussion), the consultant did not receive any information from KI interviews and site visits that indicated any lack of outreach or consultation with stakeholders.

Gender mainstreaming – Gender was treated as an important component of the project through the involvement of a dedicated staff member who conducted the gender analyses. The participation of women in the fire brigades and SLM activities, and their starting microenterprises was seen by KIs as a promising sign. Of the 375 trained in SFM and PLM activities, 319 were men and 76 women, or 80 and 20%, respectively. While, on *prima facie* analysis, this appears to reflect a profound failure of the gender sensitive programming, the local context must be taken into account. ISS conducted the MTR and was told by a women's group at that point that their simply being able to leave the house or community to participate in events was, from their perspective, a great improvement in their status. In this light, the 20% participation should be seen as a start of a process that could lead to greater participation of women in community affairs.

At AMBIO level, the vast majority of the project staff were men. This was also the case for the majority of the KIs interviewed (excluding AMBIO and community KIs, only 3 of the KIs were women), including the community technicians interviewed in Llano Grande and Libertad Campesina. Only in Libertad Campesina was it possible for the consultant to interview a group of community members with significant participation of women (those involved in mushroom production, seed collection and the tree nursery). Thus, in this context, the preponderance of men in the SFM and PLM training activities can be seen as reflective of broader long-standing societal patterns, over which any given project, especially one with different primary objectives, has only minimal influence.

Accountability and Grievance Mechanism – This mechanism was designed to address any complaints involving the above safeguards or other issues. Per the Project Document, the grievance mechanism is designed to address complaint at two levels – 1) Local, and 2) Institutional and grantee level. The process for 1) is stepwise with complaints being channeled to the community technician, the regional coordinator, the technical project coordinator, and the Project Technical Committee, in succession, as needed, if resolution is not obtained at the earlier stage(s). For 2), complaints are to be directed to the project director, the technical director or the Project Technical Committee. If necessary, the complaint would be taken up at the next ordinary session or to an extraordinary session of the Project Technical Committee. Complaints are to be received in written from by owners or holders of community resources (1) or representatives or directors of the organization or citizens active in the project region who presented the complaint (2). The answer to either kind of complaints should not exceed more than 60 working days and must be given in written form. CI-GEF is to be promptly informed about complaints submitted to the project director, the technical director or the Project Technical Committee and their resolution.

Per the KII with the grantee, there was one complaint in Chininal in Villa Allende. It regarded how the community technician was distributing the work for the *vivero* (nursery). The complaint was communicated to the regional coordinator, who did the paperwork, and worked

with CONANP, the ejido authorities and municipal authorities to resolve the issue. Resolution involved assigning work based on other criteria. The system therefore appears to have functioned correctly (noting that the original complaint not being directed first to the community technician is valid because it involved this individual). There were no other complaints.

III.5.2 Recommendations

There are no recommendations with regard to Indigenous Peoples, as the project considered all issues with great care and respect. Stakeholder engagement was also planned for appropriately, and outreach was done widely and comprehensively. As for gender, there are similarly no recommendations to make as the project did commendable work in its gender analyses and outreach to women in the communities. With respect to project staffing, ISS is unable to assess the staffing policies of AMBIO.

III.5.3 Rating

Gender and Safeguards is assessed as "Highly Satisfactory."

III.6 Sustainability

Sustainability is the ultimate goal of all conservation and development interventions. Financing institutions seek the assurance that the positive impacts of their investments will continue after the life of the project, and not merely represent a temporary upwards trend. The degree of sustainability is inversely proportional to the magnitude of the risks, which include institutional, socio-political, financial, and environmental risks. Sustainability is not rated using the six-point HS to HU scale, but a four-point scale (Likely to Unlikely) based on an assessment of the likelihood and magnitude of the risks to sustainability.

The assessment of sustainability draws on the relevant risks identified in the Project Document "Project Risk Assessment and Mitigation," as well as those identified by ISS during the TE.

