

## 1. Project Data

Summary project data			
GEF project ID		4366	
GEF Agency project ID		2000000452	
GEF Replenishment Phase		GEF-5	
Lead GEF Agency (include all for joint projects)		International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD)	
Project name		Climate Resilience through Conservation Agriculture	
Country/Countries		Republic of Moldova	
Region		Europe and Central Asia (ECA)	
Focal area		Climate Change Adaptation - GEF Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF)	
Operational Program or Strategic Priorities/Objectives		SCCF CCA-1, CCA-2 and CCA-3	
Executing agencies involved		Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry (MAFI)	
NGOs/CBOs involvement		People in Need, National Agricultural Federation "FARM"	
Private sector involvement			
CEO Endorsement (FSP) /Approval date (MSP)		September 22, 2013 <sup>1</sup>	
Effectiveness date / project start		August 25, 2014	
Expected date of project completion (at start)		September 30, 2020	
Actual date of project completion		March 31, 2021	
Project Financing			
		At Endorsement (US \$M)	At Completion (US \$M)
Project Preparation Grant	GEF funding	0.11	0.10 <sup>2</sup>
	Co-financing	0.14	0.14
GEF Project Grant		4.26	3.87
Co-financing <sup>3</sup>	IA own	23.93	14.82
	Government	4.22	2.60
	Other multi- /bi-laterals		4.37
	Private sector		
	NGOs/CSOs		
Other			28.97 <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> As mentioned on GEF website (<https://www.thegef.org/project/climate-resilience-through-conservation-agriculture>). There is discrepancy in dates mentioned in TE (February 7, 2012) and in PIR 2021 (September 23, 2013) on page 7 and 1, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> USD 0.003 million (or USD 320.71) of GEF/SCCF PPG was the uncommitted amount at the time of PPG completion to be returned to LDCF/SCCF Trust Fund (PD page 56).

<sup>3</sup> The co-finance amount at CEO endorsement differs in the TE from the amount mentioned in PIR 2021 (page 1) and the PD (page 3) which has been used by the TER. There is discrepancy within table 4 (page 7) and between table 4 and table 8 (page 24) of the TE. The PIR 2021 does not provide a source-wise breakup of the co-funding mobilized/ utilized, at the time of project completion. The PIR 2021 (page 1) says that actual co-financing secured and disbursed, at the time of project completion, to be USD 50,790,000 which match with the amounts mentioned in the in one of the columns of table 4 or table 8. Thus, this amount is used by the TER.

<sup>4</sup> This includes USD 19.649 m (beneficiaries), USD 6.48 m (CLD) and USD 2.85 m (participating financial institutions).

Total GEF funding	4.37	3.983
Total Co-financing	28.3	50.76
Total project funding (GEF grant(s) + co-financing)	32.67	54.74
<b>Terminal evaluation/review information</b>		
TE completion date	August 8, 2021	
Author of TE	Youssef Brahimi	
TER completion date	November 23, 2021	
TER prepared by	Nayanika Singh	
TER peer review by (if GEF IEO review)		

## 2. Summary of Project Ratings

Criteria	Final PIR	IA Terminal Evaluation	IA Evaluation Office Review	GEF IEO Review
Project Outcomes	S	S	MS	
Sustainability of Outcomes		L	MU	
M&E Design		S	S	
M&E Implementation		S	MU	
Quality of Implementation		MS	MU	
Quality of Execution		S	MU	
Quality of the Terminal Evaluation Report		-	MS	

## 3. Project Objectives

### 3.1 Global Environmental Objectives of the project:

The global environmental objective of the project is to enhance the adaptive capacity of farmers to climate change through resilient agricultural approaches (PD page 28).

### 3.2 Development Objectives of the project:

The development objective of the project is to improve agriculture productivity, soil protection and provide higher and more stable incomes to smallholders through sustainable agriculture and land restoration (PD page 28).

### 3.3 Were there any **changes** in the Global Environmental Objectives, Development Objectives, or other activities during implementation?

The project completion timeline was extended by six months with no cost due to global pandemic (TE page 9). The TE and the final PIR 2021 does not report of any changes in the global environmental objectives or development objectives during implementation.

The TE notes that due to delays in implementation and global pandemic, thorough prioritization was defined by IFAD supervisory mission in 2020 and dropped activities that were no longer achievable. "An unspent GEF grant balance of USD 0.4 million was due to cancelled activities (some shelterbelts and

grassland activities were not processed on time due to weather and pandemic condition), while the SWOT analysis of conservation agriculture worldwide and the international study tours were dropped due to lack of time to achieving these activities before the closing of the project” (TE page 24). Also, an earlier IFAD supervisory mission recommended cancelation of the equipment grant support (of the 3 pilots planned) to the research institutions to adjust cropping systems, under output 2.1.2 (TE page 29).

The TE mentions that “the key constraints and challenges have been identified through the baseline study, despite the cancellation of SWOT analysis” (TE page 31). While assessing the project’s achievement against the approved results-based framework especially for shelterbelts and grassland activities, the TE notes over-achievement of the targets (TE page 29). The TE does not provide a component -wise breakup of the GEF grant and co-funding utilization. The TER notes that the information thus provided in the TE of any possible impact of the cancellation of the above-mentioned activities and an unspent GEF grant on the overall project outcome as incomplete.

