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Lao People's Democratic Republic



United Nations Development Programme Global Environment Facility Government of Lao PDR

Terminal Evaluation Report for the Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao Project

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Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BD	Biodiversity
CAWA	Climate Adaptation in Wetlands Areas
CDE	Centre for the Development and Environment
CDR	Combined Delivery Reports
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CPAP	Country Program Action Plan
CRFS	Climate Resilient Food Systems
CTA	Chief Technical Advisor
DAFO	District Agriculture and Forestry Offices
DDF	Dry Dipterocarp Forest
DEQP	Department of Environment Quality Promotion
DFRM	Department of Forest Resource Management
DMSSC	District Multi-sectoral Stakeholder Committees
DOF	Department of Forestry
DPI	Department of Planning and Investment
DSA	Daily Subsistence Allowance
DSS	Decision Support System
DVFNM	Division of Village Forest and Non-Timber Forest Products Management
EbA	Ecosystem-based Adaptation
EPF	Environmental Protection Fund
FDF	Forest Development Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
HCVF	High Conservation Value Forests
ISP	Integrated Spatial Plans
LNTA	Lao National Tourism Administration
LOA	Letter of Agreement
LWCA	Lao Wildlife Conservation Association
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
MONRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investments
MTR	Mid-term Review
NIM	National Implementation Modality
NPA	National Protected Area
NSEDP	National Socio Economic Development Plan
NTFP	Non Timber Forest Products
PA	Protected Areas
PAFO	Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office
PDR	Peoples Democratic Republic
PEA	Poverty Environment Action for Sustainable Development Goals in Lao PDR
PEI	Poverty-Environment Initiative
PES	Payment for Ecosystem Services
PIF	Project Identification Form
PIR	Project Implementation Review
PMO	Project Management Office
PPG	Project Preparation Grant
ProDoc	Project Document
PSC	Project Steering Committee
PTD	Savannakhet Provincial Tourism Department
QR	Quarterly Reports
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessments

SEDP	Socio-Economic Development Plans
SESP	Social Environment Screening Procedures
SFM	Sustainable Forest Management
SLM	Sustainable Land Management
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
TE	Terminal Evaluation
TOC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VFMP	Village Forest Management Plans
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

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Executive summary

The Multi Focal Area project¹ *Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao PDR* was implemented under the GEF-6 replenishment cycle through a national implementation modality (NIM) with the Department of Forestry (DOF) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) as the Executing Agency (Implementing Partner (IP)), supported by the UNDP as the GEF agency. The original Executing Agency according to the Project Document and the CEO Endorsement Request was the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE). However, the Government of Lao PDR with its Decree No. 99 passed the mandate of all issues related to Protected Areas, Forest protection and management, wildlife protection and management to MAF. Following this, the IP that executes the project is DOF. As part of broader national level reforms, the mandates and responsibilities on all forest types were moved from MONRE to MAF. Basic project information and finances are summarized below in **Table ES 1**.

Table ES1: Project information table

Project title:			
Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao PDR			
Project Details:		Project Milestones:	
UNDP Project ID (PIMS #):	5448	PIF Approval Date:	30 Sep 2014
GEF Project ID:	6940	CEO Endorsement Date:	01 Mar 2016
UNDP Atlas Business Unit, AwardID, Project ID:	Atlas Award ID: 98798 Project ID: 94709	ProDoc Signature Date (project start):	20 May 2016
Country/Countries:	Lao PDR	Date Project Manager hired:	Prior to start
Region:	Asia Pacific	Inception Workshop date	20 October 2016
Focal Area:	Multi-focal Areas	Midterm Review Completion date:	April 2020
GEF Operational Programme or Strategic Priorities/ Objectives	GEF6 BD1-P1&2; LD3-P4; SFM1 P1&2 and SFM3-P7&8	Terminal Evaluation Completion date:	January 2022
		Operational Closure date (planned)	20 May 2022
Trust Fund:	GEF Trust Fund		
Implementing Partner (GEF Executing Entity):	Department of Forestry		
NGOs/CBOs involvement:	Delivery of contracted support, represented villagers, capacity building		
Private sector involvement:	Delivery of contracted support, engagement in pilot site activities (ecotourism), pilot site ecotourism promotion		
Geospatial coordinates of project sites:	16°26'56.9"N 106°14'29.1"E	16°16'21.7"N 106°09'47.1"E	
	16°20'02.5"N 105°41'07.8"E	16°53'04.6"N 105°41'01.9"E	
Financial Information: (cut-off data 31/11/ 2021)			
PPG:	at approval (USD)		at PPG completion (USD)
GEF grant for preparation:	130,000		129,472
Co-financing for preparation:	0		0
Project:	at CEO Endorsement (USD)		at TE* (USD)
[1] UNDP contribution:	1,806,000		1,325,766
[2] Government:	14,200,000		10,700,815
[3] Others:	62,787,100		32,160,843
[4] Private sector:	0		0
[5] NGOs:	200,000		0
[6] Total co-financing [1+2+3+4+5]:	78,993,100		44,187,424
[7] Total GEF funding:	10,879,174		10,335,686
[8] Total project funding [6 +7]:	89,872,274		54,523,110

Notes: * Actual expenditures reported through the time of the Terminal Evaluation.

Project Description

The GEF-6 replenishment cycle project *Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao PDR* was signed by UNDP and the Government of LAO PDR in May 2016 and has a

¹ Following the CEO Endorsement Request the project focal areas are BD-1 Programme 1; BD-1 Programme 2; LD-3 Programme 4; SFM-1 Programmes 1 & 2 and SFM-3 Programmes 7 & 8

planned closing on 20 May 2022. The project seeks to address two general categories of threats to Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in the Savannakhet Province: 1) Conversion and Degradation of Natural Habitat and Ecosystems; and 2) Overharvesting of biological resources, bringing about the long-term solution via the facilitation of a transformative shift from unsustainable to integrated sustainable land and forest management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest landscape of Savannakhet Province. To obtain this the project focuses on three major barriers 1) Inadequate legal, regulatory and institutional framework for Integrated Natural Resource Management, 2) Minimal experience among key government and civil society stakeholders in developing and implementing SFM practices on the ground and 3) No mechanisms to compensate for land uses for conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The project's Objective was to *facilitate a transformative shift towards sustainable land and forest management in the forested landscape of Savannakhet Province in order to secure the critical wildlife habitats, conserve biodiversity and maintain a continuous flow of multiple services including quality water provision and flood prevention*, and to achieve this objective, the project focused on three strategies or Project Components as follows:

Component 1: Enabling policy environment and increased compliance and enforcement capacities for sustainable land and forest management across landscapes including protected areas

Component 2: Sustainable Forest Management and Protected Area Expansion in five priority Districts of Savannakhet Province

Component 3: Developing and Promoting Incentives and Sustainable Financing for Biodiversity Conservation and Forest Protection

Global Environmental Benefits

The project has been instrumental in bringing about several global environmental benefits, including creating a new National Protected Area (Eld's Deer National Sanctuary) covering an area of 130,745 ha and improved the management for conservation and sustainable use in the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary as well as in three other protected areas (i.e. Dong Phou Vieng, Phou Xang He and Se Ta Nouan-Phou Nak) thus bringing the total area under improved management up to 542,198 ha.

The project also initiated the reforestation process in 3,788 ha of forest land through the re-planting of 768 ha and setting aside 3,020 ha for natural regeneration. The improved protected areas management and the forest restoration engagements are expected to result in a greenhouse gas emission mitigation (over a 20 years period) of 11,257,012 tCO₂e.

More than 9,100 direct beneficiaries have been involved in the project, the largest proportion of which has been from the village communities in the project areas. Said communities have been involved in not only village forest management planning, but also protected area ranger work and the undertaken reforestation efforts. Furthermore, villagers have been involved in various livelihood development initiatives in the areas of husbandry and agriculture as well as various vocational initiatives including dressmaking and service provisions to ecotourism.

The project has via its interventions supported the Aichi targets number 2, 4, 5, 7, 15 and 19 as well as the Sustainable Development Goals 2.3, 2.4, 5.1, 5.5, 13.1, 15.1, 15.2, 15.5 and 15.9

Summary of Conclusions

The focus of the project was predominantly on the 16 target villages, as well as on the establish and management of the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary. In this, the project has been successful in not only establishing the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary but also in engaging the villages inside the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary in sustainable forest management and in nature conservation practices including awareness creation among village communities on forest management rules and regulations, reforestation and tree planting as well as ranger patrols and reporting.

The project also facilitated the development of Integrated Spatial Plans in the five project districts, which all underwent strategic Environment Assessments. This work had important capacity building elements which

benefitted local district stakeholders. On top of this the project developed a web-based spatial decision support system which contains a very large subset of spatial and geographical data which is searchable – and from which maps can be produced. The results of these efforts are actively being used within the Savannakhet province and the five project districts.

The project has been successful in getting the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary designated as a National Protected Area and are providing support and expertise into the revision of the 2015 Protected Areas Decree. Furthermore, the project and the UNDP Country Office has engaged with the Lao PDR Government in discussions on the development of a national debt for nature swap modality which could become an important new mechanism for conservation financing in the future.

As mentioned, more than 9,100 direct beneficiaries were affected by the project through project activities, and the project provided more than 50 larger scale trainings as well as a sub-set of smaller trainings and hands-on capacity building provided by the PMOs technical staff. The trainings included capacity building on for instance 1) Integrated Spatial Planning and Strategic Environment Assessment development, 2) Protected area management, 3) Sustainable ecotourism development, 4) Training on the use of the spatial DSS, 5) Livestock raising (goats, chickens and pigs), as well as 6) Agriculture extension training (i.e. SRI rice cultivation, soil preparation), 7) Nursery establishment and maintenance, 8) GIS and SMART reporting for PA management and 9) ecotourism and hospitality.

During the TE field mission evidence of village engagements observed including the project livelihood engagements and village infrastructure project. Evidence of the village livestock banks, and rice banks were also observed where villagers had provided livestock and rice to other villagers to start up their own productions. These village banks are part of the community agreements signed with the village communities.

The project has a dedicated Facebook page and twitter account on which regular updates and postings of project activities has been placed. However, while the project has developed a substantial number of trainings and been involved in several different processes such as ecotourism development, village engagement and protected areas management planning (including business planning) the project has only made little efforts to convert this work into usable knowledge products which could be made available to interested stakeholders and the public in general. This includes preparation of video segments of trainings and beneficiaries' testimonials and self-tutorials.

The project was, and remains, highly relevant and consistent with national priorities related to biodiversity conservation, land degradation and sustainable forest management and it is embedded in the biodiversity strategy and both the 8th and 9th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan. The project was, and is, also aligned with past and current UN Development Assistance Frameworks and UNDP Country Programme Action Plans.

The project has enjoyed a strong country ownership, where particularly the provincial and district engagement has been noticeable. Part of this is due to the triple layer of steering committee that the project has relied upon, where the national level had the general oversight, provincial level provided the main strategic directions whereas the district level had a strong implementation focus.

The financial delivery has been consistently high throughout the project although deliveries in the first year of implementation were lower than expected. A budget revision in 2020 addressed an overspending under component 3 related to livelihoods and ecotourism. This was covered via project savings under component 1 and 2. Generally the project benefitted from effective and consistent project management and technical assistance performed by a professional PMO team, as well as timely strategic and administrative support from the UNDP Country Office and the Regional Bureau.

At the time of the Terminal Evaluation draft report submission the project's co-financing information is still in the process of being collected, but indications are that the project will meet its co-financing targets. Indications are that more project relevant co-financing became available during the project implementation period following an increased awareness of how co-financing is to be viewed.

There were some shortcomings in the initial monitoring and evaluation design, which was not addressed during project implementation which have led to complications for the project in meeting the set project targets. The main issue was/is that some of the indicators in the Results Framework were unclear and thus difficult to verify. Also some indicators, upon reflections, set too high targets which were unobtainable for the project, given its setup.

Evaluation Ratings:

Evaluation ratings are summarized below in Table ES 2

Table ES2: Evaluation ratings

1. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)	Rating
M&E design at entry	Moderately Satisfactory
M&E plan implementation	Satisfactory
Overall quality of M&E	Satisfactory
2. Implementing Agency (IA) implementation and Executing Agency (EA) Execution	Rating
Quality of UNDP Implementation/ oversight	Satisfactory
Quality of implementation partner execution	Satisfactory
Overall quality of implementation/ execution	Satisfactory
3. Assessment of Outcomes	Rating
Relevance	Highly Satisfactory
Effectiveness	Satisfactory
Efficiency	Moderate Unsatisfactory
Overall project outcome rating	Satisfactory
4. Sustainability	Rating
Financial sustainability	Moderately Likely
Social political sustainability	Likely
Institutional framework and governance sustainability	Moderately Likely
Environment sustainability	Likely
Overall likelihood of sustainability	Moderate Likely

Recommendations:

Recommendation 1: The project should thoroughly review the project costs and underlying practices engaged in by the project to evaluate if similar approaches are to be pursued in future projects. While this recommendation spring from the large DSA expenditures it is equally relevant to look at project costs with regard to project benefits and evaluate if such expenses are fully justified.

Recommendation 2: Regarding the project equipment purchases etc. the project (i.e. UNDP) should ensure, to the extent possible, via its handover protocols, that the entities which has received and used equipment under the project are also the ones who maintain said equipment following the operational and financial closure of the project.

Recommendation 3: For future projects it is recommended that the project risks, including the Social and Environmental risks, its issue and lessons learned logs as well as the projects indicators (Results Framework and GEF Core indicators) are not treated as static documents but is used in the project's active and regular monitoring. This is to ensure that the project is on track etc. and is meeting its obligations. Early identification and reactions can save the projects for complications later on in the implementation process.

Recommendation 4: The project should use the remaining time of the project to actively build knowledge hub where knowledge products from the project can be place for longevity. As part of this the project should ensure that its capacity building work is captured and made accessible online, for instance via recording project presentations and trainings etc. In this regard, the project could establish its own platform, use an existing national platform or rely on UNDP portals such as Exposure and Panorama. Along the same lines knowledge management should become a central part of a future projects and as part of any contract or sub-contract related to capacity building that training videos, on-line courses and accessible training materials should be prepared and made available on a web-based media.

Recommendation 5: The project should prior to project operational closure develop its exit strategy outlining not only how the bearing elements of the project can be brought forward through new project interventions, but also how the set-ups and benefits within the project area can be maintained through ongoing and future

provincial and district interventions.

Recommendation 6: For future projects data collection exercises such as Capacity Development Scorecard, and the METT score analysis should not be done through desk surveys but via stakeholder workshops, as this would provide added benefits in terms of education and knowledge sharing, as well as create broader local ownership of the exercise.

Recommendation 7: Future project should undertake Knowledge, Attitude and Practices surveys to enable the project to capture behavioral change among the project beneficiaries.

Recommendation 8: The project should prior to project operational closure undertake an end-of-project Biodiversity Intactness Index survey. While such survey might not provide for any new information per se, due to the limited time between this and the previous survey, running the survey again would verify whether the index (and the exercise) can be seen as an efficient, valuable and practical tool for biodiversity monitoring and evaluation.

Recommendation 9: The project should take a close look at its combined village engagement “packaged” to not only look at what worked well and what did not. The project should look at which components in an active village engagement is needed to make it effective and then identify how such interventions could be anchored within different government entities (and their respective programs). This analytical work could provide a central guide for cross-sectoral cooperation at provincial and district level to ensure that different sector engagements in the same village (or area) can create add-on environmental and socio-economic effects. It could also provide guidance as to how the cost of the “village packages” could be spread out and absorbed within existing or future government funding streams.

Recommendation 10: As a central component of the project’s community work are the community agreements, it is recommended that the project review of its approach for community involvement and identify lessons learned and best practices. This review could benefit from not only looking at the SAFE Ecosystems project’s work but also from similar engagements undertaken by other development partners, as well as the Lao PDR Government. The review could result in common agreed approaches for simple and cost-effective engagements.

Recommendation 11: Future projects should keep track of co-financing commitments as well as new investments during the project period regularly. It would have been prudent if the project had collected this information on a regular basis for instance in connection with the annual PIR and as a minimum prior to the Mid-term Review and the Terminal Evaluation.

Recommendation 12: For future projects, project safeguard and monitoring tools should be well drafted and based on local ownership and input. Project results and indicator targets should be agreed to with the stakeholders who ultimately will be responsible for implementing the projects and ensuring that these targets are reached. In other words project targets should not only be targets of the project but targets of the individual involved entities engaged in the project. As part of such local formulation workshops, engaging key champion stakeholders could be used in the drafting process.

Recommendation 13: For future projects the project should immediately after the onboarding of the central project staff and key technical personnel undertake a thorough review of the project documentation to identify potential inconsistencies in said documentation, which might impact the project implementation or the achievement of the project goals and targets, including GEF Core Indicator and Results Framework targets. Identified concerns should be raised through available UNDP channels in order to bring about acceptable changes addressing the identified concerns where possible.

Good Practices

The project has engaged in an extensive and targeted capacity building of project stakeholders at all levels but with a specific focus on district and village level. A central part of this has been building the capacity for PA management, including collecting and manage data from ranger patrols using current day technology such as GPS drones and relevant computer software. Another key avenue has been engagement with village beneficiaries which have been trained in various livelihood initiatives such as livestock raising, tree nursery establishment and operations, rice farming, dressmaking, reforestation and various aspects of ecotourism services and skills.

The approach for integrating nature conservation concerns into spatial/land use planning has been well structured. The development of the districts Integrated Spatial Plans and the subsequent Strategic Environment Assessments provided important input to stakeholders understanding of environmental concerns, potential impacts and the need for environmental safeguards. The development of the web-based special planning tool “Savannakhet decides” provides for an important extra, and easy to use, data source which can help in decision-making. This combined package and the associated capacity building of key beneficiaries has provided for a solid base on which the members of the district multi-sector stakeholder committees can make informed land use investment decisions on.

The project’s engagement in the development of the Protected Areas Management Plans and their supporting business plans, can be seen as refreshing as they, in their format, are brief and to the point. Generally speaking these documents are not holistic vision documents which attempts to list and tackle all issues and challenges within the protected areas at once. Rather they are practical documents which addresses the immediate needs and supports the upstart of the protected areas in the immediate future. In this, they become manageable for the protected areas managers and their briefness facilitates that these documents are being actively used.

As noted above the project has engaged in various ecotourism trainings and capacity building in support of its effort to establish functional tourist activities and attractions. And although, the current Covid-19 Pandemic has not allowed the sites/destinations to benefit from the project’s work due to lack of tourist influx the established attractions, including trails viewing platforms camping sites etc. are fully functional and has the potential for attracting tourists. The project also focused on how best to ensure sustainable tourism within the protected areas without compromising neither the nature nor the experiences of the tourists. Part of this was to facilitate the development of public private partnerships for operating and managing tourist within the National Protected Areas (NPA) like the Eld’s Deer National Sanctuary (the biggest draw-card within the project area). In its approach the project used action parameters including inviting tour operators on site visits, developed investment prospectus for the Eld’s Deer National Sanctuary, and held an investment forum. Furthermore, the project developed the general rules and regulations for engaging in ecotourism within the protected area. As noted before, the Covid-19 Pandemic have impacted the results of the project’s interventions as the investment climate in tourism/ecotourism is currently dormant. Nonetheless, the project’s approach contains many elements which can be used for other sites/NPAs which are interested in developing similar relationships. However, future initiatives might want to consider bringing in investors earlier on so that they can be involved in the development of the products to ensure that they meet the requirements of their target groups etc.

The project’s holistic approach for village engagement in conservation is multifaceted and veers away from only focusing on conservation activities. The project recognized that to ensure long-term engagement and vested interest from villagers in their natural environment immediate “bonuses”/incentives had to be provided for instance in terms of village infrastructure (village halls, water towers etc.). It also recognized that to decrease the reliance on the forest and to lesson the need for illegal activities such a hunting and tree felling and plant collection, attractive livelihood alternatives had to be provided. The village cooperation was done through a participatory stakeholder approach where villagers interests and wishes were taken into account as were the NPAs conservation needs. As the pièce de résistance conservation agreements were drawn up clarifying the role and responsibilities of the participating partners.

Lessons learned

During the project implementation the project has made a subset of important observations, or lessons learned, which are worth noting as they have been relevant for the SAFE Ecosystems project implementation but are/would be equally relevant for other ongoing and future projects. The key observations are as follows:

Onboarding of central project staff and technical personnel including the CTA, is important for an expedited project implementation start, as well as ensuring a holistic understanding and implementation of the project.

Where the project encounter national and local partners new to UNDP and UNDP/GEF projects, timely and sufficient training in UNDP NIM SOP policies and procedures are needed and such trainings should be repeated on an annual basis to re-fresh and bring new staff on-board. On-call assistance (from UNDP) should also be encouraged.

Fund transfer modalities between UNDP and the project’s main implementors should be identified prior to

project implementation start so as to ensure that funds transfer will be as smooth as possible (within UNDP and Government rules and procedures). Smooth fund transfer will lessen frustrations and potential animosities from the project's main implementors.

A detailed Gender Action Plan, as well as other stakeholder engagement documents, should be part of the project development, or at the very least undertaken during the first year of project implementation. Finding ways to increase the inclusion/mainstreaming of women in decision making and livelihood activities should be strenuously pursued by any project with a GEN 2 rating.

Project formulation should have the right amount of bottom-up involvement and should not be made in vacuum. Local buy-in into the planned project activities/outputs/outcomes is essential for a strong project implementation. One way of emphasizing such buy-in, as well as ensure local understanding, would be to obtain local areas/district co-financing letters which are supporting the project's activities/outputs/outcomes.

Communication is an essential part of a project to ensure project acknowledgement from Government partners, national and international stakeholders, as well as the public at large. As part of this though, is also to ensure an appropriate knowledge management particularly of the project capacity building efforts and behavior change approaches. Thus, communication should not only highlight that events are taking place it should also direct the audience towards where additional knowledge can be found.

To have an effective engagement at village level, free prior and informed consent are an essential prerequisite for engaging with any ethnic minority. As such no activities should be engaged in without a signed letter of agreement (in local language) outlining the engagements to be undertaken with the local community. Joint agreements clarify the respective roles and responsibilities as well as how the respective parties are to interact with one another.

To work effective at village level, it must be recognized that there is in all likelihood not an equal playing field. Project staff and consultants are often highly educated, whereas villagers more often than not have a secondary or high school education. Because of this, it cannot be expected that villages, including village leaders, are well versed in reading, and understanding complex documents and agreements. Thus, it is important to understand the project partners (i.e. for instance the village communities) and engage in accordance, hereby ensuring fewer misunderstandings, frustrations and optimizing effective engagement.

A thorough review of the project documentation to identify potential inconsistencies in the project documentation, which might impact the project implementation or the achievement of the project goals and targets, including GEF Core Indicator and Results Framework targets should be undertaken at the onset of the project. Following this, identified issues should be brought to the attention of the UNDP's technical support system in order to bring about acceptable and allowable changes addressing the identified concerns where possible.

UNDP/GEF projects are implemented in a dynamic environment and new guidance and global and national concerns are to be addressed by the project as part of its implementation, as appropriate. Hence, UNDP corporate guidance and ever increasing focus on transparency, stakeholder inclusion and good governance (including appropriate grievance mechanisms) should be included in the management aspects of the project to ensure that the project remains relevant and accountable to donors and stakeholders.

1 Introduction

1.1 Terminal Evaluation objective and scope

1. The Terminal Evaluation (TE) focused on the project's outcomes, outputs, processes and products/achievements and followed the UNDP and GEF guidelines including the *Guidance for Conducting Terminal Evaluations of UNDP-Supported, GEF-financed Projects*² and the *Guidelines for GEF Agencies in Conducting Terminal Evaluation for Full-sized Projects*³. Specifically, the TE determined whether the project results were achieved and drew out lessons learned from the project, which could provide further guidance to future implementation of other UNDP/GEF projects. The TE assessed the effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and relevance of the project with regard to its achievements related to the project outputs, outcomes and objective and their effects, as outlined in the project document. The review period for the TE was from time of project's CEO Request approval until the timing of the TE itself.

2. Overall the TE had the following complementary purposes:

- ✓ To promote accountability and transparency.
- ✓ To synthesize lessons that can help to improve the selection, design, and implementation of future UNDP-supported GEF-financed initiatives; and to improve the sustainability of benefits and aid in overall enhancement of UNDP programming.
- ✓ To assess and document project results, and the contribution of these results towards achieving GEF strategic objectives aimed at global environmental benefits.
- ✓ To gauge the extent of project convergence with other development priorities, including poverty alleviation, strengthening resilience to the impacts of climate change, reducing disaster risk and vulnerability, as well as cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, women's empowerment, and supporting human rights.

3. As part of this the project was assessed with regard to:

- Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) including M&E design at entry and M&E plan implementation.
- Implementation and execution including quality of UNDP implementation/oversight and quality of implementation partner execution.
- Assessment of outcomes including their relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of implementation, and;
- Sustainability: financial, socio-economic, environmental, institutional framework and governance risks to sustainability.

4. The TE was an evidence-based assessment, which relied on feedback from individuals who have been involved in the design, implementation and supervision of the project. As part of the tasks of the TE the TE Team undertook a review of documents made available to the TE Team.

1.2 Terminal Evaluation methodology for data collection and analysis

5. The overall approach and methodology for the review followed the guidelines outlined in the above mentioned documentation (i.e. *UNDP Guidance of Conducting Terminal Evaluation of UNDP supported, GEF - financed projects* and *Guidelines for GEF Agencies in Conducting Terminal Evaluation for Full-sized Projects*). In particular, the evaluation effort was framed using the following criteria with relevant questions:

- **Relevance:** Is the project relevant with respect to the environmental and development priorities at the local, regional and national levels?
- **Effectiveness:** To what extent have the expected outcomes and objectives of the project been achieved?

² [TE_GuidanceforUNDP-supportedGEF-financedProjects.pdf](#)

³ <http://gefio.org/evaluations/gef-guidelines-te-fsp-2017>

- **Efficiency:** Was the project implemented efficiently, in-line with international and national norms and standards?
- **Sustainability:** To what extent are there financial, institutional, social-economic, and/or environmental risks to sustaining long-term project results?
- **Impact:** Are there indications that the project has contributed to, or enabled progress toward long lasting desired changes?
- **Financial planning:** Was the project implemented in accordance to agreed norms for financial management and implementation?
- **Supervision and Backstopping:** Was the project adequately supervised and managed for effective implementation?
- **Monitoring & Evaluation:** Was the project implemented in accordance to agreed norms for monitoring and evaluation?
- **Mainstreaming:** Did the project have a gender focus and ensured adequate involvement of local stakeholders?

6. The evaluation was carried out by a TE Team, consisting of a national consultant and an international consultant, during the period of 15 November to 31 January 2022. The aforementioned duration of the TE included preparatory activities, desk review, online interviews of stakeholders and project partners, field mission and the completion of the Terminal Evaluation report. The TE was conducted during the COVID-19 Pandemic and due to international travel restrictions it was not possible for the international consultant to travel to Lao PDR. It was, however, possible for the national consultant to undertake a field mission as part of the TE. In light of the prevailing COVID-19 Pandemic the TE methodology was adjusted accordingly considering the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office's evaluation guidelines⁴

7. The TE team undertook a desk review of relevant information sources available to the TE Team, including the project document, project progress reports such as the Project Implementation Review (PIR) and Quarterly Reports (QR), financial reports and key project deliverables. The project management Office (PMO) uploaded project documentation onto a share-drive enabling easy access. A full list of documents reviewed is provided in Annex 1.

8. To support the data collection and provide the TE with a supporting analysis tool, an evaluation matrix was developed (see Annex 4), which guided the review process. The information gathered during the TE desk review and fact-finding phase was cross-referenced between as many sources as possible to verify the findings. This included cross-referencing during the TE interviews, which were held via ZOOM between 6 – 22 December 2021, as well as during the national consultant's field mission to the project sites in Savannakhet Province from 20-25 December. The list of held ZOOM interviews are listed in Annex 2 and the people met during the field mission is listed in Annex 3.

9. Financial data including data on co-financing was provided by the PMO and the UNDP Country Office and are presented in the findings section 3.2.3 of this report. At the time of the TE draft report submission the co-financing data is still in the process of being collected by UNDP and the PMO. The final TE Report will contain all of the appropriate co-financing data obtained by the project.

10. Progress towards results and project implementation and adaptive management is rated according to a 6-point scale, ranging from highly satisfactory to highly unsatisfactory. Sustainability is evaluated across four risk dimensions which include financial risk, socio-economic risk, institutional framework and governance risk, and environmental risks. According to the UNDP-GEF evaluation guidelines, all risk dimensions of sustainability are critical (i.e. the overall rating of sustainability cannot be higher than the lowest-rated dimension). Sustainability was rated according to a 4-point scale: likely, moderately likely, moderately unlikely, and unlikely. The used rating scales are presented in Annex 9

⁴ Data collection, remote interviews, and use of national consultants. Evaluations during COVID-19. Evaluation Guidelines, UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, June 2020.
<http://web.undp.org/evaluation/guideline/documents/covid19/update/June2021/UNDP%20DE%20Guidance%20for%20evaluation%20TOR%20during%20COVID%20June%202021.pdf>

1.3 Structure of the Terminal Evaluation Report

11. The TE report provides, in form of introduction, a brief description of the project, its duration, main stakeholders and the projects immediate and development objectives. The TE then proceeds to assess three specific categories of project progress (i.e. project design/formulation, project implementation and project results). Each of the three categories are further elaborated on below:

12. **Project design/formulation:** The project design assessment focused on the clarity and applicability of the project's objectives and whether components were well formulated, and if the project outcomes/outputs comply with the SMART criteria:

S: Specific: Results should describe a specific end-of-project condition in change-language;

M: Measurable: Results are measurable making it possible to assess whether the indicator results were achieved or not;

A: Achievable: Results are possible to achieve;

R: Relevant: Results must make contributions to selected priorities and;

T: Time-bound: Results should have an expected date of accomplishment and not be open ended.

13. The design assessment also covered whether national priorities and country driven-ness were sufficiently considered in the project design, as well as whether the management arrangements were adequate and in line with UNDP policies. In addition, the project's Theory of Change outlining the project logic and strategy and the Results Framework and its underlying indicators were assessed. Finally gender equality and women's empowerment, Social and Environmental Safeguards and project assumptions and risks were reviewed.

14. **Project implementation:** The quality of project implementation and execution was evaluated and rated. This assessment reviewed the performance of the Implementing Agency (UNDP) and Executing Agency (Department of Forestry (DOF)) and consider whether adaptive management during project implementation had been engaged in, in connection with the project's risk/issues management responses, including the Social and Environmental Standards risks. The project's monitoring and evaluation design and implementation were also reviewed, as was the project's financial management, including co-financing.

15. **Project results:** The assessment of project results included a review of the direct project outputs, short to medium-term outcomes and long term impacts. Local effects, replication efforts and global environmental benefits were considered in this regard. The project results were rated according to effectiveness, relevance, efficiency and sustainability as well as their progress towards impacts. More specifically effectiveness was viewed in terms of to what extent the project objective and outcomes have been achieved. Relevance was reviewed for whether the project's engagement is suited to local and national development priorities and organizational policies. The assessment of the project's efficiency looked at the extent to which results has been delivered in a cost-effective manner. In this regard the efficiency review also looked at the project's compliance to GEF's incremental cost concept.

16. The TE Team also assessed whether the project results are likely to be sustained after the project termination (i.e. after GEF funding ceases). The review looked at financial resources, institutional setups, as well as governance, socio-economic and environmental sustainability. The progress towards impacts was assessed as to whether the project results will lead to the long-term impacts predicted in the project document.

17. In addition to the above, the project's M&E systems and approaches, including financial monitoring, were reviewed including compliance with M&E plans, appropriateness of M&E reporting and the projects adaptive management approaches taken based on M&E findings.

18. The report ends with a set of recommendations for future considerations as to how project benefits, good practices and lessons learned could be reinforced and brought-fourth in other UNDP and UNDP/GEF financed projects.

1.4 Ethics

19. The TE was conducted in accordance with the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluators, and the UNEG 'Code of Conduct for Evaluation. Accordingly, the TE Team have signed the UNEG 2020 Pledge of ethical conduct

in evaluation (Annex 10). In particular the TE team ensured the anonymity and confidentiality of the individuals who were interviewed and surveyed.

1.5 Limitations

20. The TE followed the provided, for the assignment, Terms of Reference (TOR) (Annex 8) and the UNDP Guidance of Conducting Terminal Evaluation of UNDP supported, GEF- financed projects. The methodology of the TE was adjusted in response to travel restrictions for the international consultant. The TE mission thus relied on ZOOM interviews of a larger subset of project stakeholders and involved parties. Fortunately enough the COVID-19 situation in LAO PDR still allowed for the TE Teams national consultant to participate in a field mission to the project sites in Savannakhet province.

21. Aside from the main drawback of not engaging face-to-face with many of the project partners and stakeholders, for reasons described above, there were no significant limitations on the TE Team's work. The majority of the project documentation were in English and for documentation, which were not, the national consultant reviewed the documentation and reported as needed on it. Parts of the interviews during the TE were held in Lao language by the national consultant following a TE Team agreed questions set, and the national consultant translated and briefed the international consultant of the findings of these meetings, as part of the process.

22. Overall, the TE Team believes that the information and feedback obtained during the TE exercise are sufficient to capture the accountability and transparency of the project as well as the project's progress, remaining barriers and evaluate the sustainability of project results following project closure.

2 Project Description

2.1 Project Timing and Milestones

Project Milestones	Timing
Concept Approval Date:	11 Aug 2014
CEO Approval Date:	30 Sep 2014
Project Document Signature:	20 May 2016
Inception Workshop date:	20 October 2016
Mid-term Review completion data:	April 2020
Terminal Evaluation date:	November 2021-January 2022
Planned Closing date:	20 May 2022

23. The CEO approval of the *Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao PDR* project, hereafter referred to as the SAFE Ecosystems project, was granted on 30 September 2014 for incorporation into the GEF Council Work Programme for the GEF-6 replenishment cycle. Following the project preparation phase, the project obtained approval for implementation by the GEF CEO in 2016. The official start date of the project was 20 May 2016 when the Project Document was signed by UNDP and the Government of LAO PDR. The inception workshop was held on 20 October 2016. The planned closing date of 60 months following project signing is 20 May 2022.

2.2 Development Context

24. The human development Index (HDI) for Lao PDR was 0.613 (2020) which ranks the country as number 137 out of 189 countries and territories assessed and places the country in the medium human development category. Between 1990 and 2020 the Lao PDR HDI increased from 0.405, a percentage increase of 51.4 %⁵.

25. The project document notes that a majority of the population in Lao PDR lives in rural areas and remains highly dependent on subsistence agriculture, including crop cultivation and use of forest and aquatic resources, which accounts for half of the country's GDP and 80% of employment in the country. Only 4.01% of the country is arable land, and rice dominates agricultural production, with about 80% of the arable land area used for growing rice. Harvesting of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) contributes significantly to rural livelihoods.

26. In Savannakhet province agricultural land accounts for approximately 0.9 million hectares in the province, while forest areas account for another 1.63 million hectares (of which 0.4 million is significantly degraded). Overall agriculture and forestry account for about 66% of investment in Savannakhet, despite the fact that much of the land, particularly in the project area, is of low fertility. At the time of project preparation, more than 20 foreign agricultural businesses were operating in the province, and together accounted for 145,689 ha of land, including two concessions of over 10,000 ha each for sugar cane production. Agricultural land concessions in Savannakhet have often taken place without required land surveys, leading to conflicts between local communities and investors. Concessions for plantation forestry also have occurred throughout the province, primarily for eucalyptus, acacia, and rubber, including a 41,000 ha eucalyptus plantation and a 10,000 ha rubber plantation. That said of the 1.63 million ha of forest land most is designated as either Conservation, Protection or Production forest.

27. Furthermore, forests in Savannakhet play an important and at times essential role in supporting livelihoods in rural communities, with NTFPs and forest wildlife being important for local consumption and for commercial sale. Dependence on forests and their ecosystem services and products is culturally, socially and economically strong in the Lao PDR, and the gathering of NTFPs is often of equal importance for peoples' livelihoods as agriculture and livestock production.

28. The five project target districts of Xonnabouly, Phine, Phalanxay, Thapangthong and Songhkone are located within the Dry Dipterocarp Forest (DDF) landscape, which is defined as one of the identified Global 200 WWF Ecoregions. The total population of the five districts is 303,628 persons inhabiting 353 villages; of this total, 44,485 persons inhabiting 96 villages are located within the four selected Protected Areas (PA) sites. The poverty rate in the districts is 18.08%, most of whom live in small rural communities.

29. Within the DDF landscape, most households concentrate on rice farming and may have some livestock (cows, water buffalo, goats); these households also typically derive a non-trivial share of their income from the collection of various NTFPs, including mushroom, wild fruits and vegetables, frogs, wildlife (mammals, bird, reptile, fish), insects, snails, timber and firewood, materials for handicraft, thatch, resins, orchids, and herbal medicines. The DDF ecosystems of Savannakhet Province harbor a number of threatened and endangered species including Eld's Deer (subspecies *Cervus eldi siamensis*), Silvered-Leaf Monkey (*Trachypethicus germai*) and Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*), as well as 245 flowering plant species from 66 families.

2.3 Problems the Project Seek to Address

30. The Project Document described that the threats to Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in the Savannakhet Province can be defined under two general categories: 1) Conversion and Degradation of Natural Habitat and Ecosystems; and 2) Overharvesting of biological resources. It also noted that the long-term solution sought by the project was to facilitate a transformative shift from unsustainable to integrated sustainable land and forest management in the DDF landscape of Savannakhet Province in order to secure critical wildlife habitat and conserve biodiversity, to maintain a continuous flow of multiple ecosystem services, and to support rural development and livelihoods opportunities. The Project Document however underlines that there were three major barriers to implementing this solution.

1. Inadequate legal, regulatory and institutional framework for Integrated Natural Resource

⁵ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/THA>

Management.

2. Minimal experience among key government and civil society stakeholders in developing and implementing SFM practices on the ground.
3. No mechanisms to compensate for land uses for conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

2.4 Immediate and development objectives of the project

31. The project's Objective was to *facilitate a transformative shift towards sustainable land and forest management in the forested landscape of Savannakhet Province in order to secure the critical wildlife habitats, conserve biodiversity and maintain a continuous flow of multiple services including quality water provision and flood prevention*. To achieve this objective, the project focused on three strategies or Project Components.

32. **Component 1** sought to incorporate sustainable land management to ensure that future developments in Savannakhet Province incorporate biodiversity and ecosystem values into development planning. Five target districts were to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) documenting the causes and drivers of biodiversity and forest loss and degradation. The SEA was to be used to revise/strengthen the Integrated Spatial Plans (ISP) in the five target districts so that they could guide the optimal allocation of land resources to generate development benefits and critical environmental benefits in tandem. The developed SEA and ISPs would be integrated into the relevant district-level Socio-Economic Development Plans (SEDP). Relevant sector stakeholders were to be involved in the process of revising and strengthening the ISPs and SEDPs. Supporting the revisions and future comprehensive planning and investment process in the province, the project would develop a GIS-based spatial Decision Support System (DSS) for landscape modelling and planning, as well as monitoring of impacts on biodiversity (BD), sustainable land management (SLM), and sustainable forest management (SFM). The DSS was expected to enable Savannakhet Province and targeted districts to determine the location of critical habitats, the threats to these habitats, the predominant land uses in different areas, and the current as well as potential effects of land degradation and their impacts on ecosystem services and BD. In addition, the project was to support efforts to finalize and officially enact the Decree on SEAs, and to develop targeted regulations on ISPs so that the model of linked ISPs-SEDPs, piloted by the project could be replicated within Lao PDR. The project will clarify policies and regulations related to PA management, including policies and regulations to strengthen community management of forest and other ecosystems in and around protected areas. The project was also to prepare clear policies, regulations, and coordination mechanisms to support PA financing. The project also would support the development and adoption of guidelines for the designation, management and monitoring of High Conservation Value Forests (HCVF), and to incorporate HCVF guidelines and definitions into relevant policies and regulations. Furthermore, the project would provide training to a variety of stakeholders such as government staff, who would be capacitated in collaborative approaches and engage with the local communities in PA Management and sustainable forest management, while communities and private sector would receive training in actual PA management and sustainable forest management. District officials were to be capacitated to enforce new land use regulations, while communities would be trained for "self-monitoring" systems and the private sector capacitated in order to comply with the necessary regulations. Authorities tasked with natural resource and land use planning and permitting were to be brought together in District Multi-sectoral Stakeholder Committees and a provincial-level Responsible Business Forum were to be established. Finally, a set of Sustainable Plantation Forestry and Agriculture Guidelines for Savannakhet Province would be developed, providing tools and recommendations for sustainable practices in the forestry and agricultural sectors.

33. **Component 2** sought to strengthen the management effectiveness of selected PAs by realize sustainable forest landscape management through improving connectivity between forest protected areas and key biodiversity sites. The project would ensure the long-term viability and conservation of intact forest areas by increasing connectivity between the PAs and production forests. The project would focus on four priority sites: Dong Phou Vieng National Conservation Forest, Phou Xang He National Conservation Forest, Se Ta Nouan – Phou Nak National Protection Forest, and the Ong Mang Sanctuary. Management plans were to be developed, and adequate staff, equipment and infrastructure would be provided to improve the management effectiveness of the existing and new protected areas. Improvement of PA management effectiveness were to be explored and supported, such as a potential partnership for the Dong Phou Vieng National Protected Area (NPA) with the New Chip Xeng Company and a potential partnership for the Ong Mang Sanctuary with WWF and/or other non-

governmental partners. Ecological connectivity between the forest complexes were to be further enhanced by designating approximately 193,684 hectares of intact forests in the five target districts of Savannakhet Province as HCVFs. The boundaries of the HCVFs were to be delineated and marked and communities capacitated in the management of these forests. To complement the expansion of PA management and designation of HCVF areas and to create a more cohesive and well-managed area of DDF ecosystems in the province, the project would also undertake reforestation of approximately 1,100 hectares of DDF areas that were identified as vital for ecosystem services or as habitat for native species. In addition, village forest management activities at 16 villages across the five target districts would be piloted, through the establishment of forestry management plans and associated regulatory provisions and technical guidelines. This were to be supported by the strengthen of village forest management capacities and support towards the implementation of the management plans. To strengthen community incentives for forest protection and against forest conversion, provincial and district authorities and the target villages were to agree on formal community land certificates giving villages increased authority and land tenure security over their resources. Community involvement and the use of local labor were also to be engaged in connection with establishment of community ranger corps and other PA management and conservation related activities. Furthermore, education and awareness raising programs in Savannakhet Province for provincial and district policymakers, natural resource managers, communities and the general public were to be undertaken. This included education on new and existing resource management and use policies and regulations, environmental, economic and social impacts of large-scale resource extraction industries and on the importance of landscape conservation, forest connectivity, and the value of ecosystem services in DDF ecosystems. Finally, the project would determine baseline values for the DDF ecosystem health indicators and establish systems to measure indicator changes. The project was also to monitor the nature and severity of threats to the relevant ecological processes / components, focused on selected globally significant species within the project landscape, on an overall Biodiversity Intactness Index of DDF, and on baseflows (water availability) and flooding occurrence and area within the downstream area of the Xe Banghiang River.

34. **Component 3** would pursue activities aimed at increasing the funding amounts and sources for sustainable forest management in Savannakhet Province. Resource distribution criteria were to be developed for both new and existing (realigned) funding sources to ensure the most effective and efficient application of scarce resources. The resource distribution criteria would be presented to national, provincial and district authorities for approval and use in their budget decision-making processes (the criteria were foreseen to potentially also be used to make allocation decisions for the village trusts that would be established as part of the community conservation agreements). Analysis of ecosystem services values in the DDF landscape and related costs and benefits analysis of different production systems and SFM practices were to be undertaken, providing critical inputs into the planning processes such as the district ISPs and SEDPs. The developed DSS would be a valuable resource for capturing data required for the valuation and cost/benefit analyses. Development of new financing mechanisms for SFM were to be supported at both the site and national levels, potentially including: i) REDD+ initiatives; ii) ecotourism initiatives; iii) offset schemes; iv) payments for ecosystem services; and v) supporting development/strengthening of national financing mechanisms such as the existing Forest Development Fund (FDF) and the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF). In addition, business plans for each selected PAs were to be supported as would the creation of PA financial management systems to track revenues and expenditures, implement effective cost controls, inform refinement of business plans over time, and strategically adapt to evolving financial circumstances. The site-specific business plans would be used to develop an overall financing strategy for protected areas in the DDF landscape, which would also contemplate how protected areas can contribute to sustainable management beyond protected area boundaries. Different potential financing mechanisms appropriate for PA sites in Savannakhet (as those listed above) were to be explored. More broadly, the project would contribute to the design of a national financing strategy for protected areas as well as policy/regulatory improvements, both of which were to contribute to strengthening the financial sustainability of the protected areas targeted by the project. Furthermore, development of community-based ecotourism sites in the target districts of Savannakhet province would be supported to 1) allow communities and protected areas to benefit from tourism, thereby strengthening the economic case for maintaining habitat for conservation rather than conversion to other uses; 2) contribute to both community development and protected area financing and 3) link ecotourism success with local community wildlife protection support and to formalize these linkages through community conservation agreements. In this regard, potential for ecotourism development were to be reviewed; management plans and investment plans developed and vocational training for support services were to be provided and implemented at each site. In support of this, market analysis would be carried out and a marketing plan with a package of ecotourism offerings that include all the sites would be prepared. Links to the Lao National Tourism Administration (LNTA), the Savannakhet Provincial Tourism

Department (PTD), and Savannakhet Ecoguide Association were to be established. Finally, in order to further relieve pressures from local communities on forest resources, alternative livelihoods and business support would be promoted through the field-testing of conservation agreements. Agricultural support, alternative livelihood and direct payments to village trusts were to be provided to local villages on the basis of the implementation of forest conservation strategies mutually agreed between the Government of Lao PDR and the communities and stipulated in signed conservation agreements between the parties. In this regard, to be effective the project noted that it must be ensured that PA management staff members embrace conservation agreements as a co-management framework for working with communities in and around PAs, and conservation agreements were to be integrated into the process of developing PA management plans, budget planning and financing strategies. Secondly, conservation agreements were to be used as the organizing framework for all of the community development investments, including co-management and employment opportunities related to PA management, reforestation initiatives, ecotourism ventures, investments in village forestry, and alternative livelihood components. Thirdly, conservation agreement commitments needed to be integrated with land use planning, where well-developed village land use plan were to serve as a valuable foundation for a conservation agreement, so that commitments could be articulated in terms of specific aspects of the plan. As part of the community engagement the project would support Village Development Committees in managing the funds. It would do this by building village level capacity to manage funds and decision-making processes, and also ensure that appropriate access and benefit sharing provisions are included in all conservation agreements.

35. The project was aligned with the following outcomes and outputs of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2011-2015 and UNDP Country Program Action Plan 2011-2015 for Lao PDR:

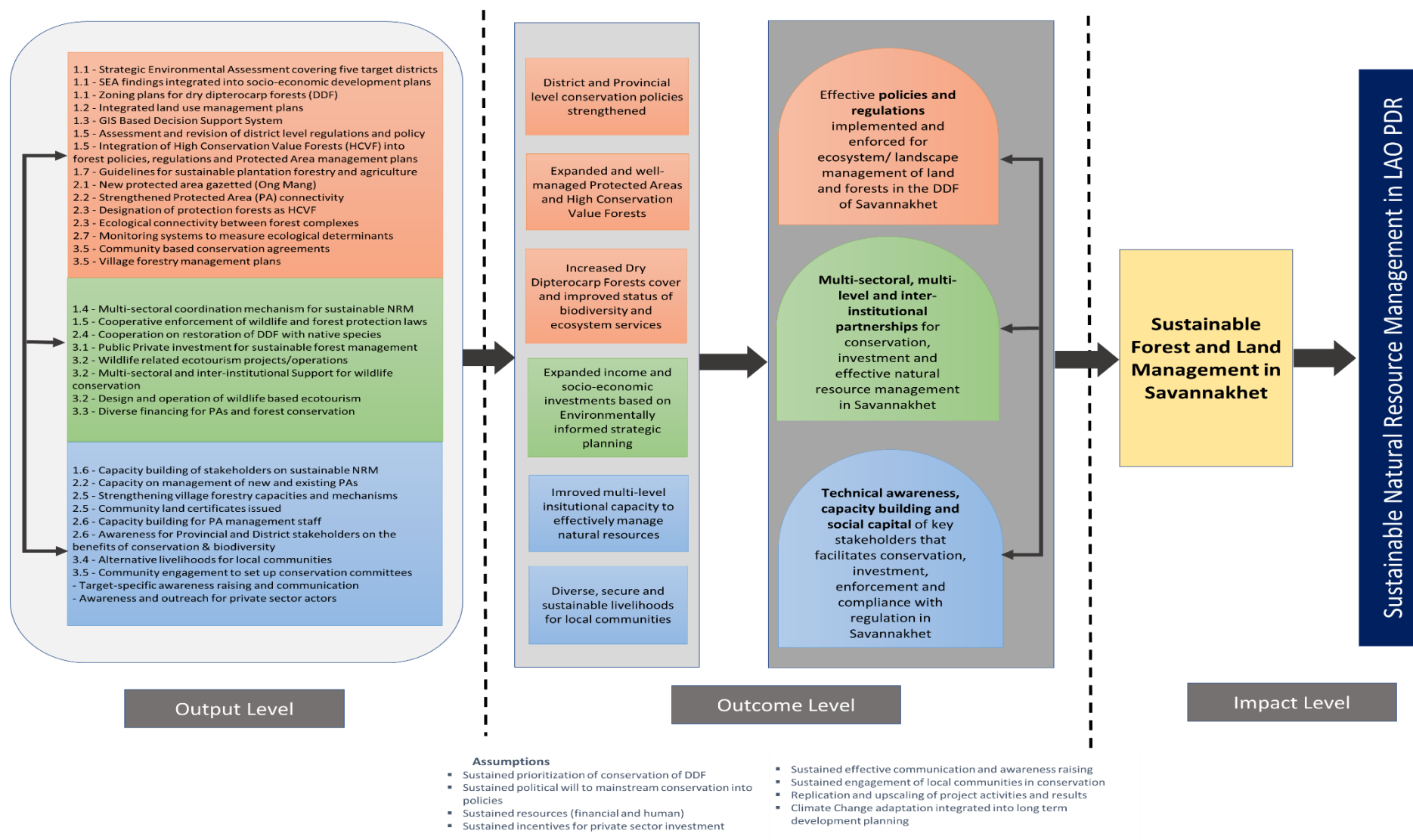
- UNDAF Outcome 7: By 2015, sustainable natural resources management enhanced through improved governance and community participation.
- CPAP Outcome: By 2015, sustainable natural resources management enhanced through improved governance and community participation
- CPAP Output: Capacities of national and sub-national authorities enhanced for better environment management as per Forestry and Fishery Laws; Communities' engagement in NRM strengthened

2.5 Expected results

36. The project was designed to ensure variety of global, national and local benefits in the area of SFM, LD and BD, maintain or increasing populations of Eld's Deer (*Panolia eldii*), Silvered Leaf Monkey (*Trachypithecus cristatus*), Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*), Francois' Langur (*Trachypithecus francoisi*), and Siamese Crocodile (*Crocodylus siamensis*) through the preservation of critical habitat. Strengthening the enforcement capacity for illegal hunting and protected area management overall would act as a catalyst for this. The strengthening of the Dry Dipterocarp Forests ecosystem maintenance and protection would further stem from the restoration of more than 1,100 hectares of degraded DDF lands and the designation, management and monitoring of HCVF. Outside protected areas reduced pressures on forest landscapes would occur through land use planning ensuring that concessions and infrastructure development would be limited to areas that minimize disturbance to the connectivity of forest complexes and thereby ensure that the full value of forest ecosystems are maintained. In addition, ecosystem services and biodiversity values and concerns would be integrated into large-scale commercial forestry and agriculture operations.