III.6.1. Institutional

Executing Agencies – AMBIO, CONANP and SEMAHN evidenced little to no institutional risk. AMBIO is a well-established NGO (technically, a cooperative under Mexican law) that has been

in existence for 21 years. AMBIO runs the Scolel'te program that is certified under the international Plan Vivo standard. It also participates in other global programs such as the Forests 2020 Project. It has long-standing relationships with communities, and (strengthened through this project) Mexican government institutions such as CONANP and SEMAHN.

CONANP and SEMAHN are Mexican government institutions at the federal and state level, respectively. While budgetary fluctuations can change personnel and the funding levels of different departments and initiatives, ISS did not observe any serious institutional challenges relative to the objectives of this project.

The institutional sustainability rating is Likely.

III.6.2. Socio-political

Land use and production practices – The social and political risks have to be discussed in three contexts, 1) Participating communities, 2) Other communities, and 3) Mexican government institutions that address land use. Regarding 1), those communities that are within the Scolel'te program and are therefore bound by the Plan Vivo technical specification will continue the project activities because they are necessary to obtain the continued installment payments from the associated carbon credits. Regarding 2), these communities do not appear to have been influenced by the project and will continue whatever practices they find most appealing. As for 3), no impact was observed on government policy other than to begin the process of managing the region as a unified whole and not as separate conservation areas.

Loss of interest from communities – As above, the communities receiving direct financial inputs through the Scolel'te program can be expected to continue the associated SLM (and, when included, SFM activities). With respect to improved milpa, honey, and mushrooms, it is more mixed. The former, as discussed previously, was poorly implemented. The other commodities have limited markets, as discussed in the financial section below.

False expectations within communities – In a sense, this risk addressed itself. Those communities that had different expectations but had been originally intended as target communities, "voted with their feet," and left the project in the first year of implementation. The communities that remained have a clear understanding of the activities that compose the project, and continue to participate because they wish to, so there is no such risk.

The sociopolitical sustainability rating is Moderately Likely.

III.6.3. Financial

Carbon markets – With respect to the carbon credits for SLM (and eventually for SFM), there is no financial risk related to their issuance, validity, and the continuity of payments to community

members, as Plan Vivo is well-established. The financing of the Plan Vivo Foundation is sourced through a payment per tonne of carbon dioxide sold, as well as project and resellers' registration fees. However, when considering the carbon markets themselves, there are real risks. Carbon offset sales volume transacted on the voluntary carbon markets dropped 24% in 2016 from the previous year. The market is very much in favor of buyers and not sellers as, in 2016, 56 $MtCO_2e$ of generated offsets were unsold, compared to a transaction volume of 63 $MtCO_2e$. The volume unsold is therefore only slightly less than the volume actually sold. On the positive side, offsets from Latin America tend to command a higher price.[7]

PLM/SLM activities – As discussed above, in the section on "Progress to Impact," the success of the PLM/SLM activities was not uniform. The lack of consideration given to value chains renders the continued viability of the honey and mushroom production challenging. With respect to the coffee, new cultivars were provided by the project and the plants are still young, so ISS is unable to assess the level of success. Thus, there appears to be significant financial risk as to the continuity of these activities.

The financial sustainability rating is Moderately Unlikely.

III.6.4. Environmental

Land use and production practices – Communities that are within the Scolel'te program and are therefore bound by the Plan Vivo technical specification will continue the project activities, because they are necessary to obtain the continued installment payments from the associated carbon credits. It is important to note that, currently only 145 ha of the 722 ha of avoided emissions (corresponding to indicator (b) for output 1.1 above, in the Results Framework) are registered in Scolel'te. The SFM activities are not yet in Scolel'te, as they are pending approval of the technical specification from Plan Vivo. No evidence was obtained by ISS regarding communities outside the project area, and it therefore can be expected that they will continue with whichever land use patterns they find most profitable, regardless of their sustainability.

