Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Terminal evaluation of the project "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems"

Project Evaluation Series
03/2024

Project Evaluation Series
03/2024

Terminal evaluation of the project "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems"

Project code: GCP/TUR/061/GFF

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
Rome, 2024

Required citation:

FAO. 2024. *Terminal evaluation of the project "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems"*. Project Evaluation Series, 03/2024. Rome. https://doi.org/10.4060/cc9352en

Abstract

This is the terminal evaluation of the project entitled "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems". The project was funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and implemented in the Republic of Türkiye from January 2017 through December 2022.

The evaluation aimed to assess the progress made towards the impact and sustainability of project outcomes and to detect any design and implementation issues that need to be addressed before scaling up the project's outputs.

The evaluation applied a mixed methodological approach to data collection (quantitative and qualitative). It included structured document analysis and the review of primary and secondary sources of information, semi-structured interviews with key informants and direct beneficiaries, focus group discussions with the community members and direct site observations (site visits).

The evaluation findings indicated significant achievements related to building the capacity and raising the awareness of national- and provincial-level stakeholders about the importance of the biodiversity conservation agenda and sustainable management of steppe ecosystems in the country. The project facilitated the creation of methodological and technical documents and guidelines as well as strategic and action plans, which serve as valuable and practical tools for the Government of Türkiye to facilitate and replicate further interventions in sustainable management of the steppe ecosystem and biodiversity in the country.

Based on the evaluation findings, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) was recommended to advance the design and preparation phase of upcoming GEF-funded projects, conduct a comprehensive and rigorous risk assessment, develop detailed risk mitigation strategies, and set realistic and feasible timelines to ensure they are aligned with the identified risks. Furthermore, the FAO Country Office needs to strengthen its monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system and ensure that the personnel possess the capacity to elaborate a detailed and gender-sensitive M&E plan, and that the recommendations of the mid-term review of the GEF-funded project are absolutely fulfilled. Finally, FAO is strongly recommended to develop the exit strategy for the GEF-funded projects and negotiate with either the GEF or the Government of Türkiye the planning and conducting of an impact evaluation of GEF-funded interventions to assess mid- and/or long-term environmental and socioeconomic impacts of this type of GEF-funded project.

Contents

Box, figures and tables

Acknowledgements

The Evaluation Team wishes to express the most profound appreciation to all those who supported the evaluation and provided the possibility to complete this assignment. The evaluation benefited from the inputs of many stakeholders, including government officers, representatives of the national partnering institutions, local farmers and direct beneficiaries of the project, FAO personnel at headquarters and the FAO Office in Türkiye. Their contributions were critical to the team's work and are deeply appreciated.

The Evaluation Team was composed of the following people: Mr Luca Molinas, Regional Evaluation Manager, who also acted as Evaluation Task Manager and was based in the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia; Ms Nelly Dolidze, Evaluation Team Leader; and Mr Nafiz Guder, National Evaluation Consultant. Support was also provided by Mr Serdar Bayryyev, Supporting Officer from the FAO Office of Evaluation.

Abbreviations

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GEF	Global Environment Facility
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals

Executive summary

1. This report presents the results of the terminal evaluation of the project "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems", implemented from January 2017 to December 2022. The evaluation was conducted from May 2022 to November 2022 and aimed to assess the progress made towards the impact and sustainability of project outcomes and to detect any design and implementation issues that need to be addressed before scaling up the project's outputs.[1] The evaluation was carried out by a team of two independent consultants, Ms Nelly Dolidze, Evaluation Team Leader, and Mr Nafiz Guder, National Evaluation Consultant. In addition, it was supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Country Office in Türkiye.

2. The evaluation methodology was designed to address 60 key evaluation questions grouped under the criteria of relevance; effectiveness; efficiency; sustainability; factors affecting performance; and cross-cutting dimensions. In this regard, the evaluation applied various data collection techniques to include all the relevant stakeholders and validate the data gathered. These techniques incorporated online and in-person interviews with key informants, focus group discussions (FGD), direct site observations and structured documentary analysis.

Main findings and conclusions

3. The evaluation resulted in the following key findings and conclusions linked to each evaluation criterion:

   i. **Relevance.** The project was fully aligned with the overall strategic priorities and needs of the Government of Türkiye (both at the design and implementation phases of the project) related to biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of the protected area (PA).

      - Also, the project outcomes were aligned with two out of five Biodiversity (BD) Objectives of the Global Environment Facility (GEF)-5 Focal Area Strategies, BD-1: Improve the sustainability of protected area systems; and BD-2: Mainstream biodiversity conservation and sustainable use into production landscapes/seascapes and sectors. Finally, the project results contributed to the selected food and agriculture-related Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets, defined by FAO; the targets not directly related to hunger and food insecurity; and relevant international treaties and conventions on biodiversity conservation, climate change and large landscape management.

      - Moreover, the project was also directly relevant to the mandate (determined by the provisions of international conventions and protocols and Turkish legislation and regulations) of the state institutions engaged in project implementation (i.e. the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks [GDNCNP][2] of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry; the General Directorate of Plant Production [GDPP][3] of the Ministry of Agriculture

[1] The project activities were implemented in the selected pilot areas of Tek Tek Mountains National Park (NP), Kizilkuyu Wildlife Development Area (WDA) and Karacadağ Steppes.

[2] At the project design phase, the GDNCN was under the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs.

[3] At the project design phase, the General Directorate of Plant Production was under the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livelihood.

and Forestry; and the General Directorate of Forestry [GDF]).[4] At the same time, some state agencies of the Government of Türkiye identified as key implementing partners of the project did not take part due to structural changes in 2018. Others were less active, as the scope of the project was not directly applicable to their mandate.

- Non-state actors took part in the project in different capacities as direct beneficiaries and implementing partners. Local community members did not participate in the design stage, rather, they directly benefited from several activities of the project. Some technical team members of the state agencies, the project implementing partners, claimed that the technical team of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry engaged in the design stage of the project differed from the Ministry team engaged in the project implementation which, according to the key stakeholders, caused the unrealistic and overambitious timeline of the project.

ii. **Effectiveness.** The project significantly increased the awareness and capacity of different stakeholders (at national and provincial levels) about the importance of the biodiversity conservation agenda and sustainable management of steppe ecosystems in the country. The project facilitated the creation of methodological and technical documents and guidelines as well as strategic and action plans, which serve as valuable and practical tools for the Government of Türkiye to facilitate and replicate further interventions on the sustainable management of the steppe ecosystem and biodiversity in the country.

- Overall, by December 2022, the evaluation validated a full achievement of 73 percent (8 out of 11) and partial achievement of 27 percent (3 out of 11) of outcome indicators. It also validated a full achievement of 87 percent of output indicators (all the indicators of Output 1.1, all seven indicators of Output 1.2, all four indicators of Output 1.3, six out of nine indicators of Output 2.1, five out of eight indicators of Output 2.2, all the indicators of Output 2.3, three out of four indicators of Output 3.1, all three indicators of Output 3.2 and all four indicators of Output 3.3.) (see Executive Summary Table 1).

[4] At the project design phase, the General Directorate of Forestry was under the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs.

Executive summary table 1. Achievement of outcome and output indicators

Achievement level	Outcome indicators achievement rate (%)	Output indicators achievement rate (%)
Full achievement	73	87
Partial achievement	27	13

Output indicators	Output indicators achievement rate (%)
Output 1.1 (10 indicators)	100
Output 1.2 (7 indicators)	100
Output 1.3 (4 indicators)	100
Output 2.1 (9 indicators, 6 fully achieved)	67
Output 2.2 (8 indicators, 5 fully achieved)	63
Output 2.3 (4 indicators)	100
Output 3.1 (4 indicators, 3 fully achieved)	75
Output 3.2 (3 indicators)	100
Output 3.3 (4 indicators)	100

Source: FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

- Notably, the project design demonstrated specific challenges associated with an ambitious project timeline, its design specifics (interlinked outputs), and insufficient risk analytics on the internal challenges (extended inception phase, delays with the project staff recruitment, translation-related issues, delays with tendering and procurement, technical clearance procedure, time-consuming FAO rules related to information sharing between FAO and the national implementing partners) and external challenges (not anticipated at the design, including the COVID-19 pandemic and tension among the community groups in the targeted areas). According to key stakeholders, it was unfeasible to achieve all the results of the project within the four-year time frame set at the design.
- Furthermore, the project workplan was subject to several adjustments and the inception period (a timeline between the design and actual implementation of the project) was longer than anticipated.

iii. **Efficiency.** The project's existing governance and management structure was efficient to a certain extent, as it allowed for applying adaptive management practices through regular and ad hoc meetings of the Project Steering Committee. It also allowed for the adjustment (to a certain extent) of the project implementation to the challenging internal and external factors that impeded the timely accomplishment of the anticipated targets.

- The efficiency of project implementation was also affected by the failure to fully address the recommendations of the mid-term review (MTR). In some cases, FAO's management response to the mid-term review recommendations was rather generic and created unrealistic expectations with regard to achieving the recommendations. The project efficiency was also affected by other factors, such as inconsistent reporting related to the project components, outcomes and outputs (which varied in different documents); actual project expenditures; the absence of the rigorous monitoring and evaluation (M&E) approach and logical framework at the

project design phase; inefficient procurement and technical clearance; as well as inadequate project staffing structure. Also, the project produced 8 out of 12 project progress reports (PPRs) and five project implementation reviews (PIRs). Some reports were produced with significant (at least three-month) delays. For ease of reference, due to the fact that both PIRs and semi-annual PPRs were lengthy and overlapping documents in the GEF reporting system, FAO reduced the number of semi-annual PPRs to cover only the July to December reporting period starting from 2020.

- About 95 percent of the GEF funds were allocated for the implementation of project activities, and the remaining 5 percent were allocated for project management. However, the evaluation did not receive any data related to the actual expenditure of the project at the output level to assess the extent to which the project was implemented in a cost-efficient way.
- Finally, cash and in-kind contributions from the Government of Türkiye and FAO constituted 224 percent of the co-funding planned at design. About 97 percent of in-kind contributions of the government were spent to cover the staff fees, and 99 percent of their cash contribution was allocated for investments and field-based activities under all three components. FAO's cash contribution was all spent on workshops, study tours and other capacity building activities, and about 88 percent of FAO's in-kind contributions were spent on FAO's project personnel service (see Executive Summary Table 2).

Executive summary table 2. A snapshot of in-kind and cash contribution

	Personnel fees	Investments and field activities	Workshops, study tours, etc.	Other expenses
Government in-kind contribution	97%	-	-	3%
Government cash contribution	-	99%	-	1%
FAO in-kind contribution	88%	-	-	12%
FAO cash contribution	-	-	100%	0%

Source: FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

iv. **Sustainability.** The sustainability of the project results was linked to the interests and willingness of the Government of Türkiye to contribute its financial and human resources for this purpose. Nevertheless, FAO failed to address the project's sustainability agenda at the design phase of the project. According to the key project stakeholders, to support sustainability of the project results and to strengthen replication of the outputs, the project team claimed to submit official letters to the national- and regional-level state sector agencies. Notably, the mid-term review also recommended developing the project sustainability plan. However, the Evaluation Team did not receive the copy of the exit strategy and/or the project sustainability plan, except for the sustainability narrative incorporated in the project terminal report. For ease of reference, FAO did not receive the project follow-up plan from the Government of Türkiye to monitor and sustain the project achievements in order to be scaled up and replicated at subregional or national levels. Nevertheless, the evaluation acknowledged the verbal commitment of the state sector representatives to sustain post-project monitoring of the strategic and action plan implementation, developed under the project.

v. **Execution and management.** Both FAO and national implementing partners played essential roles at all stages of the project life cycle. At the same time, FAO's role was indispensable in facilitating and guiding the project implementation agenda.

- At the design stage, FAO assessed the implementation risks of the project to a certain extent and introduced a contingency plan. However, FAO did not take into account a number of apparent challenges related to the local context that could have affected the implementation of the project (e.g. a complex local context and potential tensions among the communities in the targeted sites of Sanliurfa Province, as well as limited awareness of the project implementing partners about FAO's rules and procedures, project staffing, procurement and tendering) and FAO's decision-making, technical clearance, recruitment, and logistical and procurement procedures. Also, the evaluation was unable to validate challenges related to the financial management of the project due to a lack of relevant data.

vi. **Project oversight and M&E.** The project M&E system suffered certain deficiencies. The weakness of the M&E system was linked to the unsatisfactory project design and the lack of a logical framework at the design phase of the project.[5] Instead, the project document presented the FAO/GEF Strategic Results Matrix, which lacked output-level indicators. Also, it did not incorporate any information about the project activities. In addition, the project failed to produce the M&E plan as required by the project document. Furthermore, the M&E system deficiency was also the result of inconsistencies regarding indicators, the general reporting delays, as well as the incompatible format of the results matrix used for project progress reports and project implementation reviews. Also, the project allocated USD 184 500 for M&E activities at its design. The project team developed the results framework along with specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) indicators to track the project activities' progress. Detailed project progress was presented in PPRs and PIRs.

vii. **Impact.** The impact of project activities can only be observed in the long run. Apparently, the evaluation validated that: the project accelerated the understanding of the importance of steppe biodiversity; created synergies and intra-institutional collaboration among state institutions (the project implementing partners); raised awareness among different stakeholders about the importance of the steppes including a results-oriented approach; and prepared biodiversity inventories in the targeted areas.

