



**MAINSTREAMING BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION THROUGH LOW-  
IMPACT ECOTOURISM IN SINAP II (ECOTUR-AP II)**

**PN-T1190 – ATN/FM-16476-PN**

**TERMINAL EVALUATION REPORT**

**GEF PROJECT ID: 9889**

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**(FINAL VERSION)**

## **Table of Contents**

<b>1</b>	<b>Executive Summary of Results .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Findings.....	1
1.2	Results of the Evaluation .....	2
1.3	Lessons Learned and Recommendations .....	3
<b>2</b>	<b>General Aspects.....</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1	Project Description .....	4
2.2	Scope and Methodology of the Evaluation .....	5
<b>3</b>	<b>Findings.....</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1	Overall Project Execution .....	8
3.1.1	Pre-execution Stage.....	8
3.1.2	Execution Stage.....	9
3.1.3	Closure Stage .....	13
3.1.4	Project Financing .....	13
3.2	Fulfillment of the Intended Objectives and Indicators .....	15
3.2.1	Changes to the Results Matrix.....	15
3.2.2	Achievement of Objectives and Results .....	16
3.3	Analysis of Risks.....	17
3.4	Environmental, Social, and Gender Safeguards .....	18
<b>4</b>	<b>Quality of the Implementation and Execution .....</b>	<b>19</b>
4.1	Quality of the Implementation.....	19
4.2	Quality of the Execution .....	19
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusions and Lessons Learned.....</b>	<b>21</b>
5.1	Conclusions.....	21
5.2	Lessons Learned and Recommendations .....	21
<b>6</b>	<b>Annexes.....</b>	<b>23</b>
	Annex 1: Project Implementation and Execution Assessment.....	23

## Index of Tables

Table 1 - Basic Project data.....	4
Table 2 - Project Components .....	5
Table 3 - Evaluation Criteria .....	6
Table 4 - Documents supporting the Evaluation .....	6
Table 5 - Milestones of the last Planning approved by the IDB .....	10
Table 6 - Status of bidding processes by December, 2020.....	10
Table 7 - Sources of Co-financing for the Project.....	14
Table 8 - Financial Execution for the Project.....	14
Table 9 - Adjustment to the Outputs Matrix .....	15
Table 10 - Status of the Initial Risks Matrix .....	17
Table 11 - Status of the Risks Matrix at the Execution Stage .....	18
Table 12 - Lessons Learned and Recommendations .....	21

## Index of Figures

Figure 1- Timeline of the Pre-execution Stage .....	8
Figure 2- Timeline of the Execution Stage.....	12

## Acronyms

BPPPSL	Spanish acronym for San Lorenzo Protected Forest and Protecting Landscape
C	Current Execution
CGR	Spanish acronym for General Accounting Office of the Republic
CP	Comparison of Prices
CRS	Consultants Rating System
DP	Direct Procurement
ECOTUR	Low-Impact Ecotourism Project
EOP	End of Project
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IC	Individual Consultant
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
MEF	Ministry of Economy and Finance
MiAmbiente	Spanish acronym for Ministry of Environment
P	Original Planning
P(u)	Updated Planning
PA	Protected Area
PMU	Project Management Unit
PN	Spanish acronym for National Park
PNC	Spanish acronym for Coiba National Park
PNCC	Spanish acronym for Camino de Cruces National Park
PNCH	Spanish acronym for Chagres National Park
PNP	Spanish acronym for Portobelo National Park
PNRBAC	Spanish acronym for Altos de Campana Biosphere Reserve National Park
PNS	Spanish acronym for Soberania National Park
PNVB	Spanish acronym for Volcan Baru National Park
RFLG	Spanish acronym for La Yeguada Forest Reserve
SINAP	Spanish acronym for National System of Protected Areas

## 1 Executive Summary of Results

The Mainstreaming of Biodiversity Conservation through Low-Impact Ecotourism in SINAP II (ECOTUR II) Project was formulated based on the good results of its first phase, which focused on nine Protected Areas managed by the Ministry of Environment (MiAmbiente) and contributed to biodiversity conservation and sustainability of Protected Areas (PAs) in a framework of innovation, entrepreneurial integration, and sustainable social development.

The justification for the Project's second phase was to ensure continuity in the conservation efforts undertaken in the first phase and complementarity with other ongoing initiatives and, specifically, the IDB Loan Agreement (PN-L1146), currently in effect.

The Project was approved on November 17, 2017, for USD 753,247.00 from the Global Environment Facility (GEF). It was to be implemented by the IDB and executed by MiAmbiente. Its objective was to strengthen the conservation and management effectiveness of Panama's Protected Areas (PAs), with a special focus on the 4 prioritized PAs:

- i) Coiba National Park (PNC),
- ii) Volcan Baru National Park (PNVB),
- iii) Portobello National Park (PNP); and
- iv) Protected Forest and Protecting Landscape San Lorenzo (BPPPSL).

October 10, 2021 was the final Project execution date. The Project concluded without its outputs being developed, in spite of the 12-month execution extension granted to it.

This Terminal Evaluation Report intends to analyze the reasons why the Project could not be executed, give recommendations, and outline lessons learned for the Executing Agency and other projects to avoid these shortcomings in the future, as well as provide the GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) with feedback about the issues faced and update their databases for future analysis and decision making. To this end, this Evaluation includes a characterization of the relevant events that took place and their effects on the Project implementation and execution.

The methodology developed for preparing the Project's Terminal Evaluation was based on a review of the documents detailed on Table 4, as well as on conversations with the IDB staff in charge of supervising the Project and the Executing Agency's (MiAmbiente) technical team, which facilitated the retrospective analysis of the implemented operational management. Given that the Project did not achieve its intended outputs and outcomes, it was considered unnecessary to conduct field visits and focus groups with beneficiaries and other Project stakeholders.

### 1.1 Findings

The main findings identified are related to:

- **Overall Project Execution**

- (i) The pre-execution stage took 27 months from the approval of the Project. The issues that influenced the delay were the change of authorities and the lack of experience of the MiAmbiente team in charge of enabling the Project in government systems so that the Project could effectively start with its applicable budget allocation. Figure 1 shows the timeline for this stage.

- (ii) During the Project execution, the MiAmbiente team was unable to stick to the schedule agreed with the IDB in the framework of the 12-month execution period extension. The internal issues that influenced this result are related to: (i) Late Project start, which substantially reduced the effective execution period, in spite of the 12-month extension granted; (ii) Allocation of staff with partial dedication to the Project; and (iii) High staff turnover in the PMU, especially of coordinators, which resulted in: (a) constant changes in terms of planning, and presentation of proposals that were inconsistent with the Project objectives; and (b) Delays in the agreed procurement processes. Figure 2 shows the Project execution timeline compared with the agreed schedule.
- (iii) On April 19, 2021, in view of the substantial and irreversible delays, the IDB notified MiAmbiente that it was not possible to continue with the Project execution, so the processes in progress had to be cancelled and the process of returning and cancelling unused resources should be started. The reason for this decision was that none of the procurement processes in progress could get completed, and the remaining execution period was insufficient for the development of the intended outputs.
- **Fulfillment of the intended objectives and indicators:**  
As part of a planning adjustment, between February and June 2020, MiAmbiente proposed changes in the Project outputs to the IDB. The output changes approved by the IDB are shown on Table 7. The outcome indicators were not adjusted, and the objectives and targets established at the Project inception remained the same. It has been established that, in spite of the update to the outputs matrix, only two of the fourteen outputs established in the matrix could be fulfilled. The fulfilled outputs are: Biosecurity plans designed for the 4 prioritized PAs, and Strategy for monitoring, control and surveillance for public use developed through new technologies in the four prioritized PAs.