37. By conserving the ecological functioning of DDF ecosystems, the project's approaches would not only provide for SFM, LD and BD benefits but also tangible local benefits, including increased dry season water availability and a reduction in the extent and severity of erosion and flooding. Support programs providing employment and income via engagement in PA management, reforestation and ecotourism ventures would in addition to capacity building and incentive payments to develop sustainable livelihoods that would enable rural communities to sustain their livelihoods without overexploiting the forest ecosystems. The project would through the development of innovative new financing mechanisms and improved financial coordination and planning increase funding for PA management and SFM interventions, hereby securing long-term conservation engagements for the DDF preservation.

Figure 1: Theory of Change

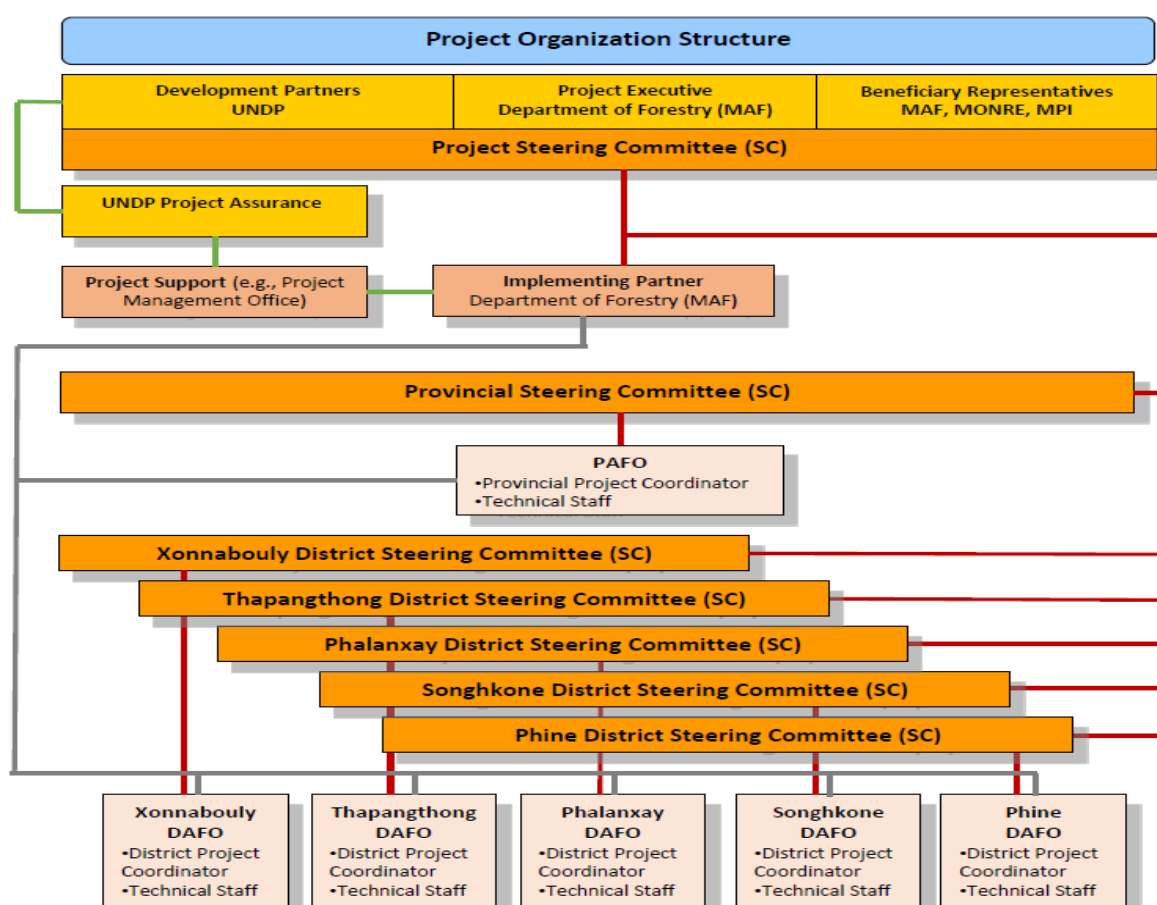


2.6 Project Theory of Change

38. The project addresses the three main barriers that were seen, in the project design, as hindering the long-term preservation of the DDF in the Savannakhet province of Lao PDR, and with that the protection of globally significant biodiversity and the maintenance of important ecosystem services. The project objective was to *facilitate a transformative shift towards sustainable land and forest management in the forested landscape of Savannakhet Province in order to secure the critical wildlife habitats, conserve biodiversity and maintain a continuous flow of multiple services including quality water provision and flood prevention* and this objective was to be obtained through three mutually supportive components or outcomes 1) Inadequate legal, regulatory and institutional framework for Integrated Natural Resource Management, 2) Minimal experience among key government and civil society stakeholders in developing and implementing SFM practices on the ground, and 3) No mechanisms to compensate for land uses for conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

39. A Theory of Change (TOC) was not prepared for the Safe Ecosystems project during project design and has therefore been prepared as part of the project's M&E Plan during project implementation. The TOC tool is largely based on the project results framework and project document and has been prepared to map and illustrate various pathways by which the project intends to achieve the desired results. The TOC was intended to provide a platform for analysis, reflection and decision-making during project implementation. The TOC (Figure 1) outlines the project's engagements to address the identified barriers leading to the intermediate state and the ultimate impacts following the achievements of the project outcomes. Internal assumption and external assumptions are conditions that are within or outside of the project control respectively and to make progress towards project identified impact/s will be contingent upon the assumptions impact drivers outlined including Sustained prioritization of conservation of DDF, sustained political will to mainstream conservation into policies and Sustained resources (financial and human). For full list of assumption see Figure 1.

Figure 2: Safe Ecosystems project's organizational structure (provided by the PMO)⁶



⁶ Project assurance, Project steering, Project implementation

2.7 Management Arrangements

40. The project was executed under National Implementation Modality (NIM). The project document stated that the execution was to be done by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE), Department of Forest Resource Management. However, the Government of Lao PDR with its Decree No. 99 passed the mandate of all issues related to Protected Areas, Forest protection and management, Wildlife protection and management to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF). Following this the IP that executes the project is Department of Forest (DOF) under MAF. As part of broader national level reforms, the Department of Forest Resource Management (DFRM) was moved from MONRE to MAF. Following the move DFRM was absorbed into DOF. In accordance with the new mandate the project's organizational structure is as shown in Figure 2.

41. The Project Steering Committees (PSC), at national, provincial and district levels serve as the project's coordination and decision-making bodies, providing guidance and oversight for the implementation of the project and ensuring that the project remains on course to deliver the desired outcomes of the required quality. The PSCs play a critical role in project monitoring and evaluations by quality assuring these processes and products, and using evaluations for performance improvement, accountability and learning. The PSCs were set up to provide strategic oversight, ensure coordination among project stakeholders. While the provincial and the district steering committees played were central to the project implementation the National steering committee was the premiere governing body for the project.

2.7 Main Stakeholders

42. The main project stakeholders and their indicative roles and general mandate as outlined in the ProDoc are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Stakeholder Participation in Project Implementation

Stakeholders	Roles in Project Implementation
Department of Forestry (DOF), MAF	As of 2017 and upon a decision made by the National Assembly, DFRM was moved to MAF; it was later amalgamated into DOF. Since then, DOF has overseen and facilitated the functioning of the Project Management Office (PMO), especially with regard to liaison with other government authorities from different sectors. DOF has also taken the lead in technical guidance and support for information management, mapping and GIS; the development of policies and regulations on sustainable land and forest management; training of provincial and district staff in forest and wildlife management; development of Sustainable Plantation Forestry and Agriculture guidelines; establishment of new protected areas and the effective management of the targeted protected areas; the final selection and designation of HVCF sites; forest restoration activities; village forest management and education & awareness programs
Department of Environment Quality Promotion, MONRE	DEQP supported project efforts to develop district-level Integrated Spatial Plans (ISPs). DEQP also worked closely with the Project and took the lead in the development of Integrated Spatial Plans for the targeted districts. DEQP took the lead in the development of SEAs for the targeted five districts, and provided technical support for the development of Integrated Spatial Plans and Sustainable Plantation Forestry and Agriculture Guidelines. DEQP has since been amalgamated into the Department of Environment.
Water Resources Division, Provincial Office of Natural Resources and Environment (PONRE)	These Provincial Water Resources Division took the leading role in monitoring of water flows in the project area, including tracking the frequency and severity of flooding events and measuring seasonal water availability; it also provided technical guidance for the creation of village water use plans.
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF)	As indicated above MAF became the Implementing Partner with project responsibilities given to DOF.
Ministry of Planning and Investments (MPI)	The Department of International Coordination (DIC) will participate in general project oversight and coordination with existing national and donor-funded programs. DPI held a significant role supporting the Responsible Business Forum for 2 years, providing oversight with the Multi-sectoral Stakeholder Committees within the 5 Districts and

Savannakhet Province Department of Planning and Investment (DPI)	supporting the development of the Decision Support System of which it currently has management responsibilities.
Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO)	PAFO has acted as the coordination unit at the provincial level during the project implementation and reported back to DOF on project progress. PAFO has taken the leading role in developing multi-stakeholder mechanisms in the province and supported the Project Management Office and other partners in virtually all other primary activities of the project.
District Agriculture and Forestry Offices (DAFO)	DAFOs acted as the responsible party for implementing project activities in the selected Districts in coordination and collaboration with the Project Management Offices, DOF and PAFO. They supported most of the project site-based activities under Components 2 and 3, in particular those related to PA management, village forest management, and reforestation. PAFO & DAFOs supported project activities related to the development of Sustainable Plantation Agriculture and Forestry Guidelines, Reforestation, and Village Forest Management.
Provincial and District Agriculture and Forest Offices (PAFOs and DAFOs), MOF Provincial Office of Natural Resources and Environment (PONRE)	These Provincial Water Resources Division took the leading role in monitoring of water flows in the project area, including tracking the frequency and severity of flooding events and measuring seasonal water availability; it also provided technical guidance for the creation of village water use plans.
World Wildlife Fund (WWF)	WWF was engaged to support Ranger Training activities and Human-Elephant Conflict studies in 2018-19.
Lao Wildlife Conservation Association (LWCA)	LWCA worked as a technical consultant firm in various areas of the project, including biodiversity monitoring and conservation; assessments of ecosystem indicators; strengthening protected area management; ecotourism programs; and community conservation agreements and livelihoods programs.
Centre for the Development and Environment (CDE), University of Bern	CDE worked with the Project developing the Decision Support System based on the National DSS.
Local Communities	The involvement of the wider public in sustainable forest and land management and ecosystem conservation is an important part of this project. Local communities will be engaged in the development of Integrated Spatial Plans; in developing and receiving awareness raising on new regulations and policies for resource management; in finalizing decisions on the siting of project activities related to PA expansion, designation of HCVMs, reforestation and ecotourism; in participatory management of PA sites; in village forest management; in ecotourism programs; and in livelihoods activities carried out in the context of community conservation agreements.
Private Sector	The project sought to engage private sector partners as much as possible where partners were consulted and involved in the development of district-level Integrated Spatial Plans; the activities of the provincial-level Responsible Business Forum; the design and implementation of ecotourism programs; and the design and testing of new financing mechanisms to support SFM and PA management.
Development Partners	The United Nations Development Programme, World Bank, Asian Development Bank and Food and Agriculture Organization are all implementing various programs at the national, provincial and local level that are relevant to the goals and scope of this project. Details on these programs, and potential coordination mechanisms with them, are provided in the description of the Baseline and of Coordination with Other Initiatives. In addition, FAO is a potential partner for some of the technical activities of the proposed project, including the development of Sustainable Plantation Agriculture and Forest Guidelines, and reforestation of Dry Dipterocarp Forests.

3 Terminal Evaluation Findings

3.1 Project Design/ formulation

3.1.1 Project Strategy

43. The project was designed to support four GEF-6 Replenishment focal areas and provide input to 10 different outcomes as follows: **BD-1 Programme 1 Outcome 1.1:** *Increased revenue for protected area systems and globally significant protected areas to meet total expenditures required for management and Outcome 1.2: Improved management effectiveness of protected areas;* **BD-1 Programme 2 Outcome 2.1:** *Increase in area of terrestrial and marine ecosystems of global significance in new protected areas and increase in threatened species of global significance protected in new protected areas and Outcome 2.2: Improved management effectiveness of new protected areas;* **LD-3 Programme 4 Outcome 3.1:** *Support mechanisms for SLM in wider landscapes established, Outcome 3.2: Integrated landscape management practices adopted by local communities based on gender sensitive needs and Outcome 3.3: Increased investments in integrated landscape management;* **SFM-1 Programmes 1 & 2 Outcome 1:** *Cross-sector policy and planning approaches at appropriate governance scales, avoid loss of high conservation value forests and Outcome 2: Innovative mechanisms avoid the loss of high conservation value forest;* and **SFM-3 Programmes 7 & 8 Outcome 5:** *Integrated landscape restoration plans to maintain forest ecosystem services are implemented at appropriate scales by government, private sector and local community actors, both women and men.*

44. In addition, the project was, as previously mentioned, aligned with the UNDAF 2011-2015 and the UNDP Country Program Action Plan 2011-2015 for Lao PDR, as well as supporting the Lao People's Democratic Republic National Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 and Action Plan to 2010 and the Lao PDRs' draft Eighth Five-Year National Socio Economic Development Plan (NSED). The project's overall objective of *facilitating a transformative shift towards sustainable land and forest management in the forested landscape of Savannakhet Province in order to secure the critical wildlife habitats, conserve biodiversity and maintain a continuous flow of multiple services including quality water provision and flood prevention*, is in the view of the Terminal Evaluation Team equally relevant today as it was then.

45. Overall, the project is well designed but while clear barriers have been defined and the project response to said barriers are also clear and should be seen as adequate there is a mismatch in the project narrative to some extent. While the project components 1 and 3 (i.e. *Enabling policy environment and increased compliance and enforcement capacities for sustainable land and forest management across landscapes including protected areas and Developing and Promoting Incentives and Sustainable Financing for Biodiversity Conservation and Forest Protection*) has a clear response relationship to the identified barriers 1 and 3 (i.e. *Inadequate legal, regulatory and institutional framework for Integrated Natural Resource Management and No mechanisms to compensate for land uses for conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services*) respectively, the wording of the project's Component 2 (i.e. *Sustainable Forest Management and Protected Area Expansion in five priority Districts of Savannakhet Province*) give it the appearance of being an appendix not specially addressing barrier 2 of the project (i.e. *Minimal experience among key government and civil society stakeholders in developing and implementing SFM practices on the ground*). This lack of relationship can also be seen in the project's theory of change (Figure 1 above). However, on the close examination of the project outputs do nonetheless address the identified barriers, this even though it is not clearly apparent from the project components per se.

46. With regard to the design, it should be noted that the Mid-term Review (MTR) spend some time on that the project (for whatever reason) did not have any listed outcomes, and the MTR Team saw this as a drawback to the project design. This was because it was perceived that the lack of outcomes potentially could/would diminish the projects focus on the holistic aspects of the project. While it is unusual for a UNDP/GEF project not to have listed project outcomes it should not, in the TE Team's opinion, be seen as a main concern. Mainly because there most often is a close relationship between a project's identified components and the prescribed outcomes. Hence for Component 1 *Enabling policy environment and increased compliance and enforcement capacities for sustainable land and forest management across landscapes including protected areas* the outcome could easily be *Policy environment and increased compliance and enforcement capacities for sustainable land and forest management across landscapes including protected areas enabled*. Interestingly enough in the MTR proposed revision of the project's results framework (MTR Annex 4) the wording of the 3 components remained the same and the only change was that the wording component had been exchanged with the wording outcome. In any event, it is a curiosity that the outcomes

are omitted from the project design, but it should also be noted that this omission has in fact been approved by both UNDP and GEF, at the time, through their approval of the project full documentation package.

47. There is another, perhaps more important, design feature of the project, which has the potential to raise questions as to the scope of the project. The project narrative in the Project Document (ProDoc) is very holistic and embrative giving the impression that large scale interventions will be undertaken in the five project identified districts (i.e. Xonnabouly, Phine, Phalamxay, Thapangthong and Songhkone) in Savannakhet Province of Lao PDR. The ProDoc gives the impression that equal attention to the four identified conservation areas (i.e. Conservation Forest Dong Phou Vieng; Conservation Forest Phou Xang He; Protection Forest Se Ta Nouan - Phou Nak and the Ong Mang Sanctuary) was to be paid. The ProDoc also outlined that the project would create interconnectivities between these conservation areas through a system of village forest (for which the project would create management plans) and project established HCVF, hence creating an interconnected functional landscape level conservation area within the five project district.

48. However, when the project activities and specially the ProDoc's supporting documentation (mainly its Annex 2) a rather different narrative, with regard to the physical area of intervention emerges. In the project documentation it is clearly specified that most of the project's interventions for instance in connection to the project's livelihood engagement will be in and around the Ong Mang Sanctuary. Likewise, the project's HCVF will also be centered around the Ong Mang Sanctuary, as would the project's village forest management interventions.

49. And while Dong Phou Vieng, Se Ta Nouan - Phou Nak and the Ong Mang Sanctuary borders up to one another the Conservation Forest Phou Xang He to the north does not. Logically one would then expect that the projects HCVF and village forest work would be situated strategically to link up Phou Xang He with the Dong Phou Vieng/Se Ta Nouan - Phou Nak/Ong Mang Sanctuary complex to the south. In the project design, however, this was not the case, and as a result the project implementation was kept mainly in and around the Ong Mang Sanctuary. For further discussion please see argumentation under indicator 12 in section 3.3.1 below.

50. Another curiosity is the selection of the Conservation Forest Phou Xang He. The Phou Xang He lies 20 kilometers north from the most northern point of Ong Mang Sanctuary and 15 kilometers from the most northern point of Dong Phou Vieng. More importantly, as Phou Xang He does not contain any Dry Dipterocarp Forest. There is therefore a question as to why this site was selected in the first place by the project proponents. While ecosystem connectivity and landscape characteristic could be argued, including the important of head water protection, it is a bit of an oddity that a site with no Dry Dipterocarp Forest, as Phou Xang He, were selected for a project which specifically focuses on the Dry Dipterocarp Forest ecosystem.

51. It should also be mentioned that substantial changes to the project targets were made between its inclusion into the GEF Work program and the CEO endorsement, none of which were mentioned or justified neither in the ProDoc or the CEO Endorsement Request. For one the Government co-financing was substantially increased from USD 2,912,662 to USD 14,200,000. More importantly the PIF states that a new protected area covering at least 50,000 ha will be established. This increases without any explanation to 168,614 ha. Similarly, the area to be established as HCVF were in the PIF listed to cover an area of 100,000 ha (both inside and outside protected areas) increased to 193,684 ha. The complications related to the concept of having HCVFs both inside and outside protected areas are further discussed in connection with the review of indicator 12 in section 3.3.1. During the TE it has become apparent that these changes has not been discussed during project formulation with relevant district governments, nor at provincial level, something which has resulted, at least in part, in some of the shortcomings under the project.

3.1.2 Analysis of the project's Results Framework

52. An important part of the Terminal Evaluation was to assess the project's results framework against the "SMART" criteria to identify whether the project's indicators and their targets were sufficiently Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound. In connection with the time-bound aspect, the end of project targets are designed to be achieved by the end of the 5-year project period and can thus all be considered as time-bound. As the project indicators in the results framework has not been labeled the Terminal Evaluation Team has, for reference, provided the indicators with numbers starting at 1 and ending at 21. Compared to the Results Framework presented in the ProDoc three new indicators have been added, two following project inception (i.e. indicator 16 Limited skills and technologies for Protected Area Management and 17 Environmental

education programmes are partially developed and partially delivered) and following the Mid-term Review (as a result of the project's migration to the GEF Core indicators) where indicator 4 (i.e. Number of direct beneficiaries disintegrated by gender) was included. While Indicator 4 is relevant as it is a GEF Core indicator, the inclusion of indicator 16 and 17 seems less so as they stem from the capacity development scorecard. For further discussion on indicators 16 and 17 please see below.

Objective Indicators

53. There are four indicators at the project objective level, as described below in Table 2. In this connection it should be noted that Indicator 1 has been identified as a GEF-7 Core Indicator (*Indicator 4.3*). Furthermore, indicator 4 which is also a GEF Core Indicator (*Core Indicator 11*) has been included into the results framework following the Mid-term Review. Generally speaking the objective indicators are SMART compliant however an issue has been identified for indicator 1 which is discussed in more detail below.

Table 2: SMART analysis of project results framework (project objective)

Indicator	Baseline	End-of Project Target	TE SMART analysis				
			S	M	A	R	T
Project Objective: To demonstrate sustainable land and forest management in the forested landscape of Savannakhet Province in order to secure the critical wildlife habitats, conserve biodiversity and maintain a continuous flow of multiple services including quality water provision and flood prevention							
Indicator 1: Improved Forest management measured by an increase in total area under Sustainable Land Management (as reported in LD PMAT, Part I)	0 ha.	271,279 ha	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Indicator 2: Improved management effectiveness of protected areas covering at least 583,672 ha. (as measured in the GEF BD1 Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool – METT): • Dong Phou Vieng Conservation Forest • Phou Xang He Conservation Forest • Se Ta Nouan – Phou Nak Protection Forest • Ong Mang Conservation Forest (proposed)	METT Scores: 39 39 33 47	METT Scores: 65 65 60 74	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Indicator 3: Capacity to ensure compliance and enforcement of sustainable forest and land management, and mainstreaming of forest connectivity into the main production sectors in Savannakhet Province (as measured by scores in the UNDP-GEF Capacity Development Scorecard)	Capacity Score: 16.5	Capacity Score by end of project: 38	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Indicator 4: Number of direct beneficiaries disintegrated by gender	0	8,835 (Male: 5,301; Female: 3,534)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound Green: SMART compliant (YES); Yellow: Questionable SMART compliance (?); RED: Not SMART compliant (N)							

54. As such **Indicator 1** is, if one only looks at the indicator and its listed target without placing it in the ProDoc and project reality context, fully SMART compliant. However, as the ProDoc including its Annex 2 which contains the projects relevant landscape and habitat related information does not clarify what areas constitutes the listed 698,746 ha. In fact, the figure is only mentioned once (without any explanations) in the

ProDoc narrative – and then the figure is repeated in the Results Framework. The issue of the projects area coverage was also highlighted in the Mid-term Review where it was suggested that the project identified the area coverage of its different interventions both inside and outside the identified conservation areas. The TE Team’s own review of the district land cover data (2019 data) confirms that the listed 698,746 ha is a substantial overestimate and that the actual end-of project target should have been approximately 426,235 ha. For further discussion please see argumentation under indicator 1 in section 3.3.1 below.

Component 1 indicators

55. There are seven indicators under component 1, as described below in Table 3. However, one of the six indicators has sub-target categories resulting in that component 1 has 11 indicators/ sub-indicators which the project has to follow. Generally speaking the objective indicators are SMART compliant however issues have been identified for indicator 6, which are discussed in more detail below. A general but smaller issue affecting 4 of the seven indicators are also discussed.

Table 3: SMART analysis of project results framework (Component 1)

Indicator	Baseline	End-of Project Target	TE SMART analysis				
			S	M	A	R	T
Component 1: Enabling policy environment and increased compliance and enforcement capacities for sustainable land and forest management across landscapes including protected areas							
Indicator 5: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) guiding resource management and conservation decision-making in Savannakhet Province	0 SEAs have been carried out in Savannakhet Province	1 SEA covering the 5 targeted districts completed by end of year 1	?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Indicator 6: Improved land use planning and management reduces degradation over 1,060,525 hectares of forest landscapes in Savannakhet Province, leading to unabated provision of ecosystem services such as water supply (quality), flood prevention and biodiversity conservation	0 district land use plans based on detailed ecological information or integrated into development and investment decision processes	5 District-level Integrated Spatial Plans (ISPs) strengthened with data from Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and integrated with District Socio-Economic Development Plans (SEDPs) by end of year 2	?	Y	N	Y	N
	No zoning or planning processes exist at the landscape level for Dry Dipterocarp Forests	Zoning Plan for the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Landscape approved and guiding management decisions by end of year 4	?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Indicator 7: Information management systems to guide land and resource use planning in Savannakhet Province	Information on natural resources and conservation priorities is incomplete and highly dispersed	Decision Support System in place and operating by end of year 2	?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Indicator 8: Inter-institutional and multi-sectoral coordinating bodies overseeing resource management activities in Savannakhet Province to ensure compliance with SEAs, ILUMPs and SEDPs	No formal coordinating mechanisms exist for stakeholders involved in resource management and conservation	Multi-sectoral stakeholder committees established and meeting regularly at each of the 5 districts by end of year 1	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Indicator 9: Public-private partnerships for sustainable land and forest management in Savannakhet Province	Existing public-private partnerships are ad-hoc mechanisms between individual companies and institutions	Responsible Business Forum established and meeting regularly at the provincial level by end of year 1	?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Indicator 10: Policy and regulatory frameworks support integrated approaches to resource management and conservation through following measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Decree on Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) & develop targeted regulations on ISPsJurisdictional issues and coordination for enforcement of wildlife and forest protection laws	Existing policy and regulatory frameworks have significant gaps that constrain effective PA management and the mainstreaming of BD, SFM and SLM approaches into provincial and district level planning and financing processes and resource management decisions	By end of year 2 SEA Decree finalized and enacted by and ISP regulations approved	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
		By end of year 3 Resolve jurisdictional issues and coordination relating to enforcement of wildlife and forest protection laws	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
		By end of year 3 2015 Decree on Pas revised to authorize PA financing	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulations on PA finance and functioning of protected areas within wider landscapes Nationally-defined HCVF categories and integration of HCVFs into forest policies and regulations and PA management plans 		mechanisms and landscape-level coordination					
		By end of year 3 Adoption of HCVF definitions; HCVF restrictions incorporated into policies, regulations and management plans	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Indicator 11: Consolidated technical guidance on the design and management of plantation forestry and agriculture in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest landscape improve the sustainability of such operations and reduce their impacts on the surrounding landscape	General guidelines for plantation forestry and agriculture exist in Lao PDR, but are not specifically tailored to the ecological conditions of Dry Dipterocarp Forest landscapes	Guidelines on Sustainable Plantation Forestry and Agriculture developed by the end of year 3	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound							
Green: SMART compliant (YES); Yellow: Questionable SMART compliance (?); RED: Not SMART compliant (N)							

56. Common for four out of seven of Component 1's indicators and four of the six indicators under Component 2 are not very **Specific** in its wording which puts the indicators SMART compliance into questions. However, as the indicator targets are quite specific the effects can be seen as negligible. That said it would have been instrumental for the project proponents to have spent more time on shaping the indicators.

57. **Indicator 6** is however not SMART compliant in that the criteria for achievable and time-bound are not met. As with indicator 1 if one only looks at the indicator in vacuum and not within the context of the ProDoc, for instance, then the indicator could be viewed as SMART compliant. However, in the ProDoc it is noted that "*direct public and private investments under the next phase of SEDP's (starting in 2021) will be directed to geographic areas and types of activities / projects prioritized in the ISPs.....*". Thus, it is not possible to have the ISPs integrated into the SEDPs by year 2 of the project, although it would be possible to ensure this integration (or at least to initiate the process of integration) by the end of the project.

Component 2 indicators

58. There are six indicators under component 2, as described below in Table 4. However, two of the six indicators have sub-target categories resulting in component 2 has 10 indicators/ sub-indicators which the project has to follow. In this connection, it should be noted that Indicator 12 and its two sub indicators has been identified as GEF-7 Core Indicators (*Indicator 1.1 and Indicator 4.3 respectively*). In addition, indicator 13 which is also a GEF Core Indicator (*Indicator 3.2*) has been included into the results framework following the Mid-term Review. Furthermore, indicators 16 and 17 were included into the results framework following the project inception. Generally speaking the objective indicators are SMART compliant but a general but smaller issue affecting 4 of the six indicators are also discussed

Table 4: SMART analysis of project results framework (Component 2)

Indicator	Baseline	End-of Project Target	TE SMART analysis				
			S	M	A	R	T
Component 2: Sustainable Forest Management and Protected Area Expansion in five priority Districts of Savannakhet Province							
Indicator 12: Area of Savannakhet Province under various forms of protection: <ul style="list-style-type: none">New Protected Areas gazetted and fully operationalNew or existing Protection Forests designated as High Conservation Value Forests (as measured in SFM Tracking Tool)	0 ha.	By the end of the project: New protected area of 168,614 ha. (Ong Mang NPA)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	0 ha.	By the end of the project: Estimated 193,684 ha. of designated HCVFs	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

⁷ SEDP = Socio-Economic Development Plans

Indicator 13: Restoration of degraded Dry Dipterocarp Forests to counteract on-going and past land degradation (as measured in SFM Tracking Tool)	Approx. 1,000 ha. In the 5 targeted districts have been reforested (mainly with non-native, commercial species)	Restoration of 1,111 ha. Of Dry Dipterocarp Forest with native species by the end of the project	?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Indicator 14: Capacities of communities located within or adjacent to protected forests to effectively participate in SFM activities	Forest-based communities have limited mechanisms or experience in SFM or community management of forest resources	Community land certificates issued for 16 villages by end of year 1	?	Y	Y	Y	Y
		Village forestry management plans for 16 villages finalized by end of year 2	?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Indicator 15: Biodiversity management / ecosystem service provision mainstreamed in forest landscape management in five priority districts resulting in improvements in the status of biodiversity and ecosystem services, indicated by: a) Increase in Biodiversity Intactness Index for Dry Forests b) Populations of species with IUCN Endangered Status • Eld's Deer (<i>Panolia eldii</i>) • Silvered Leaf Monkey (<i>Trachypithecus cristatus</i>) • Asian Elephant (<i>Elephas maximus</i>) • Francois' Langur (<i>Trachypithecus francoisi</i>) • Siamese Crocodile (<i>Crocodylus siamensis</i>) c) Maintenance of water quantity in downstream area of Xe Bangxiang River • Baseflows (dry season) • # of flooding events	73.04	No net decrease.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Current populations within Project Area: Eld's Deer 60-80 individuals Silvered Leaf Monkey 70-100 individuals Asian Elephant 32 individuals Siamese Crocodile 12 individuals	Populations by end of project within Project Area: Eld's Deer 60% increase Silvered Leaf Monkey 18% increase Asian Elephant 12% increase Siamese Crocodile 18% increase	Y	?	Y	Y	Y
	Baseflows: 0.40m One flooding event (142.256m) water level	Baseflows: 1.02m No flooding event	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Indicator 16: Limited skills and technologies for Protected Area Management	Capacity scorecard baseline: 1	Protected Area management staff have strengthened technical skills and supporting technology for planning, environmental monitoring, enforcement, and PA management by end of year 3 (Capacity scorecard target: 2.5) (NEW TARGET LEVEL APPROVED BY RTA)	?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Indicator 17: Environmental education programmes are partially developed and partially delivered	Capacity scorecard baseline: 1	Comprehensive environmental education programmes exist and are being delivered for environmental awareness by year 3 (Capacity scorecard target rating: 3)	?	Y	Y	Y	Y

		(NEW TARGET LEVEL APPROVED BY RTA)					
SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound Green: SMART compliant (YES); Yellow: Questionable SMART compliance (?); RED: Not SMART compliant (N)							

59. As already noted four of the six indicators under Component 2 are not very **Specific** in its wording, which is unfortunate as it places a small question mark as to the indicators' SMART compliance.

60. Although not related to indicators SMART compliance there is a question related to the sub-indicator a) *Increase in Biodiversity Intactness Index for Dry Forests* under **Indicator 15** which remains open – is the Biodiversity Intactness Index for Dry Forests to cover the five districts combined/individually or is the Biodiversity Intactness Index for Dry Forests to cover the combined/individual conservation areas the project is targeting.

Component 3 indicators

61. There are four indicators under component 3, as described below in Table 5.

Table 5: SMART analysis of project results framework (Component 3)

Indicator	Baseline	End-of Project Target	TE SMART analysis				
			S	M	A	R	T
Component 3: Developing and Promoting Incentives and Sustainable Financing for Biodiversity Conservation and Forest Protection							
Indicator 18: Levels of investment in land use planning and forest management planning at the village and districts levels in the targeted landscape in Savannakhet Province	USD 741,000 per year	By end of project, levels of public and private investment increased to: USD 900,000 per year	?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Indicator 19: Wildlife-based ecotourism products designed and operating in the project target area	0 projects operating	At least 4 wildlife-based ecotourism projects operating in project target area by the end of the project	?	Y	Y	Y	Y
Indicator 20: Funds available for management of protected areas / conservation forests in targeted landscape in Savannakhet Province (as reported in the GEF BD1 Tracking Tool – Financial Scorecard): <ul style="list-style-type: none">Non-governmental financing mechanismsGovernment budget allocations	USD 0 per year USD 168,480 per year	By end of project, levels of public and private investment through diverse and new revenue sources increased to: USD 100,000 per year USD 250,000 per year	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Indicator 21: Incentives and other benefits to communities within targeted landscape are directly linked to wildlife recovery and forest protection (as measured in SFM Tracking Tool)	5< Conservation Agreements with communities in the Ong Mang Sanctuary	At least 16 community-based Conservation Agreements that incorporate improved ecological conditions and human development levels signed by end of year 2	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound Green: SMART compliant (YES); Yellow: Questionable SMART compliance (?); RED: Not SMART compliant (N)							

62. Two of the indicators under Component 3 are not very **Specific** in its wording. Indicator 18 notes that investments are to be in land use planning and forest management planning and there is a question as to whether this is what is meant, as an annual cost of 700,000-900,000 USD for planning could be seen as substantial. Rather the TE Team believes that the costs referred to are for implementation of activities supporting land use and forest management plans/planning.

63. For indicator 19 it is unclear what the indicator is targeting. As the number 4 has been listed the TE Team anticipates that the indicator is to measure ecotourism engagements in four distinct sites/destinations (i.e. Eld's Deer National Sanctuary, Dong Phou Vieng, Phou Xang He and Nong Louang Lake).

3.1.3 Project's risks and social and environment safeguards.

64. Six risks are listed in the ProDoc which are presented in table 6 below. However, in the ProDoc itself it does not make any reference to the risks identified as part of the Social Environment Screening Procedures (SESP). In fact, there are no references to the SESP in the main narrative of the ProDoc, this even though the SESP is attached to the ProDoc as annex 3. The identified project risks including the risks listed in the SESP were rather weak and sporadic and it seems clear that the project formulators had not undertaken a comprehensive and in-depth risk review. They therefore did not help shaping the risk management approaches of the planned activities and outputs.

65. Including the SESP identified risks, provided in table 7 the total number of project risks were at the time of project signature 11.

Table 6: Project risks identified in the Project Document.

IDENTIFIED RISKS AND CATEGORY	RISK ASSESSMENT
Risk 1: Current institutions have inadequate capacity or resources to manage protected areas and the wider landscape	Medium
Risk 2: Ecosystems are not sufficiently resilient and their biological and physical integrity are incrementally compromised by the effects of global and regional climate change	Low
Risk 3: Conflicts and misunderstanding among public institutions, private sector partners, NGOs and resource users undermine partnership approaches and implementation of cooperative governance arrangements	Low
Risk 4: Land owners / users ignore planning and resource use regulations, leading to continued unsustainable investment projects, illegal logging, hunting and forest degradation	Medium
Risk 5: Boundaries and/or regulations revised for different categories of forested landscapes	Low
Risk 6: Institutions in Lao PDR may not have the capacity to quickly absorb some of the project recommendations and assistance as proposed.	Low

Table 7: Project risks identified in the SESP (i.e. Annex 3 of the ProDoc)

Risk Description	RISK ASSESSMENT
Risk 1: Potential negative impacts from project activities within or adjacent to critical habitats and/or environmentally sensitive areas, including legally protected areas	Low
Risk 2: The project will produce changes to the use of lands and resources that may have adverse impacts on livelihoods	Low
Risk 3: Potential negative impacts from project activities involving harvesting of natural forests and reforestation	Low
Risk 4: Potential outcomes of the Project are sensitive or vulnerable to potential impacts of climate change, including: 1) the ecosystem functioning of existing and new Protected Areas targeted by the project; 2) populations of targeted endangered species; 3) restoration of degraded forest areas; and 4) water quantity and quality conditions in the Xe Bangxiang River	Low
Risk 5: The proposed Project could possibly affect land tenure arrangements and/or community based property rights / customary rights to land, territories and/or resources	Low

66. By mid of 2018 the project's SESP were revised and the SESP indicators were reduced to three. As with the initial risk assessment there seem to have been a lack of a comprehensive and in-depth risk review. In April 2020, however the SESP were further revised and a much more thorough review of the Social and Environmental Risk Screening Checklist were performed resulting in a revision of the project risks which by then were expanded to a total of 7, increasing the total number of project risks to 13. The 2020 SESP preparation also sparked the preparation of an Ethnic Groups Plan which outlines how the project were-would be engaging with the ethnic groups within the project area. It should be noted that although the plan was only developed in the latter part of the project the project has generally followed the same practices (as ascribed) throughout the project implementation. The 2020 SESP risks are listed in table 8 below.

Table 8: Project risks identified in the April 2020 SESP (including reference to screening triggers)

Risk Description	Risk Assessment
Risk 1: Rights of affected populations (particularly of marginalized groups) are adversely impacted by, project interventions and outcomes and do not have the possibility or capacity to claim their rights or meaningful participation. SESP Principle 1, Question 5, 6 & 7	Moderate
Risk 2: Upgrading of Ong Mang Sanctuary to the National protected area and restriction of access to the protected area and the surrounding areas by the communities living in the target areas. SESP Principle 1, Question 1, 2, 3 & 4; and Principle 3, Standard 1, Question 3, Standard 5, Question 4.	Moderate
Risk 3: Ethnic minorities may have limited possibilities for accessing opportunities and/or influence on project interventions and outcomes which negatively affect their development priorities and traditional livelihood. SESP Principle 3, Standard 6, Question 1 & 7	Moderate
Risk 4: The effects of climate change such as flooding, and droughts could impact project areas and activities. SESP Principle 3, Standard 2, Question 2 & 3	Low
Risk 5: Project activities to ensure sustainable forest management and conservation of biodiversity may have unintended negative effect or reforestation activities could inadvertently introduce Invasive Alien Species (IAS) negatively impacting native species, including endangered species. SESP Principle 3, Standard 1, Question 2, 5 & 6	Moderate
Risk 6: Prevailing gender biases in unintentionally discriminated against women limiting or adversely impact their possibilities for accessing opportunities and/or influence on project interventions and outcomes. SESP Principle 2, Question 1 & 2	Moderate
Risk 7: Possibility of risk related to constructions, floods or health safety during construction. SESP Principle 3, Standard 3 Question 4, 5 & 7	Moderate

67. As part of the project's monitoring, the project has undertaken risk reporting as part of its quarterly progress reports, where the ProDoc and SESP identified risks were reported on. While this is a sign of strong project monitoring and control (as well as in line with UNDP requirements), it is interesting to note that none of the SESP risks identified in the two SESP revisions (i.e. 2018-2020) found its way into the quarterly risk reporting. This raises questions as to how serious the identified SESP risks as well as the projects overall risk monitoring were viewed by the project.

3.1.4 Gender responsiveness.

68. The project document does not specifically identify its UNDP Gender Marker, but notes that it could be either GEN2 or 3. The PIR documentation from 2019 onwards notes that the project has a GEN 2 listing. That said the ProDoc and the CEO Request documentation provides little information as to gender inclusion and mainstreaming of women although it does state that "*Gender considerations have been incorporated in the project design and will ensure equal participation of both men and women in stakeholder consultations, decision-making and project implementation*" and that it will hire a Community, Gender and Livelihoods Specialist as a key team member. Furthermore, the ProDoc states that the project will collect sex aggregated data related to the implementation of activities including "**1) total number of full-time project staff that are women and men; 2) total number of Project Board members that are women and men; and 3) the number of jobs created by the project that are held by women and men**". In this regard it should be mentioned that as part of the Mid-term Review the project transitioned into the GEF Core Indicator system and in this connection a new indicator (i.e. indicator 4, number of direct beneficiaries disintegrated by gender) was identified and added to the project's Results Framework.

3.1.5 Planned stakeholder participation.

69. The stakeholder analysis undertaken by the project in the Project Preparation Grant (PPG) phase included an extensive list of project stakeholders. While the main stakeholders have remained the same for the project implementation, the handover of the project from MONRE to MAF, at the start of the project, reshuffled different entities' engagement in the project as well as resulted in that new entities were included and some no longer were involved. For instance DFRM, which was originally the project's implementing partner were moved to MAF where its activities partially or fully were absorbed into DOF, which is the current

implementing partner of the project. The revised list of main stakeholders has been presented in Table 1 in Section 2.7 above.

70. In this regard it should be noted that the project relies on broad stakeholder representation in the relevant project implementation structures such as the projects Steering Committees (National, Provincial and District), as well as in the District Multi-sectoral Stakeholder Committees which have been involved in local planning. Please see argumentation under indicator 8 in section 3.3.1 for further discussions on the District MSSCs.

71. It should be noted that the project in connection with the 2020 SESP exercise developed an ethnic groups plan, which outlined and addressed the risks associated with the ethnic groups within the project area. And as noted while the plan was only developed in the latter part of the project the project has generally followed the same practices (as ascribed) throughout the project implementation. It should also be noted that aside from the initial stakeholder analysis developed during the PPG phase no comprehensive stakeholder analysis has been prepared. This, however, does not seem to have hampered the practical implementation of the project as stakeholder engagement in the project is deemed adequate.

3.1.6 Lessons from other relevant projects.

72. The ProDoc and CEO Endorsement request documentation is not extensive in its description of how the project strategy build upon lessons learned from other relevant projects. Nonetheless it does make linkages to key projects. These being 1) the UNDP-GEF project *Improving the Resilience of the Agriculture Sector to Climate Change Impact (IRAS)* which seeks to improve the knowledge base about climate change, to strengthen agriculture and rural sector policies, and to develop institutional capacities for managing climate change impacts in the provinces of Savannakhet and Xayaboury; 2) The FAO-GEF project *Climate Adaptation in Wetlands Areas (CAWA) in Lao PDR* which is designed to help local communities in two important wetland areas of Lao PDR adapt to the impacts of climate change, and contribute to the sustainability of their livelihoods, by supporting the restoration and sustainable management of the globally important Ramsar-designated wetlands on which they depend; and 3) the WB-GEF project *Second Lao Environment and Social Project (LENS II)* which is designed to strengthen selected environmental protection management systems, specifically for protected areas conservation, enforcement of wildlife laws and environmental assessment management. In addition to this the project as part of its design have a close relationship with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) *Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) East-West Economic Corridor Agriculture Infrastructure Sector Project* and the (GMS) *Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Project in Lao PDR* well as the UNDP project *Poverty-Environment Initiative (PEI) Lao PDR Phase 2*, which are part of the project's co-financing contributions.

3.1.7 Linkages between the project and other interventions.

73. With regard to inter-project cooperation, coordination and transmission of lessons learned the development community in Lao PDR is comparatively small and most of the actors know one another and have frequent official and unofficial interactions. In addition, stakeholder working groups under different projects often has representatives from other relevant projects. As part of this the SAFE Ecosystems project has had ongoing interactions, and absorbed lessons from, other projects including the GIZ/ Global Climate Fund (GCF) REED+ project *Improving forest and land-use management in order to implement REDD+ in the Lao People's Democratic Republic*, the UNDP/UNEP project *Improving Quality Investments for Achieving Sustainable Development Goals in Lao PDR*, as well as the World Bank and FAO projects listed in the above section. Furthermore the SAFE Ecosystems project has influenced the project approaches of the UNDP/GEF pipeline project *Promoting Climate Resilient Food Systems for Improved Food and Nutrition Security Among the Most Vulnerable Communities in Lao PDR (CRFS)* which aimed at improving food security of particularly vulnerable smallholder farmers who are faced with increased risks of intensified hydroclimate variability under climate change. The project development has however been discontinued during the SAFE Ecosystems project's implementation period. In terms of linkages the SAFE Ecosystems project have been active in sharing experiences and lessons learned from its livelihoods and ecotourism work, but more importantly on its engagement with the village communities on the village forest management planning and the development of community agreements. The SAFE Ecosystems project or experts involved in the project have also been engaged in the ongoing processes of the revisions of the Protected areas Decree and the development of a

Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) decree, all of which are important for the long-term sustainability of not only the SAFE Ecosystems project own engagement but for conservation efforts in Lao PDR more general.

3.1.8 Replication approach.

74. The project's replication approach is relevant, where the concept of using conservation agreements where communities receive financial benefits from partaking in and achieving agreed conservation objectives is expected to become a model which the Government can upscale in other areas of Savannakhet Province as well as other forested and conservation areas in Lao PDR. The project's triangular support to local planning through its Integrated Spatial Planning, Strategic Environment Assessments and the internet based Spatial Decision Support System were also seen as a pilot which could be broad scaled implemented in Lao PDR following its successful piloting. It was also hoped that the project's engagement in designing financial mechanisms would increase the funding for sustainable forest and land management, as well as protected area operations – not only within the project districts but that these could become more national in scope. Finally, the project hoped to effectively support the development/revisions of national policies and regulations including jurisdictional issues and coordination relating to enforcement of wildlife and forest protection laws, a revision of the 2015 Decree on Protected Areas and preparation of national guidelines for designating and managing HCVFs.

3.2 Project Implementation

3.2.1 Adaptive Management.

75. The project has throughout its duration implemented several adaptive management measures, some minor but no less important adjustments to the activity implementation and some larger regarding the project's strategic approach within specific project areas of intervention. Of smaller but important engagements have been to train counterpart staff and local officials etc. in how to set up, write and manage emails to ensure that there would be a fluent communication between project parties. Related to this was the project's approach to break away from the widespread habit (within Laos) to communicate via phone on even important project related issues. While this in itself should not be seen as an issue as such, the problem often was that any agreement reached were not effectively communicated to other people with a need to know. In response the project facilitated the setting up of internet communications including SKYPE (and later ZOOM) so that communication would become more inclusive – this together with the increased use of emails on project issues have changed and effectuated the project's communication. As such this adaptive management step undertaken by the project heighten the project's readiness when the project (like the rest of the world) was affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic. As a consequence, the project was less affected by the Government's response measures compared to other projects, for instance in the UNDP portfolio. In this regard, the project anticipates, in spite of the current COVID-19 Pandemic that all of its activities will be finalized at the time of planned operational closure.

76. At village level the project, in order to address a lack of knowledge on financial and project management, had to provide training to village representatives to enable them to better engage in the implementation of the agreed village conservation contracts. In addition to providing an initial training, and a needed follow up training, the project engaged four local experts/trainers which went to the villages to assist the communities in various fund and project management aspects.

77. While relatively successful the project's reforestation efforts in 2018 and 2019 were affected by the dying-off of seedlings planted in the reforestation areas, due to, not only, the quality of the seedlings and the selected planting sites, but also in larger part due to animal grazing including grazing and trampling by cows. In response the project opted to re-evaluate its intervention, supported by studies, and it identified a new approach to reforestation, which among other included better soil preparation before planting seedlings, using older seedlings and better after planting maintenance. The project also sought to engage villagers in planting trees such as Burma padauk/Mai dou (*Pterocarpus macrocarpus*), Tracwood/Mai ka yung (*Dalbergia cochinchinensis*), Ironwood/Mai daeng (*Xylia xylocarpa*), Tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*) and other species as part of an add-on initiative to further entice villagers in the tree planting in the village domain, as well as

increase the knowledge of the benefit of increased tree cover within the landscape.

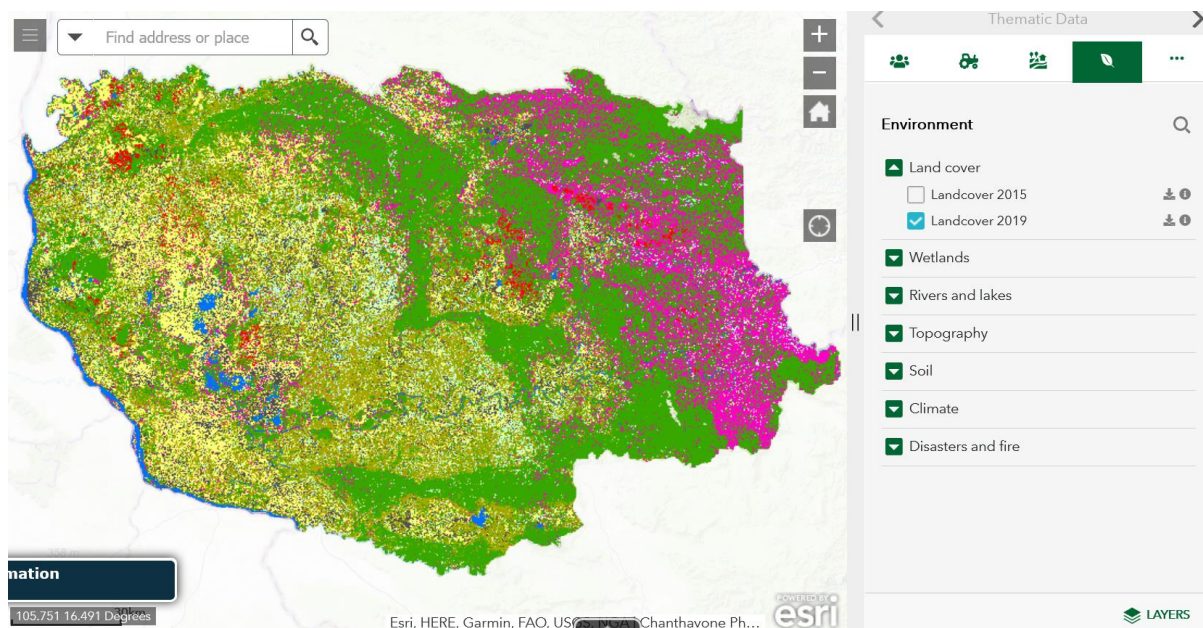
78. The project also adjusted its approach to village agreements following the first round of contracts. While the initial village conservation agreements were clear and specific (from a contractual point of view) they were difficult to implement at local level due to the capacity of village communities and village leadership. In most villages the village conservation agreements were the first ever contractual engagements the villagers had been involved in and while project support was provided (as noted above) the language and intricacies of the contracts in most cases exceeded engagements the communities had been used to in the past (if at all). For the second round of community agreements the project engaged in a much simpler format, resulting in easier management of the process overall and an increased understanding and engaged implementation at the village level. In addition, to ensure better gender balance in the project village related engagements the 30/30 rule was also included into the agreements. Hereby ensuring that for all undertaken activities there would be a minimum of 30 people participating of which 30% would be women.

79. An important example of adaptive management was the projects engagement with the Government on expediting fund transfers to the districts levels to ensure a timely and effective implementation of the project activities. In the initial stages of the project, fund transfers were undertaken through the National Treasury under Ministry of Finance, where, as noted in the 2017 Audit report, *“processing of funds within the National Treasury usually took at least a few weeks following the submission from UNDP”*. In UNDP’s Audit management response it is noted that *“Following National Treasury guidelines, as well as the UNDP NIM-SOP, the project prepared Responsible Parties agreements between central and Districts levels, hereby enabling direct fund transfer to the district level for project activity implementation. The change in funds transferal came about after long negotiations with Ministry of Agriculture and Forest’s Department of Forestry, Department of Planning and Finance and the first transfer following the new modality happened in the second quarter of 2018”*.

80. While perhaps not an example of adaptive management in itself, the project engaged the Environment Protection Fund (EPF) in 2017 to facilitate the implementation of the village conservation contracts and the village reforestation agreement. The involvement of the EPF enabled the project to pilot the transferring of funds to the district and later to village level via a national funding mechanism. By the end of the project a total of 1.2 million USD has been provided to the local level via EPF.