- The evaluation found that different project outputs (e.g. guidelines, strategic and action plans, surveys, and biodiversity assessments in Karacadağ, Tek Tek Mountains National Park and Kızılkuyu Wildlife Development Area) might potentially contribute to conserving biodiversity in the targeted areas. Also, the project assisted in developing the "Global Benefits Action Plan for Conservation and Sustainable Management of Turkey's Steppe Ecosystems", an implementation pathway along with a timetable and designation of the implementing agencies, responsible for specific actions. However, the

[5] The terminal report incorporated a final version of the official logical framework/matrix which did not include output-level and action-level indicators.

evaluation lacked the data that would have validated the national counterparts' contribution to the project's sustainability in order to fulfil the "Global Benefits Action Plan for Conservation and Sustainable Management of Turkey's Steppe Ecosystems". As such, the evaluation was not in a position to report on the project's economic well-being and other socioeconomic impacts, which would have required a rigorous impact analysis (ideally to be conducted at least three years after project completion). To be noted, the project's impact is closely tied up with the project sustainability as the Government of Türkiye (an owner of the project results) is expected to scale up and replicate the project achievements.

viii. **Partnerships.** The project introduced diverse partnership modalities, which supported information sharing among different sectors (e.g. state sector, academia, private sector, local communities and non-governmental organizations). It also facilitated different activities (including the development of the "Stakeholder Engagement Guideline") related to strengthening partnerships and cooperation among different sectors. Notably, the state sector served as a primary partner for FAO to deliver the project objectives, and FAO also engaged non-state actors (as subcontractors and workshop participants) to diversify the pool of indirect project beneficiaries and implementing partners. Overall, the sustainability of partnership arrangements varied, depending on the modality of these partnerships (e.g. among state sector agencies, between FAO and subcontractors representing private and non-governmental sectors, and between FAO and the state sector).

ix. **Communication and knowledge management.** At the project's design stage, FAO significantly lacked a holistic approach to connect properly with the direct and indirect beneficiaries through well-defined communication approaches. The project document neither considered developing a communication strategy nor did it allocate funds for this purpose.

- Nevertheless, FAO actively pursued adaptive management tactics and developed a communication strategy for the project. Notably, the aforementioned communication strategy was developed by the National Project Coordinator (NPC) and later shared with the FAO Communication Specialist.
- The project issued different printed materials, including books and other materials for local schools, developed and printed posters for the project sites, developed a project webpage to raise awareness of the project, posted guidelines on the FAO website, and created a YouTube video. It is important to highlight that FAO's systematic sharing of project-related information (including basic inventory studies, and training and capacity building materials) through digital communication means (online posting) increased the reach and impact of project-based learning as well as encouraging potential replication and scaling up of the project results.

x. **Gender and environmental and social safeguards.** The project's focus on gender equality and opportunities for women has been weak. In addition, the project mainly focused on addressing the overall environmental, steppe biodiversity and conservation agenda.

Recommendations

4. Based on the data gathered in the course of this evaluation, the Evaluation Team provided several strategic and operational recommendations.

Recommendation 1. Operational. The FAO project team is highly recommended to advance the design and preparation phase of the upcoming GEF-funded projects. In this regard, FAO needs to conduct a comprehensive and rigorous risk assessment, develop detailed risk mitigation strategies, and set realistic and feasible timelines for the projects aligned with the risks identified. Also, FAO needs to allocate financial and human resources for developing communication strategies.

Recommendation 2. Operational. The FAO project team needs to thoroughly address the recommendations of mid-term reviews and report on the progress made with regard to fulfilling the recommendations against the timeline set in the management response to the mid-term review recommendations. The reporting on the progress shall be incorporated into the project progress reports and project implementation reviews and presented to the Project Steering Committee. Consequently, the meeting notes of the Project Steering Committee meeting shall reflect the discussion topics related to the reporting on the progress made on mid-term review recommendations.

Recommendation 3. Operational. The FAO Country Office needs to strengthen its M&E system and ensure that personnel have sufficient capacity to elaborate a detailed and gender-sensitive M&E plan. In this regard, it would also be highly advisable to strengthen the capacity of FAO personnel on M&E practices with the support and guidance of FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (for example, FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia experts providing advisory on the results and logical frameworks, reviewing, advising on and validating the M&E plans, guiding the national M&E specialists throughout the process, etc.).

Recommendation 4. Operational. The FAO Country Office needs to strengthen the projectized and project management approaches through a number of measures, such as the introduction of project operation manuals (POMs) to be adjusted to the management and oversight needs of the new projects implemented by FAO. The POMs shall be tailored to the compliance and quality control requirements of the implementing partners (i.e. FAO and the Government of Türkiye) and donor agency (i.e. the GEF) and encompass the detailed procurement rules of the implementing agencies, roles, and responsibilities of each counterpart (which might differ from the ones from the project design stage). Moreover, the relevant project teams and focal points from the national counterparts should be debriefed about the project's content and operational peculiarities outlined in the POM. Furthermore, FAO needs to reconsider the project staffing and hiring practices. The staff hiring process should be completed as soon as possible to ensure that at least the National Project Coordinator is actively engaged in the project inception phase. Moreover, the roles and responsibilities of the National Project Coordinator and Lead Technical Officer shall be adequate to the scope of the project, which means that FAO should engage additional project staff to ensure efficient and smooth coordination and implementation of the project activities. At the same time, it is advisable to also scope the role of the National Project Coordinator to project management functions. Also, FAO needs to advance the financial analytics to ensure that the project's detailed expenditures are reported at output level.

Recommendation 5. Strategic. The FAO project teams are strongly advised to develop the project exit strategy at the early/design stage of the project to ensure its effective implementation. Obviously, the exit strategy addresses the sustainability of the project achievements after project completion, and the sustainability fully depends on the interest, ownership and commitment of the

Government of Türkiye to allocate the financial and human resources to continue, scale up, and replicate the project results. Therefore, FAO is recommended to initiate and maintain dialogue with the Government of Türkiye throughout project implementation regarding similar projects and on post-project resource allocation and action plans for post-project monitoring and reporting on sustainability.

Recommendation 6. Strategic. The FAO Country Office is recommended to negotiate with the GEF or the Government of Türkiye the planning and conducting of an impact evaluation of GEF-funded interventions in order to assess mid- and/or long-term environmental and socioeconomic impacts of this type of project. Obviously, an impact evaluation constitutes a resource and time-consuming exercise that needs to be planned before project implementation and should be conducted several years after project completion.

Executive summary table 3. GEF rating table

GEF criteria/subcriteria	Rating	Summary comments
A. STRATEGIC RELEVANCE		
A1. Overall strategic relevance	Highly Satisfactory	Highly relevant to the needs and priorities of the country and provincial priorities.
A1.1. Alignment with GEF and FAO strategic priorities	Highly Satisfactory	It is fully aligned with GEF and FAO strategic priorities.
A1.2. Relevance to national, regional and global priorities and beneficiary needs	Highly Satisfactory	Fully relevant to the national, local and regional needs.
A1.3. Complementarity with existing interventions	Highly Satisfactory	Was fully aligned with other similar projects implemented in the country.
B. EFFECTIVENESS		
B1. Overall assessment of project results	Satisfactory	Mixed results, most strategic dimensions of the project were fully achieved.
B1.1 Delivery of project outputs	Satisfactory	Full achievement of 87 percent (3 out of 11) of outcome indicators by December 2022 (the project was extended through the end of December 2022).
B1.2 Progress towards outcomes and project objectives	Satisfactory	Full achievement of 73 percent (8 out of 11) of outcome indicators by December 2022 (the project was extended through the end of December 2022).
Outcome 1: Effectiveness of the protected area system to conserve steppe biodiversity increased	Satisfactory	Partially achieved; 50 percent (two out of four) of outcome indicators were fully achieved and seven out of ten target indicators were fully achieved.
Outcome 2: Steppe biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into production landscapes	Highly Satisfactory	Fully achieved; all four outcome indicators were fully achieved.
Outcome 3: Enabling environment established for the effective conservation of steppe biodiversity across large landscapes	Satisfactory	Partially achieved; two out of three outcome indicators were fully achieved.
Overall rating of progress towards achieving objectives/outcomes	Satisfactory	The activities related to the development of guidelines, technical documents, monitoring plans and strategic and action plans were fully achieved.
B1.3 Likelihood of impact	Moderately Satisfactory	It depends on the project sustainability and the willingness of the Government of Türkiye to scale up the project results.

GEF criteria/subcriteria	Rating	Summary comments
C. EFFICIENCY		
C1. Efficiency*	Moderately Satisfactory	The project was subject to several no-cost extensions caused by internal and external factors (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic). The project document demonstrated deficiencies with regard to the internal and external challenges and risks but applied an adaptive management approach to resolve the issues in the course of the project implementation.
D. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES		
D1. Overall likelihood of risks to sustainability	Moderately Likely	It fully depends on the will of the Government of Türkiye to allocate funds and resources to sustain the project results.
D1.1. Financial risks	Moderately Likely	While the Government of Türkiye did not officially report allocating financial resources to sustain the project results, it expressed a verbal commitment and interest in scaling up and replicating the project activities.
D1.2. Sociopolitical risks	Unlikely	A stable sociopolitical environment was observed.
D1.3. Institutional and governance risks	Unlikely	The only challenge is associated with structural reforms within the Government of Türkiye.
D1.4. Environmental risks	Unlikely	No environmental risks were identified whatsoever.
D2. Catalysis and replication	Moderately Likely	The Government of Türkiye expressed a verbal commitment and interest in scaling up and replicating the project activities (beyond the pilot areas).
E. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE		
E1. Project design and readiness**	Moderately Satisfactory	The project time frame was too ambitious. It lacked risk assessment and mitigation measures.
E2. Quality of project implementation	Moderately Satisfactory	Mixed results: partial achievement of outcomes and partial achievement of others; shortcomings in M&E, procurement and tendering, project staffing and recruitment.
E2.1 Quality of project implementation by FAO (Budget Holder [BH], Lead Technical Officer [LTO], Project Task Force [PTF], etc.)	Moderately Satisfactory	Mixed results: full achievement of 73 percent of outcome and 87 percent of output indicators, shortcomings in M&E, procurement and tendering, project staffing and recruitment, delays in internal clearance of the project documents, and six no-cost extensions (some caused by external factors and others by the project design and implementation). Also, the multifunctional role of the NPC significantly contributed to resolving the design and implementation shortcomings.
E2.2 Project oversight (Project Steering Committee, project working group, etc.)	Satisfactory	Steering Committee meetings were organized on a regular basis (semi-annually). Facilitated the establishment of technical working groups.

GEF criteria/subcriteria	Rating	Summary comments
E3. Quality of project execution For Direct Execution Modality (DEX) projects: Project Management Unit/BH. For Operational Partners Implementation Modality (OPIM) projects: Executing Agency	Moderately Satisfactory	Shortcomings in M&E, procurement and tendering, project staffing and recruitment. Needs to strengthen the projectized approach.
E4. Financial management and co-financing	Moderately Satisfactory	The project did not provide an actual expenditure report at output level. Co-financing exceeded the anticipated targets set at design.
E5. Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement	Moderately Satisfactory	Exclusively with the state sector, with some engagement of non-state actors in the capacity of project subcontractors.
E6. Communication, knowledge management and knowledge products	Moderately Satisfactory	Successful delivery of printed and online materials. However, the project design did not consider the development of the communication plan and no funds were allocated for this purpose.
E7. Overall quality of M&E	Moderately Satisfactory	No M&E plan and logical framework were developed at design stage; some versions of the results matrix lacked the output-level indicators and all of them never incorporated activity-level results tracking framework. Also, the results framework incorporated the consolidated a SMART approach with respect to the project indicators. Some delays with reporting.
E7.1 M&E design	Unsatisfactory	No M&E plan developed.
E7.2 M&E plan implementation (including financial and human resources)	Highly Unsatisfactory	No M&E plan developed.
E8. Overall assessment of factors affecting performance	Moderately Satisfactory	Mixed results.
F. CROSS-CUTTING CONCERNS		
F1. Gender and other equity dimensions	Moderately Unsatisfactory	No specific gender focus and gender-disaggregated data were reported. The project document did not incorporate the gender equity dimension.
F2. Human rights issues/Indigenous Peoples	Satisfactory	Indirectly contributed to the human rights agenda.
F3. Environmental and social safeguards	Highly Satisfactory	The project was fully aligned with environmental and social safeguards.
Overall project rating	**Satisfactory**	

Notes: * Includes cost efficiency and timeliness.

** This refers to factors affecting the project's ability to start as expected, such as the presence of sufficient capacity among executing partners at project launch.

1. Introduction

1. This report presents the findings and conclusions of an independent evaluation of the project entitled "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems" (hereinafter, "the project"). This project evaluation, which started in May 2022, has been commissioned by the Office of Evaluation of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (OED) and was scheduled for completion by September 2022. This is one of the project evaluations managed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia. The project was subject to several extensions and its actual completion date was December 2022.

1.1 Evaluation scope and objectives

2. FAO commenced the project evaluation to assess the extent to which the project has achieved its intended results and to identify design and implementation issues. In addition, the evaluation also aimed to assess the relevance of the project, its results with respect to achieving its outputs and outcomes for beneficiaries, the effectiveness and efficiency of the project, the strategy for stakeholder engagement and partnerships, the likelihood of its sustainability and potential for long-term impacts, and the factors that have affected its performance and delivery to date, as well as examining cross-cutting dimensions such as gender and equity concerns. Finally, the lessons learned and replication possibilities are identified, some of which may be applicable to other countries.