The co-financing amount as mentioned throughout the TE (page 7-8 and 24) significantly varies from the figures mentioned in the GEF CEO endorsed project document. There are discrepancies in the co-funding amounts as mentioned in the TE which is detailed at footnote 3 of the TER.

#### 4. **GEF IEO** assessment of Outcomes and Sustainability

Please refer to the GEF Terminal Evaluation Review Guidelines for detail on the criteria for ratings.

Relevance can receive either a Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory rating. For Effectiveness and Cost efficiency, a six-point rating scale is used (Highly Satisfactory to Highly Unsatisfactory), or Unable to Assess. Sustainability ratings are assessed on a four-point scale: Likely=no or negligible risk; Moderately Likely=low risk; Moderately Unlikely=substantial risks; Unlikely=high risk. In assessing a Sustainability rating, please note if, and to what degree, sustainability of project outcomes is threatened by financial, sociopolitical, institutional/governance, or environmental factors.

Please justify ratings in the space below each box.

4.1 Relevance	Rating: <b>Satisfactory</b>
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The TE assesses the relevance of the project to be **Highly Satisfactory** (page 22). The TER rates the relevance of the project as **Satisfactory**.

Agriculture is of vital importance to the Moldovan economy, in terms of employment, rural livelihoods, food security, rural growth and exports. The Moldovan National Report for UN CSD 2012 Rio+20 highlights the fact that the agriculture sector remains most promising sector for reducing poverty and generating higher income. The Government of Moldova has been promoting conservation agriculture and organic agriculture however, its uptake has been limited due to a number of factors (PD page 20). The GEF/SCCF project address these factors while supporting conservation agriculture and scaling up of agroforest restoration on degraded farming lands. These are identified priorities for the agriculture sector in the Moldova’s Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and other relevant policy documents on this issue, such as the Moldova 2020 – National Development Strategy, the National Programme for Conservation and Enhancement of Soils’ Fertility for 2011 - 2020, the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of the

Agro-Industrial Sector for the years 2008 - 2015, and the National Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy 2014-2020 and the second National Communication to the UNFCCC (PD page 40). The TER notes that in line with the climate change policy objectives of the Government of Moldova, adaptation measures proposed by the SCCF also incorporated their mitigation potential: contribution to the reduction in humus losses, contribution to C sequestration through ecosystem restoration (TE page 23).

The TER notes that the project was in line with IFAD's agriculture-related policies and investments in Moldova on rural finance, private sector, targeting, climate change and environment. "So far, the IFAD programmes and projects in Moldova have not systematically streamlined climate change into development activities. The IFAD rural development programmes in Moldova offer an entry point for the SCCF intervention in support of the implementation of the Moldovan Government priorities on climate change adaptation in the agriculture sector" (PD page 26). The TE mentions that Inclusive Rural Finance and Capacity Development (IRECR) programme is one of the most ambitious attempts of IFAD to date in Moldova on climate adaptation through: (i) innovative approaches helping smallholder producers build their resilience to climate change; (ii) the availability of incentives and funding for smallholder farmers to shift to climate-resilient production systems; and, (iii) an informed and more coherent dialogue on climate change, rural development, agriculture and food security (TE page 24).

The project is aligned to the GEF/SCCF priorities and requirements though neither the project document nor the TE mentions the specific GEF-5 SCCF programming priorities, relevant to the project. The SCCF project was approved to promote an investment-oriented approach to transfer innovative conservation agriculture technologies to smallholders. The SCCF proposed adaptation measures also incorporated mitigation potential, as per government's comprehensive climate change approach for agriculture and agro-forestry (PD page 43). The project, at endorsement stage, outlined complementary linkages with relevant externally funded programmes in the sector (PD page 43).

IFAD's Independent Evaluation Study notes that "the Government of Moldova, IFAD (and, GEF) shared the recognition that the existing agricultural practices need to become more climate smart. However, there were significant differences in terms of whose practices they were trying to change. The government preferred focusing on medium and large holders (owning and/or renting 200 hectare or more), IFAD design called for focusing on those with 25 hectares or less (IFAD page 20) which also finds mention in GEF/SCCF project document. The GEF/SCCF project document identifies the target beneficiaries as (i) unemployed and under-employed subsistence-oriented rural men and women, including landless people and (ii) small to medium scale surplus farmers – to be selected at the project start-up in a participatory way (PD page 24-25).

The TER finds that the GEF/SCCF project design lacked adequate safeguards to ensure that the project supports smallholders which are economically vulnerable and impacted by climate change variability. The TER also notes that GEF/SCCF project documents take time to prepare and operationalize thus, provide flexibility to firm up many aspects of project design at the inception stage to ensure adequate flexibility and country ownership to meet the approved global environmental benefits. In this regard, the approved project outcomes were consistent with the GEF SCCF, IFAD's and country's programming priorities. Thus, the TER provides a satisfactory rating.

4.2 Effectiveness	Rating: <b>Moderately Satisfactory</b>
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The TE assesses the project effectiveness as **Satisfactory**. This TER rates project effectiveness as **Moderately Satisfactory**.

The TER notes that the TE throughout the report, equates grassland with “grass cover” which is factually incorrect.