81. Perhaps also not an adaptive management example, it is an example of the project’s situation awareness. The project chose to engage the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) which is under the University of Bern to develop the Spatial Decision Support System for Savannakhet province. CDE had been working with the Government for almost 20 years developing a decision system commonly referred to as “Lao Decides”. In selecting CDE the project leap-frogged its Spatial DSS development and created a very cost effective solution for the project. In turn the work done under the project, by CDE, has helped further develop the underlying system of Lao Decides which now has been further improved – creating further benefits and impacts beyond Savannakhet province. An example of the 2019 Savannakhet land cover developed by the Savannakhet Geographical Information of development planning system (<https://www.savannakhet.k4d.la/>) is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Land cover in Savannakhet developed by the Savannakhet Geographical Information of development planning system



3.2.2 Actual stakeholder participation and partnership arrangements.

82. Stakeholder participation and partnership arrangement have been strong throughout the project implementation process. This although the project went through an initial slow-down phase as part of the project's move from MONRE to MAF where the move of the PMO only happened one year following the official notice that the project was to be moved. The move from MONRE to MAF resulted in a entirely new stakeholder setup on the government side at national, provincial and district levels. Although this move comparative slowed-down the project implementation in the initial phase of the project effective working relationships with this new stakeholder group were established. Part of the initial work of the PMO was to create awareness about the project and its outcomes and scope, as well as facilitate the government stakeholder's participation in project activities. Perhaps one reason as to why MAF, DOF and its provincial and district offices were keen to absorb the project was that with Decree No. 99 the mandate of all issues related to Protected Areas, Forest protection and management, Wildlife protection and management had passed back to MAF.

83. As mentioned in the MTR, the project has received strong support particularly from provincial level, which has played a key role in the project's implementation as well as project steering. Partners have been actively involved in the project activities and provided technical, as well as financial, assistance to the national related interventions as well as to the district and village demonstrations at the pilot sites. In this regard, the district stakeholder engagement particularly staff from the DAFOs have been very instrumental in facilitating the village activities and ensuring the dissemination of best practices, lessons learned and over all knowledge generation between the village communities as well as between the individual DAFOs themselves.

84. While the project developed a Gender Analysis and Action Plan and an Ethnic Group Plan, these please were however not prepared before after the MTR. While the Ethnic Group Plan is quite detailed and specific the action plan of the Gender Analysis and Action Plan is somewhat generic and not focused on the main project target group which is the villagers. Regardless of the absent of developed plans the project's engagements at for instance village level were guided by adherence to UNDP's general guidance with regard to gender, mainstreaming of women and inclusion and safeguarding of ethnic communities. A prime example of this is the community agreements which in fact are based on free informed and prior consent and are a product of negotiations and consultations with the village communities from different ethnic groups.

85. Through the centralized project coordination with UNDP the project benefitted from having experienced colleagues building upon experiences and lessons from earlier complementary projects like the UNDP PEI and the Poverty Environment Action for Sustainable Development Goals in *Lao PDR* (PEA) projects. In addition, the SAFE Ecosystems project have actively engaged with a subset of ongoing initiative in Lao PDR including the World Bank LENS2 and the GIZ REDD+ projects. That said extensive cross fertilization between

project have not occurred – but in the views of the TE Team this cannot really be expected to occur as projects which already have establish project documents and workplans seldom have the capacity to make substantial changes or incorporate new components. However, sensitization and sharing of ideas approaches and lessons learned etc. has been part of the SAFE Ecosystems project DNA. In this regard the SAFE Ecosystems project, as other project in Laos benefits from that the donor community working on similar issue is comparatively small which facilitates more frequent interactions between projects.

86. That said, interactions with the ADB have been rather limited compared to that ADB is the main project co-financier. While this is unfortunate it in part derives from an overestimated presumed relationship between the ADB *Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) East-West Economic Corridor Agriculture Infrastructure Sector Project* and the SAFE Ecosystems Project.

3.2.3 Project financing and co-financing.

Project finances

87. Based on the combined delivery report (CDR provided by the project, a cumulative total of USD **10,335,686** out of the USD **10,879,174** GEF grant had been expended from the project start until quarter 3 2021 (i.e. the time of the TE) – please see table 9. The remaining funds will cover the project's activities until the planned operational closure in May 2022.

Table 9: Planned and actual expenditures for 2016-2021

Outcome	2016 (USD)	2017 (USD)	2018 (USD)	2019 (USD)	2020 (USD)	2021 (USD) (as per q3 2021)	Total (as per q3 2021)	Indicative ProDoc budget
Unrealized gain and loss	108,610 ⁸ (328)	6,583 ⁹ (1,251)	13,434	6,032	6,289	3,566	144,514 ¹⁰ (30,900)	
Component 1	684	279,747	548,481	514,017	245,781	116,938	1,705,648	2,156,596
Component 2	32,861	1,021,327	1,453,400	912,770	690,068	336,639	4,447,065	5,134,620
Component 3	0	1,134,708	960,756	859,996	530,065	211,358	3,696,883	3,069,958
Sub-total	142,155	2,442,365	2,976,071	2,292,815	1,472,201	668,501	9,994,110	10,361,174
Project Management	40,741	59,738	70,849	70,587	60,063	39,599	341,577	518,000
TOTAL expenditure	182,895	2,502,103	3,046,920	2,363,401	1,532,265	708,100	10,335,686	10,879,174

88. From table 9 it is clear that substantial funding has been moved from component 1 and 2 down to component 3 which has an increased overall budget expenditure of 22 %. The change stem from a budget revision was approved in December 2020. The budget revision was signed off by the UNDP Lao PDR and DOF following consultations with the UNDP Regional Bureau. The revision was deemed to be in compliance with the GEF policies. The fund movement (i.e. USD 741,117), as per the budget revision, represented 6.8 % of the overall GEF allocation (i.e. USD 10,879,174) and the funding decrease for components 1 (i.e. USD 290,000) and 2 (i.e. USD 451,117) are respectively 13,3% and 8.8%. The main justification for the budget revision was increased costs for livelihood development and ecotourism implementation. Table 10 presents the proportional changes in project spending, per components, stemming from the budget revision.

⁸ As per UNDP practice Atlas unrealized loss/gain are posted either under Activity 99 or unidentified activities. However, in 2016 amounts of 108.282 USD (procurement of 03 trucks and 17 motorcycles) and in 2017 amounts of 5.332 USD (procurement of ICT equipment) was erroneously not listed as cost under the respective components. Following this the unrealized gain and loss in 2016 was USD 328.

⁹ In accordance with the footnote 7 above the cost under unrealized gain and loss in 2017 was USD 1,251

¹⁰ In accordance with the footnote 7 above the overall cost under unrealized gain and loss until quarter 3 2021 has been USD 30,900

Table 10: Proportional change in planned and actual expenditures for 2016-2021

Outcome	Indicative ProDoc budget	Indicative ProDoc budget (Proportion)	Actual Total, as per q3 2021	Actual Total, as per q3 2021 (Proportion)	Proportions change in indicative and actual budget
Unrealized gain and loss	n/a	0%	144,514	1.4%	+1.4%
Component 1	2,156,596	19.8%	1,705,648	16.5%	-3.3%
Component 2	5,134,620	47.2%	4,447,065	43.0%	-4.2%
Component 3	3,069,958	28.2%	3,696,883	35.8%	+7.6%
Project Management	518,000	4.8%	341,577	3.3%	-1.5%
TOTAL expenditure	10,879,174	100%	10,335,686	100%	0

89. The project management costs at the time of the TE are reported to be USD 379,058 which is 3.79% of the sub-total of the project components which are well within the range of the 5% threshold outlined by the GEF policy on project management cost.

90. In connection with the project expenditure it is noteworthy that the project exhibit high costs related to project travel (budget code 71600). In fact the travel related cost (according to the project's annual combined delivery reports (CDR) is three and a half times as high as the ProDoc planned travel budget (USD 1,440,858 compared to USD 407,062). The travel cost issue is related to the wide use of daily subsistence allowance (DSA) provided to a seemingly inflated number of national participants to project events and activities (including village ranger patrols). With a cost of USD 1,296,098 the DSA expenses to national actors' accounts for 90% of the overall travel cost. It should be noted that this does not include DSA to participants who are part of project learning events, which are accounted for under the budget line 75707. The issue of DSA was highlighted in the Mid-term Review and addressing this issue was listed as one of the MTR Team's recommendations. In response, the project reduced the DSA expenditures with 73% for the period 2020-2021 compared to the period 2016-2019 with only USD 65,937 being spend on national DSA between January and November 2021. However, the provision of DSA is exuberant and it would be prudent for the project to thoroughly review the project costs and underlying practices engaged in by the project (not only for DSA expenditures) to evaluate if similar approaches are to be pursued in future projects (Recommendation). Encapsulated in the travel costs are, that PMO staff including the CTA and M&E expert routinely went to Savannakhet for prolonged stays to engage with the provincial and district management teams and stakeholders. However, the International DSA cost only accounts for 3% of the projects overall travel cost. Nonetheless as part of the recommended DSA review it would be worthwhile to also review the pros and cons of having extensive project staff missions to the project sites compared to having staff or even the PMO stationed full time in the local area.

91. The project's equipment expenditures (budget codes 72200, 72300 and 72400) are also quite high and the list the cost of purchased equipment (including building of infrastructure of meeting halls and water towers etc.) as being approximately USD 776,627 (UNDP Dec 2021 exchange rate 1USD/10781 Kip). However, these costs can be traced back to the planned budget in there ProDoc which has a combined equipment component of USD 1,393,250 hereby vastly exceeding the actual equipment expenditures.

92. Regarding the project expenditures it should be noted that the project, at the time of the TE, has undertaken spot checks in 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021. In 2017 and 2018 the spot checks were undertaken by UNDP Country office staff, but from 2019 onwards these were done by contracted audit companies. No main issues were identified during the spot checks. In addition, the project has been audited 4 times (i.e. 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020) and only 22 identified irregularities have occurred of which only 2 rated as high¹¹ and 15 rated as medium¹². In 2018 a single high rating was given in relation to Insufficient competitive procurement procedures (i.e. IP should comply with its clauses of RFQ documents and IP should ensure that all the responsible officers of procurement committee be available in the original bid opening

¹¹ Prompt action is required to ensure that UNDP is not exposed to high risks, i.e. failure to take action could result in major negative consequences and issues.

¹² Action is required to ensure that UNDP is not exposed to risks that are considered moderate. Failure to take action could contribute to negative consequences for UNDP.

date) and in 2019 a high rating was given in relation to understatement and overstatement of opening balance of assets in 2019 (i.e. The IP should ensure that closing balance of assets are correctly carried forward in the next period; In case of any deviation, it should be properly justified and documented; and the IP should establish a practice of periodical reconciliation of project assets and also get the asset list confirmed by UNDP on timely manner specially for those assets which are directly procured by UNDP so that the asset list is correct and complete). All of the irregularities identified, during the project audits were addressed as part of UNDP's management response in the time immediately following the audits. In this sense the project has had a solid and consistent fund management throughout the project duration.

Project Assets

93. The Statement of Assets and Equipment, as per 30 June 2021 provided by the project team has, as mentioned above, an overall purchase value of LAK 8,327,814,580 (USD 776,627 - UNDP Dec 2021 exchange rate 1USD/10781 Kip).

94. The funds have been utilized to purchase equipment and services as part of the project's activities and support to the project established structures. The equipment purchased by the project included cars, motorcycles, tok-toks, mountain bikes, computer equipment, video conference equipment, air conditioners, Sewing machines, Mobile phones, and Buildings (ranger stations and village halls). The breakdown of the equipment and supplies purchased and transferred to the project partners showed that a majority of the funding were delivered to the Eld's Deer National Sancturay site with 31.4 % being provided to the DDF Center and 40.4 % to the village communities within the Eld's Deer National Sancturay. Comparatively only minor investments were provided to the three remaining project sites Dong Phou Vieng, Phou Xang He and Se Ta Nouan – Phou Nak among other because few village activities were undertaken in these areas. Support towards the different DAFOs accounted for approximately 7.0 % of the overall cost.

95. With regard to the purchase equipment etc. it is recommended that the project (i.e. UNDP) ensure, to the extent possible that via its handover protocols ensures that the entities which has received equipment under the project are also the ones who are to maintain said equipment following the operational and financial closure of the project (Recommendation).

Project Co-financing

96. The co-financing to the project has been provided by three different entities, the Lao PDR Government, UNDP and ADB. A fourth planned co-financier, WWF, dropped out as the planned "Eld's Deer Conservation Project Phase III did not materialize as anticipated. Table 10 presents the Co-financing received at the time of the TE, which totals USD 44,187,424, which is little more than half of the planned co-financing contribution. The main reason for the discrepancy is that the ADB loan project has been slow in its implementation and the project period has been extended until 2023. At the time of the TE only USD 23,330,000 of the planned USD 60 million loan had been delivered. In addition, the loan itself has decreased from USD 60 million to USD 55.18 million due to exchange rate depreciation.

97. In contrast the USD 2,787,100 grant related to the *Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Project in Lao PDR* project increased to USD 8,830,843 in part due to a project extension into 2019.

98. Regarding the co-financing support from the ADB it should be noted that there is a limited area of contact between the ADB contribution and the areas of activities under the SAFE Ecosystems project, where the closest link are with *Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Project in Lao PDR* project, when looking at the concept of corridors. For the *Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) East-West Economic Corridor Agriculture Infrastructure Sector* Project, although implemented in Savannakhet it focuses on irrigation, at village level and road infrastructure, the latter to facilitate access to markets, and thus has vague overlap with the SAFE Ecosystems project.

99. Of the planned USD 14,200,000 of Government co-financing USD 10,700,815 had been provided at the time of the TE, 5,338,665 in investments mobilized and 5,362,150 in recurrent expenditures. While the Government co-financing at the time of the TE fell short by 25%, it should be noted that a substantial increase in co-financing commitment for the project occurred between the project's inclusion into the GEF work program and time of CEO endorsement. In the project's PIF the Government co-financing was listed as USD

2,912,662 and the project has thus provided a little over three and a half times the commitment listed in the project PIF. With regard to the Government co-financing it should also be mentioned that commitment followed DFRM as it moved from MONRE to MAF. However, the government handover protocol shows that none of the government financed project managed/overseen by DFRM at the time of the handover impacted the Savannakhet province let alone the five project districts, making it a bit of a mystery as to how the committed co-financing were to materialize.

100. With regard to the tracking of the co-financing commitments as well as new investments during the project period the PMO has not actively tracked such data and had to scramble to obtain the relevant data from the co-financiers etc. in connection with the Terminal Evaluation. It would have been prudent if the project had collected this information on a regular basis for instance in connection with the annual PIR or as a minimum prior to the Mid-term Review and the Terminal Evaluation (Recommendation).

101. Regardless, it should be noted that through UNDP/PMO efforts to collect the project's co-financing data six non ProDoc identified co-financing contributions in form of World Bank loans which also could be seen as co-financing contributions to the SAFE Ecosystems Project. Although limited in funding (i.e. USD 401,645) these should rightfully be mentioned.. At the time of TE draft report submission the acquired co-financing data is presented in table 10

Table 11: Obtained co-financing at the time of the Terminal Evaluation (per entity)

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Investment Mobilized/ Recurrent expenditures	Amount (\$) ¹³
Recipient Government	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry	Public investment	Investment Mobilized	5,338,665
Recipient Government	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	5,362,150
Donor Agency	Asian Development Bank (G0242)	Grants	Investment Mobilized	8,830,843
Donor Agency	Asian Development Bank (L3024)	Loans	Investment Mobilized	23,330,000
GEF Agency	UNDP	Grants	Investment Mobilized	386,451
GEF Agency	UNDP	Grants	Investment Mobilized	939,315
Total Co-financing				44,187,424

3.2.4 Monitoring and evaluation

M&E design at entry

M&E design at entry is rated as:	Moderately Satisfactory
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102. The M&E plan and budget was developed using the, then, standard UNDP template for GEF projects. The M&E budget was USD 130,000 which is approximately 1.2 % of the overall GEF contribution which is lower than the current allowed 2% for projects exceeding USD 10 million. The M&E plan outlined in the ProDoc follows the UNDP template, but was rudimentary in nature. As noted in the previous section 3.1.2 parts of the project's indicators are in some instances unclear and could have been better designed to capture the improved capacity and use of project developed results. For other, although few indicators, it is questionable as to whether they are achievable. The screening of the social and environmental risks was somewhat sporadic and not focused, thus falling to acknowledge key screening questions. Part of this is evident from the revised social and environmental screening procedures undertaken by the project in 2020. Overall, a range of monitoring relevant documentation were prepared as part of the project documentation 1) Project Risks, including Social and Environmental Risks, 2) Project Tracking Tools (*BD, LD, and SFM*), 3) Capacity Development Scorecard, and 4) the Project's Results Framework. With regard to the Results Framework, in addition to identified SMART compliance issues for some of the project indicators it should also be mentioned that the Results Framework did not contain any project mid-term targets and some of the indicators' baseline related information are unexplained in the ProDoc.

¹³ The accumulative Co-financing contribution provided by the time of the Terminal Evaluation (i.e. third quarter 2021)

M&E Implementation

M&E implementation is rated as:	Satisfactory
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103. The project has a strong monitoring set up centered around frequent communications between the PMO and activity implementors and has relied on frequent local level monitoring and activity support missions. The project has a strong reporting tradition which includes activity and consultancy reporting as well as quarterly and annual progress reporting (including the annual PIR). Although these are UNDP/GEF requirements the level of detail in the reporting is good. In supporting its work the project developed a Monitoring, reporting and evaluation plan in November 2017 which outlined the Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation Milestones, the responsible parties among other.

104. UNDP/GEF rules and regulations related to M&E has been observed including the reporting on Project Risks, Tracking Tools and the Results Framework. However, although the Tracking Tools and the Results Framework reporting were undertaken, it appears that they have not been used as project monitoring tools per se. Meaning it was not used in a circular way to regularly review *what is our project targets -> are we on track to reach the targets -> and if not how do we ensure that we will meet the set targets*. This particularly seems to be the case related to the projects financial indicators as well as tracking the co-financing contributions from the project's co-financing partners.

105. Another indication supporting that the Results Framework has not been used as a monitoring tool can be seen from the fact that the project has some indicators that seems to have unrealistic end-of-project indicator targets. (Example: 193,684 ha. of HC VF designated by the end of the project). In spite of the fact that for instance this end-of-project target is unobtainable within the project realities, the project did not take steps to correct or address this. The TE Team recognizes that it is notoriously difficult to make changes to the project indicators, as well as being ill advised, following project approval. However, the project could, as an example, have changed for instance the sub-indicator targets under indicator 12 from being a measure of area in ha to actually measure the indicator listed (i.e. Protected Areas gazetted and fully operational) hence have a project baseline of Eld's Deer National Sanctuary **not** established and an end of project target being Eld's Deer National Sanctuary established and fully operational. As most of the "problematic" indicators cannot easily be "repaired" via a word change, the project should at least have reflected project concerns towards the underlying inconsistencies and/or interpretation issues in, for instance, the project's PIR. In fact, the problems with the project indicators should have been included already in the project's inception report. The project should also have engaged in discussions with the UNDP Regional Bureau, and potentially even UNDP Headquarters, on how to approach the problems in the Results Framework, as well as documented the corporate decisions deriving from said discussions. Finally, the results of said decisions (where reformulation of the indicators were not possible) should have been included in the Results Framework potentially as footnotes, to guide the project implementation as well as provide direction for future project reviewers including those involved in the Mid-term Review and Terminal Evaluation.

Overall assessment of M&E

Overall quality of M&E is rated as:	Satisfactory
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106. The overall rating of the quality of the project monitoring and evaluation is rated as satisfactory. In spite of a weak M&E design particularly with regard to the project's monitoring tools, the project has worked well to ensure a strong project implementation. The project ability to pick up speed following the initial complications related to the handover of the project from MONRE to MAF is a testament to the project's PMO ability to adapt and adjust. Further examples of the project's ability to engage in adaptive management has been provided in section 3.2.1. And although there are noticeable shortcomings in the effective use of the monitoring tools the PMO has had a solid monitoring of the project at the activity level.

3.2.5 Project implementation and execution

UNDP Implementation oversight

Quality of UNDP implementation/oversight is rated as:	Satisfactory
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107. UNDP has provided reliable and persistent oversight and implementation assistance to the project and have been active in trouble shooting and in ensuring new adaptive management approaches. This includes UNDP engagement in changing the project's fund transfer mechanism from going through the Treasury and to enable direct payment to the project districts (please see section 3.2.1 Adaptive Management). UNDP has also been instrumental in moving along the Government discussions on debt-for-nature swap and idea which originated from the SAFE Ecosystems project. Other examples of adaptive management and active response approaches can be seen in UNDP's expedited management corrections to Audit findings, and the follow up to the Mid-term Review recommendations.

108. Although UNDP's engagement in the project has been satisfactory, its procurement procedures have at times caused delays in implementation and the project has had to wait for the needed checks and balances being seen to. While rules and procedures at times slow things down it can also be argued that the UNDP processes are well known and therefore it is prudent to start the needed procurement processes well in advance of when inputs are needed on-the-ground. Another issue which was identified during the TE was an important incident of poor-quality work of a contractor responsible for building two village halls. An incident which stresses the importance of ensuring quality control before, during and after for instance construction work is engaged in. The mentioned incident could not have been foreseen, but closer inspection during construction could have been done etc. The involved company has now been blacklisted by UNDP.

109. Also, oversight of the project risk management, including the management of the environmental and social risks identified through the UNDP SESP could have been much more efficient. As noted the project's risk reporting appears to have been rather automated and UNDP should/could have rectified this if full attention had been paid. Fortunately, the project does not have any critical risks and none of the project risks have come to fruition. In addition, UNDP has paid ample attention to the project implementation and address upcoming issues as mentioned above including addressing the Mid-term Review recommendations (Please see Annex 7 for the UNDP Management Response to the MTR).

Implementing Partner execution

Quality of Implementing Partner execution is rated as:	Satisfactory
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110. DOF as the project's implementing partner has taken an active role in the project implementation, particularly through its provincial and district offices (i.e. PAFO and DAFOs), which has been highly engaged in active implementation as well as coordination between government entities and provincial and district stakeholders. DOF has also been instrumental in facilitating the discussions related to the fund transfer mechanism and for instance the work on the debt-for-nature swap.

111. The established PMO has been supporting the engagement of DOF where the PMO and all technical staff has ensured a solid project execution. The reporting and consultancy control has already been mentioned under the M&E Implementation section above, as has the frequent project missions to provide implementation support to project stakeholders.

112. The Implementing Partner (PMO) has been very instrumental in facilitating an adaptive management within the project. This included the projects engagement in for instance:

- Funds transfer mechanism,
- Re-forestation approaches,
- Simplifying community agreements,
- DSS establishment, and
- Promoting debt-for-nature swap etc.

113. Please see section 3.2.1 Adaptive Management for further details.

Overall implementation execution

Overall quality of implementation/execution is rated as:

Satisfactory

114. The overall quality of the implementation and execution is rated as satisfactory. UNDP and the implementing partner have ensured that the project interventions have been in line with the ProDoc and by and large been on target. UNDP has brought its country and regional experience in the area of nature conservation, protected area management and livelihood development at local level to bear in its oversight and execution support to the project. The implementing partner have ensured close collaboration with project partners and the project's steering committee at national, provincial and local levels has been important structures for guiding the project at all levels.

3.2.6 Risk management

115. The project kept a risk log and an issues log which was reported on every quarter and critical risk management was reported on as part of the annual PIR. However, it should be noted that the risks, including the risks listed in the original SESP, were rather weak and sporadic and it seems clear that the project formulators had not undertaken a comprehensive and in-depth risk review. They therefore did not help shaping the risk management approaches of the planned activities and outputs. Also management responses to the identified risks were wanting. The revision of the SESP in 2020 changed, in part, this. However, it is interesting to note that none of the SESP risks identified in the two SESP revisions (i.e. 2018-2020) found its way into the quarterly risk reporting. In a similar way did the project developed Ethnic Group Plan and the Gender Analysis and Action Plan did not spark any changes to the risk or issues logs, nor did the issues raised in the Mid-term Review. Perhaps because management responses related to the MTR were dealt with in a separate set of documentation.

116. The project has followed the proscribed procedures for risk management and has in most instances undertaken appropriate risk management and address emerging issues via practical and effective adaptive management approaches. That said the risk reporting, which is part of risk management, has not been at par with the project's actual engagements. For instance, delivery of project co-financing has not been actively monitored. Also the project omitted to include the revised social environment screening procedure risks into its quarterly risk monitoring documentation. While this as such is not a critical issue it does nonetheless highlight a lack of attention. A lack of attention which in future UNDP UNDP/GEF projects should be avoided (recommendation)

117. Although the risk and issues reporting of the project is lacking there is reason to believe that risk and issues management has been actively engaged in by the project, through its monitoring work and collaboration with the local stakeholders including villagers. As part of this concerns were addressed and engaged in up front ensuring that they did not grow into actual issues. Also the project appears to have been implemented in a stable "environment" where issues/risks did not mature or evolve, and they could therefore be managed through ongoing interventions. An exception to this has been the Covid-19 Pandemic which was not foreseen by the project originally and the project had to adjust in accordance. And while the project has been proactive in addressing and managing the effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic this situation also cannot be seen in the project's risk and issues logs. That said such issues including the Covid-19 Pandemic, the change of Implementing Partner from MONRE to MAF and the MTR have been actively addressed including via Project Board discussions and direction.

3.3 Project result and impact

3.3.1 Progress towards objective and expected outcomes.

Objective: To demonstrate sustainable land and forest management in the forested landscape of Savannakhet Province in order to secure the critical wildlife habitats, conserve biodiversity and maintain a continuous flow of multiple services including quality water provision and flood prevention

Achievement rating:

Moderately Satisfactory

118. The achievement of the project objective is rated as **Moderately Satisfactory**. The project objective has remained highly relevant and there has been a consistent ownership for the project and its objective throughout the project duration. Stakeholder engagement particularly at local level has been strong as has the working relationship between the GEF agency (UNDP) and the Implementing Partner and other national (provincial and local) entities. This has resulted in improved protected area management, a build capacity of key government institutions at provincial and district levels and an active engagement of local beneficiaries, who has ensured improved sustainable agriculture and forest management. The project has four objective indicators and the indicator review, and rating, are presented in the text below.

Table 12: Project's Objective indicators their baseline and end-of-project targets, their status at the time of the Terminal Evaluation and the TE provided rating of target achievement¹⁴.

Indicator	Baseline	End of project target	Status at TE	TE assessment
	2016	May 2022	Dec. 2021	
Indicator 1: Improved Forest management measured by an increase in total area under Sustainable Land Management <i>(as reported in LD PMAT, Part I)</i>	0 ha.	698,746 ha.	271,279 ha	Moderately Unsatisfactory
Indicator 2: Improved management effectiveness of protected areas covering at least 583,672 ha. <i>(as measured in the GEF BD1 Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool – METT):</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dong Phou Vieng Conservation Forest • Phou Xang He Conservation Forest • Se Ta Nouan – Phou Nak Protection Forest • Ong Mang Conservation Forest (proposed) 	METT Scores: 39 39 33 47	METT Scores: 65 65 60 74	METT Scores: 53 51 47 66	Moderately Satisfactory
Indicator 3: Capacity to ensure compliance and enforcement of sustainable forest and land management, and mainstreaming of forest connectivity into the main production sectors in Savannakhet Province <i>(as measured by scores in the UNDP-GEF Capacity Development Scorecard)</i>	Capacity Score: 16.5	Capacity Score by end of project: 38	Capacity Score: 33.5	Moderately Satisfactory

¹⁴ The rating used follows the UNDP/GEF 6-point rating scale i.e. 6 = Highly Satisfactory (HS), 5 = Satisfactory (S), 4 = Moderately Satisfactory (MS), 3 = Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU), 2 = Unsatisfactory (U), 1 = Highly Unsatisfactory (HU), and Unable to Assess (UA).

Indicator 4: Number of direct beneficiaries disintegrated by gender	0	8,835 (Male: 5,301; Female: 3,534)	9,134 (Male: 6675; Female:2459)	Satisfactory
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119. **Indicator 1:** Generally speaking the indicator highlights some underlying issues which opens up for questions as to how and what in fact is to be reviewed. The full indicator description is “*Improved Forest management measured by an increase in total area under Sustainable Land Management*” and it has an end-of-project target of 698,746 ha. However, the 698,746 ha is not explained in the project documentation, and the figure only occurs in the project’s Results Framework, and as an explanatory text for project support towards the Aichi target number 7. Based on review, the TE Team assumes that the 698,746 ha is the total area of the five districts, when the district portions of Dong Phou Vieng, Phou Xang He and Se Ta Nouan – Phou Nak (270,556 ha) has been deducted. Although this assumption cannot account for 50,000 ha it is in the view of the TE Team a reasonable assumption in lack of better explanations.

120. Having “established” from where the 698,746 ha derives, the attention can be placed on the specific indicator description which notes that “*Improved Forest management ...*”. The issue is that not all of the mentioned 698,746 ha is forest lands, as the five districts also have agricultural lands, build up areas, lakes and rivers etc. (*app. 34% of the districts’ territories are not forested*). Furthermore, when looking at the land use data forested areas within the five districts, outside Dong Phou Vieng, Phou Xang He and Se Ta Nouan – Phou Nak it amounts to approximately 61 % of the total land area. Hence, the indicator should only have an end-of-project target of 426,235 ha.

121. Further complicating the matter is it that the project is only designed to improved forest management measured in 1) Eld’s Deer National Sanctuary, 2) the established HCVF, 3) the reforestation areas and 4) the village forest and agricultural areas. The project was not intended to work elsewhere (i.e., in the productive landscape). This even though it has as a task to develop sustainable forest and agricultural guidelines, but the ProDoc does not provide for any substantial narrative for how an active engagement with forest and agricultural stakeholders for implementing these guidelines are envisaged.

122. Thus, based on above, the projects contribution towards the achievement of this indicator would be the areas encompassed by the Eld’s Deer National Sanctuary and the established HCVF site, totaling an area of 136,525 ha. In addition to this it could be argued that having access to the Spatial DSS decision-makers can better manage the decision making processes and avoid activities in ecological sensitive areas including protection forest and conservation forests etc. If this is taken into account the area covered would increase. However, in the view of the TE Team spatial planning does not constitute “*improved forest management*” per se and because of this it is deemed that the project has, by the time of the TE managed to insure such management in 136,525 ha. As such the indicator appears to be inappropriate as the project is not designed to engage in the broader production landscapes and because of this the set end-of-project target seems to be unrealistic. Nonetheless, while unrealistic the project has not been able to obtain its planned target of 231,553 ha which is in fact a combination of the sub-indicators under indicator 12 (i.e. 168,614 ha and 62,939 ha)¹⁵. Hence the achievement of the project indicator is assessed as being **Moderately Unsatisfactory**

123. **Indicator 2:** To start off with, it should be noted that the indicator specifically mentions that at least 583,672 ha will be affected via improved management effectiveness of protected areas. However, the actual protected area covered is 542,198 ha. The change from the planned ProDoc target can in part be explained in that the reported areas (based on improved measurements) for Phou Xang He and Xetanouane-Phouank were adjusted resulting in an increase for Phou Xang He of 5,136 ha and a decrease of Xetanouane-Phouank of area 8,441 ha. However, the most contributing factor by far was that the gazetted area for the Eld’s Deer National Sanctuary was 130,745 hectares, 22% less than the proposed 168,614 ha.

124. When disregarding the hectareage issue and focusing on the main essence of the indicator, which is the improved management effectiveness of the protected areas they at first glance does not seem to have met its target as the combined METT scores are 17.8% below the end-of-project target. However, there are good indications that the initial baseline figures were inflated, and a (although internal) consultant review suggested that the baseline scores for Ong Mang Sanctuary, Dong Phou Vieng, Phou Xang He and Xetanouane-Phouank

¹⁵ The Eld’s Deer Sanctuary and the proposed established High Conservation Forests. The 62,939 ha is the adjusted figure based on the TE Teams argumentation. Please see discussion under indicator 12.

should be adjusted to 46, 30, 35 and 20 respectively. If taking these baseline numbers into account while maintaining the suggested percentage increase for the respective end-of-project targets these could also be revised to 72, 50, 58 and 36 respectively.

125. Having this in mind the end of project METT scores for Dong Phou Vieng (53) and Xetanouane-Phouank (47) exceeds the “revised” end of project targets, while the scores for, Phou Xang He (51) and the Eld’s Deer National Sanctuary (66) still remains below with 8.9% and 12.6% respectively.

126. With this in mind it is the opinion of the TE Team that the project has been actively engaged in increasing the management effectiveness of the protected areas and that the project also has results to show for it, but the Team also believes that the project falls short of meeting its planned end-of-project target. This even when taking into account the potential overestimated/inflated MEET scores of the original baseline. Hence the achievement of the project indicator is assessed as being **Moderately Satisfactory**.

127. **Indicator 3:** When discussing the Capacity Development Scorecard results it should be noted that the project has actually managed to increase the score with a fraction over 100%, which is a commendable effort which has resulted in distinct and long-term impacts. However, with a Capacity Development Scorecard score of 33.5 the project currently falls short of its stated end-of-project target score of 38 with approximately 11.8%. Hence the achievement of the project indicator is assessed as being **Moderately Satisfactory**.

128. With regard to the Capacity Development Scorecard it should be noted that the score determination was not obtained via a stakeholder workshop where representatives from the different entities were present, and they together identified the individual scores for the individual scorecard indicators. Instead the scores were obtained and calculated by the project experts and in essence build through a subset of individual and independent inputs where involved stakeholder provided independent inputs without influence from outside. While both mentioned approaches are common and has advantages and disadvantages the direct engagement via for instance workshops (face-to-face or virtual) has the added benefits of establish a group consensus and hereby create 1) ownership over the exercise and the results and 2) understanding of the overall process toward targets and where additional actions are needed. Furthermore, such workshops also have educational and knowledge sharing aspects which, along with the other points mentioned do not occur through a desk exercise. At least not to the same extent. (Recommendation) It should be noted a similar approach to that of the Capacity Development Scorecard exercise was used for the collection of METT score data.

129. **Indicator 4:** The project has had a large outreach and involved a larger subset of local beneficiaries particularly at village level. The project has undertaken more than 50 larger scale trainings as well as a sub-set of smaller trainings and hands-on capacity building provided by the PMOs technical staff. The trainings included capacity building on for instance 1) Integrated Spatial Planning and Strategic Environment Assessment development, 2) Protected area management, 3) Sustainable ecotourism development, 4) Training on the use of the spatial DSS, 5) Livestock raising (goats, chickens and pigs), as well as 6) Agriculture extension training (i.e. SRI rice cultivation, soil preparation), 7) Nursery establishment and maintenance, 8) GIS and SMART reporting for PA management and 9) ecotourism and hospitality.

130. Overall the project has actively engaged 9,134 direct beneficiaries of which 26.9% were women. The involvement of women is lower that the project pursued engagement number of at least 30%. The issue of low women involvement in trainings and project activities has, as mentioned in Section 3.1.4, been recognized by the project early on and it has tried to address the issue by adhering to a 30% rule (i.e. at least 30% of participants should be women where obtainable).

131. In this connection, it should however be noted that parts of the engagement of local stakeholders also includes the village related activities including the engagement of villagers in the project’s ranger and reforestation activities which involved a larger subset of villagers. It should also be mentioned that village work also includes a sort of “teach yourselves” aspect where villagers will support other villagers in engaging them in for instance rice production, goat rearing and dressmaking. These spring-off from the initial project capacity building is not included in the project’s beneficiary calculations. Following this, the achievement of the project indicator is assessed as being **Satisfactory**.

Component 1: Enabling policy environment and increased compliance and enforcement capacities for sustainable land and forest management across landscapes including protected areas

Achievement rating:	Satisfactory
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132. The achievement of the project component 1 is rated as **Satisfactory**. The focus of the indicators remained relevant, and the projects implementation of underlying activities has resulted in the establishment of a spatial Decision Support System which is actively being used. Stakeholders has been capacitated and enabled to integrate environment and conservation concerns into the provincial and district planning processes particularly in the area of land use planning. The project has seven component indicators where two of these indicators consists of two or more sub-indicators. The indicator review and rating are presented the text below.

Table 13: Project's Component 1 indicators their baseline and end-of-project targets, their status at the time of the Terminal Evaluation and the TE provided rating of target achievement¹⁶.

Indicator	Baseline	End of project target	Status at TE	TE assessment
	2016	May 2022	Dec. 2021	
Indicator 5: Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) guiding resource management and conservation decision-making in Savannakhet Province	0 SEAs have been carried out in Savannakhet Province	1 SEA covering the 5 targeted districts completed by end of year 1	5 Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) completed.	Satisfactory
Indicator 6: Improved land use planning and management reduces degradation over 1,060,525 hectares of forest landscapes in Savannakhet Province, leading to unabated provision of ecosystem services such as water supply (quality), flood prevention and biodiversity conservation	0 district land use plans based on detailed ecological information or integrated into development and investment decision processes	5 District-level Integrated Spatial Plans (ISPs) strengthened with data from Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and integrated with District Socio-Economic Development Plans (SEDPs) by end of year 2	5 Integrated Spatial Plans (ISP) completed	Satisfactory
	No zoning or planning processes exist at the landscape level for Dry Dipterocarp Forests	Zoning Plan for the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Landscape approved and guiding management decisions by end of year 4	Partial zoning plan completed	Moderate Satisfactory
Indicator 7: Information management systems to guide land and resource use planning in Savannakhet Province	Information on natural resources and conservation priorities is incomplete and highly dispersed	Decision Support System in place and operating by end of year 2	Decision Support System in place and operating	Highly Satisfactory
Indicator 8: Inter-institutional and multi-sectoral coordinating bodies overseeing resource management activities in Savannakhet Province to ensure compliance with SEAs, ILUMPs and SEDPs	No formal coordinating mechanisms exist for stakeholders involved in resource management and conservation	Multi-sectoral stakeholder committees established and meeting regularly at each of the 5 districts by end of year 1	Multi-sectoral stakeholder committees established and meeting regularly	Satisfactory
Indicator 9: Public-private partnerships for sustainable land and	Existing public-private partnerships are	Responsible Business Forum established and meeting regularly at the	Responsible Business Forums held	Satisfactory

¹⁶ The rating used follows the UNDP/GEF 6-point rating scale i.e. 6 = Highly Satisfactory (HS), 5 = Satisfactory (S), 4 = Moderately Satisfactory (MS), 3 = Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU), 2 = Unsatisfactory (U), 1 = Highly Unsatisfactory (HU) and Unable to Assess (UA).

forest management in Savannakhet Province	ad-hoc mechanisms between individual companies and institutions	provincial level by end of year 1		
Indicator 10: Policy and regulatory frameworks support integrated approaches to resource management and conservation through following measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decree on Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) & develop targeted regulations on ISPs Jurisdictional issues and coordination for enforcement of wildlife and forest protection laws Regulations on PA finance and functioning of protected areas within wider landscapes Nationally-defined HCVF categories and integration of HCVFs into forest policies and regulations and PA management plans 	Existing policy and regulatory frameworks have significant gaps that constrain effective PA management and the mainstreaming of BD, SFM and SLM approaches into provincial and district level planning and financing processes and resource management decisions	By end of year 2 SEA Decree finalized and enacted by and ISP regulations approved	The SEA decree enacted	Satisfactory
		By end of year 3 Resolve jurisdictional issues and coordination relating to enforcement of wildlife and forest protection laws	Jurisdictional and co-ordinational issues relating to enforcement of wildlife and forest protection laws were resolved.	Satisfactory
		By end of year 3 2015 Decree on PAs revised to authorize PA financing mechanisms and landscape-level coordination	The 2015 PA Decree is still undergoing review and revision.	Moderately Satisfactory
		By end of year 3 Adoption of HCVF definitions; HCVF restrictions incorporated into policies, regulations and management plans	Provincial rules and regulations adopted for approved HCVF site only.	Satisfactory
Indicator 11: Consolidated technical guidance on the design and management of plantation forestry and agriculture in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest landscape improve the sustainability of such operations and reduce their impacts on the surrounding landscape	General guidelines for plantation forestry and agriculture exist in Lao PDR, but are not specifically tailored to the ecological conditions of Dry Dipterocarp Forest landscapes	Guidelines on Sustainable Plantation Forestry and Agriculture developed by the end of year 3	Guidelines on sustainable plantation forestry developed.	Satisfactory

133. **Indicator 5:** It should be noted that the ProDoc specified that a single SEA covering the five districts was to be prepared – which provides for a good rationale as the SEA would then review to overall impact of the integrated spatial planning activities of the five districts ensuring the environmental soundness of the combined plans, hereby avoiding the pitfalls of a piecemeal approach. Regardless the project opted for doing individual district SEAs covering the districts respective ISPs. Contrary to the approach indicated by the indicator the SEAs were not prepared prior to the ISPs but as they should after. Hence, the indicated target date (i.e. by end of year 1) was not observed/achieved. The SEAs were finalized in February 2019 following an assignment start in 2018 after the finalizations of the ISPs (May 2018).

134. With regard to the indicator itself “*Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) guiding resource management and conservation decision-making in Savannakhet Province*” it is embrative and provides for forward motion i.e. the SEA is being actively used by relevant stakeholders in decision-making. However, the indicator baseline and target does not capture this forward momentum as it only registers whether the SEA

has been prepared or not. This is a shortcoming that is common for several of the project's indicators which were also noticed by the Mid-term Review, which recommended that the project reviewed its indicator set to ensure that they would support project efforts to become more outcome oriented. While it would have been optimal to have had a progressive indicator target, it is, in the TE Team's opinion, not a major issue as the SEAs as well as the ISPs and the developed Spatial Decision Support System (to be discussed below) have been actively used by a subset of stakeholders. That said it would have been good for the project to actually have collected data on the utilization of the SEAs, ISPs and the DSS – something which could have been part of a Knowledge, Attitude and Practices (KAP) survey. Although a common survey tool for many GEF projects KAP surveys were not included in the project's arsenal of monitoring tools. (Recommendation). Although the indicator is hampered by minor issues the achievement of the project indicator is nonetheless assessed as being **Satisfactory**

135. **Indicator 6:** As mentioned in section 3.1.2 the indicator is not specific which makes it difficult to interpret. The ProDoc identifies the 1,060,525 ha as being the entire landscapes of the 5 targeted districts (916,323 ha) as well as areas of official protected areas that extend beyond the district boundaries (144,202 ha). Therefore, to have the indicator claim that the listed 1,060,525 ha is related to the forest landscape only has to be deemed incorrect. According to the 2019 land cover data approximately 608,260 ha of land that falls within the five districts are forested.

136. The second issue with the indicator is that it introduces the aspect of management which the indicator target does not support, and it is an addition, in the view of the TE Team, which only provides for a non-needed complexity of the indicator. If the management aspect is to be tracked and measured (as it actually is) then it is best done via a separate indicator. For the current indicator it would be sufficient to look at whether improved land use planning affects planning decisions which reduces degradation of natural and production landscapes in the project districts.

137. The indicator in question has two associated end of project targets 1) *5 District-level Integrated Spatial Plans (ISPs) strengthened with data from Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and integrated with District Socio-Economic Development Plans (SEDPs) by end of year 2* and 2) *Zoning Plan for the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Landscape approved and guiding management decisions by end of year 4*. Aside from highlighting an incorrect relationship between the ISPs and SEAs it also states that the ISPs will be integrated into the SEDPs (by 2018). However, in the ProDoc it is clarified that the next phase of the district SEDPs only starts in 2021, making the listed end-of-project target unrealistic. Regardless, the ISPs were prepared by May 2018 and as noted above they underwent a SEA process. As also noted above both the ISPs, SEAs and the DSS have been actively used by relevant stakeholders in their work related to planning and review of investment plans within the districts. And while the ISPs and their proposed areas of engagements has so far not been included in the SEDP process they have been taken under consideration by district authorities since their approval. Hence the achievement of the project sub-indicator is assessed as being **Satisfactory**

138. With regard to the sub-indicator 2 an overall zoning plan for the Dry Dipterocarp Forest landscape has not been developed. However, the developed PA management plans particularly that for the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary, the village forest management plans (which all are located within the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary) and the established HCVF site could together be seen as a (non-combined) zoning plan. Furthermore the ISPs also include additional DDF, however these areas are not clearly defined and thus would be difficult to include in an overall zoning plan unless additional mapping and identification work is undertaken. Furthermore, each district is responsible for its territory and are therefore only making plans etc. for its own area. Currently, based on the admin and planning structure in the Lao PDR there is not a tradition for overall planning involving a multitude of districts even for protected areas, conservation forests and the like which often consists of a composite of territories from different districts. These areas are being managed on a piecemeal basis by the individual DAFOs without any consolidated/joint approach. Thus the project developed PA management plans will, at least until the revision of the 2015 Protected Areas Decree has been approved, be implemented by an array staff from the different DAFOs. The situation is somewhat different for the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary as it is a National Protected Area. Going back to the indicator at hand creating an overall DDF zoning plan for the five districts could in principle be done by combining the individual ISPs, PA management plans etc. but it would only create an add-on "on the shelf plan" as the districts would, as mentioned, in essence only focus on their own territory. As such the sub-indicator while sounding great, fails to take into account the practical admin and planning aspects which exists in Lao PDR. Regardless, even though the project does have reasons for not fully pursuing this sub-indicator achievement of the project sub-indicator is assessed as being **Moderate Satisfactory**

139. **Indicator 7:** The development of the Spatial Decision Support System should according to the provided indicator information have been prepared by year 2, however, the work on the system was only initiated in June 2019 and the system “Savannakhet decides” was launched on 19th January 2021. One reason for this was that the project opted for a different approach for the establishment of the DSS. Rather than starting from scratch and develop a new system which among other was relying upon the data collected via the ISP and SEA process (as prescribed by the ProDoc) the project reviewed and identified a partner, which had been involved in spatial decision making systems in Laos for more than a decade. By engaging the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) which is under the University of Bern in developing the DSS system for Savannakhet province the project was able to piggyback on already developed systems and knowledge. As noted in section 3.2.1 above the CDEs engagement in setting up “Savannakhet decides” new setups and adjustments to the existing system were prepared – changes which now have found its way into the greater national system “Lao decides” providing for a valid project contribution to said system. Thus, in spite of not being on target, time wise, the developed DSS is a major achievement of the project which not only benefits the projects five districts but all of the 15 districts in Savannakhet province. And not only that, as noted the project has also provided an important contribution to the existing “Lao Decide”. Because of this the achievement of the project indicator is assessed as being **Highly Satisfactory**.

140. **Indicator 8:** The indicator end-of-project target states that district multi-sectoral stakeholder committees (MSSC) are to be established and meet regularly at each of the 5 districts from year 1. This did not officially happen, as they were officially formed following the signing of a Letter of Agreement (LOA) in June 2018 with the Savannakhet Provincial Department of Planning and Investment (DPI). Under the LOA DPI agreed to establish and organize the district level MSSCs and the provincial level Responsible Business Forum. However, while the LOA provided for a documented relationship with DPI and its engagements with the mentioned organizational structure, DPI in fact did not establish any new structures but relied on already existing setups. For the MSSCs DPI used the existing District investment committees which to the understanding of the TE Team also had been involved in the SEA and ISP processes. Because of this it would be fair to postulate that the MSSCs were in place already at the project start. Following the LOA signing the MSSCs are reflected in the projects progress and PIR reporting, and the project engaged with the committee representatives (through DPI) in capacity building regarding rules and regulations as well as the comprehensive environmental management issues, which should be considered when making district investment decisions. While it has not been possible to triangulate the indications that the MSSCs have been engaged in and guided decision making on sustainable land/forest management issues in the individual Districts, such as closing of district sawmills in 2019 and the endorsement of the HCVF rules and regulations by the district authorities, it seems fair to assume the correctness of this. Hence the achievement of the project indicator is assessed as being **Satisfactory**.

141. **Indicator 9:** The establishment of the responsible Business Forum followed a similar process as that of the Multi-Sectoral Stakeholder Committees, where DPI used an existing set-up for the project’s activities. Contrary to the MSSCs, which in all likelihood were involved in the SEA and ISP processes the responsible Business Forum only started to focus on project related issues following the signing of the above mentioned LOA. The first responsible business forum was held in August 2018 and focused among other on potential investment in ecotourism and corporate social responsibility in the tourism service sector. Another forum was held in September 2019 and a business and cultural fair, “Savannakhet Fun Fest” was held in December 2020 in Kaysone provided for opportunity to show case both the existing businesses in the province as well as potential business opportunities to the public. And while not strictly via DPI involvement a Eld’s Deer (Ong Mang) Ecotourism Investment Opportunity webinar was held in September 2021 aimed at promoting the ecotourism site and creating awareness to potential investors to engage in the management of the site. As such the TE Team believes that the project has met its obligations in a reasonable manner and hence the achievement of the project indicator is assessed as being **Satisfactory**.

142. **Indicator 10:** This indicator has four underlying sub-indicators targets being 1) *By end of year 2 - SEA Decree finalized and enacted by and ISP regulations approved;* 2) *By end of year 3 - Resolve jurisdictional issues and coordination relating to enforcement of wildlife and forest protection laws;* 3) *By end of year 3 - 2015 Decree on PAs revised to authorize PA financing mechanisms and landscape-level coordination;* and 4) *By end of year 3 - Adoption of HCVF definitions; HCVF restrictions incorporated into policies, regulations and management plans.* For most of these sub-targets the work was undertaken via the project’s co-financing contribution, aside from sub-indicator 2 and 4, where the project was the main driving force for parts of the latter sub-indicator. With regard to the SEA decree Department of Environmental Quality Protection (DEQP)

under MONRE provided the project with the SEA Decree and SEA guidelines in September 2016 and MONRE gazetted the 'Decision on Strategic Environmental Assessment' in March 2017. With the gazettment of the SEA Decree the achievement of the project sub-indicator is assessed as being **Satisfactory**.

143. As for the jurisdictional issues and coordination relating to enforcement of wildlife and forest protection laws the 2017 PIR reports that the identified challenge of fragmented implementation and enforcement of polices and regulations related to forest, wildlife and protected areas, caused by the different related mandates of MAF and MONRE, were resolved by April 2017 with the Government of Lao PDR issuing Decree No. 99 which mandates that all issues related to Protected Areas, Forest protection and management. Following the decree, wildlife protection and management would hence forward fall under the MAF exclusively. With the issuing of the Decree No. 99 the achievement of the project sub-indicator is assessed as being **Satisfactory**.

144. The work on revising the PA Decree is currently ongoing supported by the World Bank LENS2 project. While this work is not facilitated by the project, the project is actively engaged in the process as the project (and its experts) are engaged in the formed working group which is assisting the Lao PDR Government in drafting the revised PA Decree. In addition, several of the consultants used by the SAFE Ecosystem project was recommended to the LENS2 project are now involved in the PA Decree drafting process – providing for an important link between the SAFE Ecosystem project and the decree drafting. The latest draft was circulated and discussed between involved parties on 20 December 2021. While there is an ongoing process it is not expected that the revised PA Decree will have been issued by the end-of-the project (although it most likely will be done at some point within 2022) the achievement of the project sub-indicator is assessed as being **Moderately Satisfactory**

145. With regard to the fourth sub-indicator related to the HCVF, parts of this work were undertaken by DOF on its own accord. The technical definitions of HCVF were at the time of the project implementation already including in the national legislation and during 2018 DOF were already in the process of reviewing Lao PDR legislation, regulations and policies, and because of this the project hired legal expert did not engage in a similar review. The project did however, in the first part of 2020, engaged with 10 local communities in identifying the boundaries of proposed HCVF areas, as well as creating the management rules and regulations for the identified sites via a participatory stakeholders' approach. The objective of HCVF rules and regulations development as noted in the 2020 third quarter progress report was to strengthen local community capacity and participation in managing the designated sites. The HCVF establishment is further discussed under indicator 12 below. As rules and regulations for all of the project proposed HCVFs have been prepared the end of project target for the sub-indicator has for all intent and purposes met, hence the achievement of the project sub-indicator is assessed as being **Satisfactory**.