Permanence of Environmental Benefits of Plan Vivo activities – The landowners that participate in Plan Vivo are paid in installments over 10-15 years, ex ante as opposed to the ex post payments of other carbon credit protocols. The offset calculations are based on the trees remaining standing for decades after the end of the payments, and thus there is no disincentive for the landowners to cut the trees. This is addressed through the Plan Vivo project design Plan Vivo which builds in economic co-benefits to the landowners' livelihoods. However, these co-benefits do not constitute a solid guarantee that the carbon offsetting will be valid over the decades following the end of the payments.[8]

[7] Hamrick, Kelly, and Melissa Gallant. 2017. Unlocking Potential - State of the Voluntary Carbon Markets 2017, Overview. Forest Trends' Ecosystem Marketplace.

[8] Kollmuss, Anja, Helge Zink and Clifford Polycarp. 2008. Making Sense of the Voluntary Carbon Market - A

The environmental sustainability rating is Moderately Likely.

The sustainability ratings are summarized, as follows: Institutional (Likely), Sociopolitical (Moderately Likely), Financial (Moderately Unlikely), and Environmental (Moderately Likely).

GEF 2017 TE guidelines do not specify any particular method to sum up ratings across dimensions. Therefore, ISS applied the following methodology in three steps:

1) By equally weighting all dimensions and "canceling" out equivalently positive or negative terms, so "Moderately Likely" and "Moderately Unlikely" cancel each other out,

2) Leaving "Likely" and "Moderately Likely,"

3) Of these remaining ratings, the lower one was taken as the overall rating

The overall Sustainability rating is therefore "Moderately Likely."

III.7 Summary of Ratings

The following table summarizes the ratings for the evaluation elements.

Table 9. Summary of Ratings

Evaluation Theme	**Rating**
Theory of Change	Highly Satisfactory
Assessment of Project Results	Satisfactory
Progress towards Impacts	Satisfactory
Quality of Implementation and Execution	Satisfactory (both)
Gender and Safeguards	Highly Satisfactory
Sustainability	Moderately Likely

Comparison of Carbon Offset Standards. WWF Germany.

IV. Cross-cutting Evaluation Themes and Lessons Learned

This chapter focuses on the key recommendations described in greater detail above, overall impressions of the Selva Zoque-Sumidero Project, and cross-cutting issues. The essence of this section is to support CI-GEF with a base of "ground rules" upon which to design future such programs for greater and more permanent conservation impact and identify any issues that need short-term follow-up.

IV.1. Co-financing and need for follow-up

Per the October 29, 2019 version of the FY19 PIR, the level of co-financing as of June 30, 2019 was USD 3,690,540.27, compared to an expected level of USD 3,962,462.[9] With respect to follow-up, CI-GEF should consider remote follow-up of the activities related to "Number of hectares of primary and second-growth forests managed sustainably for maintaining carbon stocks and reducing emissions," to ensure that the planned activities on the remaining 2,851 ha have been completed. Field follow-up should not be necessary given the grantee's track record during the implementation of the project.

IV.2 Lessons Learned

Inclusion of future activities in Results Framework achievements – While there were certainly extenuating circumstances related to the delays associated with the changes in the participating communities, and, to a much greater degree, the contracting of a Plan Vivo consultant, outcome indicator 1.a reported 2,851 ha of activities that have yet to be initiated. This is because the activities can only be started after the corresponding Plan Vivo technical specification is completed. While the consultant has no reason to doubt that the activities will indeed be completed in the near future, and this is supported by AMBIO's rapid progress from the MTR to the TE, it is not best practice to include achievements that have yet to occur. ISS recommends that should it be necessary to include such future achievements that the indicator be duly annotated to note that the activity has yet to occur, and the reasons for inclusion provided.