## **1.2 Results of the Evaluation**

Based on findings and results, the Project is classified as Highly Unsatisfactory (HU)<sup>1</sup> (refer to Annex 1), considering:

- a) **Relevance:** Due to the time elapsed from the design to the start of the implementation (27 months), the implementation of the Project lost relevance to the Government of Panama. This is evidenced by the different planning scenarios presented by MiAmbiente, which focused on the use of resources, rather than the achievement of results.
- b) **Efficiency:** The adjusted execution schedule could not be met, and there was a mismatch between the financial planning and the budget allocation.
- c) **Execution:** The Executing Agency (MiAmbiente) performed its duties subject to quality and staffing limitations due to a high staff turnover and insufficient time dedicated to the completion of the tasks under their care. On top of this, the governance system and the frequently changing vision prevented a swift completion of bidding processes.

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<sup>1</sup> Rating given according to the GEF rating scale.

- d) **Implementation:** The GEF agency (IDB) evidenced certain deficiencies in the performance of its duties, such as low proactivity at the beginning of the Project in terms of helping enable the Government systems, and providing guidance that generated confusion in the Executing Agency, considering that it was simultaneously executing two projects with different Project Leaders from the IDB.
- e) **Results:** There are no Project results, as no outputs were executed.
- f) **Efficiency, sustainability, monitoring and evaluation; environmental, social and gender safeguards:** These aspects cannot be assessed due to the non-execution of outputs and absence of outcomes for the Project.

### **1.3 Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

The main lessons learned and recommendations derived from an analysis of findings and the evaluation of the Project are detailed on Table 12 and summarized below:

- i) Updating the institutional, technical and fiduciary capacity report during the design stage is essential to determine the risks to the Project implementation and execution and to formulate an action plan to mitigate or prevent them. It is recommended including the updating of the institutional capacity report in the design stage, especially if a change of authorities is expected during the execution stage.
- ii) Defining an Operating Manual/Operating Rules that include a governance system and a Project execution and implementation scheme facilitates the understanding of the Project execution mechanism, especially when there is staff turnover. It is recommended that, as a condition prior to the first disbursement, the Executing Agency should present a more accurate and detailed Project implementation and execution mechanism and its governance system, both included in the Project Operating Manual or Rules.
- iii) The participation of Executing Agency authorities in the updating of the Project Results Matrix streamlines the process for agreeing and approving eventual adjustments. When a project's results matrix is requested to be reviewed, it is recommended holding review workshops with the authorities and technical team of the Executing Agency and the financing entity to shorten the timeframes for agreeing and approving the adjustments.
- iv) The lack of a single flowchart for the processes to be completed before the IDB, regulating the operating procedures not established in the Procurement Policies, contributes to the executing agencies' low effectiveness in completing the IDB no-objection procedures. It is advisable that the different IDB Project Team Leaders and the fiduciary areas agree on a single operating process flowchart to be followed before the IDB, as this will help improve the Executing Agency's effectiveness in the procedures they complete before the IDB and dissipate impressions about the IDB Team Leaders acting subjectively.



## 2 General Aspects

### 2.1 Project Description

The Mainstreaming of Biodiversity Conservation through Low-Impact Ecotourism in SINAP II (ECOTUR II) Project was formulated based on the good results of its first phase, which focused on nine Protected Areas managed by the Ministry of Environment (MiAmbiente) and contributed to biodiversity conservation and sustainability of Protected Areas (PAs) in a context of innovation, entrepreneurial integration, and sustainable social development. Also, the phase I of the Project was the basis for the formulation of a loan from the IDB to support the conservation of natural heritage and culture management (PN-L1146) currently under implementation.

The justification for the second phase of the Project was to ensure the continuation of the conservation efforts of the first phase and complementarity with other ongoing initiatives and, specifically, the IDB Loan Agreement (PN-L1146). Table 1 shows the basic Project data.

**Table 1 - Basic Project data**

GEF Project ID	9889
IDB Project ID	PN-T1190; ATN/FM-16476-PN
Project Title	Mainstreaming Biodiversity Conservation through Low-Impact Ecotourism in SINAP II
Country	Republic of Panama
Implementing Agency	Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)
Executing Agency	Ministry of Environment of Panama (MiAmbiente)
Focal Areas:	Coiba National Park (PNC), Volcan Baru National Park (PNVB), Portobello National Park (PNP), and Protected Forest and Protecting Landscape San Lorenzo (BPPPSL).
Board approval date	November 17, 2017
Agreement execution date	August 28, 2018
Effective date - start of execution	October 10, 2018
Eligibility date	April 22, 2019
Date of first disbursement	October 9, 2019
Closure date	Intended: October 10, 2020 Actual: October 10, 2021
Budget (GEF grant):	USD 753,427.00
GEF-approved co-financing:	USD 6,000,000
Total project financing:	USD 6,753,427
Actual Co-financing (IDB Loan)	USD 45,550,000.00
Executed amount (GEF grant):	USD 32,205.85 (Justified amount. Pending confirmation, with return of unused resources - still to be completed)
Executed amount (IDB Loan)	USD 454,558.00 to June 30, 2022. The Project will be in execution until December 21, 2025.

*Source: Own formulation based on data taken from the Project*

The Project objective is to strengthen conservation and effective management of Panama's PAs, and it is structured in two substantial components with their respective specific objectives, and expected outcomes

and outputs, as shown on Table 2. In addition, an operating component was included for Project oversight, monitoring and evaluation activities.

**Table 2 - Project Components**

Expected Outcomes	Expected Outputs
<b>Component 1: Strengthening PA management sustainability.</b>	
Objective: Strengthening PA management in relation to ecotourism activities.	
Increasing PA management effectiveness.	1.1 Operational manuals developed. 1.2 Implementation and Management Plan developed.
Natural resource management rating increased.	1.3 Action plans designed. 1.4 Virtual platforms designed. 1.5 Strategies designed. 1.6 Monitoring and Evaluation Plan developed.
<b>Component 2: Building participatory management models for sustainable use.</b> Objective: Building participatory management models for PAs related to ecotourism activities.	
Number of concession agreements.	2.1 Action plans implemented. 2.2 New databases created. 2.3 Individuals trained. 2.4 Methodologies designed/strengthened. 2.5 Diagnostic studies and assessments completed.
Beneficiaries participating in co-management and concession agreements.	
Percentage of women participating in co-management and concession agreements.	

*Source: Own formulation based on data taken from the Project*

MiAmbiente, as the Executing Agency, managed the Project through the Project Management Unit (PMU), which was integrated by one Project Coordinator, an expert in oversight and monitoring, and an expert in procurement, all partially dedicated to the Project.