146. **Indicator 11:** The guidelines on Sustainable Plantation Forestry and Agriculture were developed as planned by the end of year 3 (June 2019). The guidelines present the mandatory requirements as per national law as well as practices bringing about environmental, social and economic benefits. As such the guideline does not provide in-depth planning advice but are meant as an encouragement for developers of forestry plantation and larger scale agriculture to improve, for instance, their monitoring of their environmental impacts. This indicator to some extent falls short, as it is not impact oriented as it does not seek to capture whether the guidelines are being used by agriculture and forest plantations developers in their investment proposals. Or for those who already have ongoing operations whether they are using the guidelines in their ongoing work. Furthermore, the indicator does not seek to capture whether the DAFOs or the provincial DPI and or the MSSCs are using the guidelines as a reference in their work. While it would have been preferable to have been able to obtain and track such engagements for instance via KAP surveys this was not done. However, with the indicators static end-of-project target the achievement of the indicator has to be assessed as **Satisfactory**.

Component 2: Sustainable Forest Management and Protected Area Expansion in five priority Districts of Savannakhet Province	
Achievement rating:	Satisfactory

147. The achievement of the project component 2 is rated as **Satisfactory**. The focus of the indicators remained relevant, and the projects implementation of underlying activities has resulted in a strong village engagement in local conservation efforts via village forest management plans and the provision of community land certificates. Furthermore an extensive capacity building program has been developed and if managed and packaged appropriately the projects capacity building materials could become a knowledge base for beneficiaries long after the project is finished. The project has six component indicators where three of these indicators consists of two or more sub-indicators. The indicator review and rating are presented the text below.

Table 14: Project's Component 2 indicators their baseline and end-of-project targets, their status at the time of the Terminal Evaluation and the TE provided rating of target achievement¹⁷.

Indicator	Baseline	End of project target	Status at TE	TE assessment
	2016	May 2022	Dec. 2021	
Indicator 12: Area of Savannakhet Province under various forms of protection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Protected Areas gazetted and fully operational • New or existing Protection Forests designated as High Conservation Value Forests (as measured in SFM Tracking Tool) 	0 ha.	By the end of the project: New protected area of 168,614 ha. (Ong Mang NPA)	Ong Mang Sanctuary established (130,745 ha)	Moderately Satisfactory
	0 ha.	By the end of the project: Estimated 193,684 ha. of designated HCVMs	One HCVM site was established (5,780 ha)	Moderately Unsatisfactory
Indicator 13: Restoration of degraded Dry Dipterocarp Forests to counteract on-going and past land degradation (as measured in SFM Tracking Tool)	Approx. 1,000 ha. In the 5 targeted districts have been reforested (mainly with non-native, commercial species)	Restoration of 1,111 ha. Of Dry Dipterocarp Forest with native species by the end of the project	768 ha reforested and 3,020 ha set aside for afforestation through natural regeneration.	Satisfactory
Indicator 14: Capacities of communities located within or adjacent to protected forests to effectively participate in SFM activities	Forest-based communities have limited mechanisms or experience in SFM or community management of forest resources	Community land certificates issued for 16 villages by end of year 1	16 Community land certificates issued	Highly Satisfactory
		Village forestry management plans for 16 villages finalized by end of year 2	16 Village forestry management plans finalized	Highly Satisfactory
Indicator 15: Biodiversity management / ecosystem service provision mainstreamed in forest landscape management in five priority districts resulting in improvements in the status of biodiversity and ecosystem services, indicated by:	73.04	No net decrease	Biodiversity Intactness Index analysis for end-of-project not undertaken	Unable to Assess
	Current populations within Project Area: Eld's Deer 60-80 individuals	Populations by end of project within Project Area: Eld's Deer 60% increase Silvered Leaf Monkey	Populations within Project Area: Eld's Deer 173 individuals (120-193% increase) Silvered Leaf Monkey	Satisfactory

¹⁷ The rating used follows the UNDP/GEF 6-point rating scale i.e. 6 = Highly Satisfactory (HS), 5 = Satisfactory (S), 4 = Moderately Satisfactory (MS), 3 = Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU), 2 = Unsatisfactory (U), 1 = Highly Unsatisfactory (HU) and Unable to Assess (UA).

<p>a) Increase in Biodiversity Intactness Index for Dry Forests</p> <p>b) Populations of species with IUCN Endangered Status</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eld's Deer (<i>Panolia eldii</i>) Silvered Leaf Monkey (<i>Trachypithecus cristatus</i>) Asian Elephant (<i>Elephas maximus</i>) Francois' Langur (<i>Trachypithecus francoisi</i>) Siamese Crocodile (<i>Crocodylus siamensis</i>) <p>c) Maintenance of water quantity in downstream area of Xe Bangxiang River</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baseflows (dry season) # of flooding events 	<p>Silvered Leaf Monkey 70-100 individuals</p> <p>Asian Elephant 32 individuals</p> <p>Francois' Langur 12 individuals</p> <p>Siamese Crocodile 12 individuals</p>	<p>18% increase</p> <p>Asian Elephant 12% increase</p> <p>Francois' Langur 18% increase</p> <p>Siamese Crocodile No net decrease</p>	<p>111 individuals (11-59% increase)</p> <p>Asian Elephant 35-40 individuals (9-25% increase)</p> <p>Francois' Langur 18 individuals (50% increase)</p> <p>Siamese Crocodile Inconclusive data</p>	
	<p>Baseflows: 0.40m</p> <p>One flooding event (142.256m) water level</p>	<p>Baseflows: 1.02m</p> <p>No flooding event</p>	<p>Baseflows: 0.63 m</p> <p>2 additional flooding event (2019 & 2020)</p>	Unable to Assess
Indicator 16: Limited skills and technologies for Protected Area Management	Capacity scorecard baseline: 1	Protected Area management staff have strengthened technical skills and supporting technology for planning, environmental monitoring, enforcement, and PA management by end of year 3 (Capacity scorecard target: 2.5) (NEW TARGET LEVEL APPROVED BY RTA)	Capacity scorecard: 2	Satisfactory
Indicator 17: Environmental education programmes are partially developed and partially delivered	Capacity scorecard baseline: 1	Comprehensive environmental education programmes exist and are being delivered for environmental awareness by year 3 (Capacity scorecard target rating: 3) (NEW TARGET LEVEL APPROVED BY RTA)	Capacity scorecard: 2	Satisfactory

148. **Indicator 12:** This indicator has two Sub-indicator targets being 1) New Protected Areas gazetted and fully operational and 2) New or existing Protection Forests designated as High Conservation Value Forests. With regard to the gazettement of the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary as a National Protected Area (NPA) the project has a long-standing engagement supporting the Government of Lao PDR. Said engagement led to that the provincial level sanctuary, which did not have any legal status within the Lao PDR's legislation was upgraded, via a Prime Minister Decree signed in March 2020, to a NPA under the IUCN category 4. The March 2020 Prime Minister's Decree also ensured an 21,834 ha increase in the territory covered by the Eld's Deer

National Sanctuary from 108,911 ha to 130,745. This increase was however, 37,869 ha less than the end-of-project target of 168,614 ha. Thus, while the establishment of the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary as an NPA is a monumental achievement of the project the 22% decrease away from the planned end-of-project target is a substantial short-fall in one of the project's GEF core indicators. However, as mentioned under section 3.1.1 the area target for the new protected area increased from 50,000 to 168,614 ha between the GEF work program inclusion and the CEO Endorsement, in all likelihood without consultations at provincial and district levels. Also had the indicator been formulated different (i.e. New National Protected Area established) the rating of the sub-indicator would have been satisfactory, but since the indicator is explicitly linked to the size of the protected area (i.e. hectares) such a rating cannot be given. Taking the above argumentation into account the achievement of the project sub-indicator is assessed as being **Moderately Satisfactory**, this in spite of the project falls short in meeting the ProDoc ascribed target. The moderately satisfactory rating is provided to reflect the substantial underlying work needed for the protected area establishment as well as that it was possible to push the establishment through the needed governmental approval processes.

149. The second sub-indicator which relates to HCVF is complicated to untangle and review. In the ProDoc the planned end of project target has been listed as 193,684 ha. This 193,684 ha is the same continuous area which in the PPG HCVF report is outlined as the project's landscape boundary. The same report notes that this area fully encompasses the then provincial Ong Mang Sanctuary (which at the time had no official protection status). Based on this the project's concept was to create one or more HCVF for the full area. This also meant that the future National Protected Area "Eld's Deer National Sanctuary" would be within the planned HCVF area. This double layer of protected area and HCVF causes issues for the project and the two sub-indicators under indicator 12. As the project's landscape boundary of 193,684 ha includes the proposed National Protected Area Eld's Deer National Sanctuary (168,614 ha), it means that either all of the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary is to be a HCVF or that only areas outside the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary (i.e. 25,070 ha) is to be designated as HCVF. Concerning this, the Provincial Government made a decision to only recognize the proposed HCVF site that was entirely outside of the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary NPA as it was seen as impractical to designate HCVF inside the NPA as it already had Total Protected Zones (i.e. Core areas) as well as village forest management plans. Thus, only the Nuong Luong Lake, Wetland and Forest Complex covering 5,780 ha was in the end designated.

150. The rationale of the provincial government seems acceptable, but it provides a bit of a conundrum as to how to assess the sub-indicator at hand. The idea to designate HCVF must be to increase the protection and conservation status of the area/s in question and if this is the case the establishment of the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary as an NPA has provided for a much stronger protection than could be obtained via a HCVF scheme which does not have strong legal status within Lao PDR. One could therefore look at the proportion of established HCVFs outside the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary for which the project managed to establish 5,780 ha. One could also look at the area which has obtained increased protection which amounts to 136,525 ha out of the total of 193,684 ha or 70%. While the TE Team for this sub-indicator chooses to view it from the perspective of the latter it is clear that the project, regardless of the feat of establishing the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary etc., did not meet the set target. Hence the achievement of the project sub-indicator is assessed as being **Moderately Unsatisfactory**.

151. **Indicator 13:** The project's reforestation engagement has been commendable. Not only have they ensured reforestation of 768 ha of DDF they have also established a functional base from which reforestation activities can be engaged in long-term. The project has as part of its efforts collected seeds from DDF tree species found within the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary and use these as a base to establish five nurseries used for growing seedlings. While these efforts proved to be insufficient to meet the overall demand for seedlings it has played a role in maintaining and conserving the genetic diversity of the DDF within the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary. Furthermore, the project has, as mentioned in section 3.2.1, revised and refined its reforestation strategy and improved upon its implementation modalities. Accompanying the tree planning demarcation and sign-posting the forest areas were also done. The project further expanded upon its general approach to also include tree planting within the village area and their associated farmlands, including indigenous fruit trees and nitrogen fixing tree species. While the resulting tree planting are not part of the project's reforestation activities they have driven home the message of the importance of having additional tree cover among the village communities involved. Finally the project has also through forest regulations and designation of boundary areas supported natural regeneration of forest lands hereby increasing the forest area with improved tree cover with an additional 3,020 ha. Hence the achievement of the project indicator is assessed as being **Satisfactory**.

152. **Indicator 14:** This indicator has two Sub-indicator targets being 1) *Community land certificates issued for 16 villages by end of year 1* and 2) *Village forestry management plans for 16 villages finalized by end of year 2*. As with other project indicators the main indicator expresses engagement and a result changing behavior, whereas the end-of-project targets are static in nature (i.e. certificates issued and plans developed). Particularly for the forest management plans it would have been appropriate to have a target which is *“villagers implement sustainable forest management following approved village management plans”*. Regardless, land allocation certificates for the project villages were issued in February 2020 by the Provincial Office of Natural Resources and Environment (PONRE), providing the communities with rights to utilize land allocated to them within the protected area hence encouraging their participation in conservation, management and sustainable use of ecosystem resources within their allotted village areas. Hence the achievement of the project sub-indicator is assessed as being **Satisfactory**

153. As for the second sub-indicator the project’s 16 Village Forest Management Plans (VFMP) were completed in 2019, classifying the different land use activities undertaken at different zones. The development of the VFMP was undertaken with full participation of the village communities. The development process not only resulted in the mentioned plans it also strengthened villagers’ capacity to sustainably manage the forests surrounding their villages. The project used existing guidelines from the Division of Village Forest and Non-Timber Forest Products Management (DVFNM), under DOF, and provided trainings to relevant provincial and district officials from the DAFOs and PAFO. In turn the trainees provided comprehensive guidance for participatory processes resulting in the development of 16 Village Forest Management Plans covering a total of 53,948 hectares. The VFMP provided core information for the conservation agreements between the project and the villages. Overall, the achievement of the project sub-indicator is assessed as being **Satisfactory**.

154. **Indicator 15:** The indicator has three different end of project sub-indicator targets, two of which in turn are further divided. The sub-indicator targets are 1) *Increase in Biodiversity Intactness Index for Dry Forests*; 2) *Populations of species with IUCN Endangered Status*; and 3) *Maintenance of water quantity in downstream area of Xe Bangxiang River*.

155. The DDF Biodiversity Intactness Index baseline was first determined by mid-2018 and not within the first year of project implementation as originally planned. Furthermore, the identified baseline indicator cannot be found in the project progress reporting until the 2021 PIR which, for the first time, list the baseline figure of 73.04. However, the baseline figure only refers to the DDF complex within the Eld’s Deer National Sanctuary and not that of DDF found within the five districts. Furthermore, in the PMO self-reflection on the achievement of project indicator targets (Annex 5) it is noted that due to the few years between the baseline assessment (2018) and the planned operational closure (May 2022) too little time have past for any change in the landscape etc. to have occurred. A lack of change in forest cover (based on GIS analysis) has shown no significant changes since 2018 is used to support this argument. While the TE Team tends to agree with the assumption that most likely no significant changes have occurred since 2018, which could have influence the Biodiversity Intactness Index, the Team also notes that the Index is a much more complex measure than merely the forest cover. As such, it would have been prudent for the project to have repeated the 2018 biodiversity assessment of DDF in the Eld’s Deer Sanctuary, this even though the work would reveal a “no-change” situation. It should be noted that the result of such a survey is actually the end-of-project target for the sub-indicator. And it should therefore have been expected in any event. Regardless, due to the lack of an end-of-project Biodiversity Intactness Index analysis **the achievement of the project sub-indicator cannot be assessed**. Nonetheless, as this is a project indicator and the testing of the Biodiversity Intactness Index is important, as the index could prove to be an efficient, valuable and practical tool for biodiversity monitoring and evaluation, the TE team recommends that an end-of-project analysis is undertaken prior to the project’s operational closure (Recommendation).

156. The species related sub-indicator targets for the Eld’s Deer and Silvered Leaf Monkey both have a mathematical related issue. While both, like all of the species’ indicators have end of targets which are % increase, the baseline for the Eld’s Deer and Silvered Leaf Monkey is an interval, 60-80 individuals and 70-100 individuals respectively. In case the proposed end-of-project target of 60% (for Eld’s Deer) of a population of 60 individuals be obtained then there would be 96 individuals by the end of the project. However, if there are 96 individuals at the end of the project but the original population was 80 individual the observed increase would only be 20 %. To be certain that the project has met its target the numbers of Eld’s Deer should by the end of the project be 128. Following a similar rational for the Silvered Leaf Monkey the “safe” end-of-project population should be 118 individuals. The findings from the latest species surveys (2021) shows that the populations of Eld’s Deer, Silvered Leaf Monkey, Asian Elephant and Francois’ Langur are respectively at least

173 individuals, 111 individuals, 35 individuals and 18 individuals. The survey for the Siamese Crocodile provided inconclusive data due to very few sightings (3 females and one male). Overall the achievement of the project indicator is assessed as being **Satisfactory**

157. The final sub-indicator *“Maintenance of water quantity in downstream area of Xe Bangxiang River” which is measured by 1) Baseflows (dry season) and 2) # of flooding events*, while on face value is a valid indicator seems to ignore natural processes. As such it is understandable that the project wants to have an indicator related to water monitoring stations, as one was established under the project. However, it might have been more relevant to have an indicator stating, *“water monitoring station established and providing regular data on water quality and quantity and provide needed flood risk information to local authorities”*. For the current indicator it is highly unlikely that the project’s sustainable land management efforts, including increased ecosystem services deriving from the improved protected areas management, will/would create measurable effects in river flow and minimizing flash flooding etc. Overall, the project has at the time of the TE reforested 768 ha of forest – meaning the process of reforestation has been initiated. However, the planted trees have to mature before they will provide their full ecosystem service effects. Also, the reforested area, even when the area of 3,020 ha natural regeneration is taken into account, is, compared to the watershed, a very small area and because of the size alone the impact of the rivers waterflow etc. would be negotiable. Supporting the argument that the project’s effort has not yet created larger scale visible impacts is the projects GIS survey mentioned under indicator 15’s first sub-indicator above.

158. Thus, while the sub-indicator appears to be SMART compliant etc., the TE Team feels that there is in reality a too large mismatch between the indicator targets (what is to be measured) and what reasonably can be expected that the project’s sustainable land management efforts realistically can produce. The mere fact that Savannakhet has experienced three flooding events provides evidence towards the fact that larger climate related events are much stronger predictors. Because of this the TE Team have chosen not to assess the achievement of this specific sub-indicator (i.e. **not assessed**)

159. **Indicator 16:** The indicator is somewhat particular as it consists of a specific subsection of the Capacity Development Scorecard related indicator 3 which has already been discussed under Component 1. Indicator 16 has the end-of-project target of *“Protected Area management staff have strengthened technical skills and supporting technology for planning, environmental monitoring, enforcement, and PA management”* by end of year 3 - measured by an increase in the Capacity Development Scorecard Indicator 13: *Availability of required technical skills and technology transfer* up from 1 to 2.5. The latest reported figure stems from the 2021 PIR and has a score of 2. Regarding the use of the Capacity Development Scorecard it should be noted that the provided score is an aggregate of many different employees from the PAFO, DAFOs etc. and is not focusing on the PA management staff only. As such it could have been equally relevant to use the METT Assessment Form’s question 14 *“Staff training: Are staff adequately trained to fulfill management objectives?”*. The average score for the four PAs increased from 1 to 1.5 during the project’s implementation. Another point to be made is that by using the generic Capacity Development Scorecard template, as the project has, it would be very difficult to obtain a score of 3 which is *“the required skills and technologies are available, and there is a national-based mechanism for updating the required skills and upgrading the technologies”* and such a national-based mechanism has not been established. In this regard, the project might before it operationally closes create a web-based knowledge center where all of its training and knowledge products could be uploaded to. This could be a project established platform, an existing national platform or UNDP portals such as Exposure and Panorama. As part of this the project could record the project presentations etc. to facilitate access and use (recommendation). In this connection, the TE Team believes that the project will be able to make the project trainings etc. available online before the project is operationally closed and because of this the achievement of the project indicator is assessed as being **Satisfactory**.

160. **Indicator 17:** The indicator as indicator 16 is somewhat particular in that it is an individual indicator (i.e. 6) of the Capacity Development Scorecard indicator set. Indicator 17 has the end-of-project target that *“environmental education programs exist and are being delivered for environmental awareness”* by end of year 3 measured by an increase in the Capacity Development Scorecard Indicator 6: *“Existence of environmental education programs”* up from 1 to 3. Although the project by year 3 had undertaken a substantial number of trainings of project stakeholders in a large variety of areas the 2019 Capacity Development Scorecard still only provided a score of 1 for the status of its environmental education programs (i.e. *“Environmental education programs are partially developed and partially delivered”*). The Capacity Development Scorecard score changed to 2 in the 2020 PIR. As with indicator 16 using the generic Capacity Development Scorecard template without tailor it to the project realities now causes problems for the project. As such the project does not have

an environmental education program. It has however provided, as mentioned, an impressive number of trainings and through these have reached a large number of direct beneficiaries. The combined training materials, guidelines and reports does add up to comprehensive packages covering a variety of areas including reforestation, ecotourism, community involvement, Village Forest Management Planning, environment sustainability integration into planning etc. What seems to be lacking at the time of the TE is to collect and make this material publicly available through a web-based portal. Question is whether the project can manage to establish such a portal and ensure the uploading of the available material. The project could also opt for using available UNDP portals such as Exposure and Panorama. In connection with the current indicator the TE Team has opted for having a “loose” interpretation of environmental education programs and, as mentioned, the Team believes the project will be able to make the project trainings etc. available online before the project is operationally closed. Because of this the achievement of the project indicator is assessed as being **Satisfactory**

Component 3: Developing and Promoting Incentives and Sustainable Financing for Biodiversity Conservation and Forest Protection	
Achievement rating:	Moderately Satisfactory

161. The achievement of the project component 3 is currently not rated as there at the time of TE draft report submission is insufficient data is available to enable an assessment. The focus of the indicators remained relevant, although the clear link with the project’s outputs and activities are not as strong as for the previous components. Regardless, the project has been successful in establishing the base for future ecotourism development in particularly the Eld’s Deer National Sanctuary, which is partly supported via established community agreements and local infrastructure development. The project has also facilitated a continued financial support within the five project districts towards the project component and the project objective in general. The project has four component indicators. The indicator review and rating are presented the text below.

Table 15: Project’s Component 3 indicators their baseline and end-of-project targets, their status at the time of the Terminal Evaluation and the TE provided rating of target achievement¹⁸.

Indicator	Baseline	End of project target	Status at TE	TE assessment
	2016	May 2022	Dec. 2021	
Indicator 18: Levels of investment in land use planning and forest management planning at the village and districts levels in the targeted landscape in Savannakhet Province	USD 741,000 per year	By end of project, levels of public and private investment increased to: USD 900,000 per year	Total Amount as of Terminal Evaluation: USD 4,449,027	Satisfactory
Indicator 19: Wildlife-based ecotourism products designed and operating in the project target area	0 projects operating	At least 4 wildlife-based ecotourism projects operating in project target area by the end of the project	Eco-tourism in 2 destinations supported.	Moderately Unsatisfactory
Indicator 20: Funds available for management of protected areas / conservation forests in targeted landscape in Savannakhet Province	USD 0 per year	By end of project, levels of public and private investment through diverse and new revenue sources increased to: USD 100,000 per year	Non-governmental financing mechanisms USD 0 per year	Unsatisfactory

¹⁸ The rating used follows the UNDP/GEF 6-point rating scale i.e. 6 = Highly Satisfactory (HS), 5 = Satisfactory (S), 4 = Moderately Satisfactory (MS), 3 = Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU), 2 = Unsatisfactory (U), 1 = Highly Unsatisfactory (HU) and Unable to Assess (UA).

(as reported in the GEF BD1 Tracking Tool – Financial Scorecard):				
	USD 168,480 per year	USD 250,000 per year	Government budget allocations - Total Amount as of Terminal Evaluation: \$3,317,211	Satisfactory
Indicator 21: Incentives and other benefits to communities within targeted landscape are directly linked to wildlife recovery and forest protection (as measured in SFM Tracking Tool)	5< Conservation Agreements with communities in the Ong Mang Sanctuary	At least 16 community-based Conservation Agreements that incorporate improved ecological conditions and human development levels signed by end of year 2	16-community based conservation agreements completed (two rounds)	Highly Satisfactory

162. **Indicator 18:** The indicator is to a large extent linked with the Government's provided co-financing contribution. Generally speaking it is difficult to ascertain what constitute investment in land use planning and forest management planning, but the related footnote in the ProDoc Results Framework provides some indicator as to what funding is included under the indicator¹⁹. The project has identified that during the period 2016-2021 USD 1,075,886.85 USD in government programme expenditures (DPI) for land use planning and forest management planning and USD 3,373,140 of DOF, PAFO and DAFO support towards land use planning and forest management planning. Unfortunately, as mentioned elsewhere the project has not been tracking the financial data of the projects co-financing partners and because of this, annual expenditures from DPI, DOF, PAFO and DAFO were not available. Provided there would be a steady increase over the years from USD 741,000 in 2021 to 900,000 in 2021 the accumulated fund provision throughout the project period would be USD 4,923,000. Based on this figure the project has with its recorded investments of USD 4,449,027 achieved a 90% compliance with the end-of-project indicator target at the time of the TE. Because of this the achievement of the project indicator is assessed as being **Satisfactory**.

163. **Indicator 19:** The project has placed a lot of efforts and cost into developing ecotourism within the target areas. The intended sites/destinations for the project's interventions had been predetermined in the ProDoc which identified four candidate sites/destinations for wildlife-based ecotourism investments (i.e. Eld's Deer National Sanctuary, Dong Phou Vieng, Phou Xang He and Nong Louang Lake). The project has developed visitors' infrastructure, including trails, viewing towers, camping grounds, signage and the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary Center. The project also provided substantial training and awareness raising for community members to manage the inflow of tourists, and test tours were undertaken to obtain feedback needed for readjusting the developed products. Promotional materials were developed and coordination and cooperation with tour operators were pursued and facilitated. While originally considered, and initial work, including tourism potential surveys, were undertaken in and around Nong Louang Lake the site was ultimately decided against, as the natural attractions were less than perceived needed for attracting sufficient flow of tourists, including international tourists.

164. The project did not identify a new site/destination but focused its efforts on the three remaining sites/destinations. The Phou Xang He site/destination was initially seen as having great potential with the occurrence of the "trophy species" the Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*). However, it was already noted in the ProDoc that Human-elephant conflict was an on-going issue in the area. The project therefore engaged in Human-elephant conflict trainings etc. in Phou Xang He, but as encounters with aggressive elephants nonetheless have been occurring and villagers had been killed (PIR 2021 notes at least 3 and the 2021 quarter

¹⁹ \$325,000 per year from PONRE for environmental conservation; \$333,000 per year from PONRE for district and provincial master plans on land allocation and land use, and the issuing of land use and land development certificates; \$83,000/year from districts for development planning

2 progress report notes an estimate of 5 during the project period) the project ultimately found it prudent not to include Phou Xang He as a site/destination for safety reasons.

165. Thus, out of the four planned sites/destinations two have ultimately been maintained (i.e. Eld's Deer National Sanctuary, Dong Phou Vieng) both sites/destinations offering different locations and activities within areas themselves. Nonetheless, the project is falling short of its planned target and while extenuating circumstances are present a rating of **Moderately Unsatisfactory** has been provided.

166. **Indicator 20:** As for indicator 18 this indicator is to a large extent linked with the Government's provided co-financing contribution. The project reported Government budget allocations available for management of protected areas / conservation forests in targeted landscape in Savannakhet Province cannot be considered as a precise estimate, as there are potential overlaps between the listed funding sources. Also, the indicator specifies that the data to be from the Biodiversity Tracking tool which were prepared by the project on an annual basis. Hence, the BD tracking tool provides a total of USD 951,440 over the project period. The project sub-indicator states that the government allocation would increase from USD 168,480 in 2016 to 250,000 in 2021/2022, which with a steady increase of funding over the period would provide for an overall total of USD 1,225,440. Based on this the project have met 78% of its planned commitment. At the same time it has been identified, as part of the collection of co-financing data for the TE, that the DAFO and Eld's Deer National Sanctuary Center co-financing at the District Level supporting protected areas management amounts to USD 1,908,000 during the period 2016 and 2021. This investment, in all likelihood includes the funding recorded in the BD tracking tool but it also indicates that additional government budget allocations have been made available for management of protected areas / conservation forests in targeted landscape, other than operational budget (salaries, maintenance, fuel etc.). Furthermore, the co-financing data reveals that in addition to the mentioned USD 1.9 million a further USD 959,211.14 was made available natural resource management by various Government and Development Partner. Thus, even though project reported USD 3,317,211 at the time of the TE might not be exact it still exceeds the planned USD 1,225,440 and because of this the achievement of the project sub-indicator is assessed as being **Satisfactory**.

167. With regard to the sub-indicator related to the availability of funding through Non-governmental financing mechanisms the project has in spite of its extensive work related to eco-tourism and the establishment of public private partnerships not been successful. And while the global Covid-19 Pandemic have been detrimental to the tourism industry due to government imposed travel restrictions and quarantine regulations etc. the "trust" in bringing in large scale funding for management of protected areas / conservation forests in targeted landscape in Savannakhet Province seem misplaced. That said, having the Covid-19 Pandemic in mind the achievement of the project sub-indicator is assessed as being **Unsatisfactory**.

168. **Indicator 21:** The project has been successful in both developing and implementing community-based Conservation Agreements. These agreements are very much the centerpiece of the project's community approach, as it ties the village engagements together and binds them to an agreement between the village (through the village authorities) and the project. The community-based Conservation Agreements are a quid pro quo arrangement where the villagers will engage in conservation related work in return for financial support towards for instance village funds as well as different livelihood activities. While effective, the signed contracts for the first round of village agreements were difficult to engage in and manage. The main reason for this was that the contracts themselves had a "legal" format describing the rules of engagement. However, as described by one village head with regard to the original contracts *This is the first time ever, we sign agreement. It was very difficult for the village management committee and villagers to understand the agreement. We didn't know where and how to start.* In response the project developed a new simplified template focusing on ensuring participation in project activities, including 30% participation of women, as a main measure for compliance. It is generally perceived that the implementation of the second round of contracts, which has been extended to run until the project's operational closure, has been more successful compared to the first round. However, no analysis to verify this has been undertaken. In connection with the perceived difficulties of the first round of contracts, it should also be taken into account that, as mentioned by the village head, the villagers had not previously engaged in such contracts and were therefore unfamiliar with contract and project management as well as financial management. And although the project provided training in these aspects to address the shortcomings the upstart remained difficult. With the second round of contracts the villagers and the village leadership were more familiar with the underlying processes and hence understanding the contracts and implementing them could be perceived as easier. Regardless, the project has met its planned end-of-project target and hence the achievement of the project indicator is assessed as being **Satisfactory**

3.3.2 Effectiveness.

Effectiveness is rated as:	Satisfactory
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169. The overall effectiveness of the project is based on the project's achievement of the key project targets as outlined in the project's Results Framework and the results are further discussed in terms of the Objective, Component 1, Component 2 and Component 3 below.

170. **Objective:** The project has not been able to improve forest management measures in the productive landscape outside the targeted protected areas as envisaged, and while the protected areas management effectiveness has been markedly improved this also falls slightly short of its intended targets. In a similar way the capacity building of government staff at district and provincial level shy away from the planned targets. In contrast, the project has exceeded its direct beneficiaries target through a consistent and active involvement of village communities. TE provided rating **Moderately Satisfactory**.

171. **Component 1:** The project ensured the development and active use of the Integrated Spatial Plans, Strategic Environment Assessments and the web-based spatial Decision support system. Furthermore, the project utilized existing structures at province and district level for the planned "establishment" of district multi-sectoral stakeholder committees and the provincial responsible business forum. An SEA decree was enacted during the project initiation phase and the jurisdictional and coordination issues relating to enforcement of wildlife and forest protection laws were resolved (both through Government engagement only). Provincial rules and regulations were adopted for the only approved HCVF site, thus meeting the indicator target. This even though more HCVF sites had been expected. Finally, the 2015 Protected Areas Decree is currently under review actively supported by project's technical staff. TE provided rating **Satisfactory**.

172. **Component 2:** While the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary was established under the project the area designated was approximately 22% less than anticipated. In addition, the number of HCVF sites were much less than expected and the overall area of the HCVFs in hectares were substantially below what was planned. In contrast the project exceeded its target for restoration of degraded Dry Dipterocarp Forests primarily through the setting aside of forest areas for natural regeneration. The project was successful in developing 16 village forest management plans (plans are actively being used in village forest management), and in issuing 16 community land certificates granting villages land use right within the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary. Furthermore, under the project, key conservation species were surveyed and aside from Siamese Crocodile all species (i.e. Eld's Deer, Silvered Leaf Monkey, Asian Elephant, and Francois' Langur) showed a population increase. The availability of required technical skills and technology transfer, as well as a large catalogue of training materials has been developed, although not made available to interested stakeholders and the public at large in form of knowledge products. TE provided rating **Satisfactory**.

173. **Component 3:** The of government engagement and support towards the implementation of project and programs related to land use and forest management at the village and districts levels is as anticipated. The same is true for the government funding made available for management of protected areas / conservation forests in targeted landscape in Savannakhet Province. And while overall positive the project has been unsuccessful in establishing one or more non-governmental financing mechanisms, which is the main reason for the project does not achieve an overall component rating of satisfactory. On a positive note, the project has been very instrumental in setting up and implementing 16 community agreements. Over time these agreements were revised to make them more user-friendly (readily understandable) for the involved villages, a step which were much appreciated by the village leadership. Finally, while the project has had a strong emphasis on ecotourism development, and has many results to show for it, it was not able to deliver on the planned targets of having operations in four site/destinations. One site was opted out due to the recognition (based on survey work etc.) that it did not have sufficient potential to attract, in particular, international tourist. Work was reluctantly disengaged in, late in the project, due to human elephant conflict situation in the project area, making it unsuited for bringing in tourists. TE provided rating **Moderately Satisfactory**.

3.3.3 Relevance.

Relevance is rated as:	Highly Satisfactory
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174. The principles of the project laid out in the ProDoc are as relevant to the national priorities today as it was at project formulation. This includes linkages to:

- Lao People's Democratic Republic National Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 and Action Plan to 2010.
- National Environment Strategy to the year 2020
- Forestry Strategy for 2020
- Agricultural Development Strategy 2011-2020
- Ten-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the UNCCD convention (2008 – 2018)
- National Adaptation Program of Action 2009
- Lao PDRs' Eighth and Ninth Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDPP).

175. The project also maintain its alignment to the main objectives of the Focal Areas of the GEF-6 replenishment and is equally aligned with the GEF-7 replenishment focal areas of including BD-1-2a: *Mainstream biodiversity across sectors as well as landscapes and seascapes through global wildlife program to prevent extinction of known threatened species*, BD-1-5: *Mainstream biodiversity across sectors as well as landscapes and seascapes through Inclusive conservation*, LD-1-2: *Maintain or improve flow of ecosystem services, including sustaining livelihoods of forest-dependent people through Sustainable Forest Management (SFM)* and LD-1-4 *Reduce pressures on natural resources from competing land uses and increase resilience in the wider landscape*. The project has also maintained its relevance related to the strategic objectives of UNDP and it is in line with the UNDAFs for 2011-2015, 2017-2021 and 2022-2026.

3.3.4 Efficiency.

Efficiency rated as:	Moderate Unsatisfactory
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176. While the project records such as the budget information in the quarterly progress reports, the CDRs as well as the project audits the project appears to be efficient in its utilization of its financial and human resources towards the achievement of the project's objective and components within the designed five year period. However, as mentioned in section 3.2.3 the project has, at least during the first part of the project, had a high DSA cost. Funding which could have been used for more on-the-ground activities. And while the equipment cost is much lower than originally planned it does contain items such as village halls, water towers and other infrastructure investments which could be seen as exceeding the project mandate (in terms of GEF fund spending). However, the provision of village infrastructure has played a key role in buying initial goodwill from the village communities. A goodwill, although initial, have lasted through out the project period and will last for a good deal of years to come, and as such it has been a "*hearts and minds*" investment which has paid off in full.

177. When looking at the fund allocations provided at village levels for all of the project's activities there is an open question as to whether, from a conservation perspective, the investment equals the benefits received. For instance, would a simple hiring of forest rangers and workers for the project ranger and reforestation activities not have been just as successful in reaching the project's conservation objectives compared to the approach taken by the project. In all likelihood it would have been.

178. And while there are many good arguments as to why the project took the approach it did it is far from certain why GEF funding should have been used instead of for instance co-financing. Here the point argued is not if the substantial engagement within the village communities should have been done, because there are a multitude of reasons for why they should, but rather from where the funding for such engagements should come.

179. In this regard, the project should undertake a thorough review of what support it has provided and correlate it with the different government sectors and institutions. The point is that although the project in the TE Teams opinion have pursued a right approach it has been an expensive exercise which would be difficult to

replicate/upscale in other areas of Laos simply due to the cost factor per village. What needs to be looked at, is how the interventions engaged in could be anchored within the different government entities (and their respective programs) so that the cost of the “village packages” could be spread out and absorbed within existing or future government funding streams (Recommendation).

180. Thus, when looking at the project’s efficiency in utilizing the allocated GEF funding the project could have been more efficient and the provided rating for the project’s efficiency is therefore **Moderate Unsatisfactory**.

3.3.5 Overall Project Outcome Rating.

181. The projects overall outcome rating is based on the project’s performance with regard to Effectiveness, Relevance and Efficiency of the project, which are discussed above, and the overall outcome rating is **Satisfactory**. The individual ratings are summarized in table 15 below:

Table 16: Overall outcome rating

Assessment of Outcomes	Rating
Effectiveness	Satisfactory
Relevance	Highly Satisfactory
Efficiency	Moderately Unsatisfactory
Overall Project Outcome Rating	Satisfactory

3.3.6 Sustainability.

182. Sustainability is generally considered to be the likelihood of continued benefits after the GEF funding ends. Under GEF criteria each sustainability dimension is critical, and the overall ranking, therefore, cannot be higher than the lowest rating provided to each of the individual aspects reviewed 1) Financial sustainability; 2) Socio-political/economic sustainability; 3) Sustainability of established institutional framework and governance mechanisms and 4) Environmental sustainability.

Sustainability Overall: Likelihood that benefits will continue to be delivered after project closure:	Moderate Likely
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183. Generally speaking the project has facilitated and established a number of structures and systems that will help ensure the sustainability of the project results as well as ensure prolonged global environmental benefits as well as socio-economic benefits. At the same time the project has facilitated and participated in the development of initiatives which can have great future potential, such as debt-for-nature swap agreements, the development of payment for ecosystem service mechanisms and Government supported PA management.

Financial dimension: Likelihood that benefits will continue to be delivered after project closure	Moderately Likely
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184. In the short term is not foreseen that the project establish structures and initiatives will be financially sustainable, as many of the project’s planned engagement to create financial sustainability have not been successful, including 1) the planned pursuit of Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) establishment, 2) Offset payment establishment as well as 3) the ProDoc proposed engagement of develop resource distribution criteria for both new and existing (realigned) funding sources. Even in the area of ecotourism development, the project has, as reported elsewhere, not been able to make extensive impacts. While this is partially related to the national and international travel restrictions put in place to combat the Covid-19 Pandemic, other aspects have also been at play.

185. At the same time the co-financing review revealed that provisions of a reasonable level of recurrent

expenditures is provided, and it is expected to continue following the project closure. Also the provisional support to the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary is also expected to continue. That said, the expected future government funding supporting the project established initiatives and structure is not expected to remain at the high levels as under the project. On the other hand it is not expected that project established initiatives and structure will cease to be but rather continue at a slower burn in the immediate future.

186. However, a few but important aspects of the project's engagements have future potential. The project has been active in pursuing and supporting a subset of initiatives, which if they materialize will provide for long-term sustainable financing for protected areas in Lao PDR. These includes:

- Revision of the 2015 PA Decree
- Creation of a PES Decree (World Bank LENS2)
- Debt-for-nature swap negotiations.

187. The revision to the 2015 PA decree among other includes that PA must have staffed PA centers and a key operations vehicle for protected area management is the establishment of Community Contracts. Furthermore, following the approval of the revised PA decree PA will be managed as a single area through the PA Office instead of, as it is today, the individual districts are responsible for the part of the PA which falls within their territory.

188. The PES decree will open up for a national system with uniform approaches towards determining the specific ecosystem services to be targeted as well as modalities for collection of payments for said services from specified actors. Finally, the SAFE Ecosystems Project/UNDPs engagement with the Lao PDR Government on creating the structure and modalities for potential future debt-for-nature swaps can if they materialize have a huge potential for sustainable financing for nature conservation and protected areas.

Socio-political dimension: Likelihood that benefits will continue to be delivered after project closure	Likely
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189. The project has done a lot of work with the village communities and has built local people's capacities in a range of different areas and most of these are expected to continue either on their own or through established governance and government structures – potentially supported by limited future government funding.

190. The project's livelihood benefits are expected to continue to provide benefits for the people who have received support, but benefits are expected to be available to new beneficiaries through the established village funds and the livestock banks and rice banks. Although these banks are not financial instruments they act as a reservoir from which villagers can tap into. Villagers who have received support from the project are obliged to provide support to other families once their own livestock or rice production allows them to, hereby expanding the number of project beneficiaries in the future. The village market should also continue after the project's operational closure, as would the project established nurseries and the use of trees within the home gardens and the villages agricultural areas. Testimonial towards this can be found in Annex 3.

191. Build capacities in the area of eco-tourism, sewing and the provision of veterinarian services is also expected to continue, as is the conservation activities including the implementation of the village forest management plans. However, for the latter two, to a lesser degree, and these would most likely be continued through established governance and government structures.

Institutional framework and governance dimension: Likelihood that benefits will continue to be delivered after project closure	Moderately Likely
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192. The project established Spatial Decision Support System is actively being used by provincial and district actors. Furthermore, the project has used existing coordination mechanisms for their District Multi-Stakeholder Committees and Business Forums, and these will continue to function following project closure. It would be reasonable to presume that district committees will maintain the environment focus obtained via the project in their future operations.

193. The project developed Management Plans (at least in the case of the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary)

are being used and so are the Village Forest Management Plans and it is reasonable to expect that this will continue after the project. The water monitoring station has been actively used since it was established, and its use is foreseen to continue after the project. In this connection it should be mentioned that during the project period 17 staff has been allocated to the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary (Center).

194. Regarding the community involvement and the creation of the village community agreement, this is also expected to be continued in some shape or form via the existing governance and government structures, for instance via the existing village police which could perform patrolling duties. However, the project could further facilitate the process, as well as the wider use of said agreements, if it engaged in a review of its approach for community involvement to identify lessons learned and best practices. This review could benefit from not only looking at the SAFE Ecosystems project's work but from the involvement and review of other development partners work in this area. With luck such an engagement could result in a common agreed approach for simple and cost-effective engagements (Recommendation).

Environmental dimension: Likelihood that benefits will continue to be delivered after project closure	Likely
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195. The environment impact of the project is expected to be maintained. First and foremost, the designation of the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary as a National Protected Area provides for a solidified protection status of a key proportion of the Dry Dipterocarp Forest in Savannakhet province. In addition, the developed management plans and their implementation provides for an increased management and protection, and although a static intervention signage and demarcations also provides for an additional layer.

196. The village forest restoration and the introduction of trees into the home gardens and agricultural areas are also providing for environment benefits a side from embedding conservation awareness into the beneficiaries.

197. The village engagement in ranger work, through the village management plan/regulations (community contracts), is expected to continue. And the local level capacity building work has been instrumental in changing local behavior. A prime example of the change in behavior and attitudes is that the Eld's deer is now viewed as a good luck charm and is by the local population now seen as a sign of prosperity. In this regard the project did not engage in KAP surveys to clarify and exemplify the project's impact on behavior change, which is unfortunate as without this it is difficult to capture the soft changes within a population. The TE field mission managed to capture some testimonial on project impact which is presented in Annex 3.

3.3.7 Country Ownership.

198. The country ownership has been evident throughout the project implementation. That said the initial change of the implementation partner from MONRE to MAF created somewhat of a dip in this. This was however, mostly connected to doubts towards when and how the transfer of responsibilities would occur. Once the transfer was completed MAF, led by DOF and supported by the PMO moved the project into gear. The project ownership can also be seen in the reliable stakeholder engagement in the national, provincial and district steering committees. Where particular the provincial steering committee have played a central role in the project. The district steering committees has in some ways acted as implementation support bodies as the committee members in many cases played an active role in the project's implementation within the various districts.

3.3.8 Gender equality and women's empowerment.

199. Although the project did not prepare a Gender Analysis and Action Plan before 2020 the project did in its livelihoods and eco-tourism surveys etc. focus on gender and gender discrepancies to ensure that the project would have a relevant gender focus in its activities. The project also worked with the Lao Women's Union both in terms of undertaking surveys as well as for activity implementation. Thus, in spite of the lack of a Gender Analysis and Action Plan for more than half of the project it is the view of the TE Team that gender considerations and the project gender responsiveness were well observed.

200. That said when one look at the gender disaggregated data from trainings and meetings for instance there is an apparent discrepancy where males are quite substantially overrepresented. This, however, should not be prescribed to the projects approach towards gender equality and the mainstreaming of women. According to the latest Human Development Report (2020) lists Lao PDR's Gender Development Index (0.927) and the Gender Inequality Index (0.459) as being ranked 137 out of the 189 countries and territories assessed, which illustrates that gender disparities regularly occurs within Lao PDR. For instance for government staff in Savannakhet PAFO and the five DAFOs only 28 % are women. Thus, for specialized trainings it would, due to the internal distribution of women and men, be difficult to obtain a 50/50 representation at meetings. At village level the project has been faced with strong traditional biases and embedded gender roles.

201. To address this the project has adopted an internal policy to be followed by all levels that meetings and trainings etc. should/could not take place unless there were a 30 % representation of women. For village activities this were further expanded to the 30/30 rule which states that actions cannot be engaged in unless there at least 30 people present of which 30 % are women. The 30 % women's participation/beneficiaries are among other written into the 16 village conservation agreements established under the project.

202. Furthermore, the project has also pursued some activities for women only including the provision of capacity building for homestay and sewing operations where sewing machines were provided to women enabling them to provide sewing services within the village (and beyond). In the projects training of village veterinarians 17 out of the 49 people capacitated were women.

203. Because of this it is the view of the TE Team that the project has been pushing forth the issue of gender equality and the mainstreaming of women to the extent possible taking into account the realities on the ground and within Laos in general.

3.3.9 Catalytic/replication effects.

Demonstrations

204. The project has a large sub-set of demonstration activity, which includes the full "package" engagement in the 16 project villages which includes the village forest management planning, livelihood development, building village level capacity, and engaging village ranges. The project's reforestation demonstrations, while mainly undertaken within the 16 project villages, expanded beyond these, and with the project adjustments in its reforestation strategy contains valuable lessons on dues and don'ts

205. The management planning and business plan development is another important demonstration exercise as it provides for samples of government approved processes and documentation. The ISP and SEA demonstrations are in this regard equally valid. And following this, the Spatial DSS which is actively used by stakeholders with in Savannakhet has been an important project demonstration activity – one which has impacted more broadly than the project areas themselves.

206. While not overly successful in reaching its ultimate goal, the project's demonstration activities in connection with the development of ecotourism using the protected areas as cornerstones has nonetheless been important. And the approach for engaging private sector could be seen as innovative in the use of its development of investment prospectuses.

207. The designation of the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary has been a tremendously important undertaking. Not as much because of the demonstration of the process for National Protected Areas establishment, as these has been done before, but this was the first time this exercise was managed by MAF/DOF. As such the importance of the demonstration effect of the SAFE Ecosystem project with regard to MAF/DOF as well as Savannakhet PAFO and the involved DAFOs cannot be underestimated as they with the SAFE Ecosystem project ventured into a totally new area of responsibilities following the new government mandate provided by the Government of Lao PDR's Decree No. 99.

Replication

208. Aside from using similar approaches in the project's village and district interventions, as well as making needed course corrections based on lessons learned springing from the project implementation, the project has not, as such engaged in any replication related activities. This is mainly related to the project approach which did not rely on doing small scale pilots, in, for instance, one or two villages, prior to rolling out

in all of the selected project villages. Rather the project opted for a broader scale implementation approach which is more time-efficient compared to a two-step approach. Also, as there is not a strong link between the project and the engagements of the co-financing partners approaches, lessons learned have not been transferred to or influenced co-financing activities, providing for a very limited replication effect of the project.

209. That said the project does contain aspects which could be replicated and/or scaled up, but a pre-requisite in the TE Team's opinion is that the approaches taken, the lessons learned, and the results obtained should be documented in a subset of simple, easy to follow manual type of documents, potentially accompanied with video tutorials.

210. While not replication per se, the project has a current consultancy for identifying key components of the project which could provide a base or springboard for new projects. An aim of the consultancy is to develop concept notes for the identified components. UNDP is also building on the SAFE Ecosystem project and are taking aspects hereof into consideration in its GCF project "*Resilient Integrated Food Systems (RIFS) in rural Lao*" currently under development. In addition, the new UNDP/GEF project *Integrated Water Resource Management and Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) in the Xe Bang Hieng River Basin and Luang Prabang city*, which is also under development, could be seen as an extension of sorts of the SAFE Ecosystem project.

Scaling up

211. The status for the project's upscaling effect can to a larger effect be seen as similar to that outlined above for replication. However, there is one area in which scaling up could be argued have occurred, and this is with regard to the spatial DSS. As mentioned in section 3.2.1 and elsewhere the project had the foresight to engage CDE to develop the spatial DSS for Savannakhet province. In doing so it not only ensured that the project would leapfrog the DSS development and provide for a much larger than anticipated end result. It also facilitated that development aspects tested out for the Savannakhet decide system were later included in the national Lao decide system. Hereby upscaling the project results to the national level.

212. And while it is not reported anywhere and has not been mentioned as a result of the project, it cannot not have had a marked impact on MAF/DOF and its provincial and district offices regarding how they were to implement their new mandate for protected areas management deriving from the number 99 Decree. Granted this is a postulate from the TE Team as this has not been analyzed or reviewed, nor has it been mentioned as a project impact by any of the stakeholders interviewed. But in the TE teams view this is in all likelihood a case of "*not being able to see the forest for the trees*"

Knowledge transfer

213. Although the project has been engaged in project communication, has a Facebook page, have prepared success stories and generally done well in providing information about the project to stakeholders and the public at large, it has not been effective in facilitating knowledge transfer. In this connection the TE Team is not reflecting on knowledge transfer springing from the projects capacity building efforts which is discussed in the section below. The point addressed with regard to knowledge transfer is that the project does not have a broader set of knowledge products, based on the projects engagements and lessons learned from these. As noted earlier the project has engaged in a broad subset of initiatives which outside readers, communities, project developers and implementers etc. could benefit from.

214. While a common issue for many projects, the SAFE Ecosystem project has not taken the opportunity to capture for instance its capacity building work and transform them into knowledge products. For instance simple videos and web-based training materials could have been prepared in connection with the project's livelihood activities or for instance the ranger trainings. And although only limited time is left of the project it would be beneficial if it engaged in a solidified effort to capture as much as possible and ensure that the project knowledge becomes publicly accessible to facilitate a lasting legacy of the project and its results.

Capacity building

215. As noted under the review of indicator 4 the project has undertaken more than 50 larger scale trainings as well as a sub-set of smaller trainings and hands-on capacity building by the PMOs technical staff. Hence capacity building has been provided in a range of topics for instance 1) Integrated Spatial Planning and Strategic Environment Assessment development, 2) Protected area management, 3) Sustainable ecotourism development, 4) Training on the use of the spatial DSS, 5) Livestock raising (goats, rice, chickens and pigs), as well as 6) Agriculture extension training (i.e. SRI rice cultivation, soil preparation), 7) Nursery establishment

and maintenance, 8) GIS and SMART reporting for PA management and 9) ecotourism and hospitality.

216. The impact of the capacity building can in part be seen via the changes in the Capacity Development Scorecards scores recorded by the project. However, the impact on villagers is not captured by the scorecard exercise as it only focuses on the government institutions. It would therefore have been instrumental if the project had utilized KAP surveys, or other similar surveys, to capture the shift in capacities and attitudes among local non-government stakeholders.

Exit Strategy

217. The project has not as of yet prepared an exit strategy, and the project should immediately task itself with doing this. The TE Team recognizes that the project and UNDP in particular are engaged, with implementing partners and relevant stakeholders in activities exploring potential exit strategies and sustainability pathways. For instance, UNDP has engaged a consultant to develop concepts based on the learnings from SAFE Ecosystem project and UNDP is in the process of developing a LDCF project (i.e. *Integrated Water Resource Management and Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) in the Xe Bang Hieng river basin and Luang Prabang city*) which continues address issues within Savannakhet Province focused up climate change adaptation. Furthermore, UNDP is engaged in the development of a debt-for-nature swap approach. However, the broader questions as to how to embed the project results and processes into the government institutions and their agenda are not addressed by these initiatives.