3. The evaluation addressed a number of key evaluation questions (see Appendix 2) under the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, factors affecting performance and cross-cutting issues (including gender and equity considerations and environmental and social safeguards).

1.2 Evaluation methodology

4. The evaluation applied a participatory approach by including all relevant primary stakeholders to achieve a high level of ownership with respect to the evaluation results. It also used mixed methods, applying various data collection techniques, such as key informant interviews (including semi-structured online and in-person interviews), focus group meetings, online questionnaires, site visits and direct observations, and structured document analysis.

5. Furthermore, the Evaluation Team arranged in-person and in-depth interviews with the key stakeholders in Türkiye, including the FAO personnel (Türkiye) engaged in project implementation, supporting staff and those carrying out project oversight. The evaluation also consulted with the governmental institutions involved in the project implementation, national implementing partners (including technical advisers and service providers), local and regional units of the governmental institutions, the representatives of Urfa municipality, extension field staff of the local agriculture and forestry branches, as well as local staff members of the General Directorate of Plant Production (GDPP) from other provinces of Türkiye (see Appendix 1).

6. The Evaluation Team also visited all three pilot sites (which constituted 100 percent of the project sites), namely the Tek Tek Mountains National Park (NP), Kizilkuyu Wildlife

Development Area (WDA), and the Karacadağ Steppes Key Biodiversity Area. It also conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) with village heads, stock owners, shepherds, protected area (PA) rangers and guides, seasonal workers and women.

7. Direct site observations, focus group discussions and in-person interviews allowed for triangulation (cross-validation) of primary and secondary data, securing a higher level of engagement of the interviewees and conducting an in-depth assessment of the project results in the pilot areas. In total, the Evaluation Team consulted (through face-to-face and online interviews and written feedback obtained from online questionnaire forms) over 50 national and international stakeholders engaged in project implementation and conducted four focus group discussions with about 40 members of local communities.

8. Furthermore, the evaluation assessed the degree of integration of gender-related considerations in project implementation by responding to relevant evaluation questions outlined in the terms of reference (TORs) of the evaluation, as well as assessing project performance through the prism of the FAO Policy on Gender Equality and the guide to mainstreaming gender in FAO's project cycle. In addition, the Evaluation Team reconstructed the simplified version of the project's logical framework (see Appendix 3) to obtain a strategic overview and better visualization of the logical linkages between the various parts of the project, including activities leading to the production of outputs, defined outcomes, and the anticipated long-term results.

9. Moreover, the Evaluation Team reconstructed the theory of change (TOC) for the project to outline the main pathways from outputs to project outcomes and the expected results of the project (see Appendix 4). The TOC also links the project outputs and outcomes to the long-term development agenda of the country and the commitments towards Aichi Biodiversity Targets (such as Targets 1, 2, 4, 7, 12, 14 and 19). For ease of reference, Targets 1, 2 and 4 are grouped under the Strategic Goal A ("Address the underlying causes of biodiversity loss by mainstreaming biodiversity across government and society"). Meanwhile, Target 7 falls under Strategic Goal B ("Reduce the direct pressures on biodiversity and promote sustainable use"). Target 12 comes under Strategic Goal C ("To improve the status of biodiversity by safeguarding ecosystems, species, and genetic diversity"), Target 14 is under Strategic Goal D ("Enhance the benefits to all from biodiversity and ecosystem services"), and Target 19 is categorized under Strategic Goal E ("Enhance implementation through participatory planning, knowledge management and capacity building"). Overall, the scope of the project control covered nine outputs and three outcomes. The different colours of the boxes distinguish the supporting activities within one or more outputs to have leveraged one or more of the levels of change and led to changes at the outcome level. Altogether, the achievement of these outputs contributed to the accomplishment of the relevant outcomes. The achievement of the final objective of the project would contribute to expected high-level results related to the relevant Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Notably, the political will, ownership and commitment of the Government of Türkiye remain key driving factors affecting the continuity of the project results and the project's achievements of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets in the long run.

1.3 Intended users

10. The primary users of the evaluation are the donor organizations (the Global Environment Facility [GEF] and the co-financing partners), FAO Management and Country Offices, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, the GEF coordination unit, the project's

operational partners, national and international counterparts, and future formulators and implementers of technical assistance projects. The findings, conclusions and recommendations produced in the course of this evaluation will be used to secure accountability with regard to the information needs and interests of policymakers and other decision-makers. Meanwhile, the evaluation results and lessons learned will be shared with managers or others responsible for programme operations and are expected to be incorporated into future planning to improve the design, implementation and scale up of similar technical assistance interventions.

1.4 Composition of the Evaluation Team

11. The Evaluation Team comprised the Evaluation Manager, Mr Luca Molinas, and two independent consultants: Ms Nelly Dolidze (Evaluation Team Leader), who was responsible for developing the evaluation inception report, methodology, evaluation framework and data gathering tools, as well as leading the data gathering (including in-person interviews, focus group discussions and desk research), and preparing the evaluation report; and Mr Nafiz Guder (National Evaluation Consultant), who contributed to all parts of the evaluation and provided meaningful support during the gathering of fieldwork data.

1.5 Evaluation limitations

12. Several inherent limitations of this evaluation are presented as follows:

    i. The evaluation did not receive any written notifications about the sixth no-cost extension of the project until the end of December 2022. The evaluation was notified about the fifth and sixth no-cost extensions via e-mail and verbally during the interview with key stakeholders. In this regard, the team triangulates the data related to no-cost extensions through in-person interviews and emails received from relevant FAO personnel.

    ii. The Evaluation Team did not receive either the project exit strategy or the project sustainability plan, except for the relevant section incorporated in the terminal report of the project.

    iii. The Evaluation Team did not interview some critical internal and external stakeholders, as they were not responsive to interview invitations and requests to complete an online evaluation form. Also, the evaluation did not cover schoolteachers and students in the three pilot sites due to time restrictions.

    iv. The Evaluation Team did not receive financial documents regarding the actual expenditures of the project at output level. Therefore, the evaluation could not address the efficiency criteria related to the utilization of funds (i.e. actual expenditure per output vs. planned budget per output and the budget utilization rate). Instead, FAO provided the team with a short summary of actual expenditures at outcome level. Therefore, the Evaluation Team analysed the budget utilization rate at project outcome level.

2. Project background

13. The project was designed upon the request of the Government of Türkiye and within the framework of its agreement with the GEF and FAO. Pursuant to the agreement signed among the parties, FAO was responsible for the provision of the project activities with secured due diligence and efficiency. The project was planned to be launched in May 2016 and completed by May 2020. However, FAO operationally implemented the project in Türkiye from January 2017 to the end of December 2022, as the project was subject to four no-cost extensions. Pursuant to the mid-term review (MTR)[6] and due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Project Steering Committee (PSC) approved a one and a half-year project extension by the end of June 2022. In May 2022, the PSC approved an additional three-month extension by the end of September 2022. The third no-cost extension was granted in September 2022 to ensure the completion of the project activities by the end of November 2022. The fourth and final extension by the end of December 2022 was confirmed in November 2022.

14. The project was jointly carried out by the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks (GDNCNP) under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, as a leading partner, the General Directorate of Plant Production of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and the General Directorate of Forestry (GDF). The latter joined the project as a partner in 2019. The GDNCNP was responsible for delivering Component 1, the General Directorate of Plant Production was responsible for Component 2, and both agencies were responsible for Component 3, with inputs from the GDF, and as appropriate.

15. The total budget of the project was USD 11 838 767, including co-financing from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and FAO. Meanwhile, the GEF provided a financial contribution of USD 2 328 767. The detailed project financial plan is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Project financial plan

Funding/co-financing source	Amount (USD)
GEF funds	2 328 767
Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs (in kind)*	2 700 000
Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs (grant)	3 310 000
Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock (in kind)**	1 200 000
Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock (grant)	1 800 000
FAO (in kind)	150 000
FAO (grant)	350 000
Subtotal co-financing	9 510 000
Total budget	**11 838 767**

Notes: * Part of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (since 2018).

** Part of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (since 2018).

Source: FAO. 2017. *Project Document: Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems*. Ankara.

[6] The mid-term review was completed in May 2020.

16. The project's main objective was to improve the conservation of Türkiye's steppe ecosystems through effective protected area management and to mainstream steppe biodiversity conservation into production landscapes. In order to address these goals, the project incorporated three main components:

    i. Component 1. Effectiveness of the protected area system to conserve steppe biodiversity increased;

    ii. Component 2. Steppe biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into production landscapes; and

    iii. Component 3. Enabling environment established for the effective conservation of steppe biodiversity across large landscapes.

Box 1. Project background

Implementation dates at design: May 2016–May 2020
Actual implementation dates: January 2017–December 2022
Total budget: USD 11 838 767
GEF funding: USD 2 328 767
Government of Türkiye funding (grant and in-kind): USD 9 010 000
FAO funding (grant and in-kind): USD 500 000
Goal: Improve the conservation of Türkiye's steppe ecosystems through effective protected area management and mainstream steppe biodiversity conservation into production landscapes.
Components at completion:
Component 1. The effectiveness of the protected area system to conserve steppe biodiversity increased.
Component 2. Steppe biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into production landscapes.
Component 3. Enabling environment established for the effective conservation of steppe biodiversity across large landscapes.

Source: Elaborated by the Evaluation Team.

17. Component 1, Effectiveness of the protected area system to conserve steppe biodiversity increased, was designed to address Barrier 1, "Limited experience with highly effective steppe protected area design and management" and facilitate the supply of tools and experience required for protected area design and management to become much more effective in conserving steppe ecosystems and associated globally significant biodiversity. It also included setting in place a rigorous framework for steppe protected area management planning and monitoring.

18. Component 2, Steppe biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into production landscapes, addressed Barrier 2, "Limited experience with integrating steppe conservation with grazing and agricultural management practices". In this regard, the project supported the provision of tools to integrate steppe conservation within grazing and management practices. Within the framework of this component, the project also intended to help protected area managers, government extension agencies, and agriculturalists to mainstream steppe conservation within their production activities. Overall, a major part of this effort entailed introducing a stock management system that maintains ecosystem services, reduces business risk and increases profitability.

19. Component 3, Enabling environment established for the effective conservation of steppe biodiversity across large landscapes, focused on Barrier 3, "Limited capacity to generate institutional and policy-level support required to achieve landscape level grasslands conservation" by generating the institutional and policy-level support required to achieve steppe conservation at the landscape level and creating a model for provincial-level steppe conservation planning (through strategic planning and capacity development). A centrepiece of this component was the generation and implementation of a provincial-level steppe conservation strategy.

20. The project's logical framework (see Appendix 3), which was reconstructed by the Evaluation Team, outlines the logical linkages between the various parts of the project, including activities leading to the production of outputs, defined outcomes and the anticipated long-term results. In total, the project design incorporated three outcomes and nine outputs serving the purpose of achieving the overall goal of the project.

21. The project was implemented in close cooperation with state sector agencies and representatives of local academic/research centres and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Thus, the project signed an agreement with a number of local partners to implement the project's activities.

3. Findings

3.1 Relevance

22. The Evaluation Team addressed the key evaluation questions (EQs) under the relevance criterion by analysing the extent to which each project outcome and output was aligned with national strategic needs and the relevant technical priorities stipulated by the donor agencies (FAO and GEF).

EQ 1. To what extent are the project's intended outcomes and its outputs responding to the national/regional biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of the protected area's needs and priorities, set by the Government of Türkiye?

Finding 1. The project demonstrated relevance with the country contexts and was fully aligned with the strategic priorities of the Government of Türkiye (in both the design and implementation phases of the project) related to biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of protected areas.

23. Overall, the project was designed to achieve its goal ("To improve the conservation of Türkiye's steppe ecosystems through effective protected area management and mainstream steppe biodiversity conservation into production landscapes") by attaining three main outcomes and outputs (see Table 2).

Table 2. Project outputs and outcomes

Outcomes	Outputs
Outcome 1. Effectiveness of protected area system to conserve steppe biodiversity increased.	**Output 1.1.** New steppe protected area established and operational.
	Output 1.2. Effective management plans for three steppe protected areas created and implemented.
	Output 1.3. Rigorous Monitoring Programme for three steppe protected areas established.
Outcome 2. Steppe biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into production landscapes.	**Output 2.1.** Sustainable Grazing Management Programme operational across three steppe protected areas and associated buffer zones.
	Output 2.2. Sustainable Grazing Management Programme impacts monitored at three steppe protected areas.
	Output 2.3. Model Steppe Conservation Training Programme for pastoralists emplaced.
Outcome 3. Enabling environment established for the effective conservation of steppe biodiversity across large landscapes.	**Output 3.1.** Şanlıurfa Province Steppe Conservation Strategy and associated enabling environment improvements implemented.
	Output 3.2. National Steppe Conservation Strategy and associated enabling environment improvements established.
	Output 3.3. National Steppe Conservation Training and Awareness Programme for decision-makers and resource managers.

Source: FAO. 2017. *Project Document: Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems.* Ankara.