## **2.2 Scope and Methodology of the Evaluation**

Terminal evaluations usually seek to provide an independent and comprehensive opinion on the design and performance of a project during its implementation, determining the achievement of its objectives, outcomes and outputs. They also provide an evidence-based assessment of a project's sustainability likelihood and potential impacts. The main contribution of this type of evaluations looking forward is the identification of lessons learned that may contribute to the design and implementation of other projects.

The policies of the ECOTUR-II source of financing (GEF) require conducting Terminal Evaluations through a complete and systematic report of the performance of a completed project, assessing its design, implementation, and achievement of objectives, following the guidelines established to that end. Terminal Evaluations provide the GEF's Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) with feedback on recurring issues in projects and update their databases for future analysis and decision making.

For the particular case of the ECOTUR-II Project, which could not get executed after 36 months, the objective is to evaluate the reasons why it could not be executed and derive recommendations and lessons learned for the Executing Agency and other projects to avoid similar issues in the future. To this end, this report includes a characterization of the relevant events that took place and their effects on Project implementation and

execution. In this regard, the evaluation criteria applied and not applied in this report are detailed on Table 3.

**Table 3 - Evaluation Criteria**

Criteria	Application
Relevance	Evaluating if the lines of action and strategies designed and prioritized were appropriate to the development issue to be solved and aligned with government policies.
Efficiency	Aimed at identifying what prevented the attainment of Project results and objectives and, based on this, provide recommendations and lessons learned.
Quality of the Implementation and Execution	Aimed at analyzing the responsibilities fulfilled by the Executing Agency (MiAmbiente) and the Implementing Agency (IDB) during Project implementation and execution.
Results, Effectiveness, Sustainability, Quality of Monitoring and Evaluation	Cannot be evaluated, as the Project was not executed.

The Evaluation provides information that is based on credible, reliable, and useful evidence obtained through an analysis of documents and consultations with the officials involved in the Project implementation efforts. Table 4 details the documents analyzed.

**Table 4 - Documents supporting the Evaluation**

Type of document	Use in the Evaluation
Project basic documents: (i) Project Document of the IDB PN-T1190 Technical Cooperation and (ii) GEF Investment Grant Agreement No. ATN/FM 16476-PN	Providing information on the Project objectives and structure, outputs, and execution scheme. In addition, they include details about the Project background and its justification (issues expected to be solved).
Project Work Plans for 2019, 2020 and 2021.	Obtaining evidence of the constant changes in Project planning.
Biannual Project progress reports prepared and delivered to the IDB by MiAmbiente, for 2019 and 2020.	Obtaining evidence of the events that prevented the Project from being executed.
Memorandum of the different monitoring meetings held between the IDB and MiAmbiente to agree on actions that would enable the execution of the Project.	Obtaining evidence of the events that prevented the Project from being executed.
Correspondence exchanged between the IDB and MiAmbiente related to the events that prevented the Project execution.	Obtaining evidence of the events that prevented the Project from being executed.
Project Monitoring Reports (PMRs) evidencing different updates to the Project's physical and financial planning.	Obtaining evidence of replanning for the attainment of results and outputs, as well as the non-fulfilment of Project indicators.

The methodology developed for the Project's Terminal Evaluation was based on the review of the documents detailed on Table 4, as well as on conversations with the IDB staff in charge of supervising the Project and the Executing Agency's (MiAmbiente) technical team, which facilitated the retrospective analysis of the implemented operational management. Given that the Project did not achieve its intended outputs and outcomes, it was considered unnecessary to conduct field visits and focus groups with beneficiaries and other Project stakeholders.

Based on the analysis of documents and the information obtained from interviews, this Report seeks to identify the internal and external factors that prevented the Project from meeting its objectives and indicators, and to derive lessons learned based on the findings for each Project stage.

This Report is structured in four sections. The first section is an executive summary of the Evaluation results, the second one deals with general Project aspects and the scope of the Evaluation, the third one presents the findings of the Evaluation for each Project stage, the fulfilment of objectives and indicators, and an analysis of the Project implementation and execution quality, and the fourth and last section comprises conclusions and lessons learned.

## 3 Findings

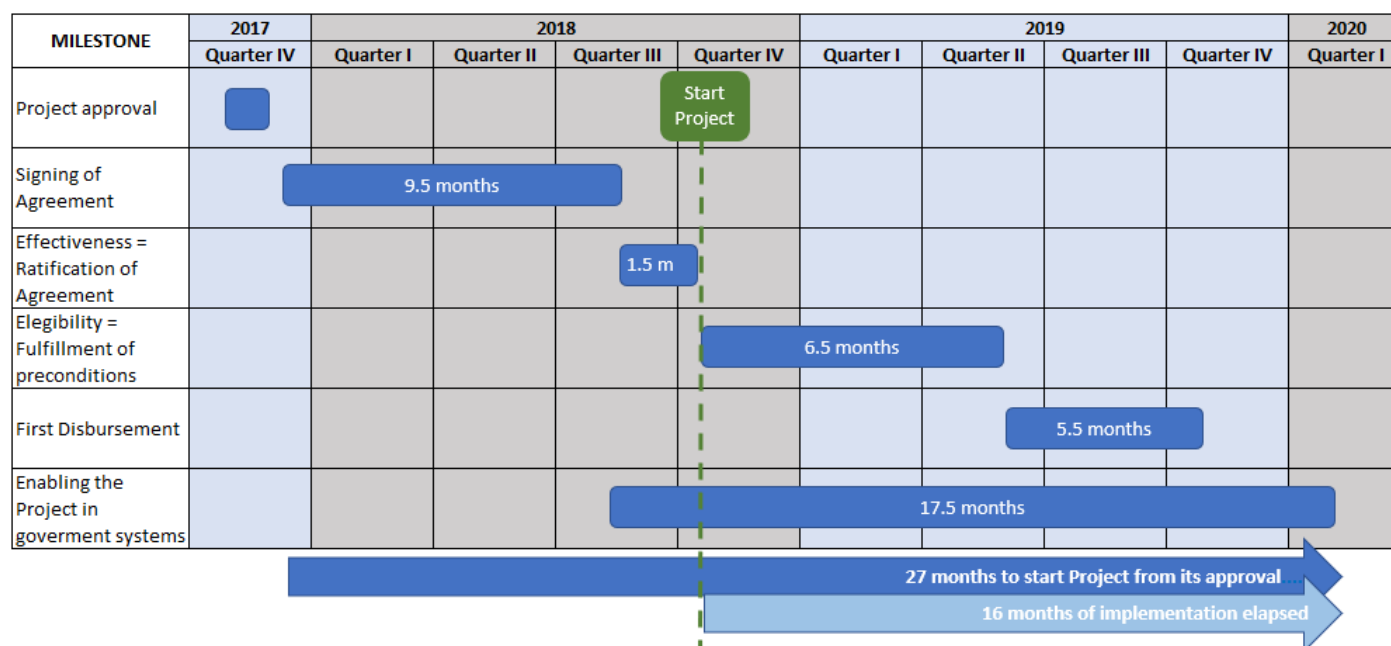
### 3.1 Overall Project Execution

#### 3.1.1 Pre-execution Stage

The pre-execution stage comprises the set of activities that must be carried out from their date of approval to generate enabling conditions for the execution of the activities that are specific to the outputs that are intended to be developed.