218. Although this is actually bigger than the SAFE Ecosystem project, there is a question as to how holistic interventions at local level can ensure multiple benefits and how different government sectors can combined support to a local area bringing about additional environmental, social-economic benefits etc. By combining engagements via for instance an area specific UNDP project, which deliberately combines government initiatives for nature conservation, livelihoods, infrastructure, gender, people with disabilities etc. multiple benefits could be ascertained – as it, at least partially, were done under the SAFE Ecosystem project.

3.3.10 Progress to Impact and Crossing-Cutting Issues

219. Global Environmental Benefits generated under the project have been outlined in Table16 below. In addition, the Core Indicator reporting prepared by the project has been provided as a separate file to this TE Report. The project originally used three different sets of tracking tools 1) Biodiversity tracking tool, 2) Land degradation tracking tool and 3) Sustainable Forest Management tracking tool. However, in connection with the GEF-7 replenishment GEF developed a subset of 11 indicators for which it was to report its achievements to the GEF council. In connection with this GEF-6 projects like the SAFE Ecosystem project migrated to the GEF Core Indicators – although for protected areas projects, they were to continue their monitoring and reporting of the biodiversity tracking tool.

Table 17: Project's Target Contributions to GEF 7 Core Indicators.

Project Core Indicators		Achievement at TE
	Terrestrial protected areas created or under improved management for conservation and sustainable use (Hectares)	542,198 ha
3	Area of land restored (Hectares)	768 ha of reforestation and 3,020 ha of natural regeneration
4	Area of landscapes under improved practices (excluding protected areas) (Hectares)	5,780 ha
6	Greenhouse gas emission mitigated (tCO ₂ e) [Estimated Based on 20-Year Period]	53,635,151tCO ₂ e ²⁰
11	Number of direct beneficiaries disaggregated by gender as co-benefit of GEF investment	9,134 (Male: 6675; Female:2459)

220. In addition to bringing about Global Environmental Benefits the project has also supported the global nature conservation and sustainable development agenda. Table 17 below lists the Aichi targets which the

²⁰ The 11,257,012 tCO₂e derives from the latest “run” of the FAO ExAct tool. However, the current “run” does not include the 3,020 ha of area set aside for natural regeneration. It is therefore suggested that a new “run” of the FAO ExAct tool is undertaken.

Safe Ecosystem project have been contributing and table 18 highlights the projects contribution to the UN Sustainable Development goals.

Table 18: Project contribution towards the Aichi targets.







	Awareness increased	By 2020, at the latest, biodiversity values have been integrated into national and local development and poverty reduction strategies and planning processes and are being incorporated into national accounting, as appropriate, and reporting systems.
	Sustainable production and consumption	By 2020, at the latest, Governments, business and stakeholders at all levels have taken steps to achieve or have implemented plans for sustainable production and consumption and have kept the impacts of use of natural resources well within safe ecological limits.
	Habitat loss halved or reduced	By 2020, the rate of loss of all natural habitats, including forests, is at least halved and where feasible brought close to zero, and degradation and fragmentation is significantly reduced.
	Sustainable agriculture, aquaculture and forestry	By 2020 areas under agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are managed sustainably, ensuring conservation of biodiversity.
	Ecosystem Restored and resilience enhanced	By 2020, ecosystem resilience and the contribution of biodiversity to carbon stocks has been enhanced, through conservation and restoration, including restoration of at least 15 per cent of degraded ecosystems, thereby contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation and to combating desertification.
	Knowledge improved, shared and applied	By 2020, knowledge, the science base and technologies relating to biodiversity, its values, functioning, status and trends, and the consequences of its loss, are improved, widely shared and transferred, and applied.

Table 19: Project contribution towards SDG goals.

	<p>Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture</p> <p>2.3 By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.</p> <p>2.4 By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality.</p>
	<p>Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls</p> <p>5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere</p> <p>5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life</p>
	<p>Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts</p> <p>13.1 Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries</p>
	<p>Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss</p> <p>15.1 By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements</p> <p>15.2 By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally</p> <p>15.5 Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species</p> <p>15.9 By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts</p>

4 Recommendation and lessons

Summary of project ratings

Criteria	Rating	Comment
1. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)		
M&E design at entry	Moderately Satisfactory	Overall, a range of monitoring relevant documentation were prepared as part of the project documentation 1) Project Risks, including Social and Environmental Risks, 2) Project Tracking Tools (<i>BD, LD, and SFM</i>), 3) Capacity Development Scorecard, and 4) the Project's Results Framework. With regard to the Results Framework, it did not contain any project mid-term targets and some of the indicators' baseline related information are unexplained in the ProDoc. Also a subset of project indicators has SMART compliance issues, and they could have been better designed to capture the improved capacity and use of project developed results. For other, although few indicators, it is questionable as to whether they are achievable. The screening of the social and environmental risks was somewhat sporadic and not focused, thus falling to acknowledge key screening questions.
M&E plan implementation	Satisfactory	The project has a strong monitoring set up centered around frequent communications between the PMO and activity implementors and has relied on frequent local level monitoring and activity support missions. UNDP/GEF rules and regulations related to M&E has been observed including the reporting on Project Risks, Tracking Tools and the Results Framework.
Overall quality of M&E	Satisfactory	In spite of a weak M&E design particularly with regard to the project's monitoring tools, the project has worked well to ensure a strong project implementation. The project ability to pick up speed following the initial complications related to the handover of the project from MONRE to MAF is a testament to the project's PMO ability to adapt and adjust. And although there are noticeable shortcomings in the effective use of the monitoring tools the PMO has had a solid monitoring of the project at the activity level.
2. Implementation Partner (IP) implementation and Executing Agency (EA) Execution		
Quality of UNDP Implementation/oversight	Satisfactory	UNDP has provided reliable and persistent oversight and implementation assistance to the project and have been active in trouble shooting and in ensuring new adaptive management approaches. This includes UNDP engagement in changing the project's fund transfer mechanism from going through the Treasury and to enable direct payment to the project districts. UNDP has, for instance, also been instrumental in moving along the Government discussions on debt-for-nature swap an idea which originated from the SAFE Ecosystems project.
Quality of implementation partner execution	Satisfactory	The PMO and all technical staff has ensured a solid project execution, with strong reporting and consultancy control as well as having frequent project missions to provide implementation support to project stakeholders. The Implementing Partner (PMO) has been very instrumental in facilitating an adaptive management within the project. This included the projects engagement in for instance 1) Funds transfer mechanism, 2) Re-forestation approaches, 3) Simplifying community agreements, 4) DSS establishment, and 5) Promoting debt-for-nature swap etc.
Overall quality of implementation/execution	Satisfactory	UNDP and the implementing partner have ensured that the project interventions have been in line with the ProDoc and by and large been on target. UNDP has brought its country and regional experience in the area of nature conservation, protected area management and livelihood development at local level to bear in its oversight and execution support to the project. The implementing partner have ensured close collaboration with project partners and the project's steering committee at national, provincial and local levels has been important structures for guiding the project at all levels.
3. Assessment of outcomes		

Relevance	Highly Satisfactory	<p>The principles of the project laid out in the ProDoc are as relevant to the national priorities today as it was at project formulation. This includes linkages to 1) Lao People's Democratic Republic National Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 and Action Plan to 2010, 2) National Environment Strategy to the year 2020, 3) Forestry Strategy for 2020, 4) Ten-year strategic plan and framework to enhance the implementation of the UNCCD convention (2008 – 2018), 5) National Adaptation Program of Action 2009, 6) Lao PDRs' Eighth and Ninth Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED).</p> <p>The project also maintains its alignment to the main objectives of the Focal Areas of the GEF-6 replenishment and is equally aligned with the GEF-7 replenishment focal areas of including BD-1-2a; BD-1-5; LD-1-2; and LD-1-4. Furthermore, the project maintained its relevance related to the strategic objectives of UNDP and it is in line with the UNDAFs for 2011-2015, 2017-2021 and 2022-2026.</p>
Effectiveness	Satisfactory	<p>The overall effectiveness of the project is based on the project's achievement of the key project targets as outlined in the project's Results Framework and the results are further discussed in terms of the Objective, Component 1, Component and Component 3 below.</p>
Objective		
<p>The project has not been able to improve forest management measures in the productive landscape outside the targeted protected areas as envisaged, and while the protected areas management effectiveness has been markedly improved this also falls slightly short of its intended targets. In a similar way the capacity building of government staff at district and provincial level shy away from the planned targets. In contrast, the project has exceeded its direct beneficiaries target through a consistent and active involvement of village communities.</p>		Moderately Satisfactory
Component 1		
<p>The project ensured the development and active use of the Integrated Spatial Plans, Strategic Environment Assessments and the web-based spatial Decision support system. Furthermore, the project utilized existing structures at province and district level for the planned "establishment" of district multi-sectoral stakeholder committees and the provincial responsible business forum. An SEA decree was enacted during the project initiation phase and the jurisdictional and coordination issues relating to enforcement of wildlife and forest protection laws were resolved (both through Government engagement only). Provincial rules and regulations were adopted for the only approved HCVF site, thus meeting the indicator target. This even though more HCVF sites had been expected. Finally the 2015 Protected Areas Decree is currently under review actively supported by project's technical staff.</p>		Satisfactory
Component 2		
<p>While the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary was established under the project the area designated was approximately 22% less than anticipated. In addition, the number of HCVF sites were much less than expected and the overall area of the HCVFs in hectares were substantially below what was planned. In contrast the project exceeded its target for restoration of degraded Dry Dipterocarp Forests primarily through the setting aside of forest areas for natural regeneration. The project was successful in developing 16 village forest management plans (plans are actively being used in village forest management), and in issuing 16 community land certificates granting villages land use right within the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary. Furthermore, under the project, key conservation species were surveyed and aside from Siamese Crocodile all species (i.e. Eld's Deer, Silvered Leaf Monkey, Asian Elephant, and Francois' Langur) showed a population increase. The availability of required technical skills and technology transfer, as well as a large catalogue of training materials has been developed, although not made available to interested stakeholders and the public at large in form of knowledge products.</p>		Satisfactory
Component 3		
<p>The of government engagement and support towards the implementation of project and programs related to land use and forest management at the village and districts levels is as anticipated. The same is true for the government funding made available for management of protected areas / conservation forests in targeted landscape in Savannakhet Province. And while overall positive the project has been unsuccessful in establishing one or more non-governmental financing mechanisms, which is the main reason for the project does not achieve an overall component rating of satisfactory. On a positive note, the project has been very instrumental in setting up and implementing 16 community agreements. Over time these agreements were revised to make them more user-friendly (readily understandable) for the involved villages, a step which were much appreciated by the village leadership. Finally, while</p>		Moderately Satisfactory

the project has had a strong emphasis on ecotourism development, and has many results to show for it, it was not able to deliver on the planned targets of having operations in four site/destinations. One site was opted out due to the recognition (based on survey work etc.) that it did not have sufficient potential to attract, in particular, international tourist. Work was reluctantly disengaged in, late in the project, due to human elephant conflict situation in the project area, making it unsuited for bringing in tourists.		
Efficiency	Moderate Unsatisfactory	Via the project records, such as the budget information in the quarterly progress reports, the CDRs, as well as the project audits, the project appears to be efficient in its utilization of its financial and human resources towards meeting the achievement of the project's objective and components within the designed five year period. However, the project has, at least during the first part of the project, had a high DSA cost. The issue of DSA was highlighted in the Mid-term Review and the project responded by reducing the DSA expenditures with 73% for the period 2020-2021 compared to the period 2016-2019. That said the initial high DSA cost affects the projects efficiency. Also, when looking at the fund allocations provided at village levels for all of the project's activities there is an open question as to whether, from a conservation perspective, the investment equals the benefits received. And while there are many good arguments as to why the project took the approach it has, it is far from certain why GEF funding should have been used instead of for instance co-financing.
Overall project outcome rating	Satisfactory	The overall outcome rating of the project is based on the project's performance with regard to Relevance, Effectiveness and Efficiency of the project, which are briefly discussed above.
4. Sustainability		
Financial sustainability	Moderately Likely	In the short term is not foreseen that the project establish structures and initiatives will be financially sustainable, as many of the project's planned engagement to create financial sustainability have not been successful, including 1) the planned pursuit of Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) establishment, 2) Offset payment establishment as well as 3) the ProDoc proposed engagement of develop resource distribution criteria for both new and existing (realigned) funding sources. At the same time the co-financing review revealed that provisions of a reasonable level of recurrent expenditures is provided, and it is expected to continue following the project closure, thus it is not expected that project established initiatives and structure will cease to be but rather continue at a slower burn in the immediate future. Also, a few but important aspects of the project's engagements have future potential, which if they materialize will provide for long-term sustainable financing for protected areas in Lao PDR. These includes 1) Revision of the 2015 PA Decree; 2) Creation of a PES Decree (World Bank LENS2) and 3)Debt-for-nature swap negotiations.
Social political sustainability	Likely	The project has done a lot of work with the village communities and has built local people's capacities in a range of different areas and most of these are expected to continue either on their own or through established governance and government structures – potentially supported by limited future government funding. The project's livelihood benefits are expected to continue to provide benefits for the people who have received support. Build capacities in the area of ecotourism, sewing and the provision of veterinarian services is also expected to continue, as is the conservation activities including the implementation of the village forest management plans.
Institutional framework and governance sustainability	Moderately Likely	The project established Spatial Decision Support System is actively being used by provincial and district actors. Furthermore, the project has used existing coordination mechanisms for their District Multi-Stakeholder Committees and Business Forums, and these will continue to function following project closure. The project developed Management Plans (at least in the case of the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary) are being used and so are the Village Forest Management Plans and it is reasonable to expect that this will continue after the project. In this connection it should be mentioned that during the project period 17 staff has been allocated to the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary (Center). Regarding the community involvement and the creation of the village community agreement, this is also expected to be continued in some shape or form via the existing governance and government structures, for instance via the existing village police which could perform patrolling duties.

Environment sustainability	Likely	The environment impact of the project is expected to be maintained. First and foremost, the designation of the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary as a National Protected Area provides for a solidified protection status of a key proportion of the Dry Dipterocarp Forest in Savannakhet province. The village forest restoration and the introduction of trees into the home gardens and agricultural areas are also providing for environment benefits a side from embedding conservation awareness into the beneficiaries. The village engagement in ranger work, through the village management plan/regulations (community contracts), is expected to continue.
Overall likelihood of sustainability	Moderate Likely	Generally speaking the project has facilitated and established a number of structures and systems that will help ensure the sustainability of the project results as well as ensure prolonged global environmental benefits as well as socio-economic benefits. At the same time the project has facilitated and participated in the development of initiatives which can have great future potential, such as debt-for-nature swap agreements, the development of payment for ecosystem service mechanisms and Government supported PA management.

Recommendations:

221. **Recommendation 1:** The project should thoroughly review the project costs and underlying practices engaged in by the project to evaluate if similar approaches are to be pursued in future projects. While this recommendation spring from the large DSA expenditures it is equally relevant to look at project costs with regard to project benefits and evaluate if such expenses are fully justified.

222. **Recommendation 2:** Regarding the project purchase equipment etc. the project (i.e. UNDP) ensure, to the extent possible, via its handover protocols, that the entities which has received and used equipment under the project are also the ones who maintain said equipment following the operational and financial closure of the project.

223. **Recommendation 3:** For future projects it is recommended that the project risks, including the Social and Environmental risks, its issue and lessons learned logs as well as the projects indicators (Results Framework and GEF Core indicators) are not treated as static documents but is used in project's active and regularly monitoring. This is to ensure that the project is on track etc. and is meeting its obligations. Early identification and reactions can save the projects for complications later on in the implementation process.

224. **Recommendation 4:** The project should use the remaining time of the project to actively build knowledge hub where knowledge products from the project can be place for longevity. As part of this the project should ensure that its capacity building work is captured and made accessible online, for instance via recording project presentations and trainings etc. In this regard, the project could established its own platform, use an existing national platform or rely on UNDP portals such as Exposure and Panorama. Along the same lines knowledge management should become a central part of a future projects and as part of any contract or sub-contract related to capacity building that training videos, on-line courses and accessible training materials should be prepared and made available on a web-based media.

225. **Recommendation 5:** The project should prior to project operational closure develop its exit strategy outlining not only how the bearing elements of the project can be brought forward through new project interventions, but also how the set-ups and benefits within the project area can be maintained through ongoing and future provincial and district interventions.

226. **Recommendation 6:** For future projects data collection exercises such as Capacity Development Scorecard, and the METT score analysis should not done through desk surveys but via stakeholder workshops, as this would provide added benefits in terms of education and knowledge sharing, as well as create broader local ownership of the exercise.

227. **Recommendation 7:** Future project should undertake Knowledge, Attitude and Practices surveys to enable the project to capture behavioral change among the project beneficiaries.

228. **Recommendation 8:** The project should prior to project operational closure undertake and end-of-project Biodiversity Intactness Index survey. While such survey might not provide for any new information per

se, due to the limited time between this and the previous survey, running the survey again would verify whether the index (and the exercise) can be seen as an efficient, valuable and practical tool for biodiversity monitoring and evaluation.

229. **Recommendation 9:** The project should take a close look at its combined village engagement “packaged” to not only look at what worked well and what did not. The project should look at which components in an active village engagement is needed to make it effective and then identify how such interventions could be anchored within different government entities (and their respective programs). This analytical work could provide a central guide for cross-sectoral cooperation at provincial and district level to ensure that different sector engagements in the same village (or area) can create add-on environmental and socio-economic effects. It could also provide guidance as to how the cost of the “village packages” could be spread out and absorbed within existing or future government funding streams.

230. **Recommendation 10:** As a central component of the project’s community work are the community agreements it is recommended that the project review of its approach for community involvement and identify lessons learned and best practices. This review could benefit from not only looking at the SAFE Ecosystems project’s work but also from similar engagements undertaken by other development partners, as well as the Lao PDR Government. The review could result in common agreed approaches for simple and cost-effective engagements.

231. **Recommendation 11:** Future projects should keep track of co-financing commitments as well as new investments during the project period regularly. It would have been prudent if the project had collected this information on a regular basis for instance in connection with the annual PIR and as a minimum prior to the Mid-term Review and the Terminal Evaluation.

232. **Recommendation 12:** For future projects project safeguard and monitoring tools should be well drafted and based on local ownership and input. Project results and indicator targets should be agreed to with the stakeholders who ultimately will be responsible for implementing the projects and ensuring that these targets are reached. In other words project targets should not only be targets of the project but targets of the individual involved entities engaged in the project. As part of this local formulation workshops, engaging key champion stakeholders could be used in the drafting process.

233. **Recommendation 13:** For future projects the project should immediately after the onboarding of the central project staff key technical personnel undertake a thorough review of the project documentation to identify potential inconsistencies in said documentation, which might impact the project implementation or the achievement of the project goals and targets, including GEF Core Indicator and Results Framework targets. Identified concerns should be raised through available UNDP channels in order to bring about acceptable changes addressing the identified concerns where possible.

Good Practices

234. The project has engaged in an extensive and targeted capacity building of project stakeholders at all levels but with a specific focus on district and village level. A central part of this has been building the capacity for PA management, including collecting and manage data from ranger patrols using current day technology such as GPS drones and relevant computer software. Another key avenue has been engagement with village beneficiaries which have been trained in various livelihood initiatives such as livestock raising, tree nursery establishment and operations, rice farming, dressmaking, reforestation and various aspects of ecotourism services and skills.

235. The approach for integrating nature conservation concerns into spatial/land use planning has been well structured. The development of the districts Integrated Spatial Plans and the subsequent Strategic Environment Assessments provided important input to stakeholders understanding of environmental concerns, potential impacts and the need for environmental safeguards. The development of the web-based special planning tool “Savannakhet decides” provides for an important extra, and easy to use, data source which can help in decision-making. This combined package and the associated capacity building of key beneficiaries has provided for a solid base on which the members of the district multi-sector stakeholder committees can make informed land use investment decisions on.

236. The project’s engagement in the development of the Protected Areas Management Plans and their supporting business plans, can be seen as refreshing as they, in their format, are brief and to the point. Generally speaking these documents are not holistic vision documents which attempts to list and tackle all

issues and challenges within the protected areas at once. Rather they are practical documents which addresses the immediate needs and supports the upstart of the protected areas in the immediate future. In this, they become manageable for the protected areas managers and their briefness facilitates that these documents are being actively used.

237. As noted above the project has engaged in various ecotourism trainings and capacity building in support of its effort to establish functional tourist activities and attractions. And although, the current Covid-19 Pandemic has not allowed the sites/destinations to benefit from the project's work due to lack of tourist influx the established attractions, including trails viewing platforms camping sites etc. are fully functional and has the potential for attracting tourists. The project also focused on how best to ensure sustainable tourism within the protected areas without compromising neither the nature nor the experiences of the tourists. Part of this was to facilitate the development of public private partnerships for operating and managing tourist within the NPAs like the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary (the biggest draw-card within the project area). In its approach the project used action parameters including inviting tour operators on site visits, developed investment prospectus for the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary, and held an investment forum. Furthermore, the project developed the general rules and regulations for engaging in ecotourism within the protected area. As noted before, the Covid-19 Pandemic have impacted the results of the project's interventions as the investment climate in tourism/ecotourism is currently dormant. Nonetheless, the project's approach contains many elements which can be used for other sites/NPAs which are interested in developing similar relationships. However, future initiatives might want to consider bringing in investors earlier on so that they can be involved in the development of the products to ensure that they meet the requirements of their target groups etc.

238. The project's holistic approach for village engagement in conservation is multifaceted and veers away from only focusing on conservation activities. The project recognized that to ensure long-term engagement and vested interest from villagers in their natural environment immediate "bonuses"/incentives had to be provided for instance in terms of village infrastructure (village halls, water towers etc.). It also recognized that to decrease the reliance on the forest and to lesson the need for illegal activities such a hunting and tree felling and plant collection, attractive livelihood alternatives had to be provided. The village cooperation was done through a participatory stakeholder approach where villagers interests and wishes were taken into account as were the NPAs conservation needs. As the pièce de résistance conservation agreements were drawn up clarifying the role and responsibilities of the participating partners.

Lessons learned

239. During the project implementation the project has made a subset of important observations, or lessons learned, which are worth noting as they have been relevant for the SAFE Ecosystems project implementation but are/would be equally relevant for other ongoing and future projects. The key observations are as follows:

240. Onboarding of central project staff and technical personnel including the CTA, is important for an expedited project implementation start, as well as ensuring a holistic understanding and implementation of the project.

241. Where the project encounter national and local partners new to UNDP and UNDP/GEF projects, timely and sufficient training in UNDP NIM SOP policies and procedures are needed and such trainings should be repeated on an annual basis to re-fresh and bring new staff on-board. On-call assistance (from UNDP) should also be encouraged.

242. Fund transfer modalities between UNDP and the project's main implementors should be identified prior to project implementation start so as to ensure that funds transfer will be as smooth as possible (within UNDP and Government rules and procedures). Smooth fund transfer will lessen frustrations and potential animosities from the project's main implementors.

243. A detailed Gender Action Plan, as well as other stakeholder engagement documents, should be part of the project development, or at the very least undertaken during the first year of project implementation. Finding ways to increase the inclusion/mainstreaming of women in decision making and livelihood activities should be strenuously pursued by any project with a GEN 2 rating.

244. Project formulation should have the right amount of bottom-up involvement and should not be made

in vacuum. Local buy-in into the planned project activities/outputs/outcomes is essential for a strong project implementation. One way of emphasizing such buy-in, as well as ensure local understanding, would be to obtain local areas/district co-financing letters which are supporting the project's activities/outputs/outcomes.

245. Communication is an essential part of a project to ensure project acknowledgement from Government partners, national and international stakeholders, as well as the public at large. As part of this though is also to ensure an appropriate knowledge management particularly of the project capacity building efforts and behaviour change approaches. Thus, communication should not only highlight that events are taking place it should also direct the audience towards where additional knowledge can be found.

246. To have an effective engagement at village level, free prior and informed consent are an essential prerequisite for engaging with any ethnic minority. As such no activities should be engaged in without a signed letter of agreement (in local language) outlining the engagements to be undertaken with the local community. Joint agreements clarify the respective roles and responsibilities as well as how the respective parties are to interact with one another.

247. To work effective at village level, it must be recognized that there is in all likelihood not an equal playing field. Project staff and consultants are often highly educated, whereas villagers more often than not have a secondary or high school education. Because of this, it cannot be expected that village, including village leaders, are well versed in reading, and understanding complex documents and agreements. Thus, it is important to understand the project partners (i.e. for instance the village communities) and engage in accordance, hereby ensuring fewer misunderstandings, frustrations and optimizing effective engagement.

248. A thorough review of the project documentation to identify potential inconsistencies in the project documentation, which might impact the project implementation or the achievement of the project goals and targets, including GEF Core Indicator and Results Framework targets should be undertaken at the onset of the project. Following this, identified issues should be brought to the attention of the UNDP's technical support system in order to bring about acceptable and allowable changes addressing the identified concerns where possible.

249. UNDP/GEF projects are implemented in a dynamic environment and new guidance and global and national concerns are to be addressed by the project as part of its implementation, as appropriate. Hence, UNDP corporate guidance and ever increasing focus on transparency, stakeholder inclusion and good governance (including appropriate grievance mechanisms) should be included in the management aspects of the project to ensure that the project remains relevant and accountable to donors and stakeholders.

Annexes

Annex 1: List of Documentation obtained at the time of the Inception Report for the Terminal Evaluation.

Annex 2: Agreed list of stakeholders to be consulted during the TE and planned interview schedules.

Annex 3: Terminal Evaluation Field Mission Report

Annex 4: Terminal Evaluation Evaluative Matrix.

Annex 5: PMO self-assessment Results Framework End of Project targets achievement.

Annex 6: Co-financing contribution at time of the Terminal Evaluation.

Annex 7: Management response to the Midterm Review

Annex 8: TE Assignment TOR (excluding TOR annexes) .

Annex 9: Rating Scales

Annex 10: 2020 UNEG Pledge of ethical conduct in evaluations signature document

Annex 11: List of interview questions used during stakeholder engagements

Annex 12: Signed TE Final Report Clearance Form

ANNEX 1: List of Documentation obtained at the time of the Inception Report for the Terminal Evaluation

Project documentation	
1.	UNDP Project Document (SAFE Ecosystem Project)
2.	CEO Endorsement Request (SAFE Ecosystem Project)
3.	Project Information Form (SAFE Ecosystem Project)
4.	SUSTAINABLE FOREST AND LAND MANAGEMENT IN THE DRY DIPTEROCARP FOREST ECOSYSTEMS OF SOUTHERN LAO PDR (Project Brief)
5.	Mid-term Report (SAFE Ecosystem Project)
6.	Mid-term Report Management Response (SAFE Ecosystem Project)
7.	Inception Report (SAFE Ecosystem Project)
8.	Combined Delivery Reports 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021(Nov.) (SAFE Ecosystem Project)
9.	Biodiversity Tool 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 (SAFE Ecosystem Project)
10.	LD Tracking Tool 2017, 2018 and 2019 (SAFE Ecosystem Project)
11.	Financial Audit Reports 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 (SAFE Ecosystem Project)
12.	Spot Checks 2017,2018, 2019 2021 (SAFE Ecosystem Project)
13.	UNDP Capacity Development Scorecards 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 (SAFE Ecosystem Project)
14.	Gender Analysis and Action Plan for the SAFE Ecosystems Project
15.	Theory of Change for the SAFE Ecosystem Project
16.	Social and Environmental Screening Procedure (Project Document version, June 2018 Version and May 2020 version)
17.	GEF Core Indicators (SAFE Ecosystem Project)
18.	Project Implementation Review (PIR) 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 (SAFE Ecosystem Project)
19.	Project Progress Reports (quarterly reports) 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 (SAFE Ecosystem Project)
20.	Project Steering Committee meeting minutes 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 (SAFE Ecosystem Project)
21.	Ethnic Group Plan 2016-2022
22.	Monitoring, reporting and evaluation plan (November 2017)
UN and UNDP corporate documentation	
23.	LAO PDR - UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION FRAMEWORK 2022-2026
24.	UN Lao PDR Socio-Economic Response Framework to COVID-19
25.	Country programme document for the Lao People's Democratic Republic (2012-2015)
26.	Country programme document for the Lao People's Democratic Republic (2017-2021)
27.	Country programme document for the Lao People's Democratic Republic (2022-2026)
28.	UNDAF ACTION PLAN 2012-2015 Lao PDR
29.	UNDAF ACTION PLAN 2017-2021Lao PDR
30.	UNDAF ACTION PLAN 2022-2026Lao PDR
UNDP/Counterpart agreements	
31.	Memorandum of Understanding between MAF, MONRE, the Lao PDR EPF and UNDP
32.	Letter of Understanding to operationalize the MOU between MAF, MONRE, the Lao PDR EPF and UNDP
National plans and strategies	
33.	8th FIVE-YEAR NATIONAL SOCIOECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN (2016–2020)
34.	The Initial Concept of the 9th NSEDP (2021-2025)
35.	9TH FIVE-YEAR NATIONAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN (2021-2025)
District planning and conservation integration	
36.	Strategic Environment Assessments (Strategic Environment Assessments (5) under the SAFE Ecosystem Project) (In Lao language)
37.	Integrated Spatial Plans (Integrated Spatial Plans (5) under the SAFE Ecosystem Project) (In Lao language)
38.	Report on the progress on the development of a Spatial Decision Support System (DSS) in Savannakhet Province - Output 4 (April 2020)
39.	Report on the development of a Spatial Decision Support System (DSS) in Savannakhet Province - Output 6 (February 2021)
Documentation on village engagements	
40.	Conservation Agreements (16 village conservation agreements under the SAFE Ecosystem Project) (In Lao language)
41.	Land license (16 village land licenses under the SAFE Ecosystem Project) (In Lao language)
42.	Village Forest Management Plan (sample) (In Lao language)
43.	Training for Village Development Committees on “Financial Management” (FM)
44.	Training for Village Development Committees on “Project Management” (PM)
45.	Training for Village Development Committees on “Project Management and Financial Management”

46.	Guidelines and Strategy for 2020-2021 SAFE Ecosystems Project Water Security, Home Garden Extension and Marketing Activities
47.	Guidelines and Strategy for 2020-2021 SAFE Ecosystems Project Reforestation/Afforestation Activities
48.	Guidelines and Strategy for 2020-2021 SAFE Ecosystems Project SRI Rice, Soil Management and Fire Control
49.	Guidelines and Strategy for 2020-2021 SAFE Ecosystems Project Animal Husbandry, Village Vet and Feed Activities
Protected areas management plans and business plans	
50.	Ong Mang Business Plan
51.	Dong Phou Vieng Business Plan
52.	Phou Xang He Business Plan
53.	Management Plan for Dong Phou Vieng National Protected Area (2019 – 2023)
54.	Management Plan for Ong Mang Sanctuary (2019 – 2023)
55.	Management Plan for Phou Xang He National Protected Area (2019 – 2023)
56.	Management Plan for Xetanouane-Phounak Protection Forest (2019 – 2023)
Surveys	
57.	Biodiversity Assessment of Dry Dipterocarp Forest in the Eld's Deer Sanctuary Savannakhet Province
58.	Biodiversity Survey wildlife-based Ecotourism Development in the Eld's Deer Sanctuary and its adjacent Areas, Savannakhet Province
59.	Review and Designation of High Conservation Value Forests in the National Eld's Deer Sanctuary, Savannakhet
60.	Draft agreement HCVF (In Lao language)
61.	Forest Cover 2017 Report
62.	Land Cover Report - Habitat - Eld's Deer Sanctuary
63.	Comparative analysis of Land Cover and Land Use
64.	Spatial Assessment of Land Cover Change and Ecosystem Services from a Case Study in Savannakhet Province, Laos
65.	MONTHLY REPORT ON DISCHARGE MEASUREMENT AND SEDIMENT MONITORING IN XEBANGHIANG RIVER
66.	Report on Siamese Crocodile (<i>Crocodylus siamensis</i>)
67.	Survey at Kout Kouang and Kout Koke Wetlands in Xonnabouly District, Savannakhet Province
68.	Report on Red-shanked Douc Langur (<i>Pygathrix nemaeus</i>) and Indochinese Silvered Leaf Monkey (<i>Trachypithecus germaini</i>) Survey at Dong Sakee Sacred Forest in Dong Phouvieng National Protected Area, Savannakhet Province
69.	Report on Asian Elephant
70.	Asian Elephant Action Plan For HEC in Phou Xang He National Protected Area, Savannakhet Province
71.	An estimation of density and population size for Eld's deer in the Xonnabouly Eld's deer sanctuary, Lao PDR
72.	SMART-GIS (In Lao language)
Ecotourism	
73.	Developing Nature-Based Tourism as a Strategic Sector for Green Growth in Lao PDR
74.	Savannakhet Province Long-Term Tourism Development Strategy
75.	Savannakhet tourism development and promotion strategy 2019-2025
76.	Eld's Deer Tourism Rules (In Lao language)
77.	Ong Mang center financial policy (In Lao language)
78.	Ong Mung Ecotourism Management Plan 2019-2025 (In Lao language)
79.	Services guideline for Ban Sanamxay and Ban Nongsonghong (In Lao language)
80.	Tour operating emergency plan (In Lao language)
81.	Village Based Guide Training Manual (In Lao language)
82.	Tourism potential info gathering , survey and assessment (In Lao language)
83.	Tourism service and managing plan for Dong Phou Vieng (In Lao language)
84.	Wildlife Tourism Experience Concept (June 2020)
85.	SAFE Project Ecotourism Report 2021 (In Lao language)
86.	<i>3-days 2-nights Katang trail to the Secret Forest -Dong Phou Vieng National Protected Area (DPV NPA)</i>
87.	Overnight camping in the National Eld's Deer Sanctuary (Ecotourism information)
88.	Morning Safari in the National Eld's Deer Sanctuary (Ecotourism information)
89.	Afternoon Safari in the National Eld's Deer Sanctuary (Ecotourism information)
Ecotourism Public Private Partnership documentation	
90.	Dong Sakee Information Sheet
91.	Ong Mang Information Sheet
92.	Phou Xang He Information sheet
93.	Marketing survey in Savannakhet and Champasak province/ first site survey eld's deer sanctuary Ban Done the crocodile conservation area.
94.	Field Report, Gap Analysis, Key Recommendations and Action Plan for the Review and Support of Sustainable Financing through Ecotourism Development within Savannakhet Province

95.	Consolidation of technical and promotional information related to the National Eld's Deer Sanctuary Wildlife-related Ecotourism activities into a marketing package
96.	A Concession Business Opportunity to Manage the Eld's Deer Sanctuary Center
97.	Unified Investment Application Form (Controlled List) In Lao PDR
98.	Eld's Deer Sanctuary Tourism Service Agreement Application Form
Legislation related documentation	
99.	Forestry Law (2019)
100.	Legal Provisions Related to Sustainable Financing of Protected Areas
101.	Laws, Rules and Procedures for Establishing New Protected Areas in Lao PDR
102.	Legal Analysis of Requirements for Elevating Ong Mang Sanctuary to the Status of National Protected Area
103.	Legal Analysis of Gaps and Areas of Non-clarity in the Existing Legal Framework
104.	Prime Minister decree -Upgrade Eld's deer national Sanctuary
105.	Draft documentation of the revision of the 2015 PA Decree (2020)
106.	Draft documentation of the revision of the 2015 PA Decree (December 2021)
Guidelines	
107.	Agroforestry in Savannakhet - Towards more sustainable Farming systems (PPT)
108.	Recommended Guidelines and Strategy for 2020-2021 SAFE Ecosystems Project
109.	Reforestation/Afforestation Activities
110.	Recommended Procedures for Reviewing and Correcting 2018-2019 Village Reforestation
111.	Sustainable DDF Management Guideline 01 Mar 2019 (In Lao language)
112.	Sustainable Plantation Forestry and Agriculture Guidelines in Savannakhet Province, Lao PDR
Project proposals and initiatives	
113.	Poverty Environment Action for Sustainable Development Goals (Project document)
114.	Poverty Environment Action for Sustainable Development Goals (Fact Sheet)
115.	Integrated Water Resource Management and Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) in the Xe Bang Hieng River Basin and Luang Prabang city (GEF PIF)
116.	Promoting Climate Resilient Food Systems for Improved Food and Nutrition Security Among the Most Vulnerable Communities in Lao PDR (CRFS) (GCF Proposal)
117.	Project Concept Note Development for Environment Activities based on the SAFE Ecosystems Project
118.	Project Concept Note Development for Environment Activities based on the SAFE Ecosystems Project (Terms of Reference)
119.	Debt for Nature SWAP PPT - Addressing Debt, Climate and Biodiversity during COVID-19
120.	UNLOCKING FISCAL SPACE FOR BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE FINANCING IN LAO PDR - THE DEBT-FOR-NATURE OPPORTUNITY

Annex 2: Agreed list of stakeholders to be consulted during the TE and planned interview schedules.

Date & Time	Description / Role	Contact persons	Remark
6 Dec. 2021 9.00-10.00	Deputy Resident Representative	Ms. Catherine Phuong	Location: Vientiane Position: DRR Dept./Org.: UNDP Background: Has been involved with the Project since 2020; has visited the project site several times.
6 Dec. 2021 13.30-15.00	The National Project Director (NPD)	Mr. Bounpone SENGTHONG	Location: Vientiane Position: Acting Director General Dept./Org.: Department of Forestry, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry Background: Has only been in this position since April 2021; not as familiar with the project as Mr. Sousath; works very closely with Project Manager for information on the project.
	Project Manager (PM)	Mr. Keophouvong CHANTHAPANYA	Location: Vientiane Position: Deputy Head of Wildlife and Aquatic Resources Division Dept./Org.: Department of Forestry, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry Background: Has been involved with the project since 2019; familiar with the project site and all Govt. Stakeholders; Chairs Monthly Meetings; works closely with Assistant Project Manager and UNDP Technical Specialist.
7 Dec. 2021 8.30-9.30	Environment Team Leader (former)	Mr. Justin Shone	Location: Suva, Fiji Position: South Pacific GEF Coordinator Dept./Org.: UNDP Background: Was the Environment Team Leader from 2019-2021; worked directly with the Technical Specialist; recently re-assigned to Fiji.
	Programme Analyst	Mr. Thome Xaisongkham	Location: Vientiane Position: Programme Analyst Dept./Org.: UNDP Background: Has facilitated the Project since 2019; works directly with the Technical Specialist
	Programme Associate	Ms. Khamkhoun Xayalath	Location: Vientiane Position: Programme Analyst Dept./Org.: UNDP Background: Has supported Project finances since 2020; works directly with the Programme Analyst and Project Finance Manager
7 Dec. 2021 10.30-11.30	Finance Manager	Mr. Thongchanh Vilaichan	Location: Vientiane Position: Finance Manager Dept./Org.: SAFE Ecosystems Project Background: Has been involved with the project since 2016; Responsible for all finance/admin management; has facilitated all audits since 2016.
	Provincial Finance Officer	Mrs. Nilaphay Bunxachai	Location: Vientiane Position: Finance Officer Dept./Org.: SAFE Ecosystems Project Background: Has been involved with the project since 2017; facilitates finance/admin management at the Provincial level; has reports directly to the Finance Manager.
7 Dec. 2021 13.30-14.30	Ecotourism Specialist	Mr. Khaisy Vongphoumy	Location: Savannakhet Position: Ecotourism Specialist Dept./Org.: SAFE Ecosystems Project Background: Has been involved with the project since 2017; involved with all ecotourism aspects of project; main activities in the field and key tourism villages.
	Communication Specialist	Mr. Soulasen Phommasen	Location: Vientiane Position: Communications Specialist Dept./Org.: SAFE Ecosystems Project

			Background: Has been involved with the project since 2021; develops all communications materials; manages FB page for project.
7 Dec. 2021 15.00-16.30	Livelihood Specialist	Mr. Sisavanh Vongkatangnou	Location: Savannakhet Position: Livelihoods / Gender Specialist Dept./Org: SAFE Ecosystems Project Background: Has been involved with the project since 2017; involved with all livelihoods/gender aspects of project; main activities in the field and 16 target villages.
	Agriculture Specialist	Mr. Phouthavong Nachampa	Location: Savannakhet Position: Agriculture Specialist Dept./Org: SAFE Ecosystems Project Background: Has been involved with the project since 2020; has been significantly involved with home garden training and SRI rice training in the villages.
	Project Livelihood Activities	Mrs. Vathsana EKALATH	Location: Savannakhet Position: Technical Staff Dept./Org: PAFO Background: Has been involved with the Project since 2017; works directly with the Project Livelihoods Specialist to support livelihoods and gender related activities.
8 Dec. 2021 09.00-10.00		Patti Moore	Location: Bangkok Position: Independent Consultant/ Environmental Lawyer Dept./Org: n/a Background: Patti was the International Team Leader for legal consultancies in 2019.
8 Dec. 2021 14.00-15.00		Dr. Michael Epprecht	Location: Vientiane Position: Chief Technical Advisor Dept./Org: Center for Development and Environment / University of Bern Background: CDE developed the Decision Support System for Savannakhet completed in 2021
9 Dec. 2021 9.00-10.00		Mr. David Boland	Location: Vientiane Position: Independent Consultant / Environmental Economist Dept./Org: n/a Background: Building upon legal work, researched sustainable financing options for protected areas in 2021; currently working as a consultant for UNDP exploring debt-swap for nature opportunities based on his previous work with SAFE project.
10 Dec. 2021 13.00-14.00	Marvelao Travel Tour	Mr. Somteak	Business owner
10 Dec. 2021 15.00-16.00		Mr. Paul Eshoo	Location: Vientiane Position: Independent Consultant / Ecotourism Dept./Org: n/a Background: Supported the Project National Specialist to develop ecotourism strategy in 2021; supported preparation to engage public-private partnership for ecotourism management Savannakhet.
10 Dec. 2021 21.00-22.00		Mr. Kent Jingfors	Location: Canada Position: Independent Consultant / Protected Areas Specialist Dept./Org: n/a Background: Kent developed the Management Plans for the 4 National Protected Areas in 2018-19.
13 Dec 2021 8.30-10.00	Phalanxay District Project Coordinator	Mr. Banlang Vongvixai	Location: Phalanxay District, Savannakhet Position: Deputy Director General Dept./Org: District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO) Background: Coordinates and supports target area activities in Phalanxay District (2 villages)

	Xonnabouly District Project Coordinator	Mr. Khamphai Xaiyalath	<p>Location: Xonnabouly District, Savannakhet Position: Head of National Eld's Deer Sanctuary Office Dept./Org: District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO)</p> <p>Background: Manages ground levels activities of the newly created National Eld's Deer Sanctuary; highly active in daily management of target area activities in Xonnabouly District</p>
13 Dec 2021 10.00-12.00	Thapangthong District Project Coordinator	Mr. Bounthai Xayyalath	<p>Location: Thapangthong District, Savannakhet Position: Deputy Director General Dept./Org: District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO)</p> <p>Background: Coordinates and supports target area activities in Thapangthong District (2 villages)</p>
	Songkhone District Project Coordinator	Mr. Kanya Xanoulath	<p>Location: Songkhone District, Savannakhet Position: Deputy Director General Dept./Org: District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO)</p> <p>Background: Coordinates and supports target area activities in Songkhone District (2 villages)</p>
	Phine District Project Coordinator	Mr. Somlith Souvannasan	<p>Location: Phine District, Savannakhet Position: Deputy Director General Dept./Org: District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO)</p> <p>Background: Coordinates and supports target area activities in Phine District (2 villages)</p>
13 Dec 2021 13.30-14.30		Mr. Valiya Sychanthongthip	<p>Location: Savannakhet Position: Director General Dept./Org: Savannakhet Department of Planning and Investment</p> <p>Background: Member of the Provincial Steering Committee since 2017; Not only has Mr. Valiya a member of the Provincial Steering Committee, but DPI has also been involved with the facilitation multi-sectoral District Stakeholder Committee Meetings and the Responsible Business Forums; highly supportive of the Project.</p>
	Support for Multi-sectoral meetings and Decision Support System	Mr. Jithpasong Boliboun	<p>Location: Savannakhet Position: Deputy Head of Investment Division Dept./Org: Savannakhet Department of Planning and Investment</p> <p>Background: Has been involved with the Project 2018; has supported the multi-sectoral meetings, as well as facilitated the DSS consultancy at the Provincial level with CDE.</p>
13 Dec 2021 15.00-15.45	Provincial Steering Committee	Mr. Oukham Phounpakone	<p>Location: Savannakhet Position: Head of Environment Office Dept./Org: Provincial Office of Natural Resources and Environment (PONRE)</p> <p>Background: Member of the Provincial Steering Committee; has been involved with hydrological monitoring with the Project since 2018.</p>
13 Dec 2021 9.00-9.45	Provincial Steering Committee	Mr. Vorasith Sivongdao	<p>Location: Savannakhet Position: Deputy Director General Dept./Org: Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO)</p> <p>Background: Co-Chair of the Provincial Steering Committee since 2021; newly appointed as part of political movement during the Communist Party elections in early 2021.</p>
14 Dec 2021 10.30-11.15	Provincial Steering Committee	Mrs. Phetmani Sivongsa	<p>Location: Savannakhet Position: Head of Forestry Division Dept./Org: PAFO</p> <p>Background: Member of the Provincial Steering Committee; has been involved with hydrological monitoring with the Project since 2017; the SAFE Ecosystems Project is implemented at the Provincial Level through the Forestry Division; the Provincial Project Office is located at the Forestry Division compound.</p>

14 Dec 2021 13.30-14.15	Provincial Steering Committee	Mr. Thonkeo Phouthakaiyalath	Location: Savannakhet Position: Former Vice Governor of SVK / Former Chair of Provincial Steering Committee (retired) Dept./Org: n/a Background: Chair of the Provincial Steering Committee from 2017-2021; Has presided over almost all Steering Committee Meetings.
14 Dec 2021 15.00-15.45	Provincial Steering Committee	Mr. Bounleth Chanthongthip	Location: Savannakhet Position: Former Co-Chair of Provincial Steering Committee; Former DG of PAFO (retired) Dept./Org: n/a Background: Co-Chair of the Provincial Steering Committee from 2017-2021; Has presided over almost all Steering Committee Meetings.
15 Dec 2021 8.30-9.30	Provincial Project Coordinator / Deputy National Eld's Deer Sanctuary Office	Mr. Bounmanh Keomolakoth	Location: Savannakhet Position: Technical Staff Dept./Org: PAFO Background: Has been involved with the Project since 2019; coordinates provincial activities; recently moved to support the Eld's Deer National Sanctuary Center operations.
15 Dec 2021 10.30-12.00	Global Information System	Mr. Somchith Ketavong	Location: Savannakhet Position: Project Volunteer Dept./Org: PAFO Background: Has been involved with the Project since 2017; works directly to support mapping, demarcation of protected areas / reforestation areas; supports reforestation activities.
	SMART-GIS	Mr. Sounthone Thilavong	Location: Savannakhet Position: Project Volunteer Dept./Org: PAFO Background: Has been involved with the Project since 2017; works directly to support mapping and remote sensing; supports coordination of community Rangers.
	Project Reforestation Activities	Mr. Vannalith Sengsavang	Location: Savannakhet Position: Technical Staff Dept./Org: PAFO Background: Has been involved with the Project since 2019; works directly to support tree nursery and reforestation activities; supported coordination of Component 2.
16 Dec 2021 8.30-9.30	National Consultants	Dr. Chanthavy Vongkhamheng	Location: Vientiane Position: Director Dept./Org: Wildlife Conservation Association (National NGO) Background: WCA is one of the few National NGOs engaged in conservation biology / natural resources in Lao PDR; Dr. Chanthavy has been the Team Leader for multiple consultancies, including: Biodiversity Survey, Primate Survey, Crocodile Survey.
		Ms. Anita Bousa	Location: Vientiane Position: Technical Officer Dept./Org: Wildlife Conservation Association (National NGO) Background: Coordinated the Primate Survey for Silver leafed Monkeys / Douc Langers; wrote the report.
16 Dec 2021 10.00-11.00		Ms. Bouakhai Phimmavong	Location: Vientiane Position: Director Dept./Org: Enterprise and Development Consultants (National NGO) Background: EDC facilitated training on financial and project management with 16 Village Development Committees to support the implementation of conservation contracts.
17 Dec. 2021 09.30-10.30	Kaen Lao Travel Co.LTD	Mr. Somphong Deviengxay	Business owner
17 Dec. 2021 10:30-11.30	Co-Chair of the National Steering committee	Mr. Sousath SAYAKHOUMANE	Location: Vientiane Position: Director General Dept./Org.: Department of Finance & Planning, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry

			Background: Previous DG of DOF; has been involved with the project since 2018; familiar with the project site and all Govt. Stakeholders; Chaired multiple Steering Committee Meetings on behalf of Vice Minister of MAF.
17 Dec. 2021 13.30-15.00	Project Technical Specialist	Adam STARR	Location: Vientiane Position: Technical Specialist Dept./Org: UNDP Background: Has been involved with the project since 2018; involved with all technical aspects of project and daily management; works closely with Project Manager and Assistant Project Manager
	Assistant Project Manager (APM)	Mr. Phayvieng Vongkhamheng	Location: Vientiane Position: Asst. Project Manager Dept./Org: SAFE Ecosystems Project Background: Has been involved with the project since 2016; involved with all technical aspects of project and daily management; works closely with Project Manager and Technical Specialist
	Monitoring & Evaluation Officer	Mr. Bernard Bett	Location: Vientiane Position: M&E Officer Dept./Org: UNV / UNDP Background: Has been involved with the project since 2019; involved with all M&E aspects of project and daily management; works closely with Project Manager, Asst Project Manager and Technical Specialist
20 Dec. 2021 14:30-15:00		Dr. Souklaty Sysaneth	Location: Germany Position: Independent Consultant Dept./Org: n/a Background: Dr. Souklaty conducted several consultancies, including village level gender analysis and the development of reforestation guidelines.
22 Dec. 2021 14:00-15:00	ADB	Ms. Chandaworn Bounnad	Location: Vientiane Position: Financial officer Dept./Org: ADB Background: Financial oversight of ADB projects including ADB co-financing
		Mr. Phetsoulaphonh Choulatida	Location: Vientiane Position: Financial officer Dept./Org: ADB Background: Supporting Ms. Chandaworn Bounnad in financial oversight of ADB projects including ADB co-financing
07 Jan 2022 23:00-23:30	Regional Technical Advisor	Mr. Bipin Pokharel	Location: Toronto Position: RTA at the UNDP Regional Bureau in Bangkok Dept./Org: UNDP Background: The new RTA who provides support and oversight to the SAFE Ecosystem Project

Annex 3: Terminal Evaluation Field Mission Report

As part of the Terminal Evaluation (TE) the National Consultant did a field missions to the five target districts of the SAFE Ecosystem Project in Savannakhet Province. The field missions were conducted from 20-25 December 2021 during the dry season which facilitated traveling by car between project sites to the following mission sites:

- Xonaboully: Ong MangCenter, Villages (Sanamxay, Nongsim)
- Songkhone: Villages (Nathang)
- Thaphangthong: Village (Nathaman, Padoung)
- Phine: Village (Keah, Naphek)
- PhalanxayDistricts: Village (Nahou, Sanoun)

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic travel restriction, the International Consultant, who was home based, only the national consultant participated in the field mission. However, there were continuous communication via Zoom/WhatsApp between the TE Team regarding mission progress and engagement in discussions of issues/things that needed to be clarified and verified.

The overall purpose of the field mission was to observe, verify and gain a better understanding of the project's outputs, results, achievements, challenges on the ground. The specific objectives were to:

- *meet and hear perspectives of local beneficiaries and relevant stakeholders*
- *look at project outputs e.g. infrastructures, equipment, system, procedure, guidelines, plan, planted trees, livestock, ecotourism, etc.*

In order to ensure that a good representation of project's sites and stakeholders, a field mission agenda and list of relevant stakeholders and beneficiaries were jointly developed and agreed with the Project Management Office. Sites and locations were visited to look at project supports and outputs e.g. infrastructures, equipment, system, procedure, guidelines, plan, ecotourism, planted trees, livestock, vegetables garden.