Importance of executing partners with significant community experience – Globally, small landholders and indigenous peoples manage large areas of lands with great conservation significance. Projects which seek to consolidate and advance conservation gains in these regions should, as many CI-GEF projects appropriately do, engage with these communities. Working through organizations such as AMBIO, which have extensive experience working at

[9] This document was prepared after the evaluation was conducted and shared with ISS during the revision of the draft report.

community level, and staff dedicated to community level efforts, is key. CI-GEF should continue to actively seek out and create partnerships with such executing partners, through strategic calls for proposals and other means such as engaging in national and sub-national fora.

Products from sustainable alternative livelihoods and value chains – It is almost a truism that activities which result in commercial products such as coffee, honey and mushrooms require markets in order to be economically sustainable. Therefore, it is critical that the implementation of these activities be preceded by a market feasibility study and a business plan be developed for each community per activity. Products that do not have a market beyond the immediate community should not be encouraged since these will almost certainly be abandoned after the end of the project. Coffee, honey and mushrooms are all high value commodities that could bring substantial economic benefits to communities if there is a viable business plan in place, and professional accompaniment of all the stages – production, marketing, transportation, pricing, scaling up, etc.

Availability of consulting expertise – When the executing partner does not have the in-house skills for particular activities, these must be procured externally. Similar to the existence of a viable business plan for marketable commodities, activities can only be effectively implemented if the appropriate expertise is available. The availability of such expertise should be determined at the project proposal stage, or, at the very latest, in the early stages of project planning.

Overall, AMBIO performed well, establishing and managing a diverse portfolio of community projects over a wide geographic area. The consultant observed that the communities deeply appreciated the technical assistance provided and collaboration with AMBIO. While, as discussed in this report, there is room for improvement in the development of future such CI-GEF programs, AMBIO performed laudably, significantly accelerating project implementation after the MTR and meeting or exceeding all targets. The on-the-ground conservation impacts are evident as is the support provided to numerous communities.

Annex

Evaluation Team Composition and Expertise

The evaluation was conducted by Integrated Sustainability Solutions LLC (http://www.issolutionsllc.com/) and implemented by Keith Forbes (kforbes@issolutionsllc.com). Mr. Forbes brings 24 years of international development, monitoring and evaluation, climate change and LULUCF experience. He has extensive evaluation experience of approximately 15 global and national projects, including CI-GEF CEPF, CI-GEF AMBIO TE and MTR in Mexico, EU GCCA in Mozambique, USAID PERFORM in Malawi, U.S. Department of State SLCP, USAID EC-LEDS Colombia, USAID EC-LEDS Mexico, and five USAID/NASA SERVIR evaluations (Brazil, Nepal, Bhutan, Ghana, Nigeria).

Mr. Forbes has 24 years of experience working internationally on project evaluation, international development, LULUCF, and climate change in the U.S., Africa, Europe, S. America, and Asia. He has lived and/or worked in Zambia, Kuwait, Sri Lanka, the U.S., Canada, and Portugal, and, on work assignments in the context of international development programs and projects, in Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Nepal, Bhutan, and Vietnam. He brings extensive evaluation and assessment experience in the include the interface between climate change and land use, conservation, biodiversity, climate change adaptation, resilience, greenhouse gas inventories. He is widely published with a Master of Science in Environmental Science, with a focus on tropical forest ecology and international development from Indiana University's (Bloomington, IN) School of Public and Environmental Affairs. He is a native English speaker, fluent in Portuguese, and professionally fluent in Spanish. Mr. Forbes has worked for international development contractors (for USAID, DFID, EU/EC), not-for-profit and for-profit private sector consulting, NGOs, foundations, and within academia. Mr. Forbes is the founder and principal consultant of ISS LLC, an international development and climate change professional services firm, based in Saratoga Springs, NY. He has taught at Skidmore College, is on the UNFCCC roster of experts for land use and other climate change areas and has been an expert reviewer for the IPCC guidance on land use GHG inventories, and the U.N. Millennium Ecosystem Assessment.