The main milestones of this stage are: signing of the agreement, fulfillment of effectiveness and eligibility conditions, and enabling the project in the government systems with the applicable budget allocation for each period. This stage lasted about 27 months from the date of approval - November 17, 2017. Figure 1 shows the timeline for each milestone in this stage.

Figure 1- Timeline of the Pre-execution Stage



The following issues contributed to this stage lasting more than average compared to other projects:

- (i) **Change of authorities.** In May 2019, there were general elections in Panama, which resulted in a new administration from July 2019. Consequently, between the elections and the inauguration of the new presidential, local and ministerial authorities, the Project remained idle for some time due to the lack of authorized signatures for proceedings before the IDB and other institutions.
- (ii) **Creation of a management center.** A management center is a structure established by Panama's government systems to request the allocation of budget items and operationalize the Project activities. The creation of the management center entails, apart from complying with the filling of forms, training the staff that operates the system. Due to the lack of experience of MiAmbiente and operating staff turnover (finance, procurement), this process took more than 17 months. It

was completed with support from the Bank through the hiring of a consultant for three months to support MiAmbiente until the opening of the management center in January 2020.

As a result of this stage, 67% of the Project execution term has elapsed (16 months), and systems have just been enabled to start the procurement processes and achieve all the intended outputs in the remaining 8 months.

### **3.1.2 Execution Stage**

The Project execution started in February 2020, with 16 months of delay, so MiAmbiente expressed the need to extend the Project term by at least one year. MiAmbiente, the IDB and MEF agreed on the conditions that should be met to enable the extension of the Project term, which are as follows:

- (i) According to the DIB Policies, the date of the last disbursement cannot be postponed if resources have not been committed for the last twelve months. Therefore, it was necessary to prioritize the procurement of at least one contract with a term shorter than the original closure date (October 2020).
- (ii) Having an execution schedule evidencing that the processes to be developed can be implemented within the new requested term.

To meet the first condition, in late April 2020, MiAmbiente agreed with the Bank to quickly move forward with the hiring of an individual consultant for the development of a monitoring, oversight and surveillance strategy for public use, through new technologies and the strengthening of the existing capacities in the four PAs of the Project. This contract was awarded on July 17, 2020, and was endorsed by the General Accounting Office of the Republic of Panama (CGR) on September 2, 2020. Its term was 75 calendar days.

At the same time, to meet the second condition, from February to June 2020, MiAmbiente reviewed the outputs and activities planned under the original Project, considering: (i) Time elapsed since the formulation (30 months); (ii) Priorities of the new government of Panama; (iii) Time remaining to execute the Project; (iv) Budget limitations for 2020; and (v) Context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited the mobilization of staff and the execution of in-person activities. MiAmbiente submitted different scenarios related to the use of resources and schedules for IDB consideration.

On July 29, 2020, through notice CPN-713-/2020, the IDB granted its no objection to the last Project planning proposal, subject to the completion of three milestones (see Table 5), and stating that it would not accept further changes to the planning. The non-completion of such milestones would result in the cancellation of the resources allocated to the relevant output. The processes related to the communication strategy for the digital platforms and the auditing and evaluation of the Project were excluded from said conditions and they could thus start in 2021. The conditions set by the IDB sought to ensure that the agreed processes would start in January 2021, and could be completed with the relevant outputs produced within the one-year Project extension term, considering that most of those processes stipulated a term of 6 to 8 months to deliver the services involved, without including the respective timeframes for review, acceptance, and payment processes.

With both conditions being met, MEF requested on behalf of MiAmbiente an adjustment to the Project's Outputs Matrix and the extension of the Project term for one year. The one-year extension was requested by MiAmbiente on September 18, 2020, and processed by the IDB on September 23, 2020. As a result, the new termination date was scheduled for October 10, 2021.

**Table 5 - Milestones of the last Planning approved by the IDB**

Milestones	Deadline for completion
Terms of Reference or scope for all bidding processes with the Bank's no objection.	September 30, 2020
Contracts for all bidding processes signed	November 30, 2020
Contracts for all bidding processes endorsed by the CGR	December 31, 2020

During the execution stage, the IDB and the MiAmbiente PMU teams held weekly monitoring meetings, and workforces were set up to ensure the timely completion of the milestones set by the IDB in its notice of approval for the new planning, to ensure that all processes could be carried out within the new Project term. The challenge was to complete 11 procurement processes in six months (see Table 6), which entailed committing 86% of the Project resources in 2020. The Bank's team supported MiAmbiente in preparing the terms of reference and the relevant bidding documents.

As a result of this effort, MiAmbiente succeeded in meeting the milestone of having all terms of reference approved by September 30, 2020, but only two processes got their contracts signed. Table 6 shows the status of bidding processes by the end of 2020. Considering that, as reported during monitoring meetings, at least eight processes were at stage of endorsement by the CGR, the IDB informed that the situation of the Project would be analyzed at the end of January 2021, in the expectation that the CGR would endorse said processes that month and the relevant consulting assignments would start. Figure 2 shows the timeline for this stage.

In a monitoring meeting held on February 3, 2021, MiAmbiente reported that the endorsement by the CGR was still pending and the budget allocation for 2021 was not enough to perform the commitments of 2020 and the contracts pending endorsement. At least USD 448,500 were required and the budget allocation amounted to USD 318,000, so the IDB proposed to only continue with the processes whose contracts were at endorsement stage which could be performed with the allocated budget. It was also proposed to purchase technological assets to use the whole of the Project resources. The IDB agreed to continue with the contract endorsement processes subject to budget availability, and objected to the proposal of purchasing assets due to the following reasons: (i) According to Notice CPN.713/2020, no new bidding processes could be opened; (ii) It was repeated that the proposed purchase of assets was not consistent with the Project objective; (iii) There was no budget allocation for new procurement processes in 2021.