During the mission the TE processes and objectives were briefly explained to interviewees encountered including a confirmation that the TE team will keep response, view, comments as confidential and findings were incorporated in the TE report. Local beneficiaries and stakeholders were interviewed and consulted according to the questionnaires/discussion points prepared by the TE team. All interviews/discussions were conducted in person following COVID 19 measures e.g. spacing, wearing mask during the interviews.

Itinerary of Field Missions

Agenda of the Mission in Sounnaboully District (1st day)

Day	Time	Activity
20 December 2021	08.00-09.00	Flight from Vientiane Capital to Savannakhet Province
	09.30-12.00	Savannakhet Province to Eld's Deer Sanctuary Center
	13.00-14.00	Meeting management and staff of the El's Deer Sanctuary Center <i>Introductory session on roles, responsibilities and staffing of the center.</i>
	14.00-14.40	Deputy district governor of Sounnaboully District <i>Discussed on Project's supports and achievements in Sounnaboully District</i>
	14.40-15.30	Site visit at the center <i>Walk around the center to see nursery garden, chicken, pig rearing activities, camping site. Discussed with volunteers to work on demonstration site on vegetables and livestock production.</i>
	15.30-15.45	Site visit at the community market at Ban Keokhamdee

		<i>The community market is recently constructed and ready to open in January 2022. This market will provide space for local community to sell their local products.</i>
	15.45-16.20	Water supply system at Ban Xaysomboun, Sonnbouly District <i>Discussed with water users/consumers who expressed appreciation with the water supply system. It is easier to get water instead of carry</i>
	16.20-17.30	Site visit at the potential tourism destination in Sonnbouly District <i>Visited the Restoration and Conservation of White Egrets Habitat at Swamp. The project supported the local community to plant trees in the areas where people look at the White Egrets.</i>

List of Beneficiaries and Stakeholders Interviewed

Name	Position	Organization
Mr. Khamphay Xaiyalath	Head of Center	El's Deer Sanctuary Center
Dr. Sounthone Theppanya	Deputy Head of Center	El's Deer Sanctuary Center
Mr. Bounmanh Keomolakoth	Deputy Head of Center	El's Deer Sanctuary Center
Mr. Phayvieng Vongkhamheng	Assistant Project Manager	PMU
Mr. Vannalith Sengsavang	Technical Staff	PAFO
Mr. Phoukhong Phanthavadee	Deputy District Governor	Soumnabouly District
Ms. Lah	Villager	Ban Xaysomboun, Sonnbouly District
Mr. Souk	Villager	Ban Xaysomboun, Sonnbouly District



Site visit at Eld's Deer National Sanctuary Center

Agenda of the Mission in Sonnbouly District (2nd day)

Day	Time	Activity
21 December 2021	08.30-11.30	Meeting with village management committee/head of village from eight villages, Sonnbouly District at Eld's Deer National Sanctuary Center <i>Discussed about Project's supports, challenges, achievements and perspectives toward of the project completion. One of discussion topics was the experience on the implementation of conservation agreement.</i>
	11.30-12.00	Meeting with Map & GIS Volunteer at Eld's Deer National Sanctuary Center <i>Discussed with the Map & GIS Volunteer on how the center communicate with and collect data from village rangers.</i>
	13.00-13.30	Presentation by ecotourism team <i>The tourism expert presented tourism activities and tour packages.</i>
	13.30-14.00	Toured around the Ong Mang Dry Dipterocarp Forest <i>Visited ecotourism sites to look at the planted trees, camping sites, tower to see Ong Mang, and walk in the core zone and saw a group of Ong Mang.</i>
	14.00-17.00	Visited Ban Sanamxay

		<i>Walk around the village to discuss with the village management committee, sewists, vegetable production group, pig and goat farmers and nursery garden. Livestock rearing practices that include free grazing during the dry season.</i>
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List of Beneficiaries and Stakeholders Interviewed

Name	Position	Organization
Mr. Vongsa	Village Committee	Ban Sanamxay
Mr. Inthava		
Mr. Khamtanh		
Mr. Yod	Village Committee	Ban Nongsonghong
Mr. Kong		
Mr. Bouala	Village Committee	Ban Tangvainam
Mr. Phomma		
Mr. Kisouk Sayadeth	Village Committee	Ban Tangvaikhok
Mr. Chanthaban		
Mr. Laumsern	Village Committee	Ban Naxay
Mr. Inteng		
Mr. Vilay	Village Committee	Ban Nasano
Mr. Buaphanh		
Mr. Khonsavanh Chanthavongsa	Village Committee	Ban Dongnongkhean
Mr. Bounlai	Village Committee	Ban Nongsim
Mr. Thongma		
Mr. Damduan	Map&GPS Volunteer	Eld's Deer National Sanctuary Center
Mr. Khaisy Vongphoumy	Ecotourism Specialist	SAFE Project
Mr. Viengxay Vongtheantho	Ecotourism Officer	Eld's Deer National Sanctuary Center
Ms. Noy	Sewing beneficiary	Ban Sanamxay
Mr. Kuom	Goat rearing	



Ecotourism site and activities at Ban Sanamxay

Agenda of the Mission in Sounnabouly and Songkhone District (3rd day)

Day	Time	Activity
22 December 2021	07.30-09.30	Travel from Eld's Deer National Sanctuary Center to Ban Nongsim, Sounnabouly District <i>Travel by car with bumping rural road through forest areas.</i>
	10.00-12.00	Meeting with villagers and site visit at Ban Nongsim <i>Met villagers including village management committee, veterinarians, rangers, agriculture farmers, sewists who were gathered at the village office. Walk around the village to see vegetable garden, rice paddy field. Livestock rearing practices that include free grazing during the dry season.</i>
	13.00-15.00	Travel from Ban Nongsim to Ban Nathang, Songkhone District

		<i>Travel by car with bumping road and crossed Xebanghieng River by traditional ferry.</i>
	15.00-17.00	Meeting with villagers and site visit at Ban Nathang <i>Met villagers including village management committee, veterinarians, rangers, agriculture farmers, dressmaker. Walk around the village to see the sewing activities e.g. making blouses with local cotton and traditional dyed, pig rearing, and vegetable garden along Xebanghieng river.</i>
	17.00-19.00	Travel from Ban Nathang to Thapangthong District

Name	Position	Organization
40 Villagers	Rangers, Veterinarians, Dressmakers, Livestock rearing, Vegetables gardeners, etc.	Ban Nongsim
20 Villagers	Rangers, Veterinarians, Dressmakers, Livestock rearing, Vegetables gardeners etc.	Ban Nathang



Discussions with youth and women at Ban Nongsim

Agenda of the Mission in Thapangthong and Phin District (4th day)

Day	Time	Activity
23 December 2021	07.00-09.00	Travel from Thapangthong District to Ban Nathaman
	09.00-12.00	Meeting with villagers from Ban Nathaman and Ban Padoung <i>Met villagers from two villages at Ban Nathaman's village office. While only village management committee from Ban Padoung attended the meeting, there were village management committee, veterinarians, rangers, agriculture farmers, dressmaker from Ban Nathaman. At Ban Nathaman, walk around the village to see the paddy rice, nursery garden, pig rearing, and vegetable garden.</i>
	13.00-14.30	Travel from Ban Nathaman to Ban Kea <i>Traveled by car with bumping road and crossed Xebanghieng River by traditional ferry</i>

	14.30-17.30	Meeting with villagers from Ban Kea and Ban Naphek <i>Met villagers from two villages at Ban Kea's village office. While only village management committee from Ban Naphek attended the meeting, there were village management committee, veterinarians, rangers, agriculture farmers, dressmaker from Ban Kea. There were village management committee, veterinarians, rangers, agriculture farmers, dressmaker. At Ban Kea, walk around the village to see the ground water drilling by the company, planted tree at household.</i>
	17.30-19.00	Travel from Ban Kea to Phin District <i>Traveled by car with bumping road</i>

Name	Position	Organization
30 Villagers	Two Village Committees, Rangers, Veterinarians, Dressmakers, Livestock rearing, Vegetables gardeners, etc.	Ban Nathaman and Ban Padoung
35 Villagers	Two Village Committees, Rangers, Veterinarians, Dressmaker, Livestock rearing, Vegetables gardeners etc.	Ban Kea and Ban Naphek



Nurseries garden at Ban Nathaman and goat rearing at Ban Padong

Agenda of the Mission in Phalanxay District (5th day)

Day	Time	Activity
24 December 2021	09.00-10.30	Travel from Phin District Center to Ban Sanoun <i>Traveled by car with bumping road</i>
	10.00-14.30	Meeting with villagers from Ban Sanoun and Ban Nahou <i>Met villagers from two villages at Ban Sanoun's village office. While only village management committee including rangers, veterinarians from Ban Nahou attended the meeting, there were village management committee, veterinarians, rangers, agriculture farmers, dressmaker from Ban Sanoun. At Ban Sanoun, walk around the village to see the chicken production, planted tree and wildfire corridors to prevent wildfire.</i>
	14.30-16.00	Travel from Ban Sanoun to Kaisone City <i>Traveled by car with bumping road</i>

Name	Position	Organization
20 Villagers	Two Village Committees, Rangers, Veterinarians, Dressmaker, Livestock rearing, Vegetables gardeners etc.	Ban Sanoun and Ban Nahou



Wildfire corridors to prevent wildfire and reforestation at Ban Sanoun

Agenda of the Mission in Savannakhet Province (6th day)

Day	Time	Activity
25 December 2021	08.00-16.00	Travel from Kaisone City, Savannakhet Province to Vientiane Capital

Summary of findings from the Terminal Evaluation Site Visits to Savannakhet Province, Lao PDR,

21 December 2021

Location (village, district): Naxay Village, Sounnabouly District					
Project Component and activity	1) Who was involved? (Women/Men) 2) What role(s) did people play? 3) If gender imbalance why?	1) What happened? (Result and process) 2) Long-term livelihood/ environment improvements?	1) Change in forest use? 2) Feeling about forest/ biodiversity?	Continued after project? (yes/no)	Note on sources and verification
Community agreements	Villagers including women and men agreed to sign the agreement. At least 20% women participated in all discussions.	Good to have the agreement. Villagers have been involved in different activities e.g. reforestation, vegetable garden, rangers, sewing. We hope to receive continue support from the project.	Villagers understand the importance to protect forest and biodiversity. We observe that livelihood of our villagers are getting better e.g. income generation, eat vegetables grown by themselves	Yes	Perspective of village management committee
Village fund (management)	We have for different activities e.g. vegetables, goat, pig	Revolving funds could help households when they need supports.	Villagers could access to money supports for relevant activities e.g. if they want to buy vegetables seeds, goat, pig	Yes	Head of village
Forest management plans (implementation)	We have been following the forest management plans to guide villagers to protect, utilize the forest. If needed base on request from villagers who is poor, an approval can be granted to utilize forest e.g. building house, temple.	Villagers have a better understanding on benefits to protect the forest. The decreased of cases for slash and burn agriculture practices shown as a result of understanding. There are decreased in illegal logging (e.g. for building house, house and animal fence).	Villagers collect NTFP only in the allocated areas. It is easy for villagers to identify areas for core-zone by the red demarcation that meant they can not collect or enter those areas.	Yes	Head of village and rangers
Livelihood activities (Pig)	Received 10 pigs from the project. Within the family, we rotate for feeding and taking care of pigs.	Pig rearing requires care and feeds, and it is more risk on disease outbreak e.g. swine fever in 2020-2021. Many pig dead (average 60-70% dead). There is no drug can cure the disease. Villagers requested the project to consider changing from pig to goat. While pig relies on the owner for feeds, goat is easier to feed and minor risk for disease with easy to sell as traders buy at the village.	More income generation activity.	Maybe	Mr. Kom, pig farmer
Livelihood activities (Goat)	I received 3 goats from the projects within 3 years, I have about 10 heads My wife and kids also help to raise goats.	The goat price is around 700,000-1 millions kip. Recently (last few days) some of goats are not healthy e.g. diarrhea, not having food. I asked the village	I can earn more money from goat rearing	Yes	Mr. Kom, goat farmer

		veterinarian to treat them and hope they are getting better			
Livelihood activities (vegetable)	6 families both men and women have been participating in preparing and taking care of the vegetable garden. “everyone could do the work, we didn’t divide roles or responsibilities” Mr. Phouthavong, project staff, trained us on how to prepare land, make organic fertilizer, etc.	Growing vegetables is not difficult, we could use rice husk, animal dung, etc. to make fertilizer. Now, we can do it by ourselves. Having a vegetable garden close to our house is comfortable so we can collect them whenever we want to eat. We can consume vegetables and sometimes we could sell within the village for organizing family event, wedding, Basi ceremony, etc. This year we could generate income about 800,000kip for the group revolving fund.	More families expand vegetable gardens on their land. Villagers consume vegetables from their garden with less rely on vegetables from forest	Yes	Reported by the vegetable group
Livelihood activities (sewing)	Two villagers received sewing training in Kaisone City, Savannakhet province. Both of us are women. I fished high school. Before receiving training, I didn’t have any job. I help our family to collect food from forest (e.g. frog, vegetables) and planting rice.	I am very happy that I can earn money by myself. Average, I can make Lao skirt (Sinh) 8 skirts/month and simple blouse 10 blouses/month. This year, I made Skirt: 15,000kip/skirt Blouse: 60,000kip/blouse I already teach one more villager and now she is able to make skirt.	I can earn income and give money to my parents. I hardly go to the forest to collect/look for food as I focus on my sewing.	Yes	Ms. Noy, Sewist
Ecotourism (home stay)	Few households were trained to provide home stay services	Tourists are not interested in staying at the household yet. Usually, they come for one day and go back.	“Villagers understand the importance to protect forest and Ong Mang. We want to protect them so that young generation and visitors could see them” stated by village head.	Maybe	Village head
Ecotourism (guide)	I received a five-day training from the project. I learned about protecting forest, ecotourism, how to explain to tourists	I guided few tourists (3 times). I hope there are more tourists after COVID. I am happy to guide the tourist to visit the forest and see Ong Mang. I set up a camp for tourists 50,000kip/camp (camps are from the Eld’s Deer National Sanctuary Center) in which we have to give 20,000kip back to the center.	I observed that more Ong Mang in the forest.	Yes	Mr. Meuy
Reforestation	We fished tree plantation for 5 ha. We were trained by the project on how to do seedlings (e.g.	Villagers also planted tree at home and in their rice field. Some trees died as the plants are too young or livestock eat them. We can produced and supplied seedlings 2020 = 8,000 seedlings 2021= 6,000 seedlings	There are more trees in the village and in the forest.	Yes	Deputy village head

	select seeds, prepare soil, fertilizers)				
Village rangers	14 rangers (some women)	All of us know how to use GPS, we follow the instruction to mark GPS e.g. saw birds, Ong Mang, logging. We conduct patrol duties 10day/month	Within this year, we have one case of logging. The 1 st is to educate them without punishment or fire.	Yes	
Location: Saysomboun Village, Sonnabouly District					
Water Supply	Through a direct procurement process, a company have been installing the water tank and underground water system (water pump)	In the past, villagers consume and utilize water directly from the Houay Lamkink Lake. This water is cleaner and comfortable by using water tap.	"this is water from heaven", Souk said. I and my family will come to use water from this place	yes	Mr. Souk

22 December 2021

Location (village, district): Nongsim Village, Sounnabouly District					
Project Component and activity	1) Who was involved? (Women/ Men) 2) What role(s) did people play? 3) If gender imbalance why?	1) What happened? (Result and process) 2) Long-term livelihood/ environment improvements?	1) Change in forest use? 2) Feeling about forest/ biodiversity?	Continued after project? (yes/no)	Note on sources and verification
Community agreements	Greater involvement of women in all activities. We have three agreements: 1 st : we didn't not know how to use or follow the agreement. 2 nd project help us to have a better understanding and guide us how to implement the agreement 3 rd Extension of the 2 nd agreement	We have been implementing different activities e.g. livelihood activities, reforestation, pig, vegetable garden, sewing, rangers. We have new village office and water supply that all villagers could use. These are good facilities. Women are more active in attending meetings and discussions as well as implementing the activities	Villagers involving in all activities. We observe that forest is greener and more animals in the forest. Less cases on illegal logging. We want to keep forest for our children!	Yes	Head of village and villagers
Village fund (management)	We have for different activities e.g. vegetables, goat, pig	Villagers can access to different village funds	People don't only rely on finding foods in the forest	Yes	Head of village
Forest management plans (implementation)	We don't have village forest management rule before. In the past, villagers freely cut trees for their household consumptions and selling to others mostly people from other areas.	We inform villagers and help them to understand the forest management rules/plan. We usually explain and remind them during the village meetings, and sometimes we go to household to explain.	Villagers collect NTFP only in the allocated areas. It is easy for villagers to identify areas for core-zone by the red demarcation that meant they can not collect or enter those areas.	Yes	Village advisory committee and rangers

Livelihood activities (Pig)	Three families received pigs from the project (10 pigs/family)	We faced difficulties for pig rearing e.g. African wine fever. Most of pig dead. Only 2-3 pig survived.	Hope we can sell remaining pigs	Maybe	Pig farmer
Livelihood activities (vegetable)	Five families receive support on vegetables garden.	We are happy that the project provide seeds (e.g. cucumber, long bean, Lettuce, onion). We could eat and sell some of the vegetables. We can still collect some vegetables from forest.	We could use money to pay electricity bill, put in the envelope for wedding parties or support other events.	Yes	Vegetables families
Livelihood activities (sewing)	Two villagers were trained by the project in Kaisone City, Savannakhet province. Two of us didn't have any job before receiving the training from the project.	We have a space for sewing at the new village office. We trained other women who is interested in sewing. We could made around 6-70 skirts (I charged 10,000kip/skirt). It is difficult to make blouse, I could made only few blouse.	I love sewing. I want to continue learning and be able to learn how to make men's clothes e.g. trouser, shirt, as well as weaving	Yes	Sewists
Livelihood activities (veterinarian)	Three villagers were trained. have no experience as a veterinarian before receiving the training by the project	I advise livestock rearers on food-mouth disease, lumpy skin, swine fever. While we reported the cases to DOFO staff, they also provide explanation on new disease. Although we give vaccines to pigs, we can't not treat the pig disease. Now we have about 5 millions kip in the vet. Fund.	Although some pig dead, we are happy to be able to provide advice livestock farmers.	Yes	Village veterinarians
Reforestation	We fished tree plantation for 5 ha. There is no specific roles and responsibilities as both women and men joint planting trees.	More trees are planted. We planted trees in the areas that suggested by the project and DAFO.	There are more trees and wildlife animal e.g. paddy rat, squirrel, monkey in the forest.	Yes	Villagers
Village rangers	6 villagers were trained to be rangers.	We understand from the training so we can train others in the village. Now we have 18 rangers who rotate to perform patrol duties. We perform 7 days/month	Within this year, we have one case of logging. The 1 st is to educate them without punishment or fire.	Yes	Rangers team

22 December 2021

Location (village, district): Ban Nathang, Songkhone District					
Project Component and activity	1) Who was involved? (Women/ Men) 2) What role(s) did people play? 3) If gender imbalance why?	1) What happened? (Result and process) 2) Long-term livelihood/ environment improvements?	1) Change in forest use? 2) Feeling about forest/ biodiversity?	Continued after project? (yes/no)	Note on sources and verification

Community agreements	We didn't know how to implement the agreement because we didn't understand. It takes times for villagers to understand. The village management committee together with DAOF tried to build understanding.	Villagers understand the agreement and able to implement accordingly. We are happy to receive supports from the project on different activities. We will continue implement those activities	More trees and biodiversity in the forest	Yes	Village management committee
Village fund (management)	Pig revolving fund	Villagers can access to credits. We don't have any problems for returning fund by villagers. We started with 5 families, now we have 15 families as members of the fund	Villagers have more options for generate incomes and livelihoods so that they don't rely on forest e.g. they have money to buy foods and other family costs	Yes	Village management committee
Forest management plans (implementation)	In the past, we don't have village forest management regulation until receiving support from the project	Villagers understand the village forest management regulation.	Decreased case for logging	Yes	Village head
Livelihood activities (livestock) – cattle & Buffalo	We didn't receive support from the project for cattle or buffalo In the village, villagers have livestock: Rainy season: raise them in the fence Dry season: free grassing	In the village: Cattle: 811 heads Buffalo: 179 heads		Yes	Village veterinarians
Livelihood activities (livestock) - pig	I received 12 pigs from the project.	I sold 10 pigs. I keep 2 Breeding parents. I was able to return pigs to the pig fund so that we can expand to 15 families. Pig rearing is challenging e.g. disease, feeds. So, we want to shift from pig to goat.	We have money to buy other foods so we don't have to rely on foods from forest.	Maybe	Mr. Somsy, pig rearer
Livelihood activities (vegetable)	8 families received supports from the project for crops and vegetable plantation (corn, sweet potato, onion). Within our family, we all taking care of vegetables garden. Mainly, men prepare land and fence and women taking care of and sell them.	We can provide seeds to other families who are interested in planting vegetables. We have vegetables garden along the Sebanghieng River We consume vegetables from our garden and sell some of them. We have money to buy good ingredients. We are lucky, there is no disease to destroy our crops.	More villagers rely on their vegetable garden for foods and less rely on foods from forest. We observed that more biodiversity in the forest and river (more fish)	Yes	Mr. Siliphon

Livelihood activities (sewing)	Two people (women) were trained by the project. Before receiving training, I only focus on planting rice.	Among two trained villagers, one deliver baby so that she has not yet continue sewing. One women is being trained and I plan to train at least 3 more villagers who are interested in sewing. Sewing is not heavy duties so I can take care my children and sewing at the same time. After the training, I made 50 blouses (short and long sleeves) and 10 skirts (I charge clients 20-25,000kip/skirt depending on the materials). The service fees are divided: 10% for village development, 10% for maintenance, 80% for buying middles, yarn, etc.	I want to learn more on how to make men's clothes e.g. trouser, shirt. I like sewing as it is not hard work and I could earn income from sewing.		Ms. Pheuy and Ms. Noy, Sewists
Livelihood activities (vet.)	2 veterinarians who received training from the project Providing vaccines service: 10% for village development, 20% medicine/vaccines, and 70% for administrative cost (fuel, labor)	We have been providing services to farmers. Although we face difficulties to understand animal medicines/vaccines and cure new disease, we could consult with DAFO. Cattle (64 heads) were affected by lumpy skin but only 6 heads dead and we can save 58 heads	We can support livestock farmers to prevent and cure disease.	Yes	Mr. Sikhaxay and Ms. Manivone
Reforestation	Areas for plantation were identified by DAFO and villagers. Men and women involved in tree plantation	We completed reforestation in 5 ha in reforestation areas and villagers also plant trees in their house areas and paddy field.	There are more trees and biodiversity	Yes	Village head

23 December 2021

Location (village, district): Ban Nathaman, Thapangthong District					
Project Component and activity	1) Who was involved? (Women/ Men) 2) What role(s) did people play? 3) If gender imbalance why?	1) What happened? (Result and process) 2) Long-term livelihood/ environment improvements?	1) Change in forest use? 2) Feeling about forest/ biodiversity?	Continued after project? (yes/no)	Note on sources and verification
Community agreements	We have signed three agreements: 1 st : started to advocate on the agreement. We faced difficulties to build understanding of villagers.	We received supports from the project and district authority to help villagers to understand the important of forest and how to protect them. It is easier if villagers understand the importance so that they are willing to cooperate and involve in the activities under the agreement	There are increasing of trees/plants, crops and bird, forest rat, squirrel that show that forest is healthier	Yes	Head of village and villagers

	2 nd : Villagers start to have better understanding 3 rd We are now implementing under the extension of the 2 nd agreement				
Village fund (management)	We have different funds (based on production groups e.g. livestock, vegetables) with cleared roles and responsibilities	Help villagers to access fund to address livelihood challenges. We experience some difficulties to get a return money (delay for 1-2 months) but we can address the issues.	Villagers have alternative income instead of totally relying on forest for their livelihood. This means that forest is less harm or more protection.	Yes	Deputy head of village
Forest management plans (implementation)	We received support from the project to develop village forest management regulation	We use the regulation to inform villagers on forest management. We allocate areas for livestock grazing but villagers still practice free grazing because they don't want their livestock to be far away from their home. During rainy season, they usually keep them in the fence but during dry season they practice free grazing.	Only few cases of logging but dead wood/trees. No major case. Forest is more protected so there area increase of trees and wildlife animal	Yes	Head of village
Livelihood activities (livestock) – Cattle & buffalo	Livestock (cattle and buffalo) rearing is mostly free grazing We didn't receive support from the project for cattle or buffalo In the village, villagers have livestock	In the village: Cattle: 859 heads Buffalo: 516 heads We have been practiced raising livestock: rainy season: raise them in the fence during the rainy season we have to find feeds for them; and free grassing for dry season so that they can find their own feeds	We can use animal dung as fertilizer for tree plantation, vegetables	Yes	Village management committee
Livelihood activities (livestock) - Pig	Original, 10 families received support from the project but 8 families stop raising pigs. I received 10 pigs from the project. My family including wife and children help each other to raise pigs.	Generally, there are challenges in raising pig due to disease outbreak and you have to look for feeds for pig. However, I don't have problem with disease because I raise pigs in my crops garden far from the village. I plants cassava and banana in the garden so pigs can eat cassava and banana. I could sell three rounds and I was able to return fund back to the village within 1 year. Currently, I have 15 heads.	I can earn income from raising pigs so we have money for household expenses	Yes	Mr. Sonemany
Livelihood activities (Vegetable)	5 families received supports from the project. The project provided training on vegetables e.g. making fertilizers,	All five families continue to have vegetable garden for their own consumption	They don't have to find vegetables from the forest	Yes	Village head

Livelihood activities (sewing)	Two villagers received training on sewing in Savannakhet	We are able to transfer our knowledge by providing training to another two villagers. This is another new way to generate income for our family	We want to learn how to make clothes for men e.g. trouser, shirt, and we have to learn more how to make different kind of blouses	Yes	Sewlingers
Livelihood activities (vet.)	Four veterinarians (one women) who received training from the projects	We are able to provide service to livestock farmers	More livestock production could help villagers to generate income so that they don't rely too much on natural resources	Yes	Village veterinarians
Livelihood activities (others)	The project help us to build the village office and water supply	Very comfortable to have village office where villagers can gather to discuss and plan for village development. Other projects could also benefit from the village office by organizing meetings there.	We can provide information, discuss and plan to project forestry and biodiversity	Yes	Village head
Reforestation	There are 3 reforestation areas	We could produce seedlings: 1 round: 20,000 seedlings 2 round: 6,000 seedlings	More tree have been planted and they growing up.	Yes	Village Management committee
Village rangers	There are 6 rangers were trained by the project.	We perform patrol duties 7 days/month. Usually, there is a group of four rangers together for each time.	There are decrease in logging, wildfire	Yes	Rangers

23 December 2021

Location (village, district): Ban Padong, Thapangthong District					
Project Component and activity	1) Who was involved? (Women/ Men) 2) What role(s) did people play? 3) If gender imbalance why?	1) What happened? (Result and process) 2) Long-term livelihood/ environment improvements?	1) Change in forest use? 2) Feeling about forest/ biodiversity?	Continued after project? (yes/no)	Note on sources and verification
Community agreements	Based on the project requirement, we have signed three agreements like other villages. This is the first time ever, we sign agreement. It was very difficult for village management committee and villagers to understand the agreement. We didn't know where and how to start. We don't have telephone signal create difficulties for communication especially outsiders	The project provide supports on different activities e.g. livelihood, reforestation, goat raising. We achieved women participation 20-30% for each activity especially for meeting and discussions on the project activities. There are two groups of villagers: Lao lum and Katang. However, we don't have problem to involve women in project activities. Usually, the head of household attend meetings but other family members could attend if the head is not able to join.	We are happy to see more trees, different wildlife animal. Villagers understand the important of protecting forest for young generation.	Yes	Head of village

Village fund (management)	We have goat rearing fund	Villagers could access fund for their livelihood improvement. It is easy to manage the fund with no issues for returning money by borrowers.	It is very good that villagers could utilize the fund for their livestock rearing	Yes	Head of village
Forest management plans (implementation)	In the past, we don't have forest management regulations so that villagers freely utilize forest e.g. unsustainable logging, harvesting NTFPs. "they can do whatever they want with the forest".	Things changes when we introduce the regulation and plan on forest management.	Cases are reduced because villagers understand the rules and they are afraid of punishment	Yes	Head of village
Livelihood activities (livestock) – Goat	At the beginning, five families received support from the project. Each family received 6 goats.	We are very successful and happy with goat production. Now, there are 30 families raise goats with more than 110 heads. The production is mainly for sell but also for consumption within the village. Traders from other areas come to buy goats but we don't know where they sell the goats.	Villagers could generate income from goat rearing	Yes	Village head
Livelihood activities (Vegetable)	The project provided support to 5 families for vegetables production. The project also train villager e.g. making fertilizers, preparing land, seedlings	The vegetables are mainly for their own consumption but sell some of them to their neighbors.	It is easy for them not to go to the forest to find vegetables	Yes	Deputy village head
Livelihood activities (Rice)	5 families received support from the project by receiving rice seed of 15kg/family (Thadokkham 7, 8)	These are good rice variety. We observe that the production increase 50% comparing to the old rice variety e.g. 50 bags (old variety) to 100 bags (Thadokkham 7,8). "I like Thadokkham 8 as it is resilience to dry weather, healthy seed and more weight)	We have enough rice for consumption	Yes	Village management committee
Livelihood activities (sewing)	The project support two villagers to attend training on sewing in Savannakhet. Before attending the training, they are rice farmers.	They are able to make Lao skirt and blouse.	They can generate income on their own.	Yes	Deputy village head
Livelihood activities (others)	The project supports on building village office	Thanks to the project for this support. We have new village office for gathering villagers and use it for informing and announce about new regulations and update.	It would be much appreciated and we would be happy if the project will continue to provide supports to our village.	Yes	Village head
Reforestation	Villagers involved in reforestation activities. No different in roles and	We finished tree plantation in 5 ha	I observed that there are more trees and biodiversity in the forest because we protect them.	Yes	Village Management committee

	responsibility as women and men can do all activities				
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23 December 2021

Location (village, district): Ban Kea, Phine District					
Project Component and activity	1) Who was involved? (Women/ Men) 2) What role(s) did people play? 3) If gender imbalance why?	1) What happened? (Result and process) 2) Long-term livelihood/ environment improvements?	1) Change in forest use? 2) Feeling about forest/ biodiversity?	Continued after project? (yes/no)	Note on sources and verification
Community agreements	Villagers did not familiar with the agreement. It takes time to build understanding of local people We achieved about 30% of women involvement for most of the activities based on the project requirement.	The project provide supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building the village office. However, the ceiling fall down after completing the construction for few months. We hope the company or project help us to repair. - Awareness creation on forest management - Seedings nursery garden - Pig rearing, fish pond - Livelihood activities <p>Now, villagers have a better understanding of the importance to protect forest and find alternative income generation.</p>	We can observe that there are greener forest during the dry season. There are more trees and biodiversity e.g. wild chicken, clicket, frog, birds, paddy rat	Yes	Head of Village
Forest management plans (implementation)	In the past, we don't have village forest management regulation.	Thanks to the project to provide support so we have a regulation and plan that we can use it as a basis to create awareness among villagers. It is important not only our villagers understand the regulation but neighboring villages should also understand. Therefore, we would like to request for continue supports from the project both on awareness creation and livelihood improvement	There is a hug decreased number of cases or issues on logging, wildfire.	Yes	Head of Village
Livelihood activities (Pig)	5 families received support from the project. 5 pigs/family	Pig farmers experience disease outbreak especially African swine fever. Furthermore, they expressed difficulties to find pig feeds. Three families stope pig rearing and they find other livelihood activities. Now only two families continue pig rearing. They raise in the garden near rice field.	Villagers request for support on livestock production e.g. goat	Maybe	Pig farmers

Livelihood activities (sewing)	I had an opportunity to receive the sewing training in Kaisone City. I didn't have job before attending the training.	After the training, we could make 70 skirts and few blouses. I charge 19,000kip/skirt. It is difficult to make blouses. We already trained another two women who are interested in sewing.	I am happy that I can earn income for the family. Money is being used for buying food ingredients and pocket money for my kids.	Yes	Sewist
Livelihood activities (vet.)	Two villagers were trained as veterinarians. We expect to train more villagers to provide support in this work.	From 2018, we are able provide vaccines for 721 heads of livestock (621 cattle and 150 pig). In 2021, we can cure and save livestock of 40 heads.	We believe that livestock could help villagers to generate income and improve livelihood. As a result, they will not rely on forest for income or food.	Yes	Mr. Silaphet, Veterinarian
Livelihood activities (other)	Villagers have to go far to get water for utilization and consumption	Our village is located uphill. The underground water drilling company already drill for 50 meters but have not yet reach the water	We understand that protecting forest and natural resources we will have more water.	Yes	Village elderly committee
Reforestation	We meet 30% involvement of women based on the project requirement	We completed reforestation activity in 5 ha with 2,448 seedlings. The tree survival rate is about 75%. Villagers follow up and take care of planted trees every month. We built fire corridors to minimize impacts from wildfire or prevent wildfires. We plan to produce more 16,000 seedlings	There are more trees and biodiversity. We can expect even more in the next few year	Yes	Head of village
Village rangers	6 villagers were trained as rangers. Sometimes, women perform the patrol duties	We perform patrol duties 7 days/month. Fill in the form and report is prepared once a month. GPS is used to marked the areas when we see or hear wildlife animal.	We can continue but we would like to request for a continue supports by the project. This will help to improve livelihood of villagers and natural resources	Yes	Village rangers

23 December 2021

Location (village, district): Ban Napek, Phine District					
Project Component and activity	1) Who was involved? (Women/ Men) 2) What role(s) did people play? 3) If gender imbalance why?	1) What happened? (Result and process) 2) Long-term livelihood/ environment improvements?	1) Change in forest use? 2) Feeling about forest/ biodiversity?	Continued after project? (yes/no)	Note on sources and verification
Community agreements	We signed three agreements. The project provide supports on building village office. We also faced difficulties at the beginning of the agreement but we receive more explanation	The project help the village to reduce poverty through providing supports especially support on livelihood improvement. About 20-30% of women involvement for most of the activities especially meetings and planning process	I observe that villagers have principles to manage and protect forest. This can be seen by observing the green forest and increase of biodiversity	Yes	Head of Village

	and guidance from the project so we have a better understanding and able to implement accordingly.				
Forest management plans (implementation)	We don't have village forest management plan or regulation before the project's support.	We conduct several meetings and discussion with villagers on the regulation. However, there is a need to continue creating awareness and understanding from time to time. This should include awareness creation of neighboring villages who seem to be the case for logging. If needed, villagers could request to utilize production forest e.g. building house. We would like to request for continue supports from the project on awareness creation within the villages and neighboring villages	Decreased number of cases or issues on logging, wildfire, expanding paddy field in the forest areas. Increased of wild chicken, birds, others wildlife.	Yes	Head of Village
Livelihood activities (Rice)	5 families received support from the project. Before the project support, the rice productivity is low. Received 20kg/family	Increased rice productivity. Two rice variety: - Thadokkham 8: healthy seeds with more weights, resilience to dry weather - Thasano 7: aromatic rice, soft and beautiful rice	Villagers have enough rice for consumption and able to sell some	Yes	Rice farmers
Livelihood activities (sewing)	Two women benefit from the sewing training in Kaisone City. They didn't have job before attending the training.	They continue the sewing especially making skirt. They are able to train one more villager who is interested in sewing	They can earn income for the family	Yes	Women representative
Livelihood activities (other)	We don't have electric city in the village	We would like to request the project to provide a solar power for the water supply system (pump)		Yes	Village management committee
Reforestation	We meet 30% involvement of women based on the project requirement	We completed reforestation activity in 5 ha with 2,848 seedlings. The tree survival rate is about 70%. The cause for dead rate came from planting too young seedlings, eaten by livestock, flood.	Yes, we can see more trees and biodiversity	Yes	Women representative
Village rangers	6 villagers were trained as rangers.	We perform patrol duties 7 days/month. Fill in the form and report is prepared once a month. GPS is used to marked the areas when we see or hear wildlife animal.	We can continue but we would like to request for a continue supports by the project. This will help to improve livelihood of villagers and natural resources	Yes	Village rangers

24 December 2021

Location (village, district), Ban Sanoun, Phalanxay District					
Project Component and activity	1) Who was involved? (Women/ Men) 2) What role(s) did people play? 3) If gender imbalance why?	1) What happened? (Result and process) 2) Long-term livelihood/ environment improvements?	1) Change in forest use? 2) Feeling about forest/ biodiversity?	Continued after project? (yes/no)	Note on sources and verification
Community agreements	We have signed three agreements. The first agreement is complicated with too many words/texts. We didn't understand and difficult to start the implementation. Both men and women attended meetings and involved in the project activities	It took some times to build an understanding. We organized several meetings to explain to villagers with support from district authority.	Villagers are willing to protect forest. There are more biodiversity	yes	Village head
Village fund (management)	There are different fund based on the project activity or supports	Each responsible group manage each fund without any issues.	Allow villagers to access fund	Yes	Village head
Forest management plans (implementation)	We don't have forest management regulations before receiving supports from the project	We can refer to the forest management regulations to inform villagers as well as resolve issues.	Decreased cases on expanding production areas in the forest areas, logging	Yes	Village management committee
Livelihood activities (livestock) - Chicken	Three families received support for chicken production. They joint as a group and raise chicken at one point	The group received 90 chicken but 20 of them dead. They may travel long and could not adjust to the condition. They are not native variety but hybrid variety (Sam Sai Phanh or mixed 3 varieties). Some challenge with disease e.g. bird flu. We are able to sell chicken and generate income for the group.	Not difficult to take care of chicken	Yes	Chicken farmers
Livelihood activities (Sewing)	Two villagers benefit from attending the sewing training	We trained one more villager. Now, there are three Sewists in the village. We charge 15,000kip/skirt. We are not able to make a nice blouse so we are not comfortable with making blouse	We consider sewing is another income source and we can make our own clothes.	Yes	Sewists
Livelihood activities (other)	We received the water supply system and village office	We are happy with the facilities provided by the project. We can consume water and use the village office for meetings and discussion		Yes	Village head and villagers
Reforestation	Women participated in the activities	We completed 2 rounds of reforestation activities: 3 ha and 5 ha. We produced seedlings for our reforestation activities and supply seedlings to other villages.	As a result of protection and reforestation by villagers, we can see more tree and biodiversity. This create a healthy environment and life.	Yes	Village management committee

		We observe that mature seedlings is more resilience and survival rate is high			
Village rangers	6 villagers were trained on patrol duties	In addition to perform patrol duties, we build wildfire corridors to prevent wildfire. We request the project to continue providing support to the rangers	There are more biodiversity in the forest. We marked on GPS when we saw or hear them.	Yes	Rangers

24 December 2021

Location (village, district): Ban Nahou, Phalanxay District					
Project Component and activity	1) Who was involved? (Women/ Men) 2) What role(s) did people play? 3) If gender imbalance why?	1) What happened? (Result and process) 2) Long-term livelihood/ environment improvements?	1) Change in forest use? 2) Feeling about forest/ biodiversity?	Continued after project? (yes/no)	Note on sources and verification
Community agreements	We signed three agreements: 1 st agreement is very difficult to understand and very hard to start the implementation. There are too many text in the agreement.	We have started to understand better during the 2 nd agreement. The agreement provide job and income to villagers. I will continue with the project activities but we would like to request for continues support from the project so that villagers have job and income.	We observed that there are more water during the dry season because forest is protected by villagers. We have seen Ong Mang come to our areas. There are many birds, wild chicken, etc.	Yes	Head of village
Village fund (management)	We never have village fund before the project	We have different fund e.g. chicken group, sewing	The project provide move livelihood options	Yes	Head of village
Forest management plans (implementation)	We didn't have any basis for forest management prior to receiving support from the project. Logging mainly for building house, fence and selling to other villages	The forest management plan and regulations provide guidance on plantation, protection, and other measures. After introduction of the forest management regulations, villagers reduced their practices to harm forest e.g. logging. One factor, villagers start to use cement to build their houses. It is important to create awareness for neighboring villages who usually use forest in our village.	As per our response earlier, more tree and biodiversity	Yes	Head of village
Livelihood activities (Chicken)	Five families received support from the project.	We organized chicken production group so we raise chicken at one point. Now, we have 3 remaining families. 2 families stop raising chicken because they don't have labor to contribute in the group. We could sell chicken (80 chicken) to traders from other villages.	We have alternative income and foods so we don't rely on forest for these. We can protect forest and biodiversity	Yes	Chicken farmers

		We have experience giving vaccine to chicken as a result they don't eat much or don't mate so chicken is not fat. We believe it is the result of vaccine. So, we refuse to give vaccine to our chickens although we have to sign an agreement with DAFO.			
Livelihood activities (sewing)	Two villagers were trained on sewing	They have not yet train other villagers yet. I am able to make clothes for themselves and able to provide service. I made around 30 skirt (20,000kip/skirt) and 20 blouses (50,000kip/blouse)	I like sewing and will continue to learn more. I want to learn how to make men's clothes e.g. trousers, shirt	Yes	Sewist
Livelihood activities (vet.)	Villagers were trained on veterinary	We have four veterinarians (2 women) to provide service e.g. cure/treatment, vaccine livestock. Most of families/households could vaccinate their livestock on their own. Sometimes they buy vaccines from other place.		Yes	Veterinarians
Livelihood activities (other)	The project build the village office	We are happy to have a new village office where we can meet and discuss among villagers	This facilitate discussions on forest management plan and provide information to villagers	Yes	Head of village
Reforestation	Women and men involve in reforestation activities. There is no specific roles but we all help in every activity.	We complete reforestation activities as identified in the agreement	We observe that there are more trees and biodiversity. Forest is healthier without harmful by villagers	Yes	Village management committee
Village rangers	6 villagers were trained on patrol duties	We perform patrol duties 8 days/month. We would like to request the project to continue providing supports to rangers so that we can earn income. Although we will continue performing patrol duties, we may perform less without supports as we have to also look for foods and income for the family.	Forest and biodiversity were protected. Number of cases were decreased	Yes	Rangers

Annex 4: Terminal Evaluation Evaluative Matrix

Evaluation Criteria Questions	Indicators	Sources	Methodology
Relevance: Is the project relevant with respect to the environmental and development priorities at the local, regional and national levels?			
To what extent is the principle of the project in line with regional and national priorities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of participation of the concerned agencies in project activities. Consistency with relevant strategies and policies. 	Minutes of meetings, Project progress reports, national and regional strategy and policy documents	Desk review, interviews
To what extent is the project aligned to the main objectives of the GEF focal area?	Consistency with GEF strategic objectives	GEF Strategy documents, PIRs, Tracking Tools	Desk review, interview with UNDP-GEF RTA
To what extent is the project aligned to the strategic objectives of UNDP?	Consistency with UNDP strategic objectives	UNDP Strategic Plan, Country Programme Document	Desk review, interview
Effectiveness: To what extent have the expected outcomes and objectives of the project been achieved?			
Assessment of progress made toward achieving the indicator targets agreed upon in the logical results framework			
Sustainability: To what extent are there financial, institutional, social-economic, and/or environmental risks to sustaining long-term project results?			
What evidence is available showing sufficient funding has been secured to sustain project results?	Financial risks	Progress reports, sectoral plans, budget allocation reports, testimonial evidence	Desk review, interviews
How have individual and institutional capacities been strengthened, and are governance structures capacitated and in place to sustain project results?	Institutional and individual capacities	Progress reports, testimonial evidence, training records	Desk review, interviews
What social or political risks threaten the sustainability of project results?	Socio-economic risks	Socio-economic studies, macroeconomic information	Desk review, interviews
Which ongoing circumstances and/or activities pose threats to the sustainability of project results?	Risks to sustainability	Sectoral plans, progress reports, macroeconomic information	Desk review, interviews, field visits
Have delays affected project outcomes and/or sustainability, and, if so, in what ways and through what causal linkages?	Impact of project delays	Progress reports	Desk review, interviews
Impact: Are there indications that the project has contributed to, or enabled progress toward long lasting desired changes?			
What verifiable environmental improvements have been made?	Verifiable environmental improvements	Progress reports, sectoral plans, municipal development plans	Desk review, interviews, theory of change analysis
What verifiable reductions in stress on environmental systems have been made?	Verifiable reductions in stress on environmental systems	Progress reports, sectoral plans, municipal development plans	Desk review, interviews, theory of change analysis
How has the project demonstrated progress towards these impact achievements?	Progress toward impact achievements	Progress reports, sectoral plans, municipal development plans	Desk review, interviews, theory of change analysis
Efficiency: Was the project implemented efficiently, in-line with international and national norms and standards?			
How was the project efficient with respect to incremental cost criteria?	Incremental cost	National strategies and plans, progress reports	Desk review, interviews
To what extent were the project objective and outcomes realized according to the proposed budget and timeline?	Efficient utilization of project resources	Progress reports, financial records	Desk review, interviews

Stakeholder Involvement and Partnership Arrangements: Did the project adequately engage with stakeholders and intended project beneficiaries?			
How has the project consulted with and made use of the skills, experience, and knowledge of the appropriate government entities, NGOs, community groups, private sector entities, local governments, and academic institutions?	Effective stakeholder involvement	Meeting minutes, reports, interview records	Desk review, interviews, field visits
How have partnerships influenced the effectiveness and efficiency of project implementation?	Effective partnerships	Progress reports, interview records	Desk review, interviews, field visits
Catalytic Role and Country Ownership: To what extent has the project influenced the development agenda in the country?			
How has the project had a catalytic or replication effect in the country?	Catalytic effect	Interview records, municipal development plans	Desk review, interviews
How are project results contributing to national and subnational development plans and priorities?	Development planning	Government approved plans and policies	Desk review, interviews
Which government policies or regulatory frameworks were approved in line with the project objective?	Policy reform	Government approved plans and policies	Desk review, interviews
Financial planning: Was the project implemented in accordance to agreed norms for financial management and implementation?			
Did the project have the appropriate financial controls, including reporting and planning, that allowed management to make informed decisions regarding the budget and allowed for timely flow of funds?	Financial control	Audit reports, project accounting records	Desk review, interviews
Has there been due diligence in the management of funds and financial audits?	Financial management	Audit reports, project accounting records	Desk review, interviews, field visits
How have governmental and other co-financing partners maintained their financial commitment to the project?	Committed co-financing realized	Audit reports, project accounting records	Desk review, interviews
Supervision and Backstopping: Was the project adequately supervised and managed for effective implementation?			
How have GEF agency staff members identified problems in a timely fashion and accurately estimate their seriousness?	Supervision effectiveness	Progress reports	Desk review, interviews
How have GEF agency staff members provided quality support, approved modifications in time, and restructured the project when needed?	Project oversight	Progress reports	Desk review, interviews
How has the implementing agency provided the right staffing levels, continuity, skill mix, and frequency of field visits for the project?	Project backstopping	Progress reports, back-to-office reports, internal appraisals	Desk review, interviews, field visits
Monitoring & Evaluation: Was the project implemented in accordance to agreed norms for monitoring and evaluation?			
Were intended results (outputs, outcomes) adequately defined, appropriate and stated in measurable terms, and were the results verifiable?	Monitoring and evaluation plan at entry	Project document, inception report	Desk review, interviews
How has the project monitoring & evaluation plan been implemented?	Effective monitoring and evaluation	Project document, inception report	Desk review, interviews
How has there been focus on results-based management?	Results based management	Progress reports, monitoring reports	Desk review, interviews

Mainstreaming: Did the project have a gender focus and ensured adequate involvement of local stakeholders?			
How were gender issues integrated in project design and implementation?	Greater consideration of gender aspects.	Project document, progress reports, monitoring reports	Desk review, interviews, field visits
How were effects on local populations considered in project design and implementation?	Positive or negative effects of the project on local populations.	Project document, progress reports, monitoring reports	Desk review, interviews, field visits

Annex 5: Project self-assessment for its achievement of the SAFE Ecosystems project End-of Project targets by the time of the Terminal Evaluation

Objective & Components	Indicator	Baseline	Targets End of Project	Current status (Terminal Evaluation)	Project Comment/self-assessment.
Project Objective: To demonstrate sustainable land and forest management in the forested landscape of Savannakhet Province in order to secure the critical wildlife habitats, conserve biodiversity and maintain a continuous flow of multiple services including quality water provision and flood prevention²¹	Improved forest management measured by an increase in total area under Sustainable Land Management (as reported in LD PMAT, Part I) <i>(Transition to GEF Core Indicators at mid-term; aligns to Core Indicator 4.3)</i>	0 ha.	698,746 ha.	271,279 ha.	The current status is lower than the initial indicator set during the PPG due to the transition to GEF core indicators at the Mid-term Review which simplified the area targeted and eliminated double counting.
	Improved management effectiveness of protected areas covering at least 583,672 ha. (as measured in the GEF BD1 Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool – METT): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dong Phou Vieng Conservation Forest Phou Xang He Conservation Forest Se Ta Nouan – Phou Nak Protection Forest Ong Mang Conservation Forest (proposed) <i>Transition to GEF Core Indicators at mid-term; aligns to Core Indicator 1.2, expansion area for Ong Mang counted under Core Indicator 1.1)</i>	METT Scores: 39 39 33 47	METT Scores by end of project: 65 65 60 74	53 51 47 66	Once enacted, the PA Decree is expected to further increase the METT scores within the target protected areas.
	Capacity to ensure compliance and enforcement of sustainable forest and land management, and mainstreaming of forest connectivity into the main production sectors in Savannakhet Province (as measured by scores in the UNDP-GEF Capacity Development Scorecard ²²)	Capacity Score: 16.5	Capacity Score <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By project mid-term: 25 By end of project: 38 	33.5	The completion of the Protected Area Decree and enhanced utilisation of decision support system expected to further increase the scores.
<i>Number of direct beneficiaries disintegrated by gender (NEW INDICATOR approved at mid-term to</i>	0	N/A	8,835 (Male: 5,301; Female: 3,534)	9,134 (Male: 6675; Female: 2459)	7,279- (5344 Male, 1935 Female)-Reforestation 1743- (1219 Male, 524 Female)-Ecotourism & Livelihoods activities 112-(All male)-Community Patrolling

²¹ Objective (Atlas output) monitored quarterly ERBM and annually in APR/PIR

²² Project will work to ensure that gender equality is promoted in the selection of persons to participate in capacity development activities

Objective & Components	Indicator	Baseline	Targets End of Project	Current status (Terminal Evaluation)	Project Comment/self-assessment.
<i>transition to GEF Core Indicators; Core Indicator 11)</i>					
Component 1: Enabling policy environment and increased compliance and enforcement capacities for sustainable land and forest management across landscapes including protected areas²³	Outputs 1.1 – Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) completed for 5 selected districts in Savannakhet Province 1.2 – Integrated Land Use Management Plans (ILUMPs) developed and under implementation in 5 selected districts in Savannakhet Province 1.3 – GIS based decision support system developed and supporting Integrated Natural Resources Management in Savannakhet Province 1.4 – Multi-sectoral Coordination Mechanisms in place to support sustainable resource planning and management in Savannakhet Province 1.5 – Policies & Regulations revised to support Sustainable Forest Management and Sustainable Land Management at the District Level 1.6 – Stakeholder Capacities strengthened for Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in Savannakhet Province 1.7 – Guidelines in place for Sustainable Plantation Forestry and Agriculture				
	Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) guiding resource management and conservation decision-making in Savannakhet Province	0 SEAs have been carried out in Savannakhet Province	1 SEA covering the 5 targeted districts completed by end of year 1	5 Strategic Environmental Assessments	5 Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) have been completed for each of the target Districts.
	Improved land use planning and management reduces degradation over 1,060,525 hectares ²⁴ of forest landscapes in Savannakhet Province, leading to unabated provision of ecosystem services such as water supply (quality), flood prevention and biodiversity conservation	0 district land use plans based on detailed ecological information or integrated into development and investment decision processes	5 District-level Integrated Spatial Plans (ISPs) strengthened with data from Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and integrated with District Socio-Economic Development Plans (SEDPs) ²⁵ by end of year 2	5 Integrated Spatial Plans	5 Integrated Spatial Plans (ISP) have been completed for each of the target Districts.
		No zoning or planning processes exist at the landscape level for	Zoning Plan for the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Landscape approved and guiding management	Zoning plans completed	Zoning plans completed utilizing existing Provincial/District Zonation combined with the creation of the new National Eld's Deer Sanctuary zoning, as well as Village Forest Management Plan / Village Land

²³ All outcomes monitored annually in the APR/PIR. It is highly recommended not to have more than 4 outcomes.