24. In-person interviews confirmed that the above outcomes fully aligned with a number of national strategic documents and action plans, for example, with the National Strategy and Action Plan to Combat Desertification (2015–2023) (Republic of Türkiye and the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs, n.d.) and its Operational Objective 7 ("Sustainable Land Management") which stated: *"Sustainable land management. Identify integrated*

preservation measures and rehabilitation practices focused on climate change to preserve biological diversity and ecosystem services towards affected and likely to be affected zones and ecosystems; implement them through sustainable management mechanisms." Moreover, Output 7.4 of this Operational Objective centred on *"Amelioration practices in forest, steppe, pasture, wetland, coastal zone and other natural habitats in line with natural ecosystem structure."*

25. Furthermore, the project design and implementation also addressed the following eight goals of the National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) for 2007–2017:

i. **Goal 1.** To identify, protect and monitor biological diversity components which have importance for Türkiye.

ii. **Goal 2.** To use biological diversity components in a sustainable manner by applying the methods, and at a level fitting to their renewal capacity by taking the future generations' needs into account.

iii. **Goal 3.** To identify, protect and benefit from the components of genetic diversity, including the traditional knowledge, which have importance for Türkiye.

iv. **Goal 4.** To identify, protect and monitor the components of biological diversity which have importance for agricultural biological diversity; to protect genetic resources which have actual and potential values for food and agriculture, as well as to ensure the sustainable use of such resources; and to ensure the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources.

v. **Goal 5.** To protect steppe biological diversity, to ensure the sustainable use of its components, as well as to ensure the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits from the utilization of genetic resources; and to combat against the loss of steppe biological diversity and the socioeconomic results of that.

vi. **Goal 6.** To establish an effective monitoring, management and coordination system for the conservation of forest biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components.

vii. **Goal 7.** To establish an effective monitoring, management and coordination system for the conservation and sustainable use of mountain biological diversity, together with its different ecosystems, pursuing a holistic approach.

viii. **Goal 8.** To establish a mechanism for the implementation of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan and the follow-up of implementation and reporting.

26. In addition, the outcomes were in line with the National Biodiversity Action Plan for 2018–2028, which addressed new national objectives. The above objective promoted socioeconomic development through the application of a multidimensional and participatory approach. The Action Plan contained seven new national objectives on the following topics:

i. biodiversity pressures and threats;

ii. biodiversity components and conservation approaches;

iii. biodiversity conservation in agricultural, forestry and fishing areas;

iv. awareness of ecosystem services by the public and administrators, and sustainable management;

v. ecosystem rehabilitation and restoration, and the filling of related legislative gaps;

vi. development of high value-added products aligned with the principles of conservation and sustainable use; and

vii. the preparation of national access and benefit-sharing (ABS) legislation, and establishment of required technical infrastructure.

27. In addition, with regard to forestry and natural resources, the 2013–2017 Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs[7] incorporated strategic objectives, which focused on: increasing institutional capacity and service quality, policy development and implementation in forestry, water, biodiversity and meteorology, mitigation of desertification and erosion, as well as conservation, improvement, and sustainable management of water resources and biodiversity.

28. Finally, the project outcomes and outputs were fully synchronized with the objectives of the Ecosystem-Based Adaptation Strategy in Anatolian Steppe Ecosystems (2018) and Türkiye's National Protected Areas and Climate Change Strategy (2011).

EQ 2. To what extent did the project results contribute towards the achievement of FAO's commitments to the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets, and relevant international treaties and conventions on biodiversity conservation and large landscape management?

Finding 2. The project results contributed to a certain extent to the selected food and agriculture-related SDG targets (as defined by FAO), which are not directly related to hunger and food insecurity, and any relevant international treaties and conventions on biodiversity conservation, climate change and large landscape management.

29. The evaluation recognized that, based on the project documents and in-person interviews, the project was aligned with one of the five Strategic Objectives (SOs) of the FAO Strategic Framework for the period 2010–2019 (see Table 3), defined to contribute to the Organization's Global Goals.

Table 3. Strategic Objectives of the FAO Strategic Framework (2010–2019)

Strategic Objectives of FAO's Strategic Framework	Coherence with the project objectives
SO 1. Contribute to the eradication of hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition.	-
SO 2. Increase and improve provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner.	Aligned
SO 3. Reduce rural poverty.	-
SO 4. Enable more inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems at local, national and international levels.	-
SO 5. Increase the resilience of livelihoods to threats and crises.	-

Source: FAO. 2017. *Project Document: Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems*. Ankara.

30. Furthermore, desk research revealed that FAO outlined eight food and agriculture-related SDGs and associated targets (see Appendix 5).

31. In addition, the project objectives, outcomes and its activities were directly aligned with four SDGs, namely SDG 2, "Zero Hunger: End hunger, achieve food security and improved

[7] Under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry since 2018.

nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture"; SDG 12, "Responsible Consumption and Production: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns"; SDG 15, "Life on Land: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss"; and SDG 17, "Partnerships for the Goals: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development". The relevant targets of each SDG are presented in Appendix 6. For ease of reference, 5 targets (Targets 2.5, 14.4, 14.6, 15.1 and 15.2) out of the 21 food and agriculture-related targets under SDG 15 were missed.[8] Notably, some targets are not food and agriculture-related (as defined by FAO), yet the project still contributed to them: Targets 12.2, 12.8, 17.15, 17.16 and 17.18.

32. Desk research also validated the relevance of the project activities with the international treaties and conventions signed by Türkiye:

i. Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (signed in 1984);

ii. Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (signed in 1994);

iii. Convention on Biological Diversity (signed in 1997);

iv. UN Convention to Combat Desertification (signed in 1998);

v. UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (signed in 2004); and

vi. International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (signed in 2006).

EQ 3. How is the project supporting partners in the achievement of their institutional targets related to the project outcomes?

Finding 3. Institutional targets of the project's partnering state institutions were determined by the Turkish Constitution and legislation,[9] and the provisions of international conventions and protocols. The project supported the partnering state institutions by delivering on the output targets and capacity building activities relevant to the institutional targets of the participating parties.

33. The Evaluation Team acknowledged that the legal status of biodiversity is determined by the Turkish Constitution and legislation,[10] and that the provisions of international conventions and protocols oblige national state agencies to take action to conserve biodiversity. The project activities were conducted in close cooperation with three main national counterparts: the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks[11] of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry; the General Directorate of Plant Production of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry; and the General Directorate of Forestry.

[8] They were supposed to be achieved by 2020.

[9] For example: law on organic farming (Law No. 5 262, dated December 2004); Soil Conservation and Land Use Law (Law No. 5 403, issued in July 2005); Biosafety Law (Law No. 5 977, dated March 2010); and law amending the Conservation and Land Use Law (Law No. 6 537, dated May 2014).

[10] Refer to footnote 11.

[11] At the project design phase, the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks was under the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs.

34. Desk research identified that each partnering institution had been mandated to address biodiversity challenges from different perspectives. For example, among other things, the Department of Biodiversity of the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks assumes responsibility *"To carry out the works and procedures related to the inventory, monitoring, protection and sustainable use of biological resources at national level, to cooperate and coordinate with relevant institutions and organizations"* (Republic of Türkiye and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2023). Moreover, the Department of National Parks of the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks is focused on ensuring "*to carry out or have the revision works required in the existing plans…*" (i.e. the development plan and management plans of national parks, natural parks, natural monuments and nature protection areas) and implementing renovation works *"of open areas within national parks, natural parks, natural monuments, landscape projects, infrastructure and superstructure projects…"* (Republic of Türkiye and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2023).

35. The mission of the General Directorate of Plant Production *"to carry out sustainable holistic activities in a way that will develop them in line with the developments experienced in the international arena by determining the strategies, priorities and measures for the crop production sequence"* served the purpose of:

    i. ensuring adequate and healthy nutrition for the population;

    ii. providing economically, ecologically and socially sustainable production; and

    iii. being among the top seven agricultural countries in the world.

36. Finally, the General Directorate of Forestry is mandated to protect forest resources against any threats and dangers, to enhance forest resources in a nature-friendly manner, and to achieve sustainable forest management at a level that will provide far-reaching sustainable benefits for society in ecosystem integrity.

37. It is also noteworthy that the 2013–2017 Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs actively supported the steppe ecosystem and incorporated strategic objectives focused on: i) increasing institutional capacity and service quality; ii) policy development and implementation in forestry, water, biodiversity and meteorology; iii) mitigation of desertification and erosion; and iv) conservation, improvement and sustainable management of water resources and biodiversity. Pertinently, since 2018, the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs was integrated into the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and both the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks and the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs (at the time of project design) are engaged in a number of relevant activities related to the management and operations of protected areas. For example, these included the completion of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2008–2017) and preservation of the Nuh'un Gemisi (Noah's Ark) National Biological Diversity Database.

38. In-person interviews and desk research confirmed that the project was coherent with the institutional targets of the aforementioned partners and aimed to contribute to building their institutional capacity through diversified interventions, including the development of guidelines, proposals, handbooks, etc. Table 4 presents some tangible outputs that were found to be relevant to the institutional mandates of the national partners.

Table 4. Project outputs relevant to institutional targets of the participating parties

Components	Project outputs
Component 1. Effectiveness of protected area system to conserve steppe biodiversity increased.	- Baseline surveys and assessment on biodiversity, social and economic assets - Guideline on Establishment of Protected Areas - Guidelines for Protected Area Management Planning - Guideline for Engaging Stakeholders in the Managing of Protected Areas - Guideline for Assessing the Effectiveness and Efficiency of Protected Areas - Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECM) dossier for Karacadağ/site-level tool for identifying other effective area-based conservation measures (OECM) - Management Plans for each of the three project sites (Tek Tek Mountains National Park, Kizilkuyu Wildlife Development Area, and Karacadağ Steppes) - Development of Species Action Plans - Instalment of the park infrastructures (information and direction boards and panels) - Guidelines for Monitoring/Monitoring Handbook - Monitoring group - Monitoring Programme for each project site - Equipment for implementation of Monitoring Programme
Component 2. Steppe biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into production landscapes.	- Guideline on Grazing Planning and Management - Baseline surveys on ongoing grazing activities - Grazing management plans for all three project sites - Livestock Monitoring Programme developed and incorporated into the Grazing Monitoring System - Livestock monitoring protocols - Grazing Management Demonstration Programme - Training Strategy and Training Programme on Steppe Management and Monitoring - Training manual and source materials for trainings
Component 3. Enabling environment established for the effective conservation of steppe biodiversity across large landscapes.	- National- and provincial-level (Şanlıurfa Province) steppe conservation strategy developed - Establishment of steppe conservation working groups at national and provincial (Şanlıurfa Province) levels - Preparing and distributing the model steppe conservation recommendations and instructions in order to increase the awareness of 81 pasture commissions in Türkiye

Note: The table demonstrates some outputs, but not the complete set.

Source: FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

39. In addition, the project carried out different capacity building activities, such as the development of the Training Strategy and Training Programme on Steppe Management and its integration into government operations, as well as the organization of steppe conservation workshops, including the one developed under Outcomes 2.3 and 3.3:

i. creating a project Training Strategy and Training Programme on Steppe Management and Monitoring (Outcome 2.3);

ii. developing a training manual and resource materials for trainings (Outcome 2.3);

iii. implementing the training programme in line with the demonstrations (Outcome 2.3);

iv. integrating the training programme into government operations (Outcome 2.3);

v. designing and implementing the Steppe Conservation and Management Training Programme for agricultural extension officers and national parks extension officers (Outcome 3.3);

vi. organizing annual steppe conservation seminars/workshops (Outcome 3.3);

vii. preparing and distributing the model steppe conservation recommendations and instructions in order to increase the awareness of 81 pasture commissions in Türkiye (Outcome 3.3);

viii. generating and publishing training materials (Outcome 3.3).

EQ 4. How does the project support the GEF biodiversity focal area and strategic priorities?

Finding 4. The project outcomes were relevant to two out of five Biodiversity Objectives of the GEF-5 Focal Area Strategies, BD-1: Improve the sustainability of protected area systems; and BD-2: Mainstream biodiversity conservation and sustainable use into production landscapes/seascapes and sectors.

40. In-person interviews and a comparative analysis of the project outcomes revealed the outcomes' links to the relevant GEF strategic objectives and programmes reflected in different GEF documents. For example, all three outcomes of the project were aligned with two Biodiversity (BD) Objectives (out of five listed) of the GEF-5 Focal Area Strategies (see Table 5) (GEF, 2011).

Table 5. Alignment with GEF Strategic Objectives

BD Objectives	Project coherence with BD Objectives	Project outcomes
BD-1. Improve the sustainability of protected area systems.	**BD-1.** Improve the sustainability of protected area systems.	**Outcome 1.** Effectiveness of protected area systems to conserve steppe biodiversity increased.
BD-2. Mainstream biodiversity conservation and sustainable use into production landscapes/seascapes and sectors.	**BD-2.** Mainstream biodiversity conservation and sustainable use into production landscapes/seascapes and sectors.	**Outcome 2.** Steppe biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into production landscapes.
BD-3. Build capacity to implement the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.	-	-
BD-4. Build capacity on access to genetic resources and benefit-sharing.	-	-
BD-5. Integrate Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) obligations into national planning processes through enabling activities.	-	**Outcome 3.** Enabling environment established for the effective conservation of steppe biodiversity across large landscapes.

Sources: FAO. 2017. *Project Document: Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems*. Ankara; and FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

EQ 5. To what extent did the project implementation address the needs of all relevant stakeholders?

Finding 5. The project conducted stakeholder mapping at the design stage to identify all the relevant state sector organizations and non-state actors. The relevance of the project to a broader cluster of stakeholders (identified at the design phase of the project) was outlined in the project document.

Finding 6. Some state agencies of the Government of Türkiye identified as key implementing partners of the project did not take part due to structural changes in 2018. Others were less active; as perceived, the project scope was not directly applicable to their mandates.