The GEF/SCCF interventions sought to achieve (i) at least 3,600 beneficiaries report ability to maintain or increase healthy soil conditions and crop production through conservation agriculture; (ii) innovative solutions for climate-resilient farm production promoted among 550 smallholder farmers; (iii) climate-resilient sustainable land restoration practices introduced to promote food security in approx. 2,100 farm plots; (iv) 12 production plans for key crops developed and implemented, covering different crops and agro-climatic conditions; (v) at least 100 smallholder trainees benefit from small grants for equipment and initiate conservation agriculture work; (vi) at least 200 hectares of protective shelterbelts established in degraded and marginal agriculture lands; and, (vii) at least 200 hectares of strips of pastures restored, in private land holdings and communal properties (TE page 15). While reporting against the overall project targets, the TE notes that despite the delays and constraints encountered, the project was able to achieve most of its objectives,” (TE page 10).

While explaining the immediate impact of the project, the TE notes that a) traditional agriculture has decreased by 7% as compared to the pre-FFSs training period, and the land under conservation agriculture has increased by 37%; b) about 127,146 ha brought under climate-resilient practices, including shelterbelts, grassland and adjusted cropping systems; c) 70% of the project beneficiaries in 2020 reported increase in the level of weeds, humidity and pests, as a positive impact of conservation agriculture; d) 51% of the project beneficiaries in 2020 reported increase in income level up to 10% and 18% beneficiaries reported increase between 10-25%; and, e) 9% of the respondents reported that the production cost decrease between 10-25% and 42% respondents reported less than 10% decrease (TE page 36).

The TER notes that these impacts are not fully (only) attributable to GEF/SCCF interventions but to IRECR program, as a whole. The TER notes that the findings of the impact survey are incomplete for example the approved GEF/SCCF document while identifying target group says that “the former sub-group [unemployed and under-employed subsistence-oriented rural men and women, including landless people] will mainly benefit directly and/or indirectly from rural investments initiated by potential entrepreneurs among the latter sub-group [small to medium scale surplus farmers]” (PD page 24) however, the findings of the Impact Survey as presented in the TE provides no information on this aspect. Also, the TE does not provide adequate information to understand the methodology, approach and datasets used by the impact survey and its findings.

The TE notes that GEF/SCCF project was fully embedded in the IFAD IRECR program’s subcomponent 1.1, which certainly facilitated the follow-up of climate change adaptation and sustainable natural resource management activities. However, this form of design is not conducive to the integration of climate change adaptation measures into the other three components of the IRECR program (TE page 9). The TE notes that there were a large number of activities, fragmented in nature, diverting attention from the main outcome (TE page 17) which were streamlined by IFAD supervisory missions.

The MTR underlined the need to focus on smallholder farmers to effectively enhance their conservation agriculture practices. The MTR also recommended that an action plan should be made as soon as possible with a clear plan for implementation of GEF financed activities” (MTR page 7).

The GEF/SCCF project was approved to promote an investment-oriented approach to transfer innovative conservation agriculture technologies to smallholders however, the performance and achievement of this approach is difficult to gauge from the information thus presented. The GEF CEO endorsed project document mentioned that the project also incorporated mitigation potential – i.e., it is expected a reduction in humus losses from the 1.48 t/ha of baseline scenario to 0.22 t/ha as a result of conservation agriculture; ecosystem restoration will also contribute to C sequestration (PD page 43). The document also outlined complementary linkages with relevant externally funded programmes in the sector (PD page 43). The TE does not provide any information on these two aspects.

Despite of the above-mentioned discrepancies, the GEF/SCCF project implemented some activities well. A summary of the project’s achievements is as provided below.

- **Component 1: An enabling environment for climate-resilient agriculture is created.**

This component aimed to increase the climate change adaptation capacity of project beneficiaries and partners involved with agriculture and agro-landscape restoration (worth USD 900,000 of SCCF grant and USD 3,047,600 of co-funding) (PD page 28). The overall expected result of this GEF/SCCF component was (i) approximately 170 service providers to be trained on the adaptation benefits of climate-resilient agriculture and land restoration measures and technologies; (ii) approximately 2,000 farmers to be trained on climate-resilient conservation agriculture and land restoration measures and technologies; (iii) approximately 100 beneficiaries to participate in international learning tours to visit successful experiences on climate-resilient conservation agriculture and land restoration; (iv) saving and credit associations procedures and manual to integrate the necessary information to evaluate the robustness of applications for finance for climate-resilient equipment and investments; (v) policy guidelines to mainstream climate change adaptation in agriculture production and soil protection developed and disseminated to policy-makers and concerned stakeholders; and, (iv) information material on conservation agriculture systems and technologies disseminated widely to practitioners and society (PD page 38).

The TE notes that at project completion, 11 (of proposed 12) farmer field schools (FFSs) provided on-farm trainings to about 3,593 (of at least 3,600 proposed) farmers of which 2,884 were men and 709 were women. Only 1 (of proposed 4) study tour was organized to Romania in March 2017 with 13 participants from FFSs, concerned Ministry and others (including, 1 woman participant). The TE mentions that an evaluation of FFSs was carried out in Feb 2021 (TE page 28) however, the findings of this evaluation are not provided. The TE does not provide adequate information to assess the performance of the FFSs.

The GEF/SCCF project supported the preparation of the National Strategy for Irrigation Sector Development (2021-2030) which was validated by the Parliament Commission and is expected to be approved shortly. The TE notes that the project also supported the preparation of the National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (2021-2030) and elaboration of a draft National Program for the development of the aromatic and medicinal plants sector (2020-2030) and “as these studies were passed to the Rural Resilience Project (because these were partially completed), these are yet to be published, and its feeding into government policies remains to be seen” (TE page 27-28).