²⁴ Land use planning and management will benefit the entire landscapes of the 5 targeted districts (916,323 ha.) as well as areas of official protected areas that extend beyond the district boundaries (144,202 ha.)

²⁵ The SEDP planning process would include enhanced consideration of underlying natural systems, better spatial analysis and evaluation, consideration of changes in Environmental Service Values under different options, and climate change mitigation and adaptation, thus enabling optimal allocation of land and critical BD and LD benefits in tandem.

Objective & Components	Indicator	Baseline	Targets End of Project	Current status (Terminal Evaluation)	Project Comment/self-assessment.
		Dry Dipterocarp Forests	decisions by end of year 4		
	Information management systems to guide land and resource use planning in Savannakhet Province	Information on natural resources and conservation priorities is incomplete and highly dispersed	Decision Support System in place and operating by end of year 2	Decision Support System developed	Decision Support System has been developed based on the National Platform, "LaoDecide" in cooperation with the University of Bern; key technical Government Staff from all Districts as well as from the Provincial level have been trained and are now utilizing the system.
	Inter-institutional and multi-sectoral coordinating bodies overseeing resource management activities in Savannakhet Province to ensure compliance with SEAs, ILUMPs and SEDPs	No formal coordinating mechanisms exist for stakeholders involved in resource management and conservation	Multi-sectoral stakeholder committees established and meeting regularly at each of the 5 districts by end of year 1	Multisectoral stakeholder committees established, Physical meetings engaged in	Multisectoral stakeholder committees have been established in 5-target Districts. Physical meetings were affected with the emergence of covid -19 pandemic and expected to continue beyond the project implementation period.
	Public-private partnerships for sustainable land and forest management in Savannakhet Province	Existing public-private partnerships are ad-hoc mechanisms between individual companies and institutions	Responsible Business Forum established and meeting regularly at the provincial level by end of year 1	Responsible Business Forums held for 2 years.	The project supported an already existing government Responsible Business Forum for 2 years.
	Policy and regulatory frameworks support integrated approaches to resource management and conservation through following measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decree on Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) & develop targeted regulations on ISPs Jurisdictional issues and coordination for enforcement of wildlife and forest protection laws 	Existing policy and regulatory frameworks have significant gaps that constrain effective PA management and the mainstreaming of BD, SFM and SLM approaches into provincial and district level planning and financing processes and resource	By end of year 2 SEA Decree finalized and enacted by and ISP regulations approved	The SEA decree finalised and enacted before the project inception.	The SEA decree was finalised and enacted before the project inception.
			By end of year 3 Resolve jurisdictional issues and coordination relating to enforcement of wildlife and forest protection laws	Jurisdictional and co-ordinational issues relating to enforcement of wildlife and forest protection laws were resolved	Jurisdictional and co-ordinational issues relating to enforcement of wildlife and forest protection laws were resolved few months after project inception with the alignment of departments as a result of parliamentary approval. The DFRM which had been in MONRE was moved to MAF and absorbed by the Department of Forestry

Objective & Components	Indicator	Baseline	Targets End of Project	Current status (Terminal Evaluation)	Project Comment/self-assessment.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulations on PA finance and functioning of protected areas within wider landscapes Nationally-defined HCVF categories and integration of HCVFs into forest policies and regulations and PA management plans 	management decisions	2015 Decree on PAs revised to authorize PA financing mechanisms and landscape-level coordination	The updated PA Decree is currently undergoing	The updated PA Decree is currently undergoing review and revision by DOF and the Ministry of Justice. Article 65 of the current draft addresses financing mechanisms. The Project Technical Specialist, as well as 1 current UNDP consultant and 2 previous consultants have provided technical support towards this.
			Adoption of HCVF definitions; HCVF restrictions incorporated into policies, regulations and management plans	Several HCVF sites have been identified. But 1 HCVF site was selected. Provincial rules and regulations have been adopted and endorsed for this site.	Several HCVF sites have been identified. However, due to overlap of the new Eld's Deer Sanctuary, only 1 HCVF site was selected. Provincial rules and regulations have been adopted and endorsed for this site.
	Consolidated technical guidance on the design and management of plantation forestry and agriculture in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest landscape improve the sustainability of such operations and reduce their impacts on the surrounding landscape	General guidelines for plantation forestry and agriculture exist in Lao PDR, but are not specifically tailored to the ecological conditions of Dry Dipterocarp Forest landscapes	Guidelines on Sustainable Plantation Forestry and Agriculture developed by the end of year 3	Guidelines developed	Guidelines on sustainable plantation forestry have been developed for Savannakhet province.
Component 2: Sustainable Forest Management and Protected Area Expansion in five priority Districts of Savannakhet Province	Outputs 2.1 – New protected areas established that conserve priority habitats or ecosystem services and/or strengthen PA connectivity 2.2 – Management Capacity strengthened for Existing and New Protected Areas 2.3 – Existing intact forests designated as High Conservation Value Forests (HCVFs) to strengthen ecological connectivity between forest complexes 2.4 – Ecological integrity of degraded forest areas restored through reforestation / afforestation 2.5 – Village forestry Capacities and Mechanisms Strengthened (possible new activity) 2.6 – Provincial and District level stakeholders aware of benefits and strategies related to the conservation and sustainable development of Dry Dipterocarp Forests in Savannakhet Province 2.7 – Monitoring System in place to measure changes in key ecological determinants of ecosystem health in dry dipterocarp forests				
	Area of Savannakhet Province under various forms of protection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Protected Areas gazetted and fully operational 	0 ha.	By the end of the project: New protected area of 168,614 ha. (Ong Mang NPA)	130,745 ha upgraded to a Protected Area	130,745 ha upgraded to a Protected Area and named the National Eld's Deer Sanctuary after stakeholder engagement with the communities and District authorities.

Objective & Components	Indicator	Baseline	Targets End of Project	Current status (Terminal Evaluation)	Project Comment/self-assessment.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New or existing Protection Forests designated as High Conservation Value Forests (as measured in SFM Tracking Tool) <p><i>(Transition to GEF Core Indicators at mid-term; PA expansion aligns to Core Indicator 1.1 for expansion area, with existing PA area reported under Core Indicator 1.2; HCVF aligns to Core Indicator 4.4)</i></p>	0 ha.	Estimated 193,684 ha. Of designated HCVFs	Several HCVF sites have been identified. But 1 HCVF site was selected. Provincial rules and regulations have been adopted and endorsed for this site (5,780 ha).	Most HCVF sites identified were within the newly upgraded or existing Protected Areas, the Provincial Government made the decision to only designate 5,780 ha as an HCVF site.
	Restoration of degraded Dry Dipterocarp Forests to counteract on-going and past land degradation (as measured in SFM Tracking Tool) <i>(Transition to GEF Core Indicators at mid-term; aligns to Core Indicator 3.2)</i>	Approx. 1,000 ha. In the 5 targeted districts have been reforested (mainly with non-native, commercial species)	Restoration of 1,111 ha. Of Dry Dipterocarp Forest with native species by the end of the project	The Project reforested 768 ha The Project has supported approximately 3,020 ha of afforestation through natural regeneration.	The Project reforested 768 ha with over 400,000 native species seedlings planted by 43 villages. The Project has supported approximately 3,020 ha of afforestation through natural regeneration. This has been complemented by supporting SRI rice and agroforestry activities facilitate sustainable forest management by reducing pressures upon forest clearance for agricultural activities.
	Capacities of communities located within or adjacent to protected forests to effectively participate in SFM activities	Forest-based communities have limited mechanisms or experience in SFM or community management of forest resources	Community land certificates issued for 16 villages by end of year 1	16 Forest Management Planning prepared	16 target villages were supported with Village Forest Management Planning which was later issued Village Land Certificates providing a level of communal land ownership by each of the villages.
			Village forestry management plans for 16 villages finalized by end of year 2	16 Village Land Certificates issued	
	<p>Biodiversity management / ecosystem service provision mainstreamed in forest landscape management in five priority districts resulting in improvements in the status of biodiversity and ecosystem services, indicated by:</p> <p>Increase in Biodiversity Intactness Index for Dry Forests</p>	73.04	No net decrease	no "end of project" study was conducted.	Given that the period of time between the Biodiversity Intactness Index baseline and the end of the project was only 3 years, GIS forest cover analysis did not indicate significant changes, and that a number of policies, rules and regulations (including the creation of the National Eld's Deer Sanctuary) no "end of project" study was conducted. Based on the above, there would not have been any changes in the index that would have been statistically significant.

Objective & Components	Indicator	Baseline	Targets End of Project	Current status (Terminal Evaluation)	Project Comment/self-assessment.
	Populations of species with IUCN Endangered Status	Current populations within Project Area:	Populations by end of project within Project Area:	116% increase (173 individuals)	Population survey for the target species undertaken in 2020 and 2021, findings indicated population increase and expected to be sustained.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eld's Deer (<i>Panolia eldii</i>) Silvered Leaf Monkey (<i>Trachypithecus cristatus</i>) Asian Elephant (<i>Elephas maximus</i>) Francois' Langur (<i>Trachypithecus francoisi</i>) Siamese Crocodile (<i>Crocodylus siamensis</i>) 	60-80 individuals	60% increase	11% increase (111 individuals)	
		70-100 individuals	18% increase	25% increase (35-40 individuals)	
		32 individuals	12% increase	50% increase (18 individuals)	
	Maintenance of water quantity in downstream area of Xe Bangxiang River	12	18%	Survey detected at least 3 females and minimum of 1 male; 21 hatchlings reported by WCS.	Growth in the forest cover expected to contribute towards the water level at the baseflow in the future.
		12	No net decrease		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baseflows (dry season) # of flooding events 	Baseflows: 0.40m One flooding event(142.256m) water level	Baseflows: 1.02m No flooding event	Baseflow: 0.63 m Flooding events recorded in 2019 and 2020.	
Technical skills and technology transfer for Protected Area management staff in planning, environmental monitoring, enforcement, and PA management. (NEW INDICATOR APPROVED BY RTA)	Limited skills and technologies for Protected Area Management (Capacity scorecard baseline: 1) (NEW BASELINE LEVEL APPROVED BY RTA)	Capacity scorecard baseline: 1	Protected Area management staff have strengthened technical skills and supporting technology for planning, environmental monitoring, enforcement, and PA management by end of year 3 (Capacity scorecard target: 2.5) (NEW TARGET LEVEL APPROVED BY RTA)	2	Protected area decree and financing expected to enhance the scores
Existence of environmental education programmes to increase the degree of	Environmental education programmes are partially developed and partially delivered (Capacity scorecard baseline: 1)	Capacity scorecard baseline: 1	Comprehensive environmental education programmes exist and	2	Programmes expected to further increase environmental conservation awareness.

Objective & Components	Indicator	Baseline	Targets End of Project	Current status (Terminal Evaluation)	Project Comment/self-assessment.
<i>environmental awareness of stakeholders.</i> (NEW INDICATOR APPROVED BY RTA)	(NEW BASELINE LEVEL APPROVED BY RTA)		are being delivered for environmental awareness by year 3 (Capacity scorecard target rating: 3) (NEW TARGET LEVEL APPROVED BY RTA)		
Component 3: Developing and Promoting Incentives and Sustainable Financing for Biodiversity Conservation and Forest Protection	Outputs 3.1 – Public sector (agriculture, forestry, mining etc.) expenditures reviewed to optimise spending and realigned to increase financing for rehabilitation and conservation of forests. 3.2 – Wildlife-related ecotourism operations developed and operated at four sites 3.3 – New financing mechanisms (e.g. REDD+ initiatives, off-set schemes, PES, FRDF) developed and operational 3.4 – Alternative Livelihoods plans including Conservation Agreements Scheme developed and implemented				
	Levels of investment in land use planning and forest management planning at the village and districts levels in the targeted landscape in Savannakhet Province	USD 741,000 per year ²⁶	By end of project, levels of public and private investment increased to: USD 900,000 per year	\$1,075,886.85 USD in government programme expenditures reported by DPI for land use planning and forest management planning between 2016 and 2021. \$3,373,140 reported as part of DOF, PAFO and DAFO co-financing with the SAFE Ecosystems Project between 2016 and 2021 supporting land use planning and forest management planning. Total Amount as of Terminal Evaluation: \$4,449,026.85	The Savannakhet Provincial Government reported it had invested approximately \$1,075,886.85 USD invested by the Savannakhet Provincial Government land use planning and forest management.

²⁶ \$325,000 per year from PONRE for environmental conservation; \$333,000 per year from PONRE for district and provincial master plans on land allocation and land use, and the issuing of land use and land development certificates; \$83,000/year from districts for development planning.

Objective & Components	Indicator	Baseline	Targets End of Project	Current status (Terminal Evaluation)	Project Comment/self-assessment.
	Wildlife-based ecotourism products designed and operating in the project target area	0 projects operating	At least 4 wildlife-based ecotourism projects operating in project target area by the end of the project	2	2 wildlife-based ecotourism projects developed for Eld's Deer and Primates.. 2 other sites were assessed but deemed unfeasible. Elephant was considered dangerous due to the aggression of the elephants in Phouxanhei. Bird watching at Nong Louang Lake provided limited options and not considered interesting enough to attract tourists
	Funds available for management of protected areas / conservation forests in targeted landscape in Savannakhet Province (as reported in the GEF BD1 Tracking Tool – Financial Scorecard): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-governmental financing mechanisms Government budget allocations 	USD 0 per year	By end of project, levels of public and private investment through diverse and new revenue sources increased to: USD 100,000 per year	0	The Savannakhet PAFO has assigned 16 staff to the National Eld's Deer Sanctuary supporting their salary and a modest budget for operations. The Project has attempted to attract private sector investment however the COVID-19 pandemic has made this difficult; many investors reported they are waiting for the pandemic to end before making further investments in the sector.
		USD 168,480 per year	USD 250,000 per year	\$90,000 per year reported on GEF BD1 Tracking Tool as indicated by Government budget allocations for management of protected areas / conservation forests in targeted landscape (total: \$450,000). \$1,908,000 reported as part of DAFO and Ong Mang Center co-financing at the District Level in support of protected areas management with the SAFE Ecosystems Project between 2016 and 2021. \$959,211.14 USD reported by DPI for various Government and Development Partner expenditures on	

Objective & Components	Indicator	Baseline	Targets End of Project	Current status (Terminal Evaluation)	Project Comment/self-assessment.
				natural resource management between 2016 and 2021. Total Amount as of Terminal Evaluation: \$3,317,211	
	Incentives and other benefits to communities within targeted landscape are directly linked to wildlife recovery and forest protection (as measured in SFM Tracking Tool)	5< Conservation Agreements with communities in the Ong Mang Sanctuary	At least 16 community-based Conservation Agreements that incorporate improved ecological conditions and human development levels signed by end of year 2	16	16-community based conservation agreements were completed and implemented in the target villages.

Annex 6: Co-financing contribution at time of the Terminal Evaluation

Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Investment Mobilized	Amount (\$) ²⁷
Recipient Government	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry	Public investment	Investment Mobilized	5,338,665
Recipient Government	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry	In-kind	Recurrent expenditures	5,362,150
Donor Agency	Asian Development Bank (G0242)	Grants	Investment Mobilized	8,830,843
Donor Agency	Asian Development Bank (L3024)	Loans	Investment Mobilized	23,330,000
GEF Agency	UNDP	Grants	Investment Mobilized	386,451
GEF Agency	UNDP	Grants	Investment Mobilized	939,315
Total Co-financing				44,187,424

²⁷ The accumulative Co-financing contribution provided by the time of the Terminal Evaluation (i.e. third quarter 2021)

Annex 7: Management response to the Midterm Review

Management response to the Midterm Review of the Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao PDR

Project Title: Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao PDR

Project PIMS #: 5448

GEF Project ID (PMIS) #: 6940

Midterm Review Completion Date: 07 April 2020

Date of update of Management Response: 27 January 2022

Prepared by: *Implementing Partner, Project Team & UNDP Lao PDR Country Office*

Contributors: *Implementing Partner, Project Team, UNDP Lao PDR Climate Change, Natural Resource Management, & Disaster Risk Reduction Unit*

Cleared by:

Acting Co-Chair National Project Steering Committee: _____

UNDP Lao PDR Country Office: _____

UNDP-GEF RTA: _____

Context, Background and Findings

Background:

This document summarizes the management response to the Mid-Term Review of the Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao PDR. As the GEF Agency of the Project, UNDP CO provides overall supervision of the project and the Department of Forestry under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry is responsible for implementation of the Project.

The Project's goal is to facilitate a transformative shift towards sustainable land and forest management in the forested landscape of Savannakhet Province in order to secure the critical wildlife habitats, conserve biodiversity and maintain a continuous flow of multiple services including quality water provision and flood prevention. In order to achieve the project objective and address the barriers the project's intervention has been organized into three components:

- Component 1: Enabling policy environment and increased compliance and enforcement capacities for sustainable land and forest management across landscapes including protected areas;
- Component 2: Sustainable Forest Management and Protected Area Expansion in five priority Districts of Savannakhet Province;
- Component 3: Developing and Promoting Incentives and Sustainable Financing for Biodiversity conservation and Forest Protection.

The Project, which is to be implemented over a six-year period from May 2016 to May 2022, aims to conserve the Central Indochina Dry Forests Ecoregion. This area has been identified as a WWF Global 200 Ecoregion and as habitat for several globally significant and threatened species, as well as nationally important for the provision of numerous ecosystem services which benefit the people of Lao PDR.

Implementation and Findings:

The MTR in accordance with UNDP-GEF policy took place in November 2019. This was conducted between the third and fourth annual project implementation review (PIR). The initial MTR in-country consultations were carried out over a two-week period in November 2019, it included a kick-off meeting, interviewing partners and other stakeholders in both Vientiane Capital and Savannakhet Province. A field mission de-briefing with both the UNDP CO and the Project Implementing Partner. This initial period was then followed-up by a review of documents (technical, administrative, financial, etc.) and write-up period.

The team concluded that the project had made moderately satisfactory progress towards achieving the overall project objective. The efforts and recommendations of the MTR team was highly appreciated, although some of the recommendations were considered to be unclear and required some interpretation by the project team to identify the key actions needed to move forward. Having stated this, most of the recommendations were accepted and will be considered for implementation accordingly.

Of the fifteen recommendations, it is positive that ten are agreed, 4 are partially agreed and only one is not agreed as set out in this management response. The recommendation not supported is Recommendation 12 and justification is provided in the management response below.

Certain parts of the report, upon review, indicate that during the field visit and stakeholder engagement, there could have been instances where evaluators reported statements from stakeholders that appear inaccurate or could have been misunderstood by the MTR team which in-turn seemingly affected some of the ratings. To redress the above, additional technical, administrative and financial reports were provided to the MTR Team and we are not clear whether these were fully considered and appropriately triangulated which may have contributed to a better understanding of the ground reality.

It should also be noted that since the MTR, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the Project and COVID-19 impacts/potential risks have been considered as relevant in the preparation of the MTR management response.

Recommendations and Management Response

Midterm Review Recommendation 1. <u>Shift to big-picture strategic approach.</u> Prioritize: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (a) achievement of results that will be sustainable for the long-term post project; • (b) achievement of objective and (PIR) outcome statements for the long-term; • (c) achievement of objective indicators for the long-term. (1) Prepare big picture plan with rough budget allocations for remaining 2.5 years of project. Delete/revise/ add outputs/ activities as needed. (2) Approve plan. This is a macro-recommendation, which several of the recommendations below support. 				
Management response: Agree UNDP and the Implementing Partner initiated follow up on numerous strategies to achieve the project outcomes and intended goal. Further key actions listed in the table below were implemented in 2020 to ensure a “big-picture strategic approach” is to be implemented for the remainder of the project. The focus was not only be to achieve the project objective but also ensure sustainability of the interventions.				
Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
1.1 IP Project Team meet with UNDP Lao CO to prepare “big picture” strategic approaches towards achieving the project objective and (PIR) outcome statements for the long-term.	30 June 2020	IP Project Team CC, NRM & DRR Unit, UNDP Lao PDR	Strategic approach prepared with steps to achieve project objective	Completed

During this meeting, gaps, opportunities and constraints towards achieving the project outcomes and objective be identified.				
1.2 Present “big picture” strategic approaches and workplans for the remainder of the project towards achieving the objective and (PIR) outcome statements for the long-term at next the Steering Committee Meeting.	31 July 2020	IP Project Team National and Provincial Steering Committee	Strategic approaches and plans presented to the steering committee for their approval on 12 th June 2020	Completed
Midterm Review Recommendation 2. Clarify and improve the project indicators (“PRF”); revise PRF: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Revise project objective-level indicators to match most pertinent of GEF core indicators. Finalize transition from tracking tool to full set of relevant core indicators. (2) Prepare and finalize 1 to 3 broad indicators for each of the 3 PIR outcomes and replace current indicators as needed. Consider those prepared by the MTR Team (Annex B). Indicators should not just target simple task completion. Instead they should target meaningful results. (3) Assess, finalize, and approve new PRF. 				
Management response: Partially Agree <p>The implementing partner made adjustments on the objective indicators as recommended to transition to GEF core tracking indicators with endorsement of the project steering committee.</p> <p>Due to the addition of the core indicators (i.e. existing beneficiaries/livelihoods targets that are gender-disaggregated) in compliance with GEF guidance, the PMU assessed and considered that other changes to the results framework are not necessary to emphasize key project results.</p>				
Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
2.1 Prepare project objective indicators aligned to core GEF tracking indicators	30 June 2020	IP Project Team CC, NRM & DRR Unit, UNDP Lao PDR	Project indicators aligned to the GEF core indicators	Completed
2.2 Present at next Steering Committee Meeting for endorsement.	31 July 2020	IP Project Team	Project indicators presented and endorsed by steering committee on 12 th June 2020	Completed
2.3. Approval of results framework changes by RTA and inclusion in 2020 PIR	30 October 2020	IP Project Team RTA	The project indicators aligned to the core indicator submitted for approval and inclusion in 2020 PIR	Completed
Midterm Review Recommendation 3. Clarify forest areas targeted and prepare action plan to address full areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Clarify forest areas targeted by first 2 project objective indicators. Ensure that SFM is carried out across full areas. This should include active management, not just management plans sitting on a shelf. 				

- (2) Come up with action plan to address full areas. Include: (a) full area of 4 target protected areas/ protection forest (within and without 5 target districts) and (b) additional forest area in five districts, but outside these protected areas.
- (3) Finalize and approve action plan.

Management response: Partially Agree

The Project held consultations with relevant government agencies clarifying the targeted forest area as much as possible; however, it was clarified by the Government that the political and jurisdictional boundaries within Lao PDR do not lend themselves to implement the recommendations as prescribed by the MTR Team. Currently, in Lao PDR, the responsibility of management of National Protected Areas (NPA) is divided between the District Agriculture and Forest Offices (DAFO) of individual Districts. For example, if an NPA is located over several Districts, under the current administrative laws, each District is responsible for the management of the NPA within its District boundaries. As such, the Project is only able to implement activities within the five District boundaries it works with.

The Project has worked towards addressing sustainable forest management issues within the five Districts outside of the National Protected Areas by developing multiple plans, guidelines, tools and actions, including: (i) Integrated Spatial Plans which were signed-off by District Governors, (ii) Strategic Environmental Assessments also signed-off by the District Governors, (iii) the implementation of Multi-sectoral Stakeholder Meetings co-chaired by the Savannakhet Department of Planning and Investment and the District Deputy Governors utilizing the ISPs and SEAs, (iv) the development of Guidelines for Industrial Agriculture and Tree Plantations, (v) surveying and selecting 29 reforestation areas outside Protected Area boundaries, and (vi) the current development of an online Decision Support System to aid Government Decision Makers on land use and investment issues.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
3.1 IP Project Team meet with UNDP Lao CO to review Project Document and areas of implementation. A joint decision be made to clarify forest areas targeted by first 2 project objective indicators (as required).	30 June 2020	IP Project Team CC, NRM & DRR Unit, UNDP Lao PDR	Project team met with country office with clarification from responsible government agency	Completed
3.2 Based upon decisions made, determine actions that are necessary to implement (such revise AWP, etc., as required).	30 June 2020	IP Project Team CC, NRM & DRR Unit, UNDP Lao PDR	No adjustment Required	Completed

Midterm Review Recommendation 4.

Put strong focus on developing financing mechanisms and other special mechanisms for post-project conservation in project's target NPAs/protection forest. Design and assess the options. Plan and implement activities to establish selected mechanisms:

Work should be very action oriented. Avoid long, theoretical reports. Instead, conduct outreach to

- (a) international funding sources and
- (b) domestic entities that are needed to make domestic mechanisms viable. Consider: (i) Identification of and outreach to international foundation/ philanthropic funding sources, including Swiss sources, that may support livelihoods or patrolling. Their support can be a short-term bridge to other options. (ii) Support to Savannakhet for involvement in REDD+ (possibly as bridge to USD71 million REDD+ project that includes USD17 million GCF grant). (iii) Fees collected from private sector companies investing in Savannakhet (advocate and support policy changes on fees). (iv) National funds targeted for conservation, including but not limited to EPF and FRDF. (v) Provision of benefits to villagers (such as access to NTFPs) in return for patrolling services.

International consultant, hired after MTR mission, should have action-oriented deliverables (e.g. making connections with promising philanthropies) and focus only on promising mechanisms.

Management response: Agree

International Ecotourism and Financing Mechanism Consultants were brought on board with the Project and have completed initial scoping missions and supported their respective objectives of developing ecotourism sites and funding of the protected areas. The Implementing Partner is in progress of considering alternative domestic funding sources available such as the development of a National Protected Area Decree.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
4.1 International Consultant has been contracted; Results of an Analysis Report for the Output 2 Initial Scoping Study to be presented: (i) Partly based upon the initial 10-day field mission. (ii) A literature review of relevant reference documents.	30 May 2020	IP Project Team CC, NRM & DRR Unit, UNDP Lao PDR International Sustainable Financing Expert	Initial scoping study completed	Completed
4.2 Submission of Output 3 Field Mission Report: (i) Based upon the second Field. (ii) Establish if there are existing Business Plans. (iii) Stakeholder analysis (iv) Identify potential sources for sustainable financing.	31 December 2020	International Sustainable Financing Expert	Completion slowed down by restriction of movements resulting from covid-19 pandemic	Completed
4.3 Submission of Output 4 Business Plans (i) Development of a business model for long term sustainable financing (ii) Identification of potential investors	31 January 2021	IP Project Team CC, NRM & DRR Unit, UNDP Lao PDR International Sustainable Financing Expert	Completion was initially delayed as a result of restrictions on meetings as a measure to control spread of covid -19 pandemic	Completed
4.4 Support development of National Protected area decree	31 December 2021	IP Project Team CC, NRM & DRR Unit, UNDP Lao PDR DOF	Development of National Protected Area decree development has been supported; only final pending administrative steps by the Government of Lao PDR remain which are beyond the support capacity of the SAFE Ecosystems Project.	Completed

Midterm Review Recommendation 5.

Improve livelihoods strategy and revise livelihoods action plan and budget:

- (i) Assess which villagers need to benefit from livelihoods support to ensure conservation results and issue clear criteria. Assuming many or most villagers need to benefit to achieve conservation goals, focus on types of livelihoods that can benefit large numbers of villagers.
- (ii) Provide support for market assessment and market access.
- (iii) Increase proportion of livelihood funds used for capital investment – substantially reduce amount going to per diems.
- (iv) Increase amount of overall project budget going towards livelihoods.
- (v) Expand number of villagers and villages receiving support, including potential expansion to other 3 target PAs.

- (vi) Consider expansion of NTFP access for villagers and support for their NTFP selling.
- (vi) Consider outside consultant to assist with i, ii, iii, v, vi.

Management response: Agree

The Implementing Partner (which includes the PMU) assessed the kind of livelihood support and set clear criteria on the villages benefiting from the project initiatives to effectively support project conservation objectives. As part of this, the Implementing Partner considered the impacts of COVID-19 upon local livelihoods within the project area. The main impacts within Lao PDR to date have been socio-economic in nature and there has not been a wide-scale health issue as there has been in other countries. Of concern, there has been a large number of Lao migrant workers from neighboring countries whom have returned and have no employment opportunities presently. This coupled with lack of access to financial support may lead to forest crimes and other illegal activities reducing the results and impacts of the project. To address the above, the Project shifted its village livelihoods focus towards activities with clear economic benefits at the village level. This include home garden development, water security for agriculture and consumption, village markets, SRI rice cultivation, soil improvement, NTFP collection, fire management and every effort will be made to include migrant workers whom may opt to remain in Lao.

The implementing partner continue to assess viability in consultations with relevant stakeholders to identify the right location and support market facility development. Steps have been taken to minimize the per diems incurred in the implementation and funds directed more to the implementation of the activities.

The implementing partner increased funds allocated to support implementation of livelihoods activities. The implementing partner continue to assess the number of villages to benefit from project activities in the four protected areas targeted by the project.

Assessment of market site was completed and development of market aimed at supporting NTFPs and agricultural produce from the target villages. Agriculture and livestock specialists were engaged to support effective implementation of livelihoods activities.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
5.1 Prepare enhanced Livelihood, NTFP and Tree Planting Strategies	30 June 2020	IP Project Team	Enhanced Livelihood, NTFP and tree planting strategies prepared	Completed
5.2 Water security assessment and renovations of village water systems within target villages for agriculture purposes.	30 December 2020	IP Project Team	Assessment of water security in the target villages completed, pending detail report	Completed
5.3 Implementation of livelihood and NTFP strategies and support market development of agricultural products and NTFPs	31 October 2021	IP Project Team	Implementation of livelihoods related activities and construction of the market completed.	Completed

Midterm Review Recommendation 6.

In future conservation agreements (2020 and beyond), achieve a better balance of what villagers receive from project and what they offer in terms of conservation. Consider innovative approaches, such as NTFP access or other benefits in return for patrolling services.

Management response: Agree

In 2018 when the IP had prepared the Conservation Contracts, it had researched International best practices and guidelines. The contracts were intended to provide robust articles for conservation actions, benefits, monitoring and penalties. However, lessons learned over 2019 indicated that as this approach was new to Savannakhet Province (both to the Provincial IP Members and the Communities themselves) the contract was not understood well and required rethinking.

Prior to the MTR Review, the IP had already been discussing how to revise and streamline the contracts so that they are much more straight-forward and easy to understand. The current round of Conservation Contracts are due for review and renewal by 30

June 2020. Steps have been initiated to simplify and streamline benefits, penalties and monitoring of the implementation and will be rolled out in 2020.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
6.1 Review the effectiveness of the agreements and lessons learned for conservation contract renewal.	31 July 2020	IP Project Team	Effectiveness and lessons learned reviewed and incorporated in the new contract	Completed
6.2 Conservation Contracts to be renewed; revised format with streamlined conservation actions, benefits, monitoring and penalties.	30 October 2020	IP Project Team	Consultations on revised conservation contract done pending renewal	Completed

Midterm Review Recommendation 7.

Improve and expand ecotourism work:

- (1) Expand scope to include more extensive work in DPV and PXH.
- (2) For each of OM, DPV, and PXH, develop clear, realistic projections on ecotourism and how this translates into needed funds for patrolling, infrastructure, etc.
- (3) Carry out promotion work for each area, beginning with materials already prepared by SVK project team with PAFO.
- (4) Reach out to tour operators, etc. for direct promotion of areas.
- (5) Ensure that the international ecotourism expert hired after the MTR mission assesses the 4 PAs for international tourist appeal and advises on what is needed for the areas and for promotion. Require action-oriented outputs of consultant, such as outreach to international guidebooks and tour operators.

Management response: Agree

Prior to the MTR Review, the project had already engaged an international ecotourism specialist and had taken the initiative to enhance ecotourism activities in Dong Phou Vieng and Phou Xang He. The implementing partner will explore options with the relevant stakeholders to ensure that part of the earnings received from ecotourism are allocated to support patrolling activities in the respective sites.

Previously, the Project had not produced promotional materials due to the desire to have a qualified communications staff working with the teams to develop a marketing strategy and prepare quality materials that could be distributed and utilized for advertising. During the MTR, the recruitment of a Graphic Designer was being finalized to develop promotional materials and work with tour operators; this individual has joined in January 2020. It should be noted that with regards to Point 5 above, the project had brought a Lonely Planet writer to the sites and assess them providing positive reviews.

Currently, ecotourism promotional materials are being prepared while signages have been installed at the sites. However, in light of COVID-19 and its effects upon international tourism and lately domestic tourism as well, the project have been working to balance its strategy on promoting and increasing local tourism in addition to the recommendations made by the MTR Team.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
7.1 Prepare balanced ecotourism strategy for each site to focus upon local tourism in addition to international focus.	30 June 2020	IP Project Team	Ecotourism strategies for the target sites prepared and implementation initiated	Completed
7.2 Incorporate recommendations on the development of tourism products prepared by International Consultant	30 June 2020	IP Project Team	Recommendations included in ecotourism sites	Completed

7.3 Production of ecotourism signage on site, construction of facilities and development of promotional materials	30 October 2020	IP Project Team	Ecotourism signages and facilities have been completed in some sites while others in progress	Completed
7.4 Work with high-quality local tour operators and investors to explore co-management of eco-tourism products developed by project.	31 December 2021	IP Project Team	After the private -public investment webinar held in September, tour operators visited the site to enable them to improve their knowledge on the viability of existing tourism products. Several tour operators are interested in participating with Eld's Deer tourism activities, however, this will likely not come to fruition until after the COVID19 pandemic ends.	Completed

Midterm Review Recommendation 8.

Prepare gender strategy and prioritize women beneficiaries, especially in livelihoods work.

- (i) Include targets for women as proportion of those that experience substantially increased incomes from livelihoods work (e.g. 70 percent). (A draft gender assessment has been prepared post-MTR mission, but what is urgently needed is a concrete approach for prioritizing women beneficiaries.)
- (ii) Indicate how livelihood activities will preferentially benefit women through a combination of women-only livelihoods, women-suitable livelihoods, and mechanisms to get more women benefiting from livelihoods work.
- (iii) Be aware that so far greatest benefits have accrued to men through payments for patrolling work, in which very few women are involved.

Management response: Agree.

Prior to the implementation of the MTR Review, the Project had already taken steps to develop and prepare a Gender Review and Strategy with a National Consultant.

While setting a target for reaching women is accepted, the example of 70% is not realistic in the village setting. This is mainly due to the fact that when reviewing forest crimes and illegal hunting, it is generally men that are engaged with such activities. Therefore, when the project has been developing livelihoods activities, the roles that men and women are interested in have been considered.

Mainly men have performed project activities such as Ranger Patrols, other activities such as tree planting has been performed mainly by women. Addressing any gender bias within the activities is constantly considered.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
8.1 Dissemination of Gender Study and Strategy completed by the Project	31 July 2020	IP Project Team	Findings of gender analysis and strategy disseminated	Completed
8.2 Draft new targets and get approved by PSC and RTA for inclusion in results framework prior to PIR.	31 July 2020	IP Project Team	The target beneficiaries were endorsed by the project steering committee and submitted for approval	Completed
8.3 Implementation of Gender Strategy	31 December 2021	IP Project Team	The project implemented activities and incorporating	Completed

			gender inclusion in most of the project initiatives	
Midterm Review Recommendation 9. <u>Improve reforestation work in Ong Mang. Develop post-project sustainability plan for nurseries and reforestation. Consider transferring some funds allocated for reforestation to livelihoods.</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Select optimal locations for planting (using satellite imagery etc.) and optimal species. Consider asking consultant to finalize draft DDF reforestation guidelines prepared so these can be referenced. (ii) Determine total areas needing planting (via satellite imagery, etc.) to map additional needs/ costs for reforestation in the long-run post-project. (iii) Improve survival rates via proper care. (iv) Develop a sustainability model for post-project continuation of nurseries and reforestation. For example, consider selling high value species seedlings at cut rates to villagers in return for them planting additional seedlings in PA conservation forest. (v) Determine where excess reforestation costs (beyond 2.8 million Kip per ha) are going and eliminate inefficiencies. 				
Management response: Agree <p>The Project acknowledges the challenges faced in restoring the degraded forested areas mainly from livestock grazing of planted trees seedlings. A tree planting strategy has been developed with the objective of increasing the survival rate of the planted trees. The locations for tree planting sites were identified using satellite imagery and seedling distribution in the target areas currently ongoing.</p> <p>Alternative models are being considered by the implementing partner to ensure continued seedling production and reforestation after the project closure.</p>				
Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
9.1 Development and dissemination of revised tree planting strategy.	30 June 2020	IP Project Team	Tree planting strategy developed and disseminated to stakeholders	Completed
9.2 Preparation of rules and regulations for reforestation/afforestation sites.	31 July 2020	IP Project Team	Rules and regulations for reforested areas developed and incorporated in revised conservation contract.	Completed
9.3 Use of GIS and Drone technology/techniques to identify and map the most appropriate reforestation/afforestation sites.	30 September 2021	IP Project Team	Areas to be reforested identified using drone technology	Completed
9.4 Identify pilot agroforestry sites in agriculture and rice paddy areas; Identify peri-urban sites in village areas for tree planting.	31 August 2021	IP Project Team	Nitrogen fixing tree seedling were planted in the piloted agroforestry sites and tree seedlings distributed for planting in open spaces by interested community members.	Completed
9.5 Improve quality of seedlings at tree nurseries by increasing growing time and planting big size.	30 June 2020	IP Project Team	Seedlings in the nursery maintained for planting in 2021.	Completed

Midterm Review Recommendation 10.**Assess patrolling needs and prepare new patrolling plan.**

Assess relevance of patrolling work with regard to locations, frequency, etc. Consider both: (a) post-project sustainability of patrolling and (b) how to cover full targeted forest area of project, or at least all 4 PAs. Prepare new patrolling plan for rest of project and first few years post-project:

- (1) Analyze patrolling needs considering: (i) incidents that are occurring, (ii) core versus noncore areas, and (iii) forest area per village.
- (2) Optimize use of patrolling personnel. Reduce number of people that patrol together to reduce costs.
- (3) Analyze composition of total patrolling costs. Reduce other areas of excess spending.
- (4) Expand patrolling areas to include those in the 3 other target PAs and protection forest via financing mechanisms (see Rec. B1).
- (5) Consider providing non-cash benefits to villagers in return for patrolling (such as access to conservation areas for sustainable harvesting of NTFPs.).

Management response: Partially Agree

The IP Project Team accepts there is a need to improve patrolling, but not for the same reasons being presented by the MTR Consultants. Upon reviewing GIS satellite imagery, it is believed that forest crimes are occurring, but that the community teams may not be well enough equipped to address such crimes without fear of repercussions or retaliation. Furthermore, some of the recommended actions may likely not be possible.

Additionally, precautions may need to be taken with regards to COVID-19 to ensure the safety of community patrol teams.

Revised patrolling areas will be based partly upon the outcomes of Recommendation 3.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
10.1 IP Project Team conduct meeting to determine revisions to Community Patrols.	30 June 2020	IP Project Team	Revision of patrols completed and incorporated in the new conservation contract	Completed
10.2 Revisions presented to Project Steering Committee for approval. Implementation upon approval from National/Provincial Steering Committee.	31 July 2020	IP Project Team National and Provincial Steering Committee	Revised patrolling strategy presented and approved by the steering committee	Completed

Midterm Review Recommendation 11.

Investigate viability and usefulness of designating HCVF areas outside of PAs to form corridors (swaths or “stepping stones”) between PAs. If deemed practical and useful, work to get these “corridor” HCVFs, which are outside of PAs, to be officially designated and protected sustainably.

- Consult with DOF and PAFO on this work, which may be combined with DSS work. If not viable or not useful, officially drop this activity.

Management response: Agree

The Department of Forestry and the PMU deems the work for HCVF to be viable and useful; the Project will continue to pursue this activity. HCVF sites may be designated either inside or outside National Protected Areas.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status

11.1 Submission of a Preliminary HCVF Report upon completing first round of field missions and analysis for each of the proposed HCVF sites. (i) Completion of inception workshop implemented in Savannakhet Province. (ii) Consultations with adjacent communities.	Completed	IP Project Team National Consultant	HCVF report on the proposed sites finalized.	Completed
11.2 Submission of Field Report based on second field mission. (i) Clarification of management practices and boundaries of HCVF sites.	Completed	IP Project Team National Consultant	Field mission completed with the boundaries of the sites clarified	Completed
11.3 Facilitation of a Final Workshop and submission of the Final Report (i) Synthesis of selected HCVF management practices.	31 July 2020	IP Project Team National Consultant	The final workshop was held in the provincial level and final report submitted	Completed

Midterm Review Recommendation 12.

Develop sub-activities to ensure that DSS, ISPs, SEAs, are used to prevent concessions in forest areas outside of PAs/ protection forests.

- If possible, ensure DSS training is periodic (every couple of months) and consider webinar training. Build ownership so that various provincial entities will contribute data. Conduct one-on-one outreach to relevant officials to ensure that DSS, ISPs, and SEAs are used. Take advantage of the window of opportunity of new socio-economic development plans (SEDPs) being prepared in the 5 project districts to get project ISP and SEA work incorporated in the SEDPs, given the ending of the last 5-year cycle (2014-2019).

Management response: Do not agree with the recommendation.

Through governance, National Laws, and Decrees, the Government of Lao PDR has delineated National Protected Areas and Protection Forests for conservation purposes and ecosystem services. Areas that are not under these categories of protection may be utilized for economic development.

The Department of Forestry and the Savannakhet Provincial Government view the purpose of the DSS, ISPs and SEAs is to guide sustainable development and mitigate any negative effects upon the environment, not prevent concessions altogether.

Appropriate steps and actions are already being taken with the current development of the DSS and implementation of the District Sectoral Meetings utilizing the ISPs and SEAs.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
n/a				

Midterm Review Recommendation 13.**Facilitate further work on PA Decree to get financing of PAs incorporated into Decree.****Management response:** Agree

UNDP and Implementing Partner acknowledges that due to the high costs involved with the management of Protected Areas, inclusion of sustainable financing within the pending Protected Area Decree with MAF would play a key role in protecting the habitats.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking ⁶⁸	
			Comments	Status
13.1 Coordinate and support DOF legislation development efforts.	31 January 2021	IP Project Team	Consultations on the development of Protected area decree financing initiated	Completed

Midterm Review Recommendation 14.**Put high priority on increasing cost effectiveness. Develop a clear view of how funds have been spent. Focus on problem areas.****Prepare a “cost effectiveness action plan”:**

- (1) Develop a better tool to see where funds are going. This should separate out project team costs and costs not directly related to an activity but accounted for under it.
- (2) Reduce excessive per diem payments – (i) only one or two key persons should travel to villages to deliver training, (ii) if training outside of village, consider providing villagers transport and food directly, but not per diem.
- (3) Reduce layers in project – do not bring in additional parties with MOUs unless value add and cost effectiveness is clear.
- (4) Eliminate unrelated costs charged to the project, if any.
- (5) Prioritize cost effectiveness in (i) livelihoods (so that bulk of funds goes to villager capital costs); (ii) patrolling (reduce team size, optimize patrolling sites, identify waste, and consider non-cash deals for patrolling services with villagers, such as patrolling in return for NTFP collection permission or permission to plant NTFPs in forest); (iii) reforestation (identify waste, consider non-cash deals for villagers to plant trees, such as compensation with seedlings for their own land); (iv) workshops (hold low cost workshops by eliminating expensive travel packages, reimbursing actual travel cost only if at all, and including only relevant attendees).

Management response: Partially agree

The project is exploring alternative financial management solutions that will enable clear separation of various costs incurred in the course of project implementation.

Steps have already been taken to improve effectiveness in all the project activities and reduce per diems payments by ensuring only essential staff take part in activity implementation.

The Project implements and follows the available government structures and hierarchies. As such, it is beyond the mandate of the Project to make such adjustments to this structure. The government agencies involved in project implementation have only been those which the activities assigned are the sole entity to undertake.

The implementing partner follows the agreed budget within project document with annual approval from the steering meeting and further approvals are followed.

Illegal logging and forest crimes remain an issue. A preliminary GIS study completed during Q1 2020 (prior to the COVID 19 pandemic outbreak) indicated there had been a 28% increase of open forest during the past year in some village areas. While this study is still in the process of being verified and ground-truthed, an increase in open forest could indicate either illegal logging or clearing for agricultural expansion. It should be noted that during the onset of COVID 19 at the end of March 2020, there was a large influx of Lao National migrant workers returning from Thailand to their villages. As such, there is now a likely increased risk of these unemployed workers engaging in illegal forest activities in order to generate incomes. Patrols will need to take place to minimize this risk, however the Project is taking measures to improve the reporting systems and streamline the patrol groups in high risk areas.

The Project has taken steps to revise its tree planting strategy for the remainder of the project. Local authorities and villagers will be working in a participatory manner developing rules and regulations within afforestation areas. Additionally, the project will be

shifting a focus towards peri-urban and agroforestry techniques addressing issues related to the greatest causes of forest conversion.

It should be noted that since the start of the project none of the unrelated costs were charged to the project budget. If any of this cost essentially arises in the future the IP will seek appropriate permission from both UNDP and GEF before implementation.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
14.1 The IP is willing to separate the project running costs (general administration costs) and staff costs in a particular sub-activity and this will come to an effective in next round budget revision;	31 December 2020	IP Project Team	The project exploring mechanisms to separate different costs incurred in the implementation	Completed
14.2 The number of key people required to take part in each activity within the activity plans will be determined and assigned in accordance with the workloads, the prioritized areas of assignments and the allowances for villagers attending the activities also implemented in accordance with the NIM-SOP DSA payment guidelines.	31 December 2020	IP Project Team	The project has prioritized only personnel take part in implementation of activities.	Completed
14.3 The project management at central and provincial levels carefully and accurately consider on each proposal of having letter of agreement (LOA) with responsible parties (RP) in accordance with their expertise, the project requirements in order to complete the project milestone for that particular areas as well as the timeline to complete the project activities.	31 December 2020	IP Project Team	The project continues to review the letter of agreements in accordance with their expertise.	Completed
14.5 Implementation of direct cost-effective activities and capital expenditures at the village level for livelihoods, patrols and tree planting.	31 December 2021	IP project Team	The project was able to implement a second round of conservation contracts which included cost-effective activities such as strategic community patrols, volunteer tree planting for agroforestry, and practical agriculture improvement activities which have the potential to improve livelihoods while reducing pressures upon forest clearance for agriculture land.	Completed

Midterm Review Recommendation 15.

Move project staff closer to the action in Savannakhet, especially Ong Mang and the other 3 PAs, if this can be done without incurring additional costs. Establish clear process for considering recommendations from province in decisions made in Vientiane:

- (1) Consider, during the upcoming critical period of implementation, assigning: (i) the Assistant Project Manager at least half time if not full time to Ong Mang or Savannakhet; (ii) the Tourism Specialist and the Gender and Livelihoods Specialist full time in Ong Mang and (if the project extends its activities as recommended to its other PAs/Protected Areas) the other 3 PAs. Adjustments to postings of staff should be done in such a way that per diems and frequent back and forth travel costs are eliminated.
- (2) Establish formal system in which ideas/ suggestions for activities from the province (project team or PAFO) are documented. Responses from Vientiane project team and DOF should also be documented. This may be achieved by preparing a table with ideas in first column and responses in second column. The purpose is to ensure that good ideas from the province are fully considered based on their merit of contributing to the project objective and outcomes.

Management response: Partially Agree

The Implementing Partner partially agrees that the members of the Project Team at the Provincial level should be working closer to the communities and has taken action to address the necessary facilities at the Ong Mang prior to the MTR finalization. However, members of the Project Team at the Central level have responsibilities to support both the Department of Forestry as the Implementing Party, as well as the Provincial team and should remain where currently posted with schedules to ensure equal division of time between the two locations.

With regards to establishing a formalized system, the Provincial and District Teams already work with the Central level PMU to develop the Annual Work Plan and take the lead in implementation of project activities. Currently, the PAFO and the Project Specialists are responsible for developing project activities and implementation. The Central Team does provide overall leadership, but with regards to the implementation of activities, its role is to ensure administrative processes are achieved and quality control delivery of outputs.

There are many forums, particularly the weekly strategy meetings and the quarterly review meeting (which are always held in the Province and records) and generally chaired by either the Director General of DOF or PAFO where the provincial teams can (and do) provide their comments and views on project implementation. When such comments are provided, they are considered and implemented if feasible.

Key action(s)	Time frame	Responsible unit(s)	Tracking	
			Comments	Status
15.1 Complete construction of facilities	31 July 2020	IP Project Team	Construction of the staff dormitories finalized	Completed
15.2 Relocation of staff upon completion of construction of facilities at Ong Mang	31 August 2020	IP Project Team	Communication made for staff based at the province to relocate	Completed
15.3 Review of current staffing locations and revise duty stations.	30 September 2020	IP Project Team	Department of Forestry approved the relocation of provincial staff, noted that central level needs to support DoF	Completed

Annex 8: Assignment TOR

POST TITLE:	International Consultant / Team Leader to Implement a Terminal Evaluation
AGENCY/PROJECT NAME:	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry / Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao PDR Project (referred to as the SAFE Ecosystems Project / PIMS# 5448)
COUNTRY OF ASSIGNMENT:	Lao PDR
PLACE OF ASSIGNMENT:	Vientiane, Lao PDR and travelling to project site in Savannakhet Province
DURATION OF ASSIGNMENT:	35 days during (01 November 2021 – 31 January 2022)
STARTING DATE:	01 November 2021
APPLICATION DEADLINE:	13 October 2021

INTRODUCTION

In accordance with UNDP and GEF M&E policies and procedures, all full- and medium-sized UNDP- supported GEF- financed projects are required to undergo a Terminal Evaluation (TE) at the end of the project. This Terms of Reference (ToR) sets out the expectations for the TE of the full-sized project titled Sustainable Forestry and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao PDR Project (referred to as the SAFE Ecosystems Project / PIMS# 5448) implemented through the Department of Forestry, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. The project started on the 20th May 2016 and is in its sixth year of implementation. The TE process must follow the guidance outlined in the document 'Guidance for Conducting Terminal Evaluations of UNDP- Supported, GEF-Financed Projects' ([link](#)).

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao (SAFE Ecosystems project) Project is funded by Global Environment Facility (GEF), supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and implemented by the Department of Forestry under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. At the Provincial level, the project is implemented through the Savannakhet Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office and District Agriculture and Forestry Offices of the five target districts of Xonaboully, Songkhone, Thaphanthong, Phine and Phalanxay.

Dry Dipterocarp Forest ecosystems are recognized as being globally important (as part of the Central Indochina Dry Forests ecoregion of the WWF Global 200 Ecoregions) and as habitat for a number of globally significant and threatened species. It is also nationally important for their provision of numerous ecosystem services (water supply, sustainable timber and non-timber forest products, and carbon sequestration) that benefit the people of Lao PDR. Over the last decades, Dry Dipterocarp Forest ecosystems and the species within them have come under increasing threats from large scale conversion of forest, degradation of forest ecosystem services, and species loss. Lao PDR retains a large proportion of the remaining Dry Dipterocarp Forests in the region. However, the demand for cash crops is propelling forest conversion, while unsustainable logging, over-hunting, over-harvesting of non-timber forest products and burning to provide fresh growth for livestock are all leading to habitat degradation.