41. The project document outlined the key relevant stakeholders from different sectors (national, regional and provincial government agencies, academia, non-governmental organizations and local communities), and defined the relevance of the project to the mandates and priorities of these stakeholders. The Evaluation Team conducted both desk research and in-person interviews to validate the level of engagement of the Government of Türkiye (see Table 6) and non-state actors. Overall, the main takeaway from both the desk research and in-person interviews was that the level of engagement of different state agencies was primarily guided by their mandates and the extent to which the project was relevant to the mandate of each participating national/regional/provincial state agency. The Evaluation Team noted significant adjustments to the list of stakeholders developed at design. For example, due to structural changes within the Government of Türkiye, the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs was replaced by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.[12] Moreover, the project was also implemented jointly with the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks and the General Directorate of Plant Production under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Obviously, the list of key stakeholders representing the Government of Türkiye became very different from the one defined in the design stage. Furthermore, the level of engagement of state agencies at the national, regional and provincial levels varied from participation in workshops and capacity building activities to providing political support (again at national/regional/provincial levels).

42. Furthermore, the project document included several international development organizations and donors in the list of project stakeholders. While the project activities were coherent with the initiatives of some donors, the evaluation found no probative evidence of this cluster of stakeholders being engaged in project activities.

[12] Since 2018, the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs has been under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry.

Table 6. Key stakeholders identified at design

Stakeholders	Their role per project design document	Validated relevance
National state agencies		
Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs	As the executive organization of the project, the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs is responsible for the conservation of nature. The organization declares and manages natural parks, nature parks, nature conservation areas and wildlife development areas.	Not participated due to structural changes in 2018.
Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock	The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock is the organization responsible for the management, improvement and conservation of soil and agricultural lands in Türkiye.	Not participated due to structural changes in 2018.
Ministry of Development	The ministry will support the project in terms of impact and progress monitoring and information dissemination.	Not participated.
Ministry of Culture and Tourism	The ministry has a Province Directorate in Şanlıurfa. The ministry will be the main focal point regarding any ecotourism activity within or after the project period.	Not participated.
Regional government agencies		
Regional Directorate of Forestry and Water Affairs (RDoM) (Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs) – Malatya	RDoM is the regional body of the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs based in Malatya.	Not participated due to structural changes in 2018.
GAP* Regional Development Administration	Two organizations and their local offices are key for achieving the gender targets of the project.	Not participated.
Karacadağ Development Agency	The agency works for rural development for Diyarbakır and Şanlıurfa Provinces.	Participated.
Regional Directorate of Forestry	Şanlıurfa Regional Directorate of Forestry is the main official organization to plan and manage the forests of the region and undertake the relations with forest villages in the region.	Participated.
Regional Directorate of State Hydraulic Works	The organization is the main body of water-related affairs in the region.	Not participated.
Provincial government agencies		
Şanlıurfa Governor's Office	The Governor of Şanlıurfa will be a natural member of the project implementation team. The Pastureland Commission operates under the Governor's office too.	Participated.
Şanlıurfa Division Directorate of the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs	The Şanlıurfa Division has long-lasting experience in the conservation of gazelles and their habitats.	Not participated due to structural changes in 2018.
Province Directorate of the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock (PDAs) (Diyarbakır and Şanlıurfa Provinces)	As the local units of the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock, the Şanlıurfa and Diyarbakır PDAs will be members of the project implementation unit in the region. They are responsible for the dissemination of information on improving the conservation of natural resources as well as sustainability, agricultural practices and farmers' training activities.	Not participated due to structural changes in 2018.

Note: * GAP stands for Southeastern Anatolia Project.

Source: FAO. 2017. *Project Document: Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems.* Ankara.

43. The project document also encompassed other clusters of stakeholders representing non-governmental organizations, the private sector and academia. Again, their engagement varied, as the project subcontracted some private and non-governmental organizations to carry out project-related activities. As for local community members, some benefited either directly from the income-generating activities under Output 2.2.4,

"Developing alternative income-generating activity opportunities for three project sites" and Output 3.1.3, "Identifying alternative income-generating activities in the Steppe Conservation Strategy", or indirectly, as the project contributed to SDG 12 ("Responsible Production and Consumption"), SDG 13 ("Climate Action") and SDG 15 ("Life on Land").

EQ 6. Were local beneficiaries and stakeholders adequately involved in project design and implementation?

Finding 7. Some technical team members of the state agencies, the project implementing partners, claimed that the technical team of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry engaged in the design stage of the project differed from the ministry team engaged in project implementation which, according to the key stakeholders, caused the unrealistic and overambitious timeline of the project.

Finding 8. Non-state actors took part in the project in different capacities as direct beneficiaries and implementing partners. Local community members did not participate in the design stage, rather they directly benefited from several activities of the project. However, in-person interviews and desk research validated that the project design was based on the available facts and data collected by local public institutions and academia.

44. Moreover, their support at national and regional/provincial levels was described as crucial to the delivery of the project outputs. At the same time, several technical staff members of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry claimed that *"none of us, from the technical team, was consulted during the project preparation phase"* and that the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry team involved in the preparation process diferred from the implementation team. This information was validated by key FAO personnel, who confirmed that *"different staff can be employed in the ministries during the preparation and implementation phases. Therefore, the ministry team engaged in the preparation phase differs from the team engaged in the implementation phase of this project."*

45. Several technical staff members of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry also claimed that some project components (such as buffer zones, ecological corridors, designation of new protected area in Karacadağ, etc.) were ambitious and unrealistic due to the complexity of the project (e.g. many interrelated activities, challenging the local social, cultural and economic environment). According to the key FAO personnel, the aforementioned issues were *"identified as needs during the preparation phase, they were not seen as a priority due to the frequent change of decision-makers during the implementation process."*

46. The stakeholders representing the private sector, academia and NGOs participated in project activities in their capacities as project subcontractors or direct and indirect beneficiaries of the capacity building and awareness raising activities.

47. The Evaluation Team found no evidence of local community representatives participating in the design phase of the project. Moreover, according to the feedback from key stakeholders, at the outset, the local communities (the beneficiaries of Output 2.2.4, "Developing alternative income-generating activity opportunities for three project sites") demonstrated a certain mistrust and in some cases even discontent regarding the project, as it was expected to lead to a change in their traditional lifestyle (mainly because these communities were traditionally livestock owners and historically less engaged in any alternative income generation activities).

48. Furthermore, the Evaluation Team reported on the challenging local context, which caused some tensions between the direct beneficiaries of the income-generating activities (e.g. building animal shelters) and the community members not directly targeted by the project. Figure 1 presents the animal shelters built with the project support for the beneficiary communities located near Tek Tek Mountains National Park.

Figure 1. Project investment in animal sheltering near Tek Tek Mountains National Park

Source: FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

49. At the same time, the evaluation noted a proactive role being taken by the project team (the FAO National Project Coordinator [NPC] and representatives of the Government of Türkiye) in resolving tensions at the local level and raising the awareness of local communities. Moreover, Şanlıurfa Metropolitan Municipality has a rural development department that directly serves the rural communities in the pilot sites. In addition, while the municipality's contribution to the project design/preparation was limited, the Evaluation Team evidenced its contribution to project implementation. Finally, almost all stakeholders agreed that the selected project region (Şanlıurfa) and three pilot sites were appropriate for the project objectives.

3.2 Effectiveness

EQ 7. Has the project been effective in achieving its expected results (outputs and outcomes) (institutional capacity, pastoralist capacity, monitoring, national policies, etc.)?

Finding 9. The evaluation validated a full achievement of 73 percent (8 out of 11) and a partial achievement of 27 percent (3 out of 11) of outcome indicators (see Table 7). It also validated a full achievement of 87 percent of output indicators (all the indicators of Output 1.1; all seven indicators of Output 1.2; all four indicators of Output 1.3; six out of nine indicators of Output 2.1; five out of eight indicators of Output 2.2; all the indicators of Output 2.3; three out of four indicators of Output 3.1; all three indicators of Output 3.2; and all four indicators of Output 3.3).

Table 7. Achievement of outcome and output indicators

Achievement level	Outcome indicators achievement rate (%)	Output indicators achievement rate (%)
Full achievement	73	87
Partial achievement	27	13
Output indicators	**Output indicators achievement rate (%)**	
Output 1.1	100	
Output 1.2	100	
Output 1.3	100	
Output 2.1	67	
Output 2.2	63	
Output 2.3	100	
Output 3.1	75	
Output 3.2	100	
Output 3.3	100	

Source: FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

50. To answer this question, the Evaluation Team assessed (to the extent feasible) the reported results against the outputs and outcomes.

3.2.1 Progress made with regard to the project outcomes

51. According to the terminal report of the project, by December 2022, of 11 outcome indicators, the project had fully achieved 8 and partially achieved 3 outcomes (see Table 8).

Table 8. Progress made with regard to outcomes

Outcomes	Outcome indicators	Baseline	Target indicator	Progress by June 2022
Outcome 1. Effectiveness of the protected area system to conserve steppe biodiversity increased.	Management effectiveness of protected areas increased according to the total score of the GEF 5-BD monitoring effectiveness tracking tool (METT) Objective 1.	METT score Tek Tek: 20 Kızılkuyu: 32 Karacadağ: 11	METT score Tek Tek: 40 Kızılkuyu: 64 Karacadağ: 22	METT score Tek Tek: 50 Kızılkuyu: 71 Karacadağ: 26
	Established a Monitoring Programme for three pilot sites.	Tek Tek: 0 Kızılkuyu: 0 Karacadağ: 0	Tek Tek: 1 Kızılkuyu: 1 Karacadağ: 1	Tek Tek: 1 Kızılkuyu: 1 Karacadağ: 1
	Total hectares of steppe area contained within the core protected areas of Şanlıurfa Province.	Total hectares: 40 000	Total hectares: 50 000	Total hectares: 48 187
		Tek Tek: 20 000	Tek Tek: 20 000	Tek Tek: 20 000
		Kızılkuyu: 20 000	Kızılkuyu: 20 000	Kızılkuyu: 15 337
		Karacadağ: 0	Karacadağ: 10 000	Karacadağ: 12 850
	Total hectares of steppe area conserved within the protected area buffer zones of Şanlıurfa Province.	Total hectares: 0	Total hectares: 60 000	Total hectares: 66 560
		Tek Tek: 0	Tek Tek: 5 000	Tek Tek: 13 732
		Kızılkuyu: 0	Kızılkuyu: 5 000	Kızılkuyu: 5 664
		Karacadağ: 0	Karacadağ: 50 000	Karacadağ: 47 164.47 (24 366.74 buffer zone and 22 797.72 sustainable use zone)

Outcomes	Outcome indicators	Baseline	Target indicator	Progress by June 2022
Outcome 2. Steppe biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into production landscapes.	Total number of hectares managed according to improved sustainable Grazing Management Programme.	Total hectares with sustainable Grazing Management Programme: 0 ha	Total hectares under the sustainable Grazing Management Programme: 110 000 ha Tek Tek: 25 000 Kızılkuyu: 25 000 Karacadağ: 60 000	A total of 118 732 ha is planned
		Tek Tek: 0		Tek Tek Mountains National Park: 37 732 (20 000 ha core + 13 732 ha buffer)
		Kızılkuyu: 0		Kızılkuyu: 21 000 ha (15 337 ha core + 5 664 ha buffer)
		Karacadağ: 0		Karacadağ: 60 000 (12 835.53 ha core, 24 366.75 ha buffer + 22 797.72 ha sustainable use zones
	Number of pastoralists with enhanced steppe conservation knowledge participating in sustainable Grazing Management Programmes.	Total pastoralists with enhanced steppe conservation capacity: 0	Total pastoralists with enhanced steppe conservation capacity: 500 Tek Tek: 200 Kızılkuyu: 100 Karacadağ: 200	Total pastoralists with enhanced steppe conservation capacity: 650
		Tek Tek: 0		Tek Tek: 200
		Kızılkuyu: 0		Kızılkuyu: 100
		Karacadağ: 0		Karacadağ: 350
	Total number of free-ranging gazelles in Şanlıurfa Province.	Total free-roaming gazelle: 200 individuals	Total free-roaming gazelle: 300 individuals	A total of 560 individuals of *Gazella marica* were recorded by the end of May 2022 in Kızılkuyu Wildlife Development Area (381 of them are free-roaming gazelle and 180 of them are in the gazelle breeding station)
	Number of hectares within and proximate to protected areas that are less severely overgrazed.	Total: 87 000 ha Tek Tek: 17 000 ha Kızılkuyu: 15 000 ha Karacadağ: 60 000 ha	57 000 ha decrease in overgrazing	Total: 67 000 ha decrease in overgrazing
Outcome 3. Enabling environment	Total government annual investment in steppe area conservation.	Şanlıurfa Province: USD 100 000	Şanlıurfa Province: USD 250 000	Şanlıurfa Province: USD 250 000

Outcomes	Outcome indicators	Baseline	Target indicator	Progress by June 2022
established for the effective conservation of steppe biodiversity across large landscapes.		Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock: USD 1 million Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs: USD 250 000	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry – General Directorate of Plant Production (GDPP): USD 1.5 million Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry - GDNCNP: USD 500 000	GDNCNP+GDF: USD 12 006 581 GDPP: USD 2 331 344 Total co-financing: USD 14 587 925
	Total number of hectares of steppe ecosystems outside of protected areas conserved from future agricultural and urban expansion as indicated within the GAP strategy.	Total hectares planned for cultivation within south-east Anatolia: 3.3 million ha	Total hectares planned for cultivation within south-east Anatolia: 3.7 million ha	Total hectares to be protected from cultivation and agricultural expansion in south-east Anatolia (outside of PAs): 3.4 million
	Number of government policies fully integrating steppe conservation principles and practices.	GDNCNP National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan: 0	GDNCNP National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan: 1	GDNCNP National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan: 1
		National Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry Annual Strategic Performance Document: 0	National Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry Annual Strategic Performance Document: 1	National Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry Annual Strategic Performance Document: 1
		Şanlıurfa Governorship's five-year development plan: 0	Şanlıurfa Governorship's five-year development plan: 1	Şanlıurfa Governorship's five-year development plan: 1

Source: FAO. 2022. *FAO-GEF Project Implementation Report (Period covered: 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022)*. Ankara.