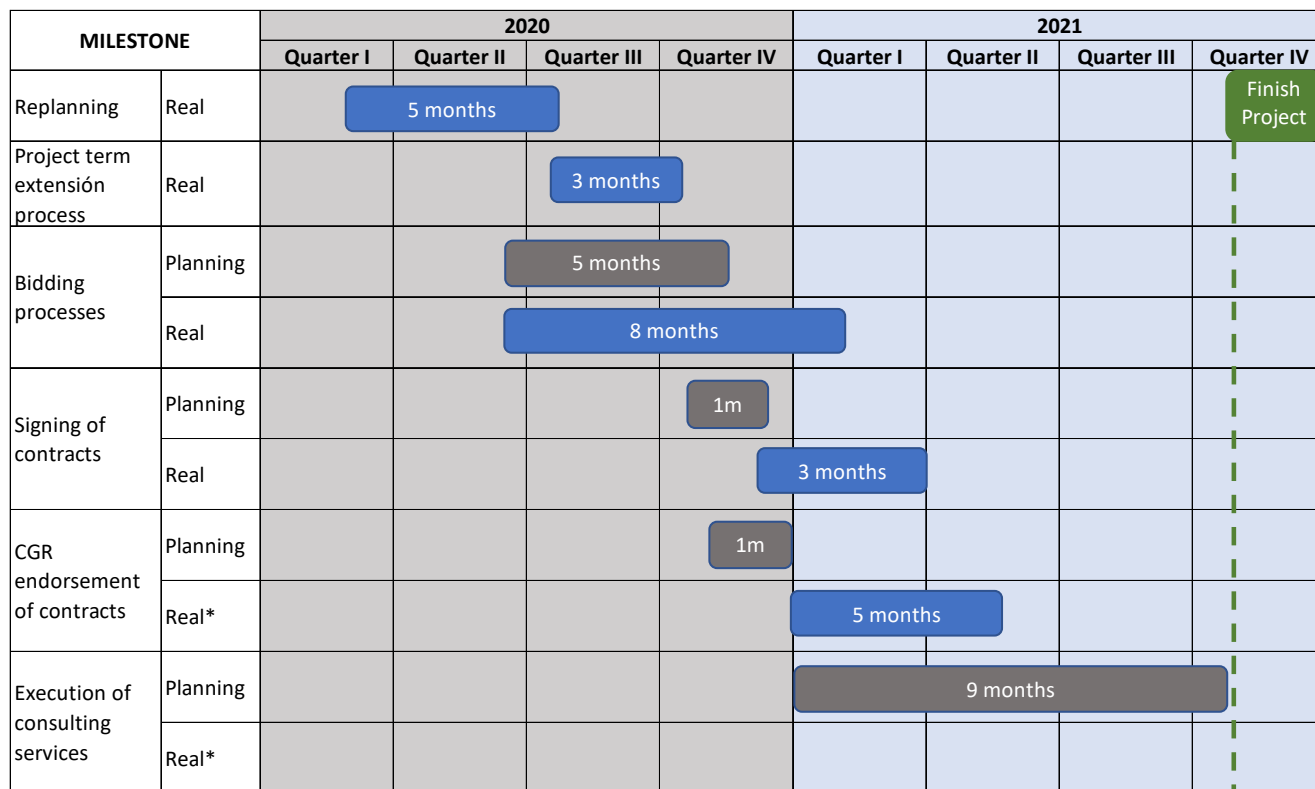
By April 15, 2021, the contracts were still pending endorsement by the CGR, so the IDB requested an updated schedule of processes to check if their execution remained feasible within the Project term. Based on the schedule provided by MiAmbiente, it was concluded that the completion of the consulting assignments was no longer feasible within the remaining term of the Project, unless MiAmbiente would co-finance payments to be made after October 10, 2021 - which was not possible either. As a result of this, it was agreed to close the Project with the processes with contracts awarded until that date.

**Table 6 - Status of bidding processes by December, 2020**

No.	Name of the process	IDB Budget	Contracting method	Term in months	Status of processes by December, 2020
1	Monitoring, control and management strategy at Volcan Baru developed using innovative technologies.	182,825.00	Consulting firm CRS	8	None of the expressions of interest received on September 21, 2020 qualified.

No.	Name of the process	IDB Budget	Contracting method	Term in months	Status of processes by December, 2020
2	Master Plan for the Portobelo Land Ordering Plan developed.	105,000.00	Consulting firm CRS	6	Bids received on November 6, 2020 still being evaluated by MiAmbiente.
3	Plan and instruments for the implementation of co-management contracts, concessions, and green tourism permits in 5 PAs: - PNCC, PNCH, PNS, PNRBAC, and RFLY - developed.	84,263.00	Consulting firm CRS	8	On December 4, 2020, the IDB issued its no objection to the awarded contract submitted on December 1, 2020.
4	Updating of the Management Plan for Volcan Baru National Park.	50,000.00	Consulting firm CRS	7	On December 4, 2020, the IDB issued its no objection to the awarded contract submitted on December 1, 2020.
5	Rapid terrestrial and marine ecological assessment as an instrument for environmental awareness and education for local communities at PN Portobelo.	50,000.00	Consulting firm CRS	7	On December 4, 2020, the IDB issued its no objection to the awarded contract submitted on December 1, 2020.
6	Editing and Printing of the prepared Plans.	10,000.00	CP	1	Brochures prepared and printing contract signed.
7	Digital platform for online payment of PA tickets for San Lorenzo, Coiba, and Volcan Baru PAs developed.	18,725.00	IC	7	Contract at stage of endorsement by CGR.
8	Ecoturismo 360° online virtual platform developed in 9 Protected Areas (PN Coiba, PN Portobelo, BPPP San Lorenzo, PN Volcan Baru, PN Chagres, PN Soberania, PN Camino de Cruces, PNRB Altos de Campana, and RF La Yeguada).	18,725.00	IC	7	Contract under legal review, for subsequent execution by the parties and submission to the CGR for endorsement.
9	Digital data management platform at PAs for the monitoring and development of co-management contracts, concessions and green tourism permits developed.	18,725.00	IC	7	Contract at stage of endorsement by CGR.
10	Monitoring, oversight and surveillance strategy for public use, through new technologies and the strengthening of the existing capacities in the PAs of PN Portobelo, BPPP San Lorenzo, PN Volcan Baru, and PN Coiba.	10,000.00	IC	7	Services completed.
11	Design and production of graphic material for the Cambute Visitor Center.	101,461.00	DP	6	Contract under legal review, for subsequent execution by the parties and submission to the CGR for endorsement.
<b>Total USD</b>		<b>660,724.00</b>			



**Figure 2- Timeline of the Execution Stage**

\*/ Time elapsed, but not achieved.

In addition, during this stage, between February 2019 and April 2021, the PMU had 4 coordinators, which resulted in an endless learning/Project-ownership curve.

The result of this stage was as follows:

- a) Progress was only made in the processes related to: (i) Development of biosecurity plans for the 4 PAs of the Project - carried out by MiAmbiente staff in 2019; (ii) Development of the monitoring, control and surveillance strategy for public use through the use of technologies in the 4 PAs; and (iii) Printing of brochures with the biosecurity plans developed by MiAmbiente. These processes required resources for up to USD 32,205.85.
- b) The internal factors that affected the progress of the Project can be summarized as follows: (i) Late Project start, which substantially reduced the effective execution period, in spite of the 12-month extension granted; (ii) Allocation of staff with partial dedication to the Project; and (iii) High staff turnover in the PMU, especially of coordinators, which impacted: (a) constant changes in the planning and presentation of proposals that were inconsistent with the Project objectives; (b) Delays in the agreed procurement processes.
- c) The external factors that affected the progress of the Project can be summarized as follows: (I) Delays in the endorsement of contracts by CGR; (ii) Negative dynamics of low budget allocation due to low Project execution from the beginning; and (iii) COVID-19 pandemic context, which forced the review of processes related to in-person trainings and visits to the PAs.