Recognizing their global and national importance, the Government of Lao PDR prioritized the conservation and sustainable management of dry dipterocarp forest landscape. As part of government efforts to conserve the dry dipterocarp landscape, it selected the area to be the site of the newest national protected area in the country and a demonstration site for testing the implementation of national policies and processes related to Strategic Environmental Assessment, Integrated Spatial Planning and high conservation value forests. It also identified the landscape suitable for the development and implementation of innovative financing mechanisms for sustainable forest management and protected area management as well as community participation in protected areas management, ecotourism programs, and livelihoods programs linked to conservation outcomes through formal conservation agreements with the community.

The 6-year project (expected operational closure May 20th, 2022) is executed under national implementation modality by the Department of Forestry. Execution of the project is subject to oversight by a Project Steering Committee while day-to-day coordination is carried out under the supervision of the Project Management Office led by the Project Manager. The Executing Agency (UNDP) is responsible for different outcomes/activities according to existing capacities and field realities, ensuring effective and efficient use of resources.

The project objective is to demonstrate sustainable land and forest management in the forested landscape of Savannakhet Province in order to secure the critical wildlife habitats, conserve biodiversity and maintain a continuous flow of multiple services including quality water provision and flood prevention.

The project components are the following

- Component 1: Enabling policy environment and increased compliance and enforcement capacities for sustainable land and forest management across landscapes including protected areas
- Component 2: Sustainable Forest Management and Protected Area Expansion in five priority Districts of Savannakhet Province
- Component 3: Developing and Promoting Incentives and Sustainable Financing for Biodiversity Conservation and Forest Protection

As of 30th August 2021, there were 14,846 confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Lao PDR, of which 14 cases were fatalities, 5,040 hospitalized and 5551 persons recovered spread across 16 provinces within the country. Lao PDR implemented its first nationwide lockdown from 30 March 2020 - 19 April 2020, which included the suspension of all international and inter-zonal travel, and imposition of restriction of movement within the country, with the exception of essential services. Restrictions on movement within the country after community spread was eventually managed in 2020. However, in April 2021 lockdown and restriction of movement were reimposed as a result of community spread as a result of an illegal border crossing case, as well as an influx of returning migrant worker when neighboring Thailand imposed its own lockdown measures. Various measures continue to be implemented in different parts of the country depending upon the number of COVID cases confirmed in the communities.

While International travel is currently restricted in Lao PDR, the Government continues to implement National restrictions on movements and gatherings of people as necessary such as limiting the number of attendees at events and ability to travel in areas with high number of cases confirmed in the community. These restrictions have resulted in numerous delays in project implementation and processes, including: (i) limitations of interactions and engagements between project partners and beneficiaries; (ii) completion of intended activities as required due to restriction of movement of people and supplies, and (iii) postponement of trainings and meetings to ensure compliance with the recommended health protocols. Additionally, the anticipated increase in COVID-19 cases particularly from the ongoing return of migrant workers from neighboring countries poses a considerable risk to the implementation of the project being evaluated, particularly with regards to travel to project sites, and consultations with project stakeholders.

TE PURPOSE

The TE report will assess the achievement of project results against what was expected to be achieved and draw lessons that can both improve the sustainability of benefits from this project, and aid in the overall enhancement of UNDP programming. The TE report promotes accountability and transparency and assesses the extent of project accomplishments.

The TE will mainly focus on assessing the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, results, impact, coordination and sustainability of the SAFE Ecosystems Project achievements over the past 6 years. It should include and analyze best practices, specific lessons learned, and recommendations (including forward looking ones) on the strategies used and how they were implemented. The results and recommendations of the TE will be used by key stakeholders (such as GEF, UNDP, government, local governments, etc.) to be replicated by other projects or by other countries, improving their implementation in future programs.

TE APPROACH & METHODOLOGY

The TE report must provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful.

The TE team will review all relevant sources of information including documents prepared during the preparation phase (i.e. PIF, UNDP Initiation Plan, UNDP Social and Environmental Screening Procedure/SESP) the Project Document, project reports including annual PIRs, project budget revisions, lesson learned reports, national strategic and legal documents, and any other materials that the team considers useful for this evidence-based evaluation. The TE team will review the baseline and mid-term GEF focal area Core Indicators/Tracking Tools submitted to the GEF at the CEO endorsement and mid-term stages and the terminal Core Indicators/Tracking Tools that must be completed before the TE field mission begins.

The TE team is expected to follow a participatory and consultative approach ensuring close engagement with the Project Team, government counterparts (the GEF Operational Focal Point), Implementing Partners, the UNDP Country Office(s), the Regional Technical Advisor, direct beneficiaries and other stakeholders.

Engagement of stakeholders is vital to a successful TE. Stakeholder involvement should include interviews with stakeholders who have project responsibilities, including but not limited to:

- Implementing Partner – Department of Forests in MAF
- Chair (or Co-Chair) of the National Project Board
- The National Project Director (NPD)
- Project Manager (PM)
- Assistant Project Manager (APM)
- Project Staff in Vientiane Capital
- Chair of the Provincial Project Board
- Staff of PAFO and DAFO
- Communities in the five target districts
- National Consultants
- International Consultants
- Co-financiers
- UNDP staff who have project responsibilities

Additionally, the TE team is expected to conduct field missions to Savannakhet province, including the following project sites in Xonabouly, Songkhone, Thaphangthong, Phine and Phalanxay Districts if permitted by UNDP as per the SOPs and government of Lao PDR regulations under COVID-19 pandemic (see **Note** below).

The specific design and methodology for the TE should emerge from consultations between the TE team and the above-mentioned parties regarding what is appropriate and feasible for meeting the TE purpose and objectives and answering the evaluation questions, given limitations of budget, time and data. The TE team must, however, use gender-responsive methodologies and tools and ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as other cross-cutting issues and SDGs are incorporated into the TE report.

The final methodological approach including interview schedule, field visits and data to be used in the evaluation must be clearly outlined in the TE Inception Report and be fully discussed and agreed between UNDP, stakeholders and the TE team.

The final report must describe the full TE approach taken and the rationale for the approach making explicit the underlying assumptions, challenges, strengths and weaknesses about the methods and approach of the evaluation.

Note:

As of 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic as the new coronavirus rapidly spread to all regions of the world. Travel to the country has been restricted since March 2020 and travel in the country is also restricted. If it is not possible to travel to or within the country for the TE mission then the TE team should develop a methodology that takes this into account the conduct of the TE virtually and remotely, including the use of remote interview methods and extended desk reviews, data analysis, surveys and evaluation questionnaires. This should be detailed in the TE Inception Report and agreed with the UNDP Lao PDR Country Office.

If all or part of the TE is to be carried out virtually then consideration should be taken for stakeholder availability, ability or willingness to be interviewed remotely. In addition, their accessibility to the internet/computer may be an issue as many government and national counterparts may be working from home. Also note their working hours are generally between 8:30 am and 4:30 pm local time Monday to Friday. These limitations must be reflected in the final TE report.

If a data collection/field mission is not possible then remote interviews may be undertaken through telephone or online (skype, zoom etc.). International consultants can work remotely with national evaluator support in the field if it is safe for them to operate and travel. No stakeholders, consultants or UNDP staff should be put in harm's way and safety is the key priority.

A short validation mission may be considered if it is confirmed to be safe for staff, consultants, stakeholders and if such a mission is possible within the TE schedule. Equally, qualified and independent national consultants can be hired to undertake the TE and interviews in country as long as it is safe to do so.

DETAILED SCOPE OF THE TE

The TE will assess project performance against expectations set out in the project's Logical Framework/Results Framework (see ToR Annex A). The TE will assess results according to the criteria outlined in the Guidance for TEs of UNDP-supported GEF-financed Projects ([link](#)). The Findings section of the TE report will cover the topics listed below.

A full outline of the TE report's content is provided in ToR Annex C. The asterisk "*" indicates criteria for which a rating is required.

Findings

i. Project Design/Formulation

- National priorities and country driven-ness
- Theory of Change
- Gender equality and women's empowerment
- Social and Environmental Safeguards
- Analysis of Results Framework: project logic and strategy, indicators
- Assumptions and Risks
- Lessons from other relevant projects (e.g. same focal area) incorporated into project design
- Planned stakeholder participation
- Linkages between project and other interventions within the sector
- Management arrangements

ii. Project Implementation

- Adaptive management (changes to the project design and project outputs during implementation)
- Actual stakeholder participation and partnership arrangements
- Project Finance and Co-finance
- Monitoring & Evaluation: design at entry (*), implementation (*), and overall assessment of M&E (*)
- Implementing Agency (UNDP) (*) and Executing Agency (*), overall project oversight/implementation and execution (*)
- Risk Management, including Social and Environmental Standards

iii. Project Results

- Assess the achievement of outcomes against indicators by reporting on the level of progress for each objective and outcome indicator at the time of the TE and noting final achievements
- Relevance (*), Effectiveness (*), Efficiency (*) and overall project outcome (*)
- Sustainability: financial (*), socio-political (*), institutional framework and governance (*), environmental (*), overall likelihood of sustainability (*)
- Country ownership

- Gender equality and women's empowerment
- Cross-cutting issues (poverty alleviation, improved governance, climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster prevention and recovery, human rights, capacity development, South- South cooperation, knowledge management, volunteerism, etc., as relevant)
- GEF Additionality
- Catalytic Role / Replication Effect
- Progress to impact

Main Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations and Lessons Learned

- The TE team will include a summary of the main findings of the TE report. Findings should be presented as statements of fact that are based on analysis of the data.
- The section on conclusions will be written in light of the findings. Conclusions should be comprehensive and balanced statements that are well substantiated by evidence and logically connected to the TE findings. They should highlight the strengths, weaknesses and results of the project, respond to key evaluation questions and provide insights into the identification of and/or solutions to important problems or issues pertinent to project beneficiaries, UNDP and the GEF, including issues in relation to gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Recommendations should provide concrete, practical, feasible and targeted recommendations directed to the intended users of the evaluation about what actions to take and decisions to make. The recommendations should be specifically supported by the evidence and linked to the findings and conclusions around key questions addressed by the evaluation.
- The TE report should also include lessons that can be taken from the evaluation, including best and worst practices in addressing issues relating to relevance, performance and success that can provide knowledge gained from the particular circumstance (programmatic and evaluation methods used, partnerships, financial leveraging, etc.) that are applicable to other GEF and UNDP interventions. When possible, the TE team should include examples of good practices in project design and implementation.
- It is important for the conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned of the TE report to include results related to gender equality and empowerment of women.

The TE report will include an Evaluation Ratings Table, as shown below:

ToR Table 2: Evaluation Ratings Table for the SAFE Ecosystems Project

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)	Rating ²⁸
M&E design at entry	
M&E Plan Implementation	
Overall Quality of M&E	
Implementation & Execution	Rating
Quality of UNDP Implementation/Oversight	
Quality of Implementing Partner Execution	
Overall quality of Implementation/Execution	
Assessment of Outcomes	Rating
Relevance	
Effectiveness	
Efficiency	
Overall Project Outcome Rating	
Sustainability	Rating
Financial resources	
Socio-political/economic	
Institutional framework and governance	

²⁸ Outcomes, Effectiveness, Efficiency, M&E, I&E Execution, Relevance are rated on a 6-point rating scale: 6 = Highly Satisfactory (HS), 5 = Satisfactory (S), 4 = Moderately Satisfactory (MS), 3 = Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU), 2 = Unsatisfactory (U), 1 = Highly Unsatisfactory (HU). Sustainability is rated on a 4-point scale: 4 = Likely (L), 3 = Moderately Likely (ML), 2 = Moderately Unlikely (MU), 1 = Unlikely (U)

Environmental	
Overall Likelihood of Sustainability	

TIMEFRAME

The total duration of the TE will be approximately 35 working days over a time period of 12 weeks starting on 01 November 2021. The tentative TE timeframe is as follows:

Timeframe	Activity
13 October 2021	Application closes for National Expert
14-18 October 2021	Final selection of TE team
01 November 2021	Preparation period for TE team (handover of documentation)
5 November 2021	Document review and preparation of TE Inception Report
14 November	Finalization and Validation of TE Inception Report; latest start of TE mission
15 November – 3 December	TE mission: stakeholder meetings, interviews, field visits, etc.
10 December 2021	Mission wrap-up meeting & debriefing of preliminary findings; earliest end of TE mission
13-31 December 2021	Preparation of draft TE report
3 – 14 January 2022	Circulation of draft TE report for comments
17-21 January 2022	Incorporation of comments on draft TE report into Audit Trail & finalization of TE report
24-27 January 2022	Preparation and Issuance of Management Response
28 January 2022	Concluding Stakeholder Workshop presenting final Main Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations and Lessons Learned (optional)
31 January 2022	Expected date of full TE completion

Options for site visits should be provided in the TE Inception Report.

TE DELIVERABLES

#	Deliverable	Description	Timing	Responsibilities
1	TE Inception Report	TE team clarifies objectives, methodology and timing of the TE	No later than 2 weeks before the TE mission: (by 14 November 2021)	TE team submits Inception Report to the UNDP Lao PDR Country Office
2	Debriefing	Preliminary Findings	End of TE mission: (by 10 December 2021)	TE team presents to the UNDP Lao PDR Country Office and project management
3	Draft TE Report	Full draft report (using guidelines on report content in ToR Annex C) with annexes	Within 3 weeks of end of TE mission: (by 03 January 2022)	TE team submits to the UNDP Lao PDR Country Office; reviewed by BPPS-GEF RTA, Project Coordinating Unit, GEF OFP
5	Final TE Report* + Audit Trail	Revised final report and TE Audit trail in which the TE details how all received comments have (and have not) been addressed in the final TE report (See template in ToR Annex H)	Within 1 week of receiving comments on draft report: (by 31 January 2022)	TE team submits both documents to the UNDP Lao PDR Country Office

*All final TE reports will be quality assessed by the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office (IEO). Details of the IEO's quality assessment of decentralized evaluations can be found in Section 6 of the UNDP Evaluation Guidelines²⁹.

²⁹ Access at: <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/guideline/section-6.shtml>

TE ARRANGEMENTS

The principal responsibility for managing the TE resides with the Commissioning Unit. The Commissioning Unit for this project's TE is the UNDP Lao PDR Country Office.

The UNDP Lao PDR Country Office will contract the evaluators and ensure the timely provision of per diems and travel arrangements within the country for the TE team. The Project Team will be responsible for liaising with the TE team to provide all relevant documents, set up stakeholder interviews, and arrange field visits. An updated stakeholder list with contact details (phone and email) will need to be provided by the UNDP Lao PDR Country Office to the TE team.

TE TEAM COMPOSITION

A team of two independent evaluators will conduct the TE – one Team Leader / International Consultant (with experience and exposure to projects and evaluations in other regions) and one National Expert from Lao PDR. The Team Leader will be responsible for the overall design and writing of the TE report, etc.) The National Expert will assess emerging trends with respect to regulatory frameworks, budget allocations, capacity building, and work with the Project Team in developing the TE itinerary, etc.

The evaluator(s) cannot have participated in the project preparation, formulation and/or implementation (including the writing of the project document), must not have conducted this project's Mid-Term Review and should not have a conflict of interest with the project's related activities.

The selection of evaluators will be aimed at maximizing the "Team Leader" qualities in the following areas:

Education

- Master's degree in Environmental Science, Forestry, Biodiversity Conservation, Landscape Management, Sustainable Development or other closely related fields. (5 points)

Experience

- Relevant experience with results-based management evaluation methodologies. (10 points)
- Experience applying SMART indicators and reconstructing or validating baseline scenarios. (5 points)
- Competence in adaptive management, as applied to Environmental Science, Forestry, Biodiversity Conservation, Landscape Management, or Sustainable Development. (10 points)
- Experience in evaluating GEF projects. (10 points)
- Experience working in Southeast Asia. (5 points)
- Experience in relevant technical areas for at least 10 years. (5 points)
- Demonstrated understanding of issues related to gender and Environmental Science, Forestry, Biodiversity Conservation, Landscape Management, or Sustainable Development; experience in gender responsive evaluation and analysis. (5 points)
- Excellent communication skills. (5 points)
- Demonstrable analytical skills. (5 points)
- Project evaluation/review experience within United Nations system will be considered an asset. (5 points)

Note:

Experience with implementing evaluations remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic will be considered an asset.

Language

- Fluency in written and spoken English.

EVALUATOR ETHICS

The TE team will be held to the highest ethical standards and is required to sign a code of conduct upon acceptance of the assignment. This evaluation will be conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the UNEG 'Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation'. The evaluator must safeguard the rights and confidentiality of information providers, interviewees and stakeholders through measures to ensure compliance with legal and other relevant codes

governing collection of data and reporting on data. The evaluator must also ensure security of collected information before and after the evaluation and protocols to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of sources of information where that is expected. The information knowledge and data gathered in the evaluation process must also be solely used for the evaluation and not for other uses without the express authorization of UNDP and partners.

PAYMENT SCHEDULE

- 20% payment upon satisfactory delivery of the final TE Inception Report and approval by the Commissioning Unit
- 40% payment upon satisfactory delivery of the draft TE report to the Commissioning Unit
- 40% payment upon satisfactory delivery of the final TE report and approval by the Commissioning Unit and RTA (via signatures on the TE Report Clearance Form) and delivery of completed TE Audit Trail

Criteria for issuing the final payment of 40%:

- The final TE report includes all requirements outlined in the TE TOR and is in accordance with the TE guidance.
- The final TE report is clearly written, logically organized, and is specific for this project (i.e. text has not been cut & pasted from other TE reports).
- The TE Audit Trail includes responses to and justification for each comment listed.

Note:

In line with the UNDP's financial regulations, when determined by the UNDP Lao PDR Country Office and/or the consultant that a deliverable or service cannot be satisfactorily completed due to the impact of COVID-19 and limitations to the TE, that deliverable or service will not be paid.

Due to the current COVID-19 situation and its implications, a partial payment may be considered if the consultant invested time towards the deliverable but was unable to complete to circumstances beyond his/her control.

APPLICATION PROCESS³⁰

Process and Recommended Presentation of Proposal:

- a) Potential candidates will be selected from the vetted **UNDP Roster List**. They will then be required to submit the following:
- b) **Letter of Confirmation of Interest and Availability** using the [template](#)³¹ provided by UNDP;
- c) **CV** and a **Personal History Form** ([P11 form](#)³²);
- d) Brief description of **approach to work/technical proposal** of why the individual considers him/herself as the most suitable for the assignment, and a proposed methodology on how they will approach and complete the assignment; (max 1 page)
- e) **Financial Proposal** that indicates the all-inclusive fixed total contract price and all other travel related costs (such as flight ticket, per diem, etc), supported by a breakdown of costs, as per template attached to the [Letter of Confirmation of Interest template](#).

All potential application materials should be submitted on-line, NOT later than **13 October 2021** via this link https://www.la.undp.org/content/lao_pdr/en/home/jobs.html

Incomplete applications will be excluded from further consideration.

³⁰ Engagement of evaluators should be done in line with guidelines for hiring consultants in the POPP <https://popp.undp.org/SitePages/POPPRoot.aspx>

³¹

<https://intranet.undp.org/unit/bom/psd/Support%20documents%20on%20IC%20Guidelines/Template%20for%20Confirmat>

³² http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/Careers/P11_Personal_history_form.doc

Criteria for Evaluation of Proposal: Offers will be evaluated according to the Combined Scoring method – where the technical proposal including the educational background and experience on similar assignments will be weighted at 70% and the price proposal will weigh as 30% of the total scoring. Any Applicant who obtains a technical score under 49 points, will be considered as technically disqualified, and their Financial Proposal will not be further reviewed.

The applicant receiving the Highest Combined Score that has also accepted UNDP's General Terms and Conditions will be awarded the contract.

TOR ANNEXES

- ToR Annex A: Project Logical/Results Framework
 - ToR Annex B: Project Information Package to be reviewed by TE team
 - ToR Annex C: Content of the TE report
 - ToR Annex D: Evaluation Criteria Matrix template
 - ToR Annex E: UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluators
 - ToR Annex F: TE Rating Scales
 - ToR Annex G: TE Report Clearance Form
 - ToR Annex H: TE Audit Trail
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Annex 9: Rating Scales

Outcome Ratings

The overall ratings on the outcomes of the project are based on performance on the following criteria:

- a. Relevance
- b. Effectiveness
- c. Efficiency

Project outcomes are rated based on the extent to which project objectives were achieved. A six-point rating scale is used to assess overall outcomes:

- 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.

The calculation of the overall outcomes rating of projects considers all the three criteria, of which relevance and effectiveness are critical. The rating on relevance determines whether the overall outcome rating will be in the unsatisfactory range (MU to HU = unsatisfactory range). If the relevance rating is in the unsatisfactory range then the overall outcome is in the unsatisfactory range as well. However, where the relevance rating is in the satisfactory range (HS to MS), the overall outcome rating could, depending on its effectiveness and efficiency rating, be either in the satisfactory range or in the unsatisfactory range.

The second constraint applied is that the overall outcome achievement rating may not be higher than the effectiveness rating.

During project implementation, the results framework of some projects may have been modified. In cases where modifications in the project impact, outcomes and outputs have not scaled down their overall scope, the evaluator should assess outcome achievements based on the revised results framework. In instances where the scope of the project objectives and outcomes has been scaled down, the magnitude of and necessity for downscaling is taken into account and despite achievement of results as per the revised results framework, where appropriate, a lower outcome effectiveness rating may be given.

Sustainability Ratings

The sustainability is assessed taking into account the risks related to financial, sociopolitical, institutional, and environmental sustainability of project outcomes. The evaluator may also take other risks into account that may affect sustainability. The overall sustainability is assessed using a four-point scale.

- Likely (L). There is little or no risks 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.

Project M&E Ratings

Quality of project M&E is assessed in terms of:

- Design
- Implementation

Quality of M&E on these two dimensions is assessed on a six point scale:

- Highly satisfactory (HS): There were no short comings and quality of M&E design / implementation exceeded expectations.
- Satisfactory (S): There were no or minor short comings and quality of M&E design / implementation meets expectations.
- Moderately Satisfactory (MS): There were some short comings and quality of M&E design/implementation more or less meets expectations.
- Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): There were significant shortcomings and quality of M&E design /implementation somewhat lower than expected.
- Unsatisfactory (U): There were major short comings and quality of M&E design/implementation substantially lower than expected.
- Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): There were severe short comings in M&E design/ implementation.
- Unable to Assess (UA): The available information does not allow an assessment of the quality of M&E design /implementation.

Implementation Oversight for UNDP's oversight function and Execution Rating

Quality of implementation and of execution is rated separately. Quality of implementation pertains to the role and responsibilities discharged by the GEF Agencies that have direct access to GEF resources. Quality of Execution pertains to the roles and responsibilities discharged by the country or regional counterparts that received GEF funds from the GEF Agencies and executed the funded activities on ground. The performance is rated on a six-point scale.

- Highly satisfactory (HS): There were no short comings and quality of implementation / execution exceeded expectations.
- Satisfactory (S): There were no or minor short comings and quality of implementation / execution meets expectations.
- Moderately Satisfactory (MS): There were some short comings and quality of implementation / execution more or less meets expectations.
- Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU): There were significant shortcomings and quality of implementation / execution somewhat lower than expected.
- Unsatisfactory (U): There were major short comings and quality of implementation / execution substantially lower than expected.
- Highly Unsatisfactory (HU): There were severe short comings in quality of implementation / execution.
- Unable to Assess (UA): The available information does not allow an assessment of the quality of implementation/ execution.

Annex 10: 2020 UNEG Pledge of ethical conduct in evaluations signature document



ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATION

PLEDGE OF ETHICAL CONDUCT IN EVALUATION



By signing this pledge, I hereby commit to discussing and applying the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation and to adopting the associated ethical behaviours.



INTEGRITY

I will actively adhere to the moral values and professional standards of evaluation practice as outlined in the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation and following the values of the United Nations. Specifically, I will be:

- **Honest and truthful** in my communication and actions.
- **Professional**, engaging in credible and trustworthy behaviour, alongside competence, commitment and ongoing reflective practice.
- **Independent, impartial and incorruptible**.



ACCOUNTABILITY

I will be answerable for all decisions made and actions taken and responsible for honouring commitments, without qualification or exception; I will report potential or actual harms observed. Specifically, I will be:

- **Transparent** regarding evaluation purpose and actions taken, establishing trust and increasing accountability for performance to the public, particularly those populations affected by the evaluation.
- **Responsive** as questions or events arise, adapting plans as required and referring to appropriate channels where corruption, fraud, sexual exploitation or abuse or other misconduct or waste of resources is identified.
- **Responsible** for meeting the evaluation purpose and for actions taken and for ensuring redress and recognition as needed.



RESPECT

I will engage with all stakeholders of an evaluation in a way that honours their dignity, well-being, personal agency and characteristics. Specifically, I will ensure:

- **Access** to the evaluation process and products by all relevant stakeholders – whether powerless or powerful – with due attention to factors that could impede access such as sex, gender, race, language, country of origin, LGBTQ status, age, background, religion, ethnicity and ability.
- **Meaningful participation and equitable treatment** of all relevant stakeholders in the evaluation processes, from design to dissemination. This includes engaging various stakeholders, particularly affected people, so they can actively inform the evaluation approach and products rather than being solely a subject of data collection.
- **Fair representation** of different voices and perspectives in evaluation products (reports, webinars, etc.).



BENEFICENCE

I will strive to do good for people and planet while minimizing harm arising from evaluation as an intervention. Specifically, I will ensure:

- **Explicit and ongoing consideration of risks and benefits** from evaluation processes.
- **Maximum benefits** at systemic (including environmental), organizational and programmatic levels.
- **No harm**. I will not proceed where harm cannot be mitigated.
- **Evaluation makes an overall positive contribution** to human and natural systems and the mission of the United Nations.

I commit to playing my part in ensuring that evaluations are conducted according to the Charter of the United Nations and the ethical requirements laid down above and contained within the UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation. When this is not possible, I will report the situation to my supervisor, designated focal points or channels and will actively seek an appropriate response.

Sengphachanh Sonethavixay 24 January 2022

Carsten Germer 24 January 2022

Annex 11: List of interview questions used during stakeholder engagements

List of questions asked during ZOOM interviews. Each interview or group of interviewees were asked a relevant subset of questions. Each of the listed questions was asked at least once.

1.	A main project engagement is the establishment of the Spatial Decision Support System (DSS) for Savannakhet province, - having in mind that the DSS was launched in January 2021 what in your opinion is the importance of this and how well is it being utilized by provincial stakeholders including the District Multi-Stakeholder Committees
2.	Based on the UNDP oversight of the project how would you rate the work of the PMO –1) has it been effective in implementing the planned activities 2) has it engaged in appropriate monitoring and evaluation and 3) has it had an effective reporting (including financial reporting)
3.	Based on your understanding and knowledge are village development committees established structures in villages or was these project established structures, and also can such structure be important drivers for village development.
4.	Based on your answer just now can such village engagements be a long-term strategy for large, protected areas. Engagements with a large number of communities would have a large cost and involve large administrative and management setup.
5.	Based on your opinion could you highlight a couple of key achievement of the project as well as something which has not worked as well (<i>if any</i>)
6.	Based on your opinion could you highlight a key achievement within Phalanxay District as well as something which has not worked as well (<i>if any</i>)
7.	Based on your work and project engagement what are the main discrepancies in gender equality at village level and in your view what are the main reasons for this.
8.	Based on your work and project engagement what are the main discrepancies in gender equality within Government institutions and in your view what are the main reasons for this.
9.	Could you briefly exemplify what increased capacities of farmers to manage and use agriculture infrastructure effectively entailed.
10.	Could you briefly exemplify what restoration, protection and sustainable management of biodiversity corridors entailed.
11.	Could you briefly exemplify what strengthen institutions and communities for biodiversity corridor management entailed.
12.	Could you briefly outline what type of agriculture infrastructure the loan covered
13.	Could you briefly, outline for us, how you as a company are thinking about engaging in ecotourism and where you foresee such an engagement would be.
14.	Could you comment on how COVID-19 affected the project implementation in Savannakhet and how the project has managed to constructively engage with the challenges the Covid-19 pandemic have posed to the project.
15.	Could you elaborate a bit on how the provincial and national steering committees engages with one and other to ensure successful implementation of the SAFE Ecosystem project.
16.	Could you elaborate a bit on what the strategic purpose of the projects Responsible Business Forums are and are there something you particularly would like to highlight about these forums.
17.	Could you elaborate on the project successes in the area of agriculture including if they are long-term sustainable.
18.	Could you elaborate on the project successes in the area of livelihood development including if they are long-term sustainable.
19.	Could you go through the steps of a normal recruitment process of a consultant or sub-contractor.
20.	Could you provide a short (2 minutes) re-cap of the main activities you have been engaged in the project?
21.	Could you provide briefly describe your company and what your main activities in Savannakhet province are.
22.	Could you tell us the circumstances that led to you become interested in the project and its eco-tourism activities
23.	Did the villages and the village community agreements play a specific role in the development of the ecotourism strategy and will the villages play a special role in the strategy role-out and if so in what way.

24. Do you believe that the Government of Lao PDR will expand the setup demonstrated under the SAFE Ecosystem project to other areas in Laos using (national, provincial or district) government funding
25. Do you believe that the projects work on improved park management, staff and ranger capacity building, sign posting and demarcation helps safeguard the ecosystems and species within which the Protected Areas are put in place to conserve as well as managing the human/livestock <-> wildlife conflicts– why or why not depending upon your point of view (<i>question to be answered by all three</i>)
26. Do you believe that you have obtained adequate support from the UNDP Regional Bureau in connection with the projects implementation.
27. Do you have any indication or knowledge as to whether the developed Management Plans are being implemented – with a particular reference to the activities not undertaken by the Safe Ecosystem project.
28. Do you have any indications as to whether the DSS is actively being used in the districts and the province.
29. Do you have any information or details which you would like to share with the Terminal Evaluation Team before we end this interview (<i>A common question to end the session</i>)
30. Do you feel again based on discussions with the government partners that financing into protected areas and protected areas management will increase in the future.
31. Ex Act data could you clarify which areas are the included in the four entries in the excel sheet management degradation 1) 40,665, 2) 4,825, 3) 37,555 and 4) 37,555.
32. For the Dry Dipterocarp Forest species – if we look away from the predominant tree species – do the ecosystem consist of a distinct set of grass shrub and other plant species which are unique to the Dry Dipterocarp Forest
33. For the management plan for the xetanouane phounak protection forest it is mentioned that the management plan primarily focuses on the area which is located in the Phin District – what was the specific reason for this. and more generally for the management plans were there district juristically issues which should be considered and (if so) how were these addressed. ---- Part of the reason for this question is that in the management response to the midterm evaluation the project has commented that protected areas falls in several districts and it would be difficult for the project to engage in management activities in districts not included in the project -à so we were wondering if this had an impact on the management planning process.
34. For the systems and structures established such as the District Multi-Stakeholder Committees, increased Protected area management capacity and PA staffing, and village engagements including the village agreements continue to be engaged in following the end of the project – in other words will the Lao PDR Government provide financing long term.
35. For the Xetanouane-Phounak Protected Forest it was suggested to not to a Management Office but rather having staff from Dong Phou Vieng NPA and Ong Mang Sanctuary be tasked with overseeing management of the Protection Forest, was this discussed with stakeholders and how would this in practical terms work (from a jurisdictional point of view)
36. From the project reporting part of the work has to been to propose viable finance mechanisms, has it been possible to identify such mechanisms which are acceptable to the Lao Government and/or which can be established with little external funding and if so are they in the process of being pursued.
37. From the project reporting we can see that WCA has provided training on skills related to ecotourism could you briefly describe the trainings and why they were needed as well as let us know how many people were trained.
38. From you point of view was it reasonable to list the full 60 million USD as co-financing to the Safe Ecosystem Project given that projects geographical coverage and loan outcomes. <i>Grant 19 million USD -> 2,787,100 USD co-financing</i>)
39. From your perspective and knowledge of the project how valuable has the projects work on Integrated Spatial Planning, the Strategic Environment Assessment and the Spatial Decision Support System (DSS) and the use of District Multi-Stakeholder Committees in decision making been.
40. From your perspective and knowledge of the project what has been the role of the District Multi-Stakeholder Committees and have they been an instrumental entity for the project's work at local level.
41. From your point of view and to your knowledge is the SAFE Project well aligned with the National and UNDP priorities – in other words is/was it a relevant project.
42. From your point of view are village community agreement useful instrument for engaging the local communities in the project's activities – why and why not – and could you provide one or two examples which illustrates your opinion?

43. From your point of view can planting of trees in home gardens and for instance paddy fields in reality be seen as reforestation of the Dry Dipterocarp Forest or should it more be seen as a type of in-situ conservation of Dry Dipterocarp Forest species.
44. From your point of view can the work under the SAFE Ecosystem Project be seen as a pilot/demonstration of a functional provincial system which could/should be replicated in other provinces of Lao PDR.
45. From your point of view do you feel that the project is in a position to ensure increased financial sustainability at local level based on the current results of the project
46. From your point of view from where would/should the income stream (for the annual budget needs) come from – and again in your view how realistic do you think it is/was to ensure the needed long-term funding for the respective protected areas.
47. From your point of view from where would/should the income stream (for the PA annual budget needs) come from – and again in your view how realistic do you think it is/was to ensure the needed long-term funding for the respective protected areas.
48. From your point of view has there been any benefits for the project that there has been a Provincial Project Office and if so could you elaborate a bit further on that.
49. From your point of view how can the projects requirement of having at least 30% participation of women in activities be seen as a positive attempt for ensuring the mainstreaming of women
50. From your point of view how has the SAFE Ecosystem project's involvement in hydrological monitoring been an important contribution including being a factor in disaster risk reduction.
51. Has gender and specifically women's empowerment had a specific focus in the project's communication and has the mainstreaming of women been specifically highlighted through for instance special features and/or success stories.
52. Has the project been audited during its lifetime and if so what was the audit findings.
53. Has the projects approach to reforestation been effective and has the strategy been important for reaching the projects targets or exceeding it.
54. Has the village community agreement been a useful instrument for engaging the local communities in the project's activities – why and why not – and could you provide one or two examples which illustrates your opinion?
55. Has the village community agreement been a useful instrument for engaging the local communities in the projects livelihood and agricultural activities.
56. How and how often do you do financial reporting to UNDP and what is the procedures for requesting funding from UNDP
57. How do you feel the collaboration with UNDP has been under this project, and do you believe that UNDP has provided adequate support and oversight to the project.
58. How do you foresee the Public-Private Partnerships for future ecotourism engagement play out particularly in a country where limited Government funding is available for, for instance, protected areas and sustainable development initiatives at village level.
59. How has Covid-19 impacted development work in Lao PDR and what adaptive measures to ensure efficient implementation has been undertaken by UNDP.
60. How has the project communicated the project ecotourism work as well as its work related to local livelihoods
61. How has the working relationship between the Implementing Partner and UNDP been throughout the project implementation, are there any issues which the Terminal Evaluation teams should be aware of.
62. How much do you think could be charged by a fee by the PA on top of the current prices. -> to support the park management and conservation efforts including maintaining trails etc.
63. How successful have the project so far been in establishing Public-Private Partnerships until now and do you believe that such PPPs will be established by the end of the project or in the period here after in case 1) the ongoing PPP activities are further pursued by UNDP through other means and 2) in case the ongoing PPP activities are not further pursued by UNDP through other means
64. How well do you feel the collaboration with UNDP has been and have you received sufficient support.
65. Improve infrastructure irrigation facilities and roads to facilitate production
66. In a similar manner – are there any plans to integrate parts of the results (such as the Integrated Spatial Planning, the Strategic Environment Assessment and the Spatial Decision Support System (DSS) and the use of District Multi-Stakeholder Committees in decision making) into the ongoing GCF project Planning Building resilience of urban populations with ecosystem-based solutions in Lao PDR.

67. In addition to this, the District Multi-Stakeholder Committees were, again according to the project reporting, to engage in local planning. Could you elaborate a bit on what district planning related work they have been involved in including whether they have partaken in the district's ISPs integration into the SEDPs.
68. In developing the Management Plans who were/became the main proponents for brining the plans forward and ensuring that these would not remain "on the shelf documents" – or in other words did the plans have local ownership (district, provincial national).
69. In establishing local agriculture schemes what has been the main local strengths and weaknesses.
70. In establishing local eco-tourism what has been the main local strengths and weaknesses and how have this been included in the ecotourism strategy.
71. In establishing local livelihood schemes what has been the main local strengths and weaknesses.
72. In the agriculture activities engaged in under the project what has be level of women's involvement and what has been done to ensure gender equality (to the extend possible) and also if there were gender disparities what were the main reasons for this.
73. In the livelihood activities engaged in under the project what has be level of women's involvement and what has been done to ensure gender equality (to the extend possible) and also if there were gender disparities what were the main reasons for this.
74. In the project reporting it is mentioned that the legal review of regulations and policies related to sustainable forest management and protected areas will contribute in strengthening policies and regulations governing sustainable land and forest management – has this to your knowledge occurred.
75. In wat way has the project engaged and coordinated with the Poverty Environment Initiative: Phase II (co-financing 600,000 USD), and has SAFE Ecosystem Project influenced the Poverty Environment Initiative.
76. In what way do the ecotourism strategy support the project's end of project target of "At least 4 wildlife-based ecotourism projects operating in project target area" and is this part of an overall strategy for the five districts as a whole.
77. In your view has the project been effective in achieving the expected results – if so why and if not why?
78. Is the Decision Support System or "Savannakhet Decide" now fully functional for the long-term or will it require updating both in terms of data as well as software etc.
79. Is the overnight stays at Ong Mang in the centers tent camp and or center facilities or are they done in the villages.
80. It has been reported that the Ong Many Eco-Centre that will function as a headquarters for the management of the four targeted PA units.... How will this work in practice and secondly can this approach be seen as the reason for why the staffing in Ong Mang has been increased while it has been decreased in the other three areas
81. Looking at the community work from your perspective and knowledge of the project how valuable has the projects work with village communities (such as ecotourism, livelihoods and forest management planning) been
82. Looking at the work with village communities (such as ecotourism, livelihoods and forest management planning) do you believe that the initiatives demonstrated by the SAFE Ecosystem project will be replicated elsewhere in Laos – for instance via government programs.
83. Related to this, based on your knowledge, has or will the Lao PDR Government bring in (or upscale) activities under the project to other areas in Laos for instance through new Government programs
84. SAFE Ecosystem project has both central level, provincial, district and village level components do you feel that the project different governance structures were able to steer the project sufficiently and could you (as an example) potentially comment on how the project managed to constructively engage with the challenges the Covid-19 pandemic have posed to the project.
85. Sustainability of establish structures and processes are a big part of any UNDP project (including GEF projects) – in your views do you feel based on discussions with the government partners that the project financed community work will be continued through government funding following project closure.
86. The activities you have been engaged in are somewhat specialized do you feel that capacity has been build at local district and/or provincial level to maintain the work you do once the project has finished (or that you leave your current position) (<i>question to be answered by all three</i>)
87. The Decision Support System is a complex system which requires training in use management and up-keep. Have people in the province and districts been trained as part of your work and if so in what, from where did the trainees come from and how many people have been trained

88. The Mid-term Review made suggestions for the SAFE Ecosystem Project to form links and ensure of project uptake into the GCF project GIZ – was this suggestion followed up upon and if so could you provide some examples.
89. The National Steering committee is a key governing body of the SAFE Ecosystem project, in your view has the National Steering committee been well established and as a structure been able to make adjustments when and if needed. In case adjustment were made what were the reason for the adjustments.
90. The Ong Mang Sanctuary has become a National Protected Area a process which was supported by you (from a legal perspective), to you knowledge how well were your recommendations/ work integrated into the relevant documentation for the Ong Mang Sanctuary establishment.
91. The project document is mentioning some quite substantial undertakings regarding building the financial sustainability of the project
92. The project has different Co-financing partners UNDP, ADB as well as the different entities of the Government of Lao PDR. How closely has the project worked with these co-financing initiatives and can it be said that the SAFE Ecosystem project has been able to influence these initiatives.
93. The project has established a series of village agreements – have you been involved in the financial management of these agreements and if so what are the main processes engaged in.
94. The project has established District Multi-Stakeholder Committees which (according to project reporting were to be actively engage in the Integrated Spatial Planning and Strategic Environment Assessment processes . In this connection, when was these District Multi-Stakeholder Committees established and could you elaborate a bit on their engagement in the district ISPs and SEAs
95. The project has established District Multi-Stakeholder Committees which (according to project reporting, are to engage in local planning including integrating the developed Integrated Spatial Plans into the District Socio-Economic Development Plans (SEDPs). In this connection, has these District Multi-Stakeholder Committees, to your knowledge, been established and have they partaken in the districts ISPs integration into the SEDPs or any other planning related work. <i>(question to be answered by both)</i>
96. The project has had many parties involved at national provincial district and village level how well do you believe that the project has been able to manage and coordinate the engagement of these stakeholders.
97. The project has listed the Poverty Environment Initiative: Phase II project as a co-financing contribution (600,000 USD), how do you see the cooperation between this project and the SAFE Ecosystem Project, and do you foresee that the results and parts of the undertaken activities (such as those related to livelihoods and ecotourism) are to be included in future UNDP work related to poverty.
98. The project has reported that from 1988 and 2017 there had been five flooding events of the Xe Bangxiang River and during the project period there had been three. From your point of view what could be the reason for the increase in flooding events over the last years.
99. The project reporting notes that sustainable financing is to be incorporated into a revision of the Protected Areas Decree, to your knowledge is the decree in the process of being revised and if so do you have any information as to how well sustainable financing and sustainable financing mechanisms are being included in the decree.
100. The project's Results Framework has an end of project target of "At least 4 wildlife-based ecotourism projects operating in project target area by the end of the project" - Could you elaborate on the success of these four projects are including if they are long-term sustainable.
101. The Provincial Steering committee is a key governing body of the SAFE Ecosystem project, in your view has the Provincial Steering committee been well established and as a structure been able to make adjustments when and if needed. In case adjustment were made what were the reason for the adjustments.
102. The SAFE Ecosystem project has assisted in increasing the management capacity of Protected Areas and promoted village engagement in conservation and protection of PAs. Do you believe that the Government of Lao PDR will maintain the engagement and support towards the PA system following project closure.
103. To start off with could you outline for us the main activities undertaken by you with regard to the financial management of the project, and in this connection specify if there are any differences in the work at national and provincial level.
104. To your knowledge did the Safe Ecosystem Project influence the loan project or the other way around – did the grant project influence the Safe Ecosystem Project.
105. UNDP has provided a large amount of TRAC for the projects co-financing (1.2 million USD) – which is somewhat unusual – what was the main reason for the decision to use sparse TRAC resources on one stand-alone project.

106. We can see that focus of the Xetanouane-Phounak Protection Forest Management Plan is on the area located inside the Savannakhet Province – why not focusing on the full area. And just to clarify did the other management plans cover the full areas.
107. We have been informed that a part of the reforestation and tree planting Jack fruit and Mango trees are used while this seems fine from a livelihood perspective would this “count” in terms of reforestation
108. We have been informed that government staff are being rotated creating a turnover at different posts/positions which sometimes complicates corporation between entities/ departments/ institutions etc. We were wondering how often such rotations occur and whether this is a general thing or is specifically focused on postings in remote areas such as for instance protected areas.
109. We have been informed the livelihood activities for the provision of chicken and pigs have been impacted by the occurrence of Swine fever and bird flu – how big an impact has this had on the activities and how did the project respond?
110. We have noticed from our document review that there are talks of a debt-swap for nature initiative do you have any information about this as we understand that you are taking part in these discussions.
111. We understand from the project reporting that CDE has also been involved in the development of “Lao Decide”. Does “Savannakhet Decide” constitute a sub-system of “Lao Decide” or is it something different. Or asked in a different way what new and additional information is provided by “Savannakhet Decide”
112. We understand from the project that you have been involved in several surveys – how important do you feel these surveys are and do you believe that in time such surveys could be undertaken by the Protected Area staff at some time in the foreseeable future.
113. We understand that the project re-evaluated its approach to reforestation compared to the reforestation approach used in 2018-19. What were the main reasons for this and how are shortcomings addressed going forward.
114. Were the sustainable forestry and agriculture guidelines you developed more practical or guiding in nature?
115. What are some of the main challenges in running the project’s communication and in ensuring that it is both nationally and internationally relevant.
116. What are the main features of the developed Decision Support System, who has access and for what would it be used.
117. What are the main steps you have undertaken in terms of project monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the project is well implemented and can you give some examples of where the project have engaged in adaptive management based on M&E findings.
118. What are the main steps you undertake to ensure financial compliance in your day to day work.
119. What changes could have been made (if any) to the design of the project, or its outputs, in order to have improve the achievement of the project’s expected results? <i>(A common question to end the session)</i>
120. What changes could have been made (if any) to the financial management of the project in order to have improve the working processes
121. What changes could have been made (if any) to the project’s agriculture and livelihood components in order to have improve the achievement of the project’s expected results?
122. What changes could have been made (if any) to the project’s communication and overall communication strategy in order to have improve the overall communication outreach of the project?
123. What changes could have been made (if any) to the projects ecotourism component in order to have improve the achievement of the project’s expected results?
124. What did the feasibility and marketing study on village handicraft provide information on.
125. What has been the main challenges with regard to the reforestation efforts
126. What has been the role of the District Multi-Stakeholder Committees and have they been an instrumental entity for the project’s work at local level..... In a follow-up you could clarify which committee this is during the interviews it has been explained to us that the District Multi-Stakeholder Committees as such are 1) the district Steering Committee and 2) the District Investment Committee..... As a further follow-up it has been mentioned that the provincial steering committee are mostly involved in strategic issues while the district steering in practical terms are involved in project implementations <i>(in this connection it is assumed that the provided reference is in related to the committee members rather than the committees as structures)</i>
127. What in your point of view is the most important aspect of the SAFE Ecosystem project

128. What is the cost of a typical 3 day 2 nights trip and how much of this is provided to the overnight stay meals guides etc. inside the Ong Mang.
129. What types of local communities did the project cater to smaller villages in remote rural areas or large communities in more accessible lowland areas for example.
130. What was the geographical area the grant covered
131. What were some of the main complications in developing the Management Plans
132. When viewed from the outside as a National NGO Do you believe that the project's work on improved park management, staff and ranger capacity building, sign posting and demarcation helps safeguard the ecosystems and species within which the Protected Areas are put in place to conserve as well as managing the human/livestock <-> wildlife conflicts– why or why not depending upon your point of view.
133. When viewed from the outside as a National NGO do you think that the village community agreement have been a useful instrument for engaging the local communities in the project's activities – why and why not.
134. When viewed from the outside as a National NGO how valuable is it to work with village communities on issues such as ecotourism, livelihoods and forest management planning.
135. Why did the project engage with the Environment Protection Fund and what processes were EPF involved in and how do you feel the overall implementation of the engagement was? In this connection we have learned that there has been delays in the provision of funds to the communities.
136. With regard to Ecotourism do you see Ecotourism as a financial support mechanism which can provide substantial financial contributions to 1) PA management and 2) livelihoods of villagers within the project target areas.
137. With regard to Ecotourism has the project, in your view, been effective in achieving the expected results – if so why and if not why?
138. With regard to Ecotourism has the project, in your view, been effective in achieving the expected results and have it succeeded in making its engagement long-term sustainable – if so why and if not why?
139. With regard to the Eld's Deer Sanctuary do you believe that the community ranger activity financed under the project will continue after the project – if so who would finance this and if not what do you believe would be the on the ground effects of this.
140. With regard to the establishment of High Conservation Value Forest the ProDoc estimated the coverage to be 193,684 hectares. However, the HCVF Planning report covers HCVF for a total of 25,104 hectares. Ultimately only one site totaling 5,780 hectares was approved by the Provincial Government as a HCVF. The question is why the big difference between the ProDoc estimate and that of the HCVF Planning report.
141. With regard to the establishment of High Conservation Value Forest were this work general in scope or related to individual HCVF and if so how many different HCVF sites were you involved in.
142. With regard to the project's agricultural engagement has the project, in your view, been effective in achieving the expected results – if so why and if not why?
143. With regard to the project's Livelihood engagement has the project, in your view, been effective in achieving the expected results – if so why and if not why?
144. With time do you foresee that there, aside from your selected destinations, are potential for developing further destinations in the Savannakhet province.

General guidance for Site Visit for Terminal Evaluation of SAFE Ecosystem Project Savannakhet Province, Lao PDR, 20-26 December 2021

Talk to local people:

- Do you know about SAFE Ecosystem project?
- What did you gain or benefits from the SAFE Ecosystem project?
- How does/did the project help you?
- Can you compare to last 5 years, do you feel that your living condition is getting better? Why?
- Do you know if the village have a revolving fund? Have you ever deposit or borrow money?
- Women's involvement and reason for gender imbalance.
- See also the summary of findings template below.

Things to be checked

Donphouvieng, and OngMang Center

1. Infrastructure: village office, PA Center, etc.
2. Office equipment – check if UNDP/GEF's local is on those vehicles
3. Vehicles – check if UNDP/GEF's loco is on those vehicles
4. System, Software, Application (phone app, DSS): check if users are using it
5. Sign
6. Demarcation
7. Drone

Village level

1. Infrastructure: village office, any infrastructures from the project support? check if UNDP/GEF's loco is on those vehicles
2. Village markets
3. Homestay: talk to service providers, how long do you start providing the service, how many guests/tourist have visit you?
4. Shewing: what are the project or service?
5. Livestock (chicken, pig, goat, fish pond): are they for family consumption or market, any plan for expansion? If sell, who are the buyer/trader?
6. Village has how many cows – where do they graze – has there been a change in where they graze due to the project and will they return to the old ways after the project ends.
7. Do cattle from other villages graze in the “your” village area – if so how do you deal with that?
8. How many goats in the village - where do they graze.
9. Vegetable garden: vegetables for consumption or market, any plan for expansion?
10. Ranger: check the application (phone app) for reporting the cases, name of application?

Summary of findings template

Location (village, district)									
Project Component ³³ and activity	Who was involved? (Women/Men)	What role(s) did people play?	If gender imbalance why?	What happened? (Result and process)	Long-term livelihood/ environment improvements?	Change in forest use?	Feeling about forest/ biodiversity?	Continued after project? (yes/no)	Note on sources and verification
Community agreements									
Village fund (management)									
Forest management plans (implementation)									
Livelihood activities (livestock)									
Livelihood activities (vegetable)									
Livelihood activities (rice)									
Livelihood activities (fishpond)									
Livelihood activities (sewing)									
Livelihood activities (vet.)									
Livelihood activities (other)									
Ecotourism (home stay)									
Ecotourism (guide)									
Ecotourism (support service)									

³³ Component 1: Enabling policy environment and increased compliance and enforcement capacities for sustainable land and forest management across landscapes including protected areas³³

Component 2: Sustainable Forest Management and Protected Area Expansion in five priority Districts of Savannakhet Province

Component 3: Developing and Promoting Incentives and Sustainable Financing for Biodiversity Conservation and Forest Protection

Annex 12: Signed Terminal Evaluation final report clearance form

Terminal Evaluation Report Reviewed and Cleared By:	
Commissioning Unit	
Name:	
Signature:	Date:
UNDP-GEF Regional Technical Advisor	
Name:	
Signature:	Date:


TE Report Clearance Form

Terminal Evaluation Report for: Sustainable Forest and Land Management in the Dry Dipterocarp Forest Ecosystems of Southern Lao Project (GEF ID 6940; UNDP PIMS ID 5448)

Reviewed and Cleared By:

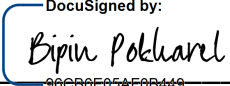
Commissioning Unit (M&E Focal Unit)

Name: Vipapone A
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Signature:  Date: 21-Feb-2022

Regional Technical Advisor (Nature, Climate and Energy)

Name: Bipin Pokharel Regional Technical Adviser

Signature:  Date: 21-Feb-2022