After two years of procedural delay, the TE notes that two training of trainers (TOT) programs were conducted in December 2019 with 70 participants, 11 of which were women. The TE notes that this delay has influenced development of toolkits and mobilization of local public authorities and farmers in applying grants for rehabilitation/ establishment of shelterbelts, grasslands and grants for conservation agriculture, organic agriculture machinery (TE page 27). The TE notes that the project came out with a number of knowledge and communication products and events. While referring to the Final Impact Evaluation Report findings, the TE says that overall, about 93% of the targeted population “got a high awareness level about climate change risks” (due to project intervention) (TE page 28).

- **Component 2: Agriculture production through climate-resilient investments is enhanced.**

This component aimed to promote and encourage the adoption of conservation agriculture and organic agricultural practices by the farmers (worth USD 3,150,000 of SCCF grant and USD 20,667,100 of co-funding) (PD page 32). The overall expected result of this GEF/SCCF component was (i) promotion and finance support to small farmers for conservation agriculture systems and technologies to increase soil water content and reduce about 30% of crops water requirements in the converted farmlands; (ii) soil erosion to decrease between 60-90% in farmland under conservation agriculture and restored with shelterbelts and grasslands; (iii) water quality to improve in farmland under conservation agriculture due to 20-50% lower use of fertilizers and pesticides; (iv) conservation agriculture technology successfully tested and disseminated over approx. 1500 ha (approx. 250 farm holdings); and, (v) reduction in machinery, fuel and labour requirements for conservation agriculture will increase profits and available time, mainly for poor-asset women and youth, to diversify income opportunities through multipurpose shelterbelts producing MAP, wild fruits and honey (PD page 38).

The TE notes that “at project completion, 11 production plans, one for each FFS was finalized along with the practical guide for the implementation of conservation agriculture. Land quality assessment was also undertaken on an annual basis for the FFSs. The FFS production plans included needs assessment for equipment and technology to shift towards conservation agriculture. A total of 123 farmers (112 men and 11 women) received USD 10,000 to 15,000 of grant support for the purchase of equipment. However, with regard to the research institutions, no pilot project (of the 3 proposed) was undertaken to work on adjusting cropping pattern. About 123 agricultural enterprises benefitted from project grants to invest in agricultural equipment. 89% of these beneficiaries were men and 11% were women. While referring to the findings of the final evaluation impact report, 100% of the respondents had knowledge on conservation agriculture and, 87% of these beneficiaries are using mini-till, 33% are using no-till and 6% are using strip-till” (TE page 29). The TE also notes that at the time of project completion, “312.69 ha of shelterbelts installed, 192.56 ha of degraded grasslands restored, 5 privately owned nurseries supported and 80% of smallholder farmers joining the project NTFP scheme benefitted” (TE page 32).

Overall, this TER concurs with the concerns raised as well as achievements recorded by the TE. In addition to the above, the TER notes that the TE does not provide adequate data, information or/ and analysis to understand the effectiveness of the project outcomes in a comprehensive manner. The TER also notes that many of the important activities had a delayed start and the TE does not provide information on the comprehensive completion of these activities though it does underline the need for follow-up action. It is also important to note that the TE presents the performance and impact of GEF/SCCF interventions as stand-alone. How GEF/SCCF interventions worked, influenced and impacted the co-financed activities and

vice versa - does not find a mention in the TE. The TE also does not explain changes in the targets or how a change in strategy, affected the achievement of targets, especially after MTR. In view of all the above, this TER rates project effectiveness as **Moderately Satisfactory**.

4.3 Efficiency	Rating: <b>Moderately Unsatisfactory</b>
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The TE assesses project efficiency as **Moderately Satisfactory**. The TER rates the project efficiency as **Moderately Unsatisfactory**.

The project was endorsed by the GEF CEO for implementation in September 2013 but it took one year for the grant to become effective (in August 2014). The first disbursement was in December 2014 however, the project actually started disbursing in 2016. This is due to the project had developed a set of TORs in 2014-2015 for launching the activities, but the calls for tenders had to be reissued several times due to the difficulty in getting requisite technical expertise to work on conservation agriculture (TE page 23-24). The TER notes that these delays were avoidable considering the fact that during the project preparation phase, an extensive stakeholder analysis was conducted and there was adequate knowledge of the risks involved in effectively and efficiently implementing this project.

The TE notes that “the GEF-funded activities have suffered from lack of expertise and staff turnover, until 2018 when a Senior CCRS was recruited, followed by the recruitment of a Value Chain Development Specialist in early 2019 and an Ecological & Land Restoration Specialist in 2020. But it (these recruitments) has not made up for all the delays accumulated previously, due to cumbersome administrative and financial procedures, the objective difficulty of finding national expertise in a new field such as conservation agriculture and organic farming, as well as the rigid criteria established for the allocation of GEF grants to potential beneficiaries (TE page 35). This finding resonates in the findings of the IFAD’s Independent Evaluation Study that “without the expertise of a climate resilience specialist, coming up with persuasive alternatives to government’s strong preference.....this gap led to a permanent and dramatic departure from the design stipulation of restricting project benefits to those holding less than 25 hectares of land” (IFAD page 16).

The TE does not provide information about the project inception workshop report which is important at least from the GEF perspective. The MTR of the project was conducted in 2019 about one year before original project closure which recommended some important change especially from GEF perspective.