### 3.1.3 Closure Stage

On April 19, 2021, in view of the substantial and irreversible delays, the IDB notified MiAmbiente that it was not possible to continue with the Project execution, so the processes in progress had to be cancelled and the process of returning and cancelling unused resources should be started. It was stipulated as follows:

- a) It is the IDB's responsibility, as the administrator of the GEF resources, to ensure that resources are properly used and, specifically, that the executed expenses materialize in completed outputs with added value, by applying the results-based management principles. This is why the IDB cannot allow the GEF resources to be used to finance the early stages of contracts only, without the expenses materializing in completed outputs with added value.
- b) In 2021, the GEF resources can only be used to pay for the biosecurity brochures provided that the expense is executed and justified with the Bank, by mid-September at the latest.
- c) In spite of the limited achievements that the Project will attain, the terminal evaluation of the Project remains a requirement. The evaluation must analyze in detail the reasons why the Project was not executed, outline the internal and external factors that contributed to this, and give recommendations related to these circumstances.

Consequently, the Project closed on October 10, 2021, with the completion of two outputs: (i) Development of biosecurity plans for the 4 prioritized PAs; and (ii) Development of monitoring, oversight and surveillance strategy for public use, through new technologies and the strengthening of the existing capacities in the 4 prioritized PAs (PN Coiba, PN Portobelo, PN Volcan Baru, and BPPPP San Lorenzo).

MiAmbiente completed the financial technical closure, having executed USD 32,205.85. As of the date of this report, USD 117,794.15 remain to be returned by MiAmbiente to the IDB. In addition, the requirement to perform an audit of the Project was waived by the IDB based on the level of execution.

### 3.1.4 Project Financing

September 2018 marked the beginning of the execution of the funds for Operation PN-L1146 “Support for the Conservation and Management of the Cultural and Natural Heritage”, of which USD 45.5 million are co-financing for the Project PN-T1190; ATN/FM-16476-PN, for the development of investments in the 4 PAs of the Project.

Such co-financing comes from the same source identified during the Project design stage (IDB Loan) and was more than planned. Table 7 shows the differences between the agreed and the actual co-financing.

As of the date of submission of this report, the executed funds amount to USD 454,558.00, and the total execution is expected to be completed in December 2025. The financial execution when this report was concluded amounted to USD 486,763.85, as detailed on Table 8.

**Table 7 - Sources of Co-financing for the Project**

Programmed				Actual			
Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Amount (million USD)	Sources of Co-financing	Name of Co-financier	Type of Co-financing	Amount (USD)
Multilateral Agency	Inter-American Development Bank	Loan	6,000,000	Multilateral Agency	Inter-American Development Bank	Loan	454,558

Source: Own formulation based on planning data from the Project PN-L1166

**Table 8 - Financial Execution for the Project**

Sources	Name	Type	Expected Amount (USD)	Executed Amount (USD)
GEFTF	GEF	Grant	753,427	150,000
Multilateral Agency	Inter-American Development Bank	Loan	6,000,000	454,558.00
<b>Total</b>			<b>6,753,427</b>	<b>604,558</b>

Source: Own formulation based on data taken from the financial reports of the Projects.

## 3.2 Fulfillment of the Intended Objectives and Indicators

### 3.2.1 Changes to the Results Matrix

As part of a planning adjustment, between February and June 2020, MiAmbiente proposed changes to the Project outputs to the IDB. The output changes approved by the IDB are shown on Table 9. The outcome indicators were not adjusted, and the objectives and targets established at the Project inception stage remained the same.

**Table 9 - Adjustment to the Outputs Matrix**

COMPONENT 1 – Strengthening PA Management Sustainability					Physical Progress		Observations
Outputs	Output Description	Unit of Measure	Baseline Year	Means of verification		EOP	
1.1 Operational manuals developed	Guidelines for visitor flows in 4 protected areas	Manuals (#)	2017	Project Reports	P	4	Limited to the development of the Volcan Baru manual
					P(u)	1	
					C	0	
1.2 Implementation and Management Plan developed	Volcan Baru monitoring, control and management strategy developed using innovative technology	Plans (#)	2020	Plan	P	4	Limited to the development of the Volcan Baru strategy
					P(u)	1	
					C	0	
1.3 Action plans designed	Biosecurity Plan designed	Action Plans (#)	2019	Plan	P	3	It includes the Biosecurity Plans of the 4 priority PAs of the Project: PNVB; PNP; BPPPSL and PNC. Fulfilled output. Actual Cost USD 22,086.85
					P(u)	4	
					C	4	
1.4 Virtual platforms designed	Digital platforms for online payment of park fees designed	Platforms (#)	2020	Platform	P	1	No changes.
					P(u)	1	
					C	0	
1.5 Strategies designed	Communication Strategy on virtual platforms of MIAMBIENTE, designed	Strategies (#)	2020	Strategy	P	4	No Changes. A single communication strategy on platforms was proposed for the 4 PAs.
					P(u)	1	
					C	0	
1.6 Monitoring and Evaluation Plan developed	Strategy for monitoring, control and surveillance for public use through New Technologies in the Public Administrations	Plans (#)	2020	Plan	P	3	No Changes. A single monitoring strategy was proposed for the 4 PAs. Fulfilled output. Actual Cost US\$ 10,119.00
					P(u)	1	
					C	1	
1.7 Territorial Ordering Plan of Portobelo	New output	Plan (#)	2020	Plan	P		Based on new needs in the Portobelo National Park, which would be the basis for works to improve access and visitor services.
					P(u)	1	
					C	0	
1.8 Rapid Terrestrial and Marine Ecological Assessment in Portobelo National Park	New output	Evaluation	2020	Assessment	P		Based on new needs to establish the baseline and informative material of the species in the Portobelo National Park.
					P(u)	1	
					C	0	
1.9 Design and development of graphic material for	New output	Exhibition	2020	Material	P		Based on new needs in the Coiba National Park, aimed at
					P(u)	1	
					C	0	

the Gambute Visitor Centre							improving the visitor experience.
<b>COMPONENT 2: Building Participatory Management Models for Sustainable Use</b>							
Outputs	Output Description	Unit of Measure	Baseline Year	Means of verification		EOP	
2.1 Action plans implemented	Concessions, Green Tourism Permits and / or Shared Management Agreements Plan	Action Plans (#)	2020	Plan	P	5	No Changes. A single instrument was proposed for the 5 prioritized PAs: PN Coiba, PN Volcan Baru, PN Portobelo, BPPP San Lorenzo and RF La Yeguada.
					P(u)	1	
					C	0	
2.2 New databases created	Database to facilitate the implementation of co-management and concessions	Databases (#)	2020	Database	P	1	No Changes.
					P(u)	1	
					C	0	
2.3 Individuals Trained	Capacity building to facilitate the implementation of co-management and concessions	Individuals (#)	2020	Individuals	P	50	Removed. Given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
					P(u)	0	
					C	0	
2.4 Methodologies designed/ strengthened	Strategy on digital platforms to improve coordination for service providers developed	Methodologies (#)	2020	Methodology	P	1	Unified scopes with output 2.2.
					P(u)	0	
					C	0	
2.5 Diagnostic studies and assessments completed	Technical advisory support provided to businesses for the application of sustainability standards	Diagnostic studies (#)	2020	Assessment	P	8	Removed. Given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
					P(u)	0	
					C	0	

Source: Own formulation based on data taken from the Project reports.