3.2.2 Component 1: Progress made with regard to the project outputs – Output 1.1

52. Overall, the Evaluation Team validated the achievement of all ten suboutputs of Output 1.1. Table 9 presents a snapshot of the reported achievements and the validation status of each of the outputs. Under Outputs 1.1.1 and 1.1.2, the evaluation validated the production of several survey posters and the completion of the following survey reports:

    i. surveys and assessments on biodiversity, socioeconomic and sociocultural aspects, ongoing grazing activities and livestock situation: No. 1 – Third Thematic Report (2018);

    i. surveys and assessments on biodiversity, socioeconomic and sociocultural aspects, ongoing grazing activities and livestock situation: No. 2 – Biodiversity (2018);

    ii. surveys and assessments on biodiversity, socioeconomic and sociocultural aspects, ongoing grazing activities and livestock situation: No. 3 – Socio-cultural and Socio-economic Aspects (2018);

    iii. surveys and assessments on biodiversity, socioeconomic and sociocultural aspects, ongoing grazing activities and livestock situation: No. 4 – Ongoing Grazing Activities (2018)

    iv. surveys and assessments on biodiversity, socioeconomic and sociocultural aspects, ongoing grazing activities and livestock situation: No. 5 – Livestock Situation (2018);

    v. surveys and assessments on biodiversity, socioeconomic and sociocultural aspects, ongoing grazing activities and livestock situation: No. 6 – Core Areas, Buffer Zones and Ecological Corridors (2018);

    vi. surveys and assessments on biodiversity, socioeconomic and sociocultural aspects, ongoing grazing activities and livestock situation: No. 1 – Kızılkuyu Wildlife Development Area (2018);

    vii. surveys and assessments on biodiversity, socioeconomic and sociocultural aspects, ongoing grazing activities and livestock situation: No. 2 – TekTek Mountains – Final Report Summary (2018);

    viii. surveys and assessments on biodiversity, socioeconomic and sociocultural aspects, ongoing grazing activities and livestock situation: No. 3 – Karacadağ Steppes – Final Report Summary (2018); and

    ix. surveys and assessments on biodiversity, socioeconomic and sociocultural aspects, ongoing grazing activities and livestock situation: "Ecological Corridors – Final Report Summary (2018)".

53. The project reported modifying Output 1.1.7 in pursuit of the recommendations of the mid-term review and the decision of the second meeting of the Project Steering Committee. Thus, the modified version[13] was stipulated as follows: "New steppe protected area proposal submitted for establishment".

[13] The previous version considered establishing and making operations protected in the new steppe.

Table 9. Progress made with regard to Output 1.1

Component 1. Effectiveness of protected area system to conserve steppe biodiversity increased		
Outputs	**Status**	**Verification status**
Output 1.1. New steppe protected area established and operational		
Output 1.1.1. Surveys and assessment of biodiversity in Karacadağ, Tek Tek Mountains NP, and Kızılkuyu WDA.	Completed	Validated
Output 1.1.2. Surveys and assessment of social and economic issues in Karacadağ, Tek Tek Mountains NP, and Kızılkuyu WDA.	Completed	Validated
Output 1.1.3. Preparing Guidelines on the Establishment of Protected Areas for the establishment of new protected areas.	Completed	Validated
Output 1.1.4. Preparing Protected Areas Assessment Guidelines for the assessment and establishment of new protected areas.	Completed	Validated. The title of this guideline was changed to "Guideline for Assessing the Effectiveness and Efficiency of Protected Areas."
Output 1.1.5. Involving and consulting stakeholders through a series of meetings, workshops and assessments.	Completed	Validated
Output 1.1.6. Developing and circulating the Stakeholder Engagement Guideline.	Completed and the guideline was uploaded	Validated. The title of this guideline was changed to "Guideline for Engaging Stakeholders in the Managing Protected Areas."
Output 1.1.7. Finalizing the "Other effective area-based conservation measure" (OECM) dossier.	Completed*	Validated the delivery of the final draft OECM proposal
Output 1.1.8. Undertaking communication activities, raising of public awareness, and publishing information materials, strategies, guidelines and other field survey results.	Completed**	Validated
Output 1.1.9. Undertaking a series of activities (training, workshops, etc.).	Completed	Validated
Output 1.1.10. Karacadağ OECM Assessment.	Completed***	Validated

Notes: * At the ad hoc Project Steering Committee Meeting (on 4 November 2021), it was decided that the "Other effective area-based conservation measure" (OECM) approach would be taken for Karacadağ.

** Linked to Outputs 1.2.3; 1.2.4; 1.2.5; 1.2.7; and 2.1.3.

*** Linked to Output 1.1.7.

Sources: FAO. 2022. *FAO-GEF Project Implementation Report (Period covered: 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022)*. Ankara; and FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

54. Furthermore, under Output 1.1.8, the evaluation validated the development of a bilingual (Turkish and English) information portal (Bozkirprojesi, 2022) to communicate information and to raise awareness about the project and its activities (see Figure 2). In addition, the project developed national and provincial steppe conservation strategies in the Turkish and English languages, and a bilingual (both Turkish and English) brochure promoting the progress made by the project and the results achieved. The project also drafted a communication strategy that covered the purposes and objectives of the strategy, the communication management approach, the target audience, communication channels and tools, and key messages.

Figure 2. A snapshot of the information portal

Source: Bozkirprojesi. 2022. Türkiye'nin Bozkir Ekosistemlerinin (Steppe Ecosystems of Türkiye). In: Bozkirprojesi. Ankara. https://bozkirprojesi.org/ or https://en.bozkirprojesi.org

55. Under Output 1.1.9, the project organized different face-to-face meetings and capacity building events (training sessions, thematic workshops and field studies) with the implementing partners and key stakeholders.[14] It also reported carrying out small group meetings with contracted companies (e.g. PGlobal Advisory and Training Services Inc. [PGlobal], Nature Conservation Centre [DKM], ANÇEO Çevre Ormancılık Haritacılık [ANÇEO] and Uyum teams) to finalize the activities falling within the scope of their responsibilities. Furthermore, the project organized two study visits (for two groups), one to Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, and the other to Azerbaijan. The project team also organized online meetings in November 2021 to present the National Steppe Conservation Strategy and Action Plan, and the Şanlıurfa Steppe Conservation Strategy and Action Plan to decision-makers and technical staff.

56. Under Output 1.1.10, the project applied the "Other effective area-based conservation measure (OECM)" approach for Karacadağ, as decided by the Project Steering Committee during its ad hoc meeting conducted in November 2021.

3.2.3 Component 1. Progress made with regard to the project outputs – Output 1.2

57. Under Output 1.2, the project reported completing all the outputs (see Table 10). With regard to Outputs 1.2.2, 1.2.3 and 1.2.5, the project confirmed clearing three sections of the plans, while a combination of the previous three sections and its submission to the ministry was scheduled for October 2022. The project conducted the activities under Output 1.2.4 simultaneously with the activities under Output 1.2.2, and set up four groups of management interventions as follows:

[14] For example, in 2021, the project implementing partner (ANÇEO) organized the workshops "Development of Grazing Plans for Şanlıurfa Merkez Kızılkuyu Wildlife Development Area, Tek Tek Mountains National Park, and Karacadağ Steppes" in Şanlıurfa and Ankara. During the same year, it organized an event in Şanlıurfa to discuss the draft management plans, species/multispecies action plans and grazing management plans.

i. first group: welcome signboards containing information about the name and function of the area;

ii. second group: special area signboards aimed at informing the visitors about a special area or stage on the route or within the area;

iii. third group: directional and mileage signboards located on the intersections to guide visitors towards focal points; and

iv. fourth group: intermediate direction signs serving as follow-up signs located at certain intervals to guide and help maintain movement in the area and on the route.

58. Moreover, under this output, the project also reported listing the technical specifications of park infrastructure. Output 1.2.6 was linked with Output 1.2.4. Although the tendering process was scheduled for completion in July 2022, the implementation was still ongoing at the time of this evaluation.

59. The activities under Output 1.2.7 were carried out by the ANÇEO, an external contractor, to engage stakeholders in the management planning process. The activities encompassed the kick-off meeting (in May 2021) with 44 participants, a three-day main workshop (organized in August 2021) with the representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks, the representatives of Harran University, Şanlıurfa-based government institutions, mukhtars, and other representatives from the project sites. In addition, the contractor organized the following two thematic workshops:

i. first thematic workshop for Species Action Plans in August 2021; and

ii. second thematic workshop for Management Plans in October 2021.

Table 10. Progress made with regard to Output 1.2

Component 1. Effectiveness of protected area system to conserve steppe biodiversity increased		
Outputs	**Status**	**Verification status**
Output 1.2. Effective management plans for three steppe protected areas created and implemented.		
Output 1.2.1. Preparing Guidelines for Protected Area Management Planning.	Completed	Validated
Output 1.2.2. Completing the draft management plan for Kızılkuyu to revise the existing management plan.	Completed	Validated
Output 1.2.3. Finalizing and ratifying all three management plans based on the Kızılkuyu management planning experience and adapted according to the different formats and needs.	Completed	Validated
Output 1.2.4. Implementing and modelling the priority management interventions.	Completed*	Validated
Output 1.2.5. Developing a specific "Species Action Plan" for managing and conserving important (flag) species.	Completed	Validated
Output 1.2.6. Realizing some key investments in infrastructures required to operationalize management planning (signboards, demarcate borders, etc.).	Completed	Validated
Output 1.2.7. Using the management planning process for capacity building at all levels by developing guidelines, ensuring active participation of key staff, and a series of other capacity building activities.	Completed**	Validated

Notes: * Linked to Outputs 1.2.2; 1.2.3; 1.2.5; 1.2.7; and 2.1.3.

** Linked to Outputs 1.2.2; 1.2.3; 1.2.4; 1.2.5; and 2.1.3.

Sources: FAO. 2022. *FAO-GEF Project Implementation Report (Period covered: 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022)*. Ankara; and FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

3.2.4 Component 1. Progress made with regard to project outputs – Output 1.3

60. Under Output 1.3, the project completed all four outputs (see Table 11). For the activities under Output 1.3.4, the project reported that some equipment and tools were required to initiate the Monitoring Programme. The technical specifications of the equipment, tools and materials were clearly defined in each corresponding monitoring programme along with the estimated budget for each item. The equipment, tools and materials required technical approval/clearance from FAO headquarters and the Lead Technical Officer. By the time of the evaluation, the project reported having completed tendering for GPS collars and GPS transmitters pending technical clearance.

Table 11. Progress made with regard to Output 1.3

Component 1. Effectiveness of protected area system to conserve steppe biodiversity increased		
Outputs	**Status**	**Verification status**
Output 1.3 Rigorous Monitoring Programme for three steppe protected areas established		
Output 1.3.1. Generating and publishing a simple Monitoring Handbook.	Completed	Validated. The title was changed to "Guideline for Biodiversity Monitoring".
Output 1.3.2. Catalysing the establishment of a monitoring group to advise and support the protected area managers with the design and implementation of a rigorous Biodiversity Monitoring Programme.	Completed	Validated
Output 1.3.3. Preparing a Monitoring Programme for three project pilot sites according to the guidance of the Monitoring Handbook and set in place a monitoring programme for all three protected areas.	Completed	Validated
Output 1.3.4. Provide equipment and tools required to initiate the Monitoring Programme.	Completed	Validated

Sources: FAO. 2022. *FAO-GEF Project Implementation Report (Period covered: 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022)*. Ankara; and FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

3.2.5 Component 2: Progress made with regard to project outputs – Output 2.1

61. Under Output 2.1, the evaluation validated the completion of six out of nine sub-outputs (see Table 12). Thus, in 2018, the project prepared a guideline entitled "Guideline on Grazing Planning and Management" (Output 2.1.1). It also analysed the ongoing grazing activities, conducted a baseline survey and produced a report on ongoing grazing activities (Output 2.1.1). It is noteworthy here that the project reported the infeasibility of carrying out the activities under Output 2.1.4 due to extensive project delays. Under Output 2.1.5, the project reported completing the management and grazing plans for three pilot sites. Under Output 2.1.6, the project reported completing the establishment of the coordination system between government agencies and livestock producers during the grazing management planning process. Meanwhile, the evaluation found it unfeasible to validate the results with respect to Output 2.1.6 due to the generic nature of the output indicator. Finally, the project reported having completed the activities under Output 2.1.9 and having purchased many pieces of equipment during the first two years of the project. The evaluation also acknowledged that the draft project implementation review for 2022 confirmed completing the tendering process and conducting technical evaluations. Therefore, the evaluation could not validate the completion of this output.