The variations in the information provided on the co-funding is mentioned in the preceding sections. The GEF/SCCF project was aligned with IFAD IRECR program’s component 1 (TE page 15). In this regard, the relevance of the information provided on fund utilization by source of funding in table 8 of the TE is questionable as it is for the IRECR program as a whole and not for the GEF/SCCF component. The TE also does not present the component-wise utilization of GEF grant and co-funding, at project completion to understand the cost-effectiveness of GEF/SCCF interventions. The TE reports that 91% of the GEF grant i.e., USD 3.87 million of USD 4.26 million were utilized (TE page 23).

4.4 Sustainability	Rating: <b>Moderately Unlikely</b>
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The TE assesses project sustainability and rate it as **Likely**.

An Independent Evaluation Study of the project undertaken by IFAD finds that “the interviews indicated, and the 2020 IRECRP supervision report confirmed that the project benefits were unlikely to be sustained or activities scaled-up. The exit strategy of component 1 (to which GEF/SCCF project was attached) called for influencing policies and behavior of farmers and agriculture enterprises. There is no evidence that efforts were underway to influence policies or that farmers were changing their behavior towards restoring eco-systems and climate smart agricultural practices” (IFAD page 17).

The TER concurs with the findings of the IFAD’s Independent Evaluation Study. After much delay, the GEF/SCCF project has introduced climate-resilient technologies and practices in the agricultural sector of Moldova mainly benefitting credit-worthy farmers or farmers with more than. As noted by the TE, the incomplete project activities have been passed on to an ongoing IFAD project (Rural Resilience Project – RRP). There is evidence of continued external financial assistance to Moldova’s agricultural sector though, the TE does not mention how the successful demonstrations done through GEF/SCCF intervention will be institutionalized and sustained beyond external agency funding. The project has supported the preparation of a number of national policy frameworks though the IFAD’s Independent Evaluation Study finds that “the government did not plan to invest its own resources to restore and manage shelterbelts once the projects ended” (IFAD page 17) “The IRECR supervision mission report 2020 lamented the total absence of initiating policy dialogue or promoting scaling up and noted that this effort is entirely left in the hands of RRP. The Government of Moldova is mainly supporting mechanized conservation agriculture that mostly work in favour of the middle and large-scale farmers” (IFAD page 18).

Based on all the above, this TER rates project sustainability as **Moderately Unlikely**.

### **Financial Resources**

The TE notes that “the O&M budgets related to the maintenance of shelterbelts and grassland will be managed by the Local Public Authorities” (TE page 37). The TE also mentions that incomplete project activities have been passed on to Rural Resilience Project (RRP) (TE page 38). However, it is not clear of the project was able to devise a sustainable solution for access to financing as required by the even by the credit-worthy farmers (leave along smallholder farmers) to address the challenge of climate change.

### **Sociopolitical**

The TE does not mention any socio-political risks to the sustainability of project outcomes. The project activities are relevant to both the policy-makers as well as to the credit-worthy farmers to achieve food security and economic growth amidst increasing climate variability. The TER also take note one of the findings of the IFAD Independent Evaluation that “the projects [IFAD and GEF/SCCF] were targeting on an average farmer with holdings of 200 hectares or more, when 98% of the farms in Moldova are 10 hectares or less” (IFAD page 20).

### **Institutional Frameworks and Governance**

The TE notes that the promotion of conservation agriculture and organic agriculture is important to ensure that Moldavian agricultural production standards meet the EU standards and requirements. This provides a kind of guarantee of continuity of actions initiated by the GEF/SCCF project. The project facilitated the

Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment (MARDE) to amend the order number 79 of April 5, 2016 regarding the requirements and technical specification for the eligible techniques applied in the conservative agriculture system. Also, the Government Programme for Land Improvement (2021-2025) adopted in 2020, incorporate measures to prevent and reduce soil erosion, including the establishment and rehabilitation of grasslands, shelterbelts and forest plantations (TE page 32). The GEF/SCCF project has extensively contributed to the development of the national strategy and policies related to conservation agriculture while setting up FFSs at the grassroot level action. However, it is not clear from the TE, if the FFSs will be promoted across the country to strengthen the institutional framework at farmer's level or how the Government of Moldova plans to take the work undertaken by the GEF/SCCF project forward.

## **Environmental**

The TE notes that the project activities were aimed at, among other things, sustainable management of water and soil resources and environmental protection.

The TE states that “the conditions to ensuring their (shelterbelts and grasslands) long-term maintenance beyond the IRECR programme is secured by the agreements between IRECR and LPAs” (TE page 37) however, on the TE mentions the need for follow-up to ensure the sustainability of the shelterbelts and grasslands before future investments as well as publication and effective use of the various studies undertaken by the project (TE page 38).

Conservation agriculture practices implemented by the project contributed to biodiversity conservation and reduced use of bio-chemicals which along with restoration of degraded lands are expected to be sustained and will yield positive environmental outcomes. (TE page 39).

## **5. Processes and factors affecting attainment of project outcomes**

5.1 Co-financing. To what extent was the reported co-financing essential to the achievement of GEF objectives? If there was a difference in the level of expected co-financing and actual co-financing, then what were the reasons for it? Did the extent of materialization of co-financing affect project's outcomes and/or sustainability? If so, in what ways and through what causal linkages?