References, Table 9

P	Programming. At the time of Project approval.
P(u)	Updated programming, during Project execution stage.
C	Current. Project Execution.
EOP	End of Project. Target or execution by end of Project.

### 3.2.2 Achievement of Objectives and Results

After 36 months, the Project did not get executed and thus its intended objectives and results were not achieved.

### 3.3 Analysis of Risks

During the Project preparation stage, four important risks were identified, but they lost relevance due to the execution problems experienced by MiAmbiente. Table 10 shows an analysis of the risks identified at the preparation stage.

Given the delays that affected the Project and resulted in its not being executed, new risks were identified during the execution stage, which were reported in the biannual progress reports. Table 11 shows and analyzes those risks. There is no evidence in the reviewed documents that the executing team performed a risk management exercise, given that the mitigation measures did not address the potential causes of the identified risks.

**Table 10 - Status of the Initial Risks Matrix**

Preparation stage			Analysis at execution and closure stages
Risk	Level	Mitigation strategy	
<b>Operational risks</b> , lack of coordination among key public institutions involved in ecotourism in the PAs.	Medium	Existing mechanisms in place for the co-management of the PAs will provide a channel for coordination and consultation with relevant local actors involved.	<b>Inactive.</b> The delays in the execution of the Project did not activate the elements that would have triggered this risk.
<b>Environmental risks</b> , increase in visits could compromise long-term environmental sustainability of PAs.	Low	Phase I facilitated the development of well-defined strategies for managing public use (e.g. PUPs include carrying capacity for PAs). Phase II will consolidate planning guidelines and strategies and facilitate implementation to guarantee visits to PAs stay within the limits of acceptable change and work towards the long-term sustainability of the SINAP and conservation of its natural wealth and biodiversity.	<b>Inactive.</b> The delays in the execution of the Project did not activate the elements that would have triggered this risk.
<b>Sustainability risks</b> , due to limited financial capacity and political will for operating and maintaining project outputs and once the project has closed.	Medium	The Project together with the co-financing Cultural and Natural Heritage Program (PN-L1146) will help to set the SINAP on a path for financial sustainability by contributing to the generation and diversification of revenues for the SINAP. Moreover, empowering local stakeholders and private sectors, to ensure continuity and strengthen the financial autonomy of protected areas.	<b>Inactive.</b> The delays in the execution of the Project did not activate the elements that would have triggered this risk.
<b>Local support and participation</b> is weak due to inadequate cooperation with local stakeholders causing lack of project ownership at the local scale.	Medium	The community-based approach will maximize the likelihood of ownership and uptake at the local scale, and holding coordination meetings as needs arise.	<b>Inactive.</b> The delays in the execution of the Project did not activate the elements that would have triggered this risk.

*Source: Own formulation based on data taken from the Project Document and progress reports.*

**Table 11 - Status of the Risks Matrix at the Execution Stage**

Execution Stage			Analysis at closure stage
Risk	Level	Mitigation strategy	
Identified in 2019			
<b>Operational risks</b> , the change of government may slow down activities, and bring changes in the Project’s vision and delays.	High	Meetings to present and disclose the scope of the Project to the new authorities.	<b>Materialized.</b> The mitigation measures proved ineffective. The Project suffered delays due to the time it took to generate ownership among the new authorities, and even a change of vision resulted in the Project losing relevance.
Identified in 2020			
<b>Operational risks</b> , delays in bidding process due to ambiguous or unclear terms of reference.	Low	Designing clear terms of reference and responding as quickly as possible to any query.	<b>Materialized.</b> The mitigation measure was not the most appropriate to address the cause that triggered the risk. The cause was MiAmbiente’s low technical capacity to generate technical inputs for the procurement processes.
<b>Scope-related risks</b> , delays in the processing of the Project term extension and not being able to execute all of the Project outputs.	High	Closely monitoring the extension request process.	<b>Mitigated.</b> MiAmbiente managed to meet the requirements for the 12-month Project term extension. However, the effect of this risk materialized anyway because, even with the extension, the Project could not be executed.
<b>Operational risks</b> , delays in the endorsement process for contracts bid in September 2020.	Medium	Strengthening the procurement unit to streamline contract preparation processes.	<b>Materialized.</b> This mitigation measure was not implemented. The procurement unit remained staffed with one person, who suffered from COVID-19 related issues.
<b>Operational risks</b> , generation of payment commitments beyond a contract term due to delays in the issuance of the order to proceed.	High	Closely monitoring the endorsement process. Closely monitoring the execution of projects to avoid delays, and identifying opportunities to cut down delivery timeframes.	<b>Inactive.</b> The delays in the execution of the Project did not activate the elements that would have triggered this risk because no contracts were signed.

Source: Own formulation based on data taken from the progress reports.

### 3.4 Environmental, Social, and Gender Safeguards

Thirty-six months elapsed without the Project having executed its outputs, so the aspects related to environmental, social and gender safeguards cannot be evaluated.

## **4 Quality of the Implementation and Execution**

### **4.1 Quality of the Implementation**

The implementation quality assessment seeks to evaluate the role and responsibilities fulfilled by the GEF agencies - in this case, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) - in supervising and supporting the execution of projects - in this case, the Mainstreaming Biodiversity Conservation through Low-Impact Ecotourism in SINAP II Project.

Based on the information analyzed and the events that took place during the implementation of the Project, the implementation quality is considered Moderately Satisfactory (MS). This rating is based on:

- a) A low initial proactivity. During the first year of execution, the IDB remained expectant and no support was given to the Executing Agency in the creation of the management sector; it was not until 15 months had elapsed that an experienced consultant was available to cooperate with MiAmbiente. This task was completed three months later.
- b) Allocation of consultants and ongoing monitoring. Between February 2020 and April 2021, the IDB assigned two consultants to support MiAmbiente as follows: (i) Support for planning based on the vertical logic of the Project, real schedules and a results-oriented approach; (ii) Preparation of the terms of reference; and (iii) Preparation of bidding documents and training on IDB procurement policies. Also, weekly meetings were held to monitor progress and take corrective or preventive measures in the event of deviations in meeting the goals.
- c) IDB Guidance. MiAmbiente was simultaneously executing two projects (PN-T1190 y PN-L1146) with IDB supervision and funding, and with different Team Leaders. The execution of both projects was carried out through the same technical team from MiAmbiente (coordinator, procurement, finance, monitoring). However, for non-regulated activities, the IDB applies the experiences and good practices deemed appropriate by the Team Leader, which often confused the MiAmbiente team, because it received different guidance for similar processes. This, added to the lack of knowledge about IDB Policies by the MiAmbiente team, led to a perceived lack of clarity in the guidance received from the IDB.

### **4.2 Quality of the Execution**

The assessment of the execution quality is aimed at evaluating the performance of the functions and responsibilities of the national counterparts that received GEF funds and executed the financed activities on the field. MiAmbiente was in charge of executing the Mainstreaming Biodiversity Conservation through Low-Impact Ecotourism in SINAP II Project.