Table 12. Progress made with regard to Output 2.1

Component 2. Steppe biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into production landscapes		
Output 2.1. Sustainable Grazing Management Programme operational across three steppe protected areas and associated buffer zones		
Outputs	**Status**	**Verification status**
Output 2.1.1. Guideline on Grazing Planning and Management.	Completed	Validated
Output 2.1.2. Analysing the ongoing grazing activities and baseline surveys with each of the protected areas and associated buffer zones dealing with grazing.	Completed	Validated
Output 2.1.3. Identifying the best grazing management models for each site and preparing grazing plans for three sites.	Completed*	Validated
Output 2.1.4. Implementing the new grazing management plans with a Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) and Trade Approach.	Not completed**	
Output 2.1.5. Preparing land use management plans for three sites.	Completed	Validated
Output 2.1.6. Establishing and functionalizing an effective coordination system between government agencies and livestock producers.	Completed**	Unfeasible to validate due to a generic and intangible target set
Output 2.1.7. Establishing the Grazing Working Group to ensure that lessons learned are captured and disseminated.	Completed**	
Output 2.1.8. Developing and implementing a Grazing Management Demonstration Programme.	Completed	Validated
Output 2.1.9. Supporting implementation of the Grazing Management Plan through necessary equipment and tools.	Completed**	Not validated

Notes: * Linked to Outputs 1.2.2; 1.2.3; 1.2.4; 1.2.5; and 1.2.7.

** Linked to Output 2.1.3.

Sources: FAO. 2022. *FAO-GEF Project Implementation Report (Period covered: 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022)*. Ankara; and FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

3.2.6 Component 2. Progress made with regard to project outputs – Output 2.2

62. Under Output 2.2, the evaluation validated the completion of five out of eight indicators (see Table 13). Under Output 2.2.5, the project drafted a monitoring protocol for livestock monitoring, together with biodiversity monitoring for each project site. The drafted protocols were technically cleared by the Lead Technical Officer and submitted to the ministry for approval. Following the latter's approval, the monitoring protocols shall be implemented by the project team jointly with the ministry staff (Output 2.2.6).

Table 13. Progress made against Output 2.2

Component 2. Steppe biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into production landscapes		
Output 2.2. Sustainable Grazing Management Programme impacts monitored at three steppe protected areas		
Outputs	**Status**	**Verification status**
Output 2.2.1. Developing Grazing Monitoring System and linked BD Monitoring Programme (ecosystem monitoring, impact monitoring, socioeconomic and land use applications and livestock monitoring with link BD Monitoring Programme).	Completed	Validated. The title is "Guideline for Grazing and Livestock Monitoring".
Output 2.2.2. Developing Livestock Monitoring Programme and incorporating it inside the Grazing Monitoring System.	Completed	Validated
Output 2.2.3. Creating a Livestock Sales Programme linked to "steppe-friendly" production methods (in Grazing Plan).	Completed*	Validated
Output 2.2.4. Developing alternative income-generation activity opportunities for three project sites.	Completed**	Validated. The grazing plans covered alternative income-generating activities and livelihoods for the project pilot sites.
Output 2.2.5. Completing the livestock monitoring protocols and baseline analysis with ecological herd production and social indicators.	Completed***	Validated
Output 2.2.6. Implementing the monitoring protocols.	Not completed	
Output 2.2.7. Improving and/or revising the Grazing Management Plan upon the findings of monitoring.	Not completed	
Output 2.2.8. Supporting impact monitoring of the sustainable Grazing Management Programme through necessary equipment and material.	Completed	Not validated

Notes: * Linked to the Grazing Management Plan under Output 2.1.3.

** Linked to Outputs 1.2.2; 1.2.3; 1.2.4; 1.2.5; 2.1.3; 2.1.7; and 2.1.9.

*** Linked to Output 1.3.3.

Sources: FAO. 2022. *FAO-GEF Project Implementation Report (Period covered: 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022)*. Ankara; and FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

63. Furthermore, under Output 2.2.7, the project reported that it was unfeasible to revise the Grazing Management Plan with regard to the monitoring findings. The project implemented an alternate Grazing Demonstration Programme in Karacadağ and the experiences gained by the ministry staff in previous grazing plans were reflected in the ongoing management plans. The project reports highlighted that the drafted grazing plans were actually adaptive management plans. Therefore, these plans should be revised and updated by the ministry in further stages in line with the monitoring results.

64. Finally, the project reported completion of the activities under Output 2.2.8 and purchasing of many pieces of equipment during the first two years of the project. The evaluation also acknowledged that the draft project implementation review for 2022 confirmed completion of the tendering process and the conduct of technical evaluations. Therefore, the Evaluation Team could not validate the completion of this output.

3.2.7 Component 2. Progress made with regard to project outputs – Output 2.3

65. Under Output 2.3, the Evaluation Team validated the completion of all its indicators (see Table 14). According to the project reports, the training manual under Output 2.3.2 was drafted by PGlobal Advisory and Training Services Inc. in 2019.

Table 14. Progress made with regard to Output 2.3

Component 2. Steppe biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into production landscapes		
Output 2.3. Model Steppe Conservation Training Programme for pastoralists emplaced		
Outputs	**Status**	**Verification status**
Output 2.3.1. Creating a project training strategy and Training Programme on Steppe Management and Monitoring.	Completed	Validated
Output 2.3.2. Developing a training manual and resource materials for trainings.	Completed	Validated
Output 2.3.3. Implementing the training programmes in line with the demonstrations.	Completed	Validated
Output 2.3.4. Integrating the training programme into government operations.	Completed	Validated

Sources: FAO. 2022. *FAO-GEF Project Implementation Report (Period covered: 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022)*. Ankara; and FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

3.2.8 Component 3. Progress made with regard to project outputs – Outputs 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3

66. Under Output 3.1, the Evaluation Team validated the completion of three out of four indicators (see Table 15) and all the indicators under Output 3.2 and Output 3.3. More specifically, under Output 3.1, the project reported establishing the Şanlıurfa Steppe Conservation Technical Working Group from January to June 2020, organizing meetings (including a high-level meeting) to develop the Şanlıurfa Steppe Conservation Strategy and Action Plan at provincial and national levels, preparing a technical report to identify alternative income sources in Şanlıurfa steppes and rangelands for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Steppes and Rangelands.

67. Furthermore, the project reported completing (in cooperation with the Government of Türkiye) the activities related to mainstreaming the strategy objectives and priorities with respect to operational budgets, human resources, and policies of local and regional organizations (Output 3.1.4), and to mainstreaming the national strategy into the national policy and strategic documents and annual plans (Output 3.2.3). However, the Evaluation Team could not validate this finding, as neither in-person interviews nor desk research provided probative evidence to support the above claims.

Table 15. Progress made with regard to Outputs 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3

Component 3. Enabling environment established for effective conservation of steppe biodiversity across large landscapes		
Output 3.1. Şanlıurfa Provincial Steppe Conservation Strategy and associated enabling environment improvements implemented		
Outputs	**Status**	**Verification status**
Output 3.1.1. Establishing Şanlıurfa Steppe Conservation Technical Working Group under the Pasture Commission.	Completed	Validated
Output 3.1.2. Designing and developing a model steppe conservation strategy at provincial level.	Completed	Validated
Output 3.1.3. Identifying alternative income generation activities in the Steppe Conservation Strategy.	Completed	Validated
Output 3.1.4. Mainstreaming the strategy objectives and priorities to operational budgets, human resources and policies of local and regional organizations.	Completed	Not validated
Output 3.2. National Steppe Conservation Strategy and associated enabling environment improvements established		
Output 3.2.1. Establishing a Steppe Conservation Working Group as a joint initiative of the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock and Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs.	Completed	Validated
Output 3.2.2. Developing a steppe conservation strategy at national level.	Completed	Validated
Output 3.2.3. Mainstreaming the national strategy into the national policy and strategy documents, annual plans, etc.	Completed	Validated
Output 3.3. National Steppe Conservation Training and Awareness Programme for decision-makers and resource managers implemented		
Output 3.3.1. Designing and implementing a Steppe Conservation and Management Training Programme for agricultural and national park extension staff.	Completed	Validated
Output 3.3.2. Organizing annual steppe conservation seminars/workshops.	Completed	Validated
Output 3.3.3. Preparing and distributing the model steppe conservation recommendations and instructions in order to increase awareness of 81 pasture commissions in Türkiye.	Completed	Validated
Output 3.3.4. Generating and publishing training materials.	Completed	Validated

Sources: FAO. 2022. *FAO-GEF Project Implementation Report (Period covered: 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022)*. Ankara; and FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

68. Under Output 3.3.1, the project conducted a number of capacity building activities, including educational activities in schools, a study visit to Spain in 2019 for the project's technical team, a study visit to Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova (31 October to 5 November 2021) for high-level decision-makers (who were members of the Project Steering Committee) from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and an online Training Session on Steppe Conservation and Management for technical staff and decision-makers (29 to 30 November 2021). Furthermore, the project prepared a steppe training kit which included the following:

i. Student's Activity Book: Plants of the Steppe;

ii. Student's Activity Book: The Steppe is an Ecosystem;

iii. Student's Activity Book: Life on the Steppe;

iv. Student's Activity Book: Animals of the Steppe; and

v. Teacher's Guide.

69. Under Output 3.3.2, the project organized the First National Steppe Conservation Workshop in 2019 for 178 participants to lay a foundation for the cooperation between different sectors on steppe conservation and management. The Second Annual Steppe Conservation Workshop was held on 30 December 2020 for about 100 participants. The project reported the completion of all activities under Output 3.3.3. For example, the project carried out a certified training programme from 31 May to 6 June 2021 for participants from: the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry; the General Directorate of Plant Production; the Provincial Directorates of Agriculture and Forestry; the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks; and the General Directorate of Forestry. The training was attended by representatives of 21 different provinces.

70. Finally, under Output 3.3.4, the project produced the following training materials in Turkish and English:

i. Steppe Plants (booklet, poster, brochure, illustrated map);

ii. Steppe Animals – birds might be a separate topic (booklet, poster, brochure, illustrated map);

iii. Archaeology/History of Steppes (booklet, poster, brochure, illustrated map);

iv. Life in Steppes (booklet, poster, brochure);

v. Ancestors of Wheat (booklet, poster, brochure);

vi. Türkiye's Steppes (brochure, illustrated map); and

vii. Şanlıurfa's Steppes (illustrated map).

EQ 8. What lessons have been learned from the project regarding the achievement of its outputs and outcomes?

Finding 10. The project workplan was subject to several adjustments, and the achievements of some outputs was delayed by mixed internal factors (lengthy procurement and the project staff hirings, translation-related challenges, FAO rules and regulations, challenges related to coordinating a diverse pool of national and international stakeholders) and external factors (inadequate input of national and international consultants and delayed clearance of their technical inputs, the COVID-19 pandemic), as well as the interrelated modality of the project outputs. Also, the project did not elaborate the exit strategy until the closure stage of the project. A short exit strategy section was included in the terminal report of the project.

71. The review and final approval of deliverables and guidelines were greatly delayed by translation challenges (from English into Turkish and vice versa) as well as by the approaches taken by the international experts, which diverged from the expectations of the national counterparts. The latter issue was mainly associated with national legislative peculiarities and led to disagreements and lengthy communication between national counterparts and FAO with regard to the content of specific deliverables. According to the feedback from different stakeholders (both FAO and national counterparts), the FAO technical team did not accept the comments of the national counterparts and, at the same time, the national counterparts did not accept the input of international consultants, with

both stances delaying the final clearance of the deliverables. Some stakeholders (both from the Government of Türkiye and academia) stated that foreign experts were not fully familiar with the local peculiarities, and in some cases, their work was not fully consistent with the actual local needs. A similar comment (being not fully knowledgeable about the project pilot sites) was put forward for some local (Turkish) experts as well, in particular in the case of grazing planning.

72. Furthermore, the project's mid-term review also confirmed that *"technical inputs provided by the national consultants are weak and need multiple revisions. In addition, information requested by international consultants from the national consultant is delivered at a rather slow pace."* In addition, both desk research and in-person interviews confirmed that pursuant to the approved business procedure, the technical deliverables had to be cleared by the Lead Technical Officer and, on some occasions, the clearance took longer than anticipated, as it required clarifications, communication and engagement of the national counterparts.

73. The COVID-19 pandemic (which was beyond the project's control) affected the implementation of a number of capacity building activities, which were carried out later than scheduled. In addition, the project team reported on the challenges related to coordinating the engagement of key stakeholders from the state agencies, key national experts, and project partners, which caused the extension of contracts related to the development of Grazing Management Plans and Management Plans for the Kizillnyu Wildlife Development Area, Tek Tek Mountains National Park, and part of Karacadağ.

74. Both desk research and in-person interviews confirmed that changes had been made to the project workplans and that project implementation had been delayed due to the lengthy procurement and/or nomination/hiring of staff and consultants, as well as tendering. More specifically, while the project's official launch date was May 2016, the project staff was hired with a significant delay. Pertinently, the recruitment of the National Project Coordinator (from FAO's side) was initiated in October 2016 but the NPC joined the project only around ten months later than initially planned. The National Project Director (NPD) from the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs was nominated only in March 2017, while the National Project Implementation Unit (NPIU), Field Implementation Unit (Field Office), and Project Task Force (PTF) were established in March 2017, and the Project Steering Committee was nominated only after March 2017. Furthermore, the first meeting of the Project Steering Committee was conducted in 2017. It is also noteworthy that, according to the First Progress Report (for 1 January to 30 June 2017), the project became operational in January 2017, even though the project workplan was not prepared by the National Project Coordinator until March 2017.