The role of co-financing in this GEF/SCCF project was essential to the achievement of the project objectives as was clearly mentioned in the approved project document. However, the TE reports on the performance and achievement of the GEF/SCCF-funded activities as stand alone. The causal linkage between the GEF/SCCF and the baseline project activities has not been mentioned. The variations in the reported co-financing figures have already been mentioned in the preceding sections.

5.2 Project extensions and/or delays. If there were delays in project implementation and completion, then what were the reasons for it? Did the delay affect the project's outcomes and/or sustainability? If so, in what ways and through what causal linkages?

As noted in the Efficiency section above, the project's start and implementation at least till MTR in 2019 was delayed which adversely affected the project outcome as also noted by the TE (page 35).

Further, the MTR in 2019 notes that “there has been variable implementation of the GEF supported activities with many of the budgeted activities falling off the radar. The mission alerted the project

management to the fact that the budget lines indicated in the GEF grant should be fully adhered to and that all activities specified in the proposal should be undertaken. To ensure that this takes place the mission recommended that an action plan should be made as soon as possible with a clear plan for implementation of GEF financed activities” (MTR page 7). After MTR, the procedures for accessing project grant were simplified among other things. What were these recommendations and how these affected the project outcome is not clear from the TE. Also, the TE does not provide a component -wise breakup of the GEF grant and co-funding utilization to assess the causal linkages. The project activities picked up after MTR resulting in the achievements as mentioned in the Effectiveness section.

5.3 Country ownership. Assess the extent to which country ownership has affected project outcomes and sustainability? Describe the ways in which it affected outcomes and sustainability, highlighting the causal links:

As noted in the Relevance section above, the project addressed the national priorities of Moldova to promote climate-resilient practices in the agricultural sector as also reported by the country in its National Communication to the UNFCCC. The TE at many places has mentioned the role played by the concerned national Ministry, Local Public Authorities and worked with state agencies, including “Moldsilva” and Forestry Research Institute. The GEF/SCCF project supported the preparation of a number national policies relevant to the promotion of conservation agriculture practices. The O&M of the shelterbelts and restored grassland is the responsibility of LPA, beyond project period (TE page 37). The overall responsibility for the SCCF project management and implementation rested with the IFAD Programme Steering Committee established by Government decree (PD page 46).

After review of the annual Project Implementation Reports submitted by the project between 2016 and 2021, the TER notes that an active leadership role by the government had the potential of limiting delays and positively affecting the outcome and sustainability of the GEF/SCCF interventions.

## 6. Assessment of project’s Monitoring and Evaluation system

Ratings are assessed on a six point scale: Highly Satisfactory=no shortcomings in this M&E component; Satisfactory=minor shortcomings in this M&E component; Moderately Satisfactory=moderate shortcomings in this M&E component; Moderately Unsatisfactory=significant shortcomings in this M&E component; Unsatisfactory=major shortcomings in this M&E component; Highly Unsatisfactory=there were no project M&E systems.

Please justify ratings in the space below each box.

6.1 M&E Design at entry	Rating: <b>Satisfactory</b>
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The TE assesses the project’s M&E design at entry as **Satisfactory**. The TE notes that the “GEF/SCCF project document did not originally include a Theory of Change which was therefore reconstructed based on the SCCF Project Result Framework” (TE page 18). The TE notes that the “IRECR programme set up an efficient M&E system and data collection. The annual data collection process has been based on a survey of project beneficiaries. The database allowed for disaggregation of beneficiaries by gender, type of intervention, land ownership, and types of crops grown and business” (TE page 34).

M&E was a budgeted activity in the approved project document and the process of monitoring, reporting and evaluation was well laid out in detail. The project’s results framework provided indicators for project implementation along with their corresponding means of verification – forming the basis on which the project’s M&E system was to be built after it has been verified and finalized during the project inception workshop. Baseline survey for IFAD/SCCF component was also a budgeted activity to be completed within first six months of project start up. The project had adequate provisions for semi-annual reviews and a midterm review of the project’s progress (PD page 4-6). Based on the above-mentioned considerations, this TER rates M&E design at entry as **Satisfactory**.

6.2 M&E Implementation	Rating: <b>Moderately Unsatisfactory</b>
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The TE assesses the project’s M&E implementation as **Satisfactory**. The TE notes that “since the beginning of the programme, a detailed M&E system was in place, allowing for regular monitoring of activities and regular quantification of indicators. This allowed for adjustments to the program when necessary. The data processing also generated geo-referenced maps of the project results such as the geographical distribution of project beneficiaries. The M&E Plan elaborated at the design phase has been followed: the inception workshop was organized, the Project Implementation Report (PIR) have been produced annually, in addition to the annual supervision mission carried by IFAD and the Terminal Impact Evaluation by an independent expert firm” (TE page 34).

The TER notes that GEF/SCCF project was monitored as per well laid out M&E system for IFAD program and institutions with a minimal grant support from GEF (USD 79,000 for the entire project period) (PD page 6). The delay in operationalizing GEF-funded project activities and the observations of MTR on GEF-funded activities (as detailed in the preceding sections) raises doubts on the effectiveness of the monitoring system from GEF perspective. The PIRs and MTR of the project are good quality M&E documents and the project implementation did pick up pace after MTR. However, the TE does not provide adequate information on what adjustments were made in the project design at the inception and various other stages during project implementation. How the delays impacted the M&E plan, was it revised and was the indicator data collected and used in a systematic manner? Nor does it comment on the quality of annual outcome surveys and impact surveys, which the IOE Independent Evaluation case study of the same project found to be of questionable quality. Based on the above-mentioned considerations, this TER rates M&E implementation as **Moderately Unsatisfactory**.