Based on the information analyzed, the events that took place during the execution of the Project, and the factors that were under control of the Executing Agency, the execution quality is considered Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU). This rating is based on:



- a) Insufficient or partially dedicated staff. The allocated staff was taking care of other projects and internal processes of MiAmbiente, which limited the attention given to the Project. Key staff performed two different roles, like the procurement specialist, who also acted as a legal specialist for two projects.
- b) Governance and change of coordinators. The Project lacked a governance system that would allow all stakeholders to fully understand the scope of the Project and the procedures for its execution. On top of this, having 4 different coordinators in a period of 24 months made it even more difficult to understand the Project.
- c) Permanent changes of vision. During the first six months of effective execution, at least 6 Project replanning proposals were submitted. These constant changes in the focus of the products prevented progress in the bidding processes.

## 5 Conclusions and Lessons Learned

### 5.1 Conclusions

Based on what is discussed in the previous sections, the Project is classified as Highly Unsatisfactory (HU), considering:

- g) **Relevance:** Due to the time elapsed from the design to the start of the implementation (27 months), the implementation of the Project lost relevance to the Government of Panama. This is evidenced in the different planning scenarios presented by MiAmbiente, which focused on the use of resources, rather than the achievement of results.
- h) **Efficiency:** The adjusted execution schedule could not be met, and there were inconsistencies between the financial planning and the budget allocation.
- i) **Execution:** The Executing Agency (MiAmbiente) performed its duties subject to quality and staffing limitations due to a high staff turnover and insufficient time dedicated to the completion of the tasks under their care. On top of this, the governance system and the frequently changing vision prevented a swift completion of bidding processes.
- j) **Results:** There are no Project results, as no outputs were executed.
- k) **Efficiency, sustainability, monitoring and evaluation:** These aspects cannot be assessed due to the non-execution of outputs and the absence of Project outcomes.

### 5.2 Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Table 10 outlines the main lessons learned from this Project as of the date of preparation of this Report.

**Table 12 - Lessons Learned and Recommendations**

Aspects	Situation encountered	Lessons Learned and Recommendations
Institutional capacity	<p>The assumption that the qualified staff that executed the previous project financed by the GEF would also be in charge of this second stage was wrong.</p> <p>The Executing Agency faced challenges due to changes of authorities and staff turnover, allocation of staff with partial dedication to the Project, with profiles not appropriate to the functions assigned to them and without experience in IDB policies and procedures.</p>	<p>Updating the institutional, technical and fiduciary capacity report during the design stage is essential to determine the risks to the Project implementation and execution and to formulate an action plan to mitigate or prevent them.</p> <p>For future projects, it is recommended including the updating of the institutional capacity report in the design stage, especially if a change of authorities is expected during the execution stage.</p>
Governance and Execution Scheme	The Project Document only stipulated that the PMU for the first Project phase would be responsible for this second phase (PN-T1190).	Defining an Operating Manual/Operating Rules that include a governance system and a Project execution and implementation scheme facilitates the understanding of the Project

Aspects	Situation encountered	Lessons Learned and Recommendations
	There was no document establishing an execution and governance scheme for the Project within the Executing Agency. As a result of this, the flow of internal processes was unclear, and the execution of the Project followed a "trial and error" dynamics. On top of this, steps or stages that did not add value and consumed time were established. In addition, any arrangements made with the IDB or its guidance only remained with the two people who attended the meetings.	<p>execution mechanism, especially when there is staff turnover.</p> <p>It is recommended that, as a condition prior to the first disbursement, the Executing Agency should present a more accurate and detailed Project implementation and execution mechanism and its governance system, both included in the Project Operating Manual or Rules.</p>
Review of the Results Matrix (Outputs)	<p>Due to the delayed start of the Project and the change of authorities, the outputs and processes defined at the design stage lost relevance to the new authorities.</p> <p>This resulted in delays of about 6 months, during which the Executing Agency "prepared-presented-readjusted-presented-readjusted-presented..." proposals for the adjustment of outputs. This back and forth prevented progress in bidding processes because it generated uncertainty over what outputs were to be developed.</p>	<p>The participation of Executing Agency authorities in the updating of the Project Results Matrix streamlines the process for agreeing and approving eventual adjustments.</p> <p>When a project's results matrix is requested to be reviewed, it is recommended holding review workshops with the authorities and technical team of the executing agency and the financing entity to shorten the timeframes for agreeing and approving the adjustments.</p>
Implementation - IDB Guidance	<p>For activities that are not regulated by its Procurement Policies, the IDB guides the Executing Agency based on the experiences and good practices deemed appropriate by the Project Team Leader. MiAmbiente faced the challenge of simultaneously executing two projects, each with its respective Team Leader from the IDB, and implementing different practices.</p> <p>This generated confusion in the MiAmbiente team over the steps to take in similar processes, given that they received different operating directions from the IDB.</p>	<p>The lack of a single flowchart for the processes to be completed before the IDB, regulating the operating procedures not established in the Procurement Policies, contributes to the executing agencies' low effectiveness in completing the IDB no-objection procedures.</p> <p>It is advisable that the different IDB Project Team Leaders and the fiduciary areas agree on a single operating process flowchart to be followed before the IDB, as this will help improve the executing agencies' effectiveness in the procedures they complete before the IDB and dissipate impressions about the IDB Team Leaders acting subjectively.</p>

## 6 Annexes

### Annex 1: Project Implementation and Execution Assessment

Criteria	Rating						Justification
	Relevance	Efficiency	Execution	Implementation	Results	Efficiency, sustainability, monitoring and safeguards	
<b>Highly satisfactory (HS):</b> There were no shortcomings and the quality exceeded expectations							
<b>Satisfactory (S):</b> There were minor or no shortcomings and the quality meets expectations							
<b>Moderately satisfactory (MS):</b> There were some shortcomings and the quality more or less meets expectations				X			The GEF agency (IDB) evidenced certain deficiencies in the performance of its duties, such as low proactivity at the beginning of the Project in terms of helping enable the Government systems, and providing guidance that generated confusion in the Executing Agency, considering that it was simultaneously executing two projects with different Project Leaders from the IDB.
<b>Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU):</b> There were significant shortcomings and the quality was somewhat lower than expected							
<b>Unsatisfactory (U):</b> There were major shortcomings and the quality was substantially lower than expected			X				The Executing Agency (MiAmbiente) performed its duties subject to quality and staffing limitations due to a high staff turnover and insufficient time dedicated to the completion of the tasks under their care. On top of this, the governance system and the frequently changing vision prevented moving forward.
<b>Highly Unsatisfactory (HU):</b> There were severe shortcomings in terms of quality	X	X			X		27 months between design and implementation; its implementation lost relevance to the Government of Panama. The adjusted execution schedule could not be met, and there was a mismatch between financial planning and budget allocation. There are no Project outcomes, as no outputs were executed.
<b>Unable to Assess (UA):</b> Quality cannot be assessed with the available information						X	These aspects cannot be assessed due to the non-execution of outputs and the absence of Project outcomes.