## 7. Assessment of project implementation and execution

Quality of Implementation includes the quality of project design, as well as the quality of supervision and assistance provided by implementing agency(s) to execution agencies throughout project implementation. Quality of Execution covers the effectiveness of the executing agency(s) in performing its roles and responsibilities. In both instances, the focus is upon factors that are largely within the control of the respective implementing and executing agency(s). A six-point rating scale is used (Highly Satisfactory to Highly Unsatisfactory), or Unable to Assess.

Please justify ratings in the space below each box.

7.1 Quality of Project Implementation	Rating: <b>Moderately Unsatisfactory</b>
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The TE provides a rating of **Moderately Satisfactory** to the quality of project implementation. The TE says that the project reacted well to global pandemic situation with IFAD opting for online supervisory mission in 2020 and completion mission in 2021 (TE page 40). The TE notes that “IFAD supervision and implementation support missions could have avoided as much as possible the tendency to propose a large number of recommendations per mission as well as high turnover of experts to maintain continuity in implementation support and minimize cases of controversial recommendations. The project design should have a comprehensive PIM for GEF-related activities to avoid lengthy and sometimes contradictory amendments” (TE page 41).

The TER concurs with the TE’s above mentioned observations. The TE at various places says that GEF/SCCF activities were fully integrated with IRECR project’s sub-component 1.1 which may not be the best approach to integrate climate change adaptation concerns in other components of the IRECR project (TE page 15). The gaps in the implementation of the GEF-funded activities were also noted by the MTR (presented in the preceding sections). Based on the findings of IFAD’s Independent Evaluation Study, the TER take into cognizance that there may be many aspects of GEF/SCCF project implementation which might be beyond IFAD’s control. However, as GEF agency, IFAD was responsible for ensuring that GEF/SCCF project activities were implemented in a cost-effective manner which is not apparent from the information available in the TE. The concern also is that either while monitoring or while reporting, the achievements of the GEF/SCCF activities were presented as IRECR program achievements as a whole. The relevance and cost effectiveness of GEF/SCCF interventions is not fully apparent. In view of the above, this TER rates quality of project implementation as **Moderately Unsatisfactory**.

7.2 Quality of Project Execution	Rating: <b>Moderately Unsatisfactory</b>
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The TE provides a rating of **Satisfactory** to the quality of project execution. The TE notes that the “overall management of the project lies within the responsibility of the CPIU-IFAD, established by the Government Decree. The GEF-funded activities have initially suffered due to lack of expertise and staff turnover. The strengthening of CPIU could not make up for the initial delays, due to cumbersome administrative and financial procedures (TE page 35).

The TER disagrees with the rating. The GEF/SCCF project was a national priority of the Government of Moldova yet, procurement and procedural hurdles were not addressed effectively based on the information provided by the TE. In view of this, this TER rates quality of project execution as **Moderately Unsatisfactory**.

## 8. Assessment of Project Impacts

**Note - In instances where information on any impact related topic is not provided in the terminal evaluations, the reviewer should indicate in the relevant sections below that this is indeed the case and identify the information gaps. When providing information on topics related to impact, please cite the page number of the terminal evaluation from where the information is sourced.**

8.1 Environmental Change. Describe the changes in environmental stress and environmental status that occurred by the end of the project. Include both quantitative and qualitative changes documented,

sources of information for these changes, and how project activities contributed to or hindered these changes. Also include how contextual factors have contributed to or hindered these changes.

The TE does not provide information on the achievement of the project's impact indicator for environmental change.

8.2 Socioeconomic change. Describe any changes in human well-being (income, education, health, community relationships, etc.) that occurred by the end of the project. Include both quantitative and qualitative changes documented, sources of information for these changes, and how project activities contributed to or hindered these changes. Also include how contextual factors have contributed to or hindered these changes.

The TE notes that "majority of the respondents reported an increase in their incomes. Around 51% of the respondents mentioned that the income was up to 10% growth. Only 5% reported an increase of over 25% of their income. Over half of the respondents reported that the level of their fuel consumption has decreased to 10% (45% of the respondents) and 10-25% (39%). Overall, 52% of respondents plan to increase the land under conservation agriculture in the following years (on average 118 ha) (TE page 40).

8.3 Capacity and governance changes. Describe notable changes in capacities and governance that can lead to large-scale action (both mass and legislative) bringing about positive environmental change. "Capacities" include awareness, knowledge, skills, infrastructure, and environmental monitoring systems, among others. "Governance" refers to decision-making processes, structures and systems, including access to and use of information, and thus would include laws, administrative bodies, trust-building and conflict resolution processes, information-sharing systems, etc. Indicate how project activities contributed to/ hindered these changes, as well as how contextual factors have influenced these changes.

a) Capacities

As mentioned in the Effectiveness section, the TE notes that "about 3,593 farmers (of which 709 were women) received on-farm training by FFSs, two ToT on conservation agriculture benefitted 70 participants (of which 11 were women) and a number of knowledge products (available at <http://www.ucipifad.md/biblioteca/>) as well as communication and outreach events were organized the project on climate change adaptation and mitigation measures in agricultural and allied sector. Many of the knowledge products were translated into Russian and Romanian languages for wider dissemination (TE page 61).

b) Governance

As mentioned in the Effectiveness section, the project supported the preparation of a number of national policies and strategies relevant to the promotion of climate-resilient conservation agriculture practices which are at various stages of national approval and adoption.

8.4 Unintended impacts. Describe any impacts not targeted by the project, whether positive or negative, affecting either ecological or social aspects. Indicate the factors that contributed to these unintended impacts occurring.

The TE does not indicate any unintended impacts.

8.5 Adoption of GEF initiatives at scale. Identify any initiatives (e.g. technologies, approaches, financing instruments, implementing bodies, legal frameworks, information systems) that have been mainstreamed, replicated and/or scaled up by government and other stakeholders by project end. Include the extent to which this broader adoption has taken place, e.g. if plans and resources have been established but no actual adoption has taken place, or if market change and large-scale environmental benefits have begun to occur. Indicate how project activities and other contextual factors contributed to these taking place. If broader adoption has not taken place as expected, indicate which factors (both project-related and contextual) have hindered this from happening.

The TE does not identify any instances of adoption of GEF initiatives at scale.

## 9. Lessons and recommendations

9.1 Briefly describe the key lessons, good practices, or approaches mentioned in the terminal evaluation report, including how they that could have application for other GEF projects.

The TE provides the following key lessons learned (page 41):

- New concepts and activities, such as the climate change resilience project component require more guidance, training and modelling, including international expertise and experience to enable its optimum usage.
- The Farmer-Field- School concept has proven to be one of the best tools for demonstrating the long-term economic and environmental benefits of conservation agriculture (CA) and organic farming (OA). However, their success was only possible because the project had the capacity to provide, upon request, adequate financial support to beneficiaries to equip themselves to use new CA and OA technologies, as well as the capacity to provide interventions appropriate to their local production systems. The projects must therefore be able to respond to the needs of smallholder farmers along the entire production chain if these new technologies to be applied effectively.
- There is a need to integrate CA and OA principles into national legislation and budgeted sectoral plans in view of establishing land management norms that allow for climate change adaptation and improved production.
- The experience of the project shows that when smallholder farmers are targeted, they can be effectively reached to enhance their conservation agriculture practices. However, there is need to thoroughly assess at the design stage the capabilities and production means of the smallholder producers for higher adoption of innovations.
- IFAD supervision and implementation support missions could avoid as much as possible the tendency to propose a large number of recommendations per mission.
- IFAD could avoid as much as possible, high turnover of experts to maintain continuity in implementation support and minimize cases of controversial recommendations/ amendments.

- There is a need to set up right from design stage clear and detailed implementation arrangements for co-financing grants managed by IFAD. A clear section in the PIM from the Start-up of the Project will allow better implementation and disbursement of the GEF grant and reduce or avoid time-consuming processes.

## 9.2 Briefly describe the recommendations given in the terminal evaluation.

The TE provides the following recommendations (pages 42):

- The wide range of lessons learned, and knowledge generated from IRECR could guide the implementation modalities of the ongoing and future investment programmes under IFAD or GoM funding, particularly in addressing climate change through conservation agriculture.
- Based on the project results with regard to the development of national capacities, establish and develop a network of experts on CA and OA matters, in order to strengthen national competencies in this area and to provide experienced service providers.
- The concerned Ministry could build on and enhance the technical guidelines produced by the project in order to mainstream conservation agriculture into all government development programs aimed at reducing producers' vulnerability to climate change.
- The Farmer Field Schools could be institutionalised and used by the concerned Department as a tool to promote CA and OA practices in the country.
- The CPIU could ensure the completion of activities transferred to the ongoing Rural Resilience Project (RRP), including as the finalisation of the National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development (2021–2030).

## 10. Quality of the Terminal Evaluation Report

A six-point rating scale is used for each sub-criteria and overall rating of the terminal evaluation report (Highly Satisfactory to Highly Unsatisfactory)

Criteria	GEF IEO comments	Rating
To what extent does the report contain an assessment of relevant outcomes and impacts of the project and the achievement of the objectives?	Overall, the TE is sketchy and lacks comprehensive analysis of the outcomes, achievements and impacts of the envisaged project objectives. This may be due to the restrictions imposed by the global pandemic and limitations mentioned in the TE.	MS
To what extent is the report internally consistent, the evidence presented complete and convincing, and ratings well substantiated?	The TE is internally consistent when read along with PIRs, MTR and other project-related reports. However, as a stand-alone TE report, it does not provide complete assessment to substantiate ratings. This may be due to the restrictions imposed by the global pandemic and limitations mentioned in the TE.	MS
To what extent does the report properly assess project sustainability and/or project exit strategy?	The report provides information on project sustainability and exit strategy but lacks a detailed assessment. This may be due to the limited information made available to TE.	MS
To what extent are the lessons learned supported by the evidence	The TE provides comprehensive lessons learned and recommendations.	S

presented and are they comprehensive?		
Does the report include the actual project costs (total and per activity) and actual co-financing used?	The TE report only provides a total of the actual project costs but does not provide activity-wise breakup of the GEF grant and co-financing used. There are discrepancies in the information thus, provided.	<b>US</b>
Assess the quality of the report's evaluation of project M&E systems:	The TE does provide broad information of project M&E system which lacks a detailed assessment.	<b>US</b>
<b>Overall TE Rating</b>		<b>MS</b>

11. Note any additional sources of information used in the preparation of the terminal evaluation report (excluding PIRs, TEs, and PADs).