75. In addition, due to the interdependence of tasks, the following outputs were impossible to be carried out punctually, as the activities were linked (because they were under the same tender) with other outputs:[15]

    i. Output 1.2.2, "Completing the draft Management Plan for Kızılkuyu to revise the existing management plan"), which was linked with Outputs 1.2.3, 1.2.4, 1.2.5, 1.2.7 and 2.1.3.

[15] In other words, the launch of a specific activity depended on the completion of other interrelated activities.

ii. Output 1.2.3, "Finalizing and ratifying all three Management Plans based on the Kızılkuyu management planning experience and adapting according to the different formats and needs", which was linked with Outputs 1.2.2, 1.2.4, 1.2.5, 1.2.7 and 2.1.3.

iii. Output 1.2.4, "Implementing and modelling the priority management interventions", which was linked with Outputs 1.2.2, 1.2.3, 1.2.5, 1.2.7 and 2.1.3.

iv. Output 1.2.5, "Developing specific 'Species Action Plans' for managing and conserving important (flag) species", which was linked with Outputs 1.2.2, 1.2.3, 1.2.4, 1.2.7 and 2.1.3.

v. Output 1.2.6, "Realizing some key investments in infrastructure required to operationalize management planning (signboards, demarcation of borders, etc.)", which was linked with Output 1.2.4.

vi. Output 1.2.7, "Using the management planning process for capacity building at all levels by developing guidelines, ensuring active participation of key staff and a series of other capacity building activities", which was linked with Outputs 1.2.2, 1.2.3, 1.2.4, 1.2.5 and 2.1.3.

vii. Output 2.1.3, "Identifying the Best Grazing Management Models for each site and preparing Grazing Plans for three sites", which was linked with Outputs 1.2.2, 1.2.3, 1.2.4, 1.2.5 and 1.2.7.

viii. Output 2.1.4, "Implementing the new grazing management plans with a Common Agriculture Practice (CAP) and Trade Approach" and Output 2.2.3, "Creating a Livestock Sales Programme linked to "steppe-friendly" production methods (in the Grazing Plan)", which were linked with Output 2.1.3.

ix. Output 2.1.6, "Establishing and functionalizing an effective coordination system between government agencies and livestock producers", which was linked with Output 2.1.3.

x. Output 2.1.7, "Establishing the Grazing Working Group to ensure that lessons learned are captured and disseminated" and Output 2.1.9, "Supporting implementation of the Grazing Management Plan through necessary equipment and tools", which were linked with Output 2.1.3.

xi. Output 2.2.4, "Developing alternative income-generating activity opportunities for three project sites", which was linked with Outputs 1.2.2, 1.2.3, 1.2.4, 1.2.5, 2.1.3, 2.1.7 and 2.1.9.

76. Finally, according to the project reports (the project workplan for 2022 and the project implementation review for the period of 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022), Output 2.1.4, "Implementing the new grazing management plans with a Common Agriculture Practice (CAP) and Trade Approach" and Output 2.2.3, "Creating a Livestock Sales Programme linked to 'steppe-friendly' production methods (in the Grazing Plan)" were unfeasible due to extensive project delays. Likewise, Output 2.2.7, "Improving and/or revising the Grazing Management Plan upon the findings of the monitoring" was not expected to be completed within the project framework due to extensive delays. The project team planned to include this output (Output 2.2.7) in the project's exit strategy. However, the Evaluation Team also noted that the project document did not incorporate any reference to an exit strategy. Moreover, the mid-term review recommended preparing an exit strategy to ensure the sustainability of outputs and outcomes beyond project closure.

EQ 9. What changes could have been made (if any) to the project design or its implementation approaches in order to improve the achievement of the project's expected results?

Finding 11. According to some key stakeholders, it was unfeasible to achieve all project results within the four-year time frame set at design. Also, the inception period of the project (a timeline between the design and actual implementation) took a longer time frame than anticipated and led to delays in project activities. In the course of project implementation, the state institutions were subject to reforming, which affected the stakeholder mapping set in the project design.

77. Overall, some key stakeholders stated that it was unfeasible to achieve all of the project outputs and outcomes within the four-year period set at design. First and foremost, this alleged unfeasibility was linked to the fact that the activities under many outputs were interlinked, and thus their implementation depended on the completion of the associated outputs. In addition, several key stakeholders perceived that some project activities were overambitious (i.e. the establishment of a new protected area in Karacadağ, the concept of buffer zones and ecological corridors for pilot sites having no legal basis in the national regulation). Likewise, the mid-term review also concluded that the number of components and outcomes was quite ambitious to be completed within the original life cycle of the project.

Figure 3. Steering Committee meeting in 2018

78. Furthermore, the evaluation noted that the project was subject to six no-cost extensions (see Table 16). It is noteworthy here that only one out of six extensions was officially approved at the ad hoc meeting of the Project Steering Committee conducted on 4 November 2021.

79. Moreover, according to the project progress report for 1 January to 30 June 2018, the *"project became operational on 15 January with a budget of USD 2 328 767 for a duration of 48 months until 15 January 2021."*[16] The same information was repeated in the following project progress report through the sixth project progress report covering the period of 1 July to 31 December 2019. The seventh project progress report (for 1 July to 31 December 2020) updated the data with regard to project completion and reported that the *"project became operational on 15 January 2017 with a budget of USD 2 328 767 for a*

[16] The Evaluation Team understands that 2011 was a typo and the project progress report intended to put 2021.

duration of 66 months until 30 June 2022." It is also noteworthy that at the first meeting of the Project Steering Committee (conducted on 19 July 2017), the project's implementation timeline remained intact and covered the period from 2016 to 2020.

Table 16. Timeline of the project extensions

No. of extensions	Original closure date	Proposed extension date	Comment
1	May 2020	15 January 2021	The project progress report pointed out this new completion date of the project.
2	15 January 2021	June 2021	
3	June 2021	June 2022	Approved by the Project Steering Committee (ad hoc meeting in November 2021) and recommended by the mid-term review. It was also reported in the seventh and eighth project progress reports.
4	June 2022	September 2022	Approved by FAO (internally).
5	September 2022	November 2022	Approved by FAO (internally).
6	November 2022	December 2022	Approved by FAO (internally).

Source: FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

80. The third no-cost extension was strongly recommended at the completion of the mid-term review (in November 2019) to *"enable its Objective and Outcomes to be achieved successfully, subject to the understanding that all strategies, protected area management plans, grazing plans, and monitoring and training programmes are delivered within at least 12 months of the respective contracts being signed (i.e. by the first quarter of 2021) in order to be able to focus on mainstreaming these deliverables and on preparing and implementing an exit strategy to ensure that relevant outputs are institutionalized by project closure"*.

81. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic also affected the delivery of project activities, leading to further extensions of such activities. Additionally, the warfare situation between the Syrian Arab Republic and Türkiye negatively affected the implementation of some project activities in the pilot sites. The last three extensions took place in the course of the final evaluation of the project activities and were the subject of intentional discussions and approval from the FAO team. The evaluation found no evidence of these last three extensions being approved by the Project Steering Committee.

82. The project implementation was conducted with some changes to its original design (see Table 17). There were no changes in the project's main outputs and outcomes. However, desk research validated that the latest project implementation review (PIR) (for 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022) presented two different sets of outcomes, as the original outputs of the project (stipulated at design) were presented as outcomes as well. In the meantime, the latest project progress report (covering the period of 1 July to 31 December 2021) kept the outputs intact.

Table 17. Changes in outcomes and outputs

Original version (at design)	Modified version	Comments
Outcomes		
Outcome 1. Effectiveness of protected area system to conserve steppe biodiversity increased.	**Outcome 1**. Effectiveness of the protected area system to conserve steppe biodiversity increased.	No change
Outcome 2. Steppe biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into production landscapes.	**Outcome 2.** Steppe biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into production landscapes.	No change
Outcome 3. Enabling environment established for the effective conservation of steppe biodiversity across large landscapes.	**Outcome 3.** Enabling environment established for the effective conservation of steppe biodiversity across large landscapes.	No change
Outputs*		
Output 1.1. New steppe protected area established and operational.	**Output 1.1.** New steppe protected area established and operational.	No change
Output 1.2. Effective management plans for three steppe protected areas created and implemented.	**Output. 1.2.** Effective management plans for three steppe protected areas created and implemented.	No change
Output 1.3. Rigorous Monitoring Programme for three steppe protected areas established.	**Output 1.3.** Rigorous Monitoring Programme for three steppe protected areas established.	No change
Output 2.1. Sustainable Grazing Management Programme operational across three steppe protected areas and associated buffer zones.	**Output 2.1.** Sustainable Grazing Management Programme operational across three steppe protected areas and associated buffer zones.	No change
Output 2.2. Sustainable Grazing Management Programme impacts monitored at three steppe protected areas.	**Output 2.2.** Sustainable Grazing Management Programme impacts monitored at three steppe protected areas.	No contextual change
Output 2.3. Model Steppe Conservation Training Programme for pastoralists emplaced.	**Output 2.3.** Model Steppe Conservation Training Programme for pastoralists emplaced.	No change
Output 3.1. Şanlıurfa Province Steppe Conservation Strategy and associated enabling environment improvements implemented.	**Output 3.1.** Şanlıurfa Province Steppe Conservation Strategy and associated enabling environment improvements implemented.	No change
Output 3.2. National Steppe Conservation Strategy and associated enabling environment improvements established.	**Output 3.2.** National Steppe Conservation Strategy and associated enabling environment improvements established.	No change
Output 3.3. National Steppe Conservation Training and Awareness Programme for decision-makers and resource managers.	**Output 3.3.** National Steppe Conservation Training and Awareness Programme for decision-makers and resource managers.	No change

Note: * The PIR presents outputs as outcomes.

Sources: FAO. 2017. *Project Document: Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems*. Ankara; and FAO. 2022. *FAO-GEF Project Implementation Report (Period covered: 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022)*. Ankara.

3.3 Efficiency

EQ 10. Was adaptive management used or needed to ensure efficient resource use?

Finding 12. The existing project management and governance structure allowed for applying adaptive management practices through regular and ad hoc meetings of the Project Steering Committee. In some cases, the FAO management response to the mid-term review recommendations was rather generic. It created unrealistic expectations related to achieving the recommendations. Also, in other cases, the mid-term review recommendations were not accepted despite the fact that the project continued facing the issues raised by the mid-term review (i.e. translation-related challenges).

83. The evaluation addressed a question about the adaptive management modalities in the context of the project team's approaches to making decisions and adjustments in response to new information and changes in various contexts. According to the in-person interviews and desk research, the project was implemented in accordance with the relevant FAO regulations and predefined business processes related to the project's governance and management structure. Project-related issues were discussed at the Project Steering Committee meetings to decide on the corrective actions to be taken. Meanwhile, the Project Steering Committee meetings were organized on regular and ad hoc bases. For example, the Project Steering Committee meeting dated 17 April 2020 changed a decision related to the establishment of a new protected area in Karacadağ steppe. This decision was aligned with the mid-term review, which recommended a Biosphere Reserve Approach as an appropriate model to adopt for Karacadağ Steppes Key Biodiversity Area. In addition, the Project Steering Committee (at the ad hoc meeting conducted on 4 November 2021) decided to work using the "*Other effective area-based conservation measure (OECM)"* approach instead of declaring the new protected area. This decision affected the focus of the activities under Output 1.1.7, "Finalizing the protected area proposal dossier and submitting it to the Ministry of Environment, Urbanisation and Climate Change" and Output 1.1.10, "Declaring the protected area".

84. Furthermore, the mid-term review provided 19 corrective recommendations to be taken into account. FAO officially accepted 18 out of the 19 recommendations, and also pointed out that 3 out of these 18 required additional funding to be implemented. Pursuant to the mid-term review recommendations, FAO completed the preparation of the National Steppe Conservation Strategy (Recommendation 6-1), requested the extension of the project for an additional one and a half years (Recommendation 6-2a), and prepared the Global Benefits Action Plan (Recommendation 6-2b[2] – v).

85. Moreover, the management response to Recommendation 6-2b[2] – i (related to the revision of the roles of the project management team) highlighted that the composition, roles and responsibilities of the project management team were defined in the project document.[17] It also pointed out that the role being performed by the National Project Coordinator should change, as the National Technical Coordinator (NTC) also acted as

[17] For ease of reference, the project documents outlined that "the Project Management Team will be composed of a National Project Coordinator, an Operations Officer and Procurement and Financial Associates. More specifically, the role of the Project Management Team will be to: i) ensure the overall project management and monitoring; ii) facilitate communication and networking among key stakeholders; iii) organize the meetings of the PSC and other experts and participants; iv) support the local level implementing unit and working groups; and v) reporting and day-by-day managing of the project."

Chief Technical Adviser (CTA). The management response foresaw/advised that the position of the National Project Coordinator should be reframed as National Technical Coordinator (a technical post) by April 2020. However, the Evaluation Team did not find any formal or informal evidence of this transition having taken place. Moreover, in-person interviews confirmed that the scope of the project management team was not adequate for the complexity and diversity of the project interventions. The other two recommendations under Recommendation 6-2b[2] of the mid-term review, related to modifications to the project workplan and development of the procurement plan, were reported to have been addressed, as the project workplans were updated in accordance with the extensions granted. The Evaluation Team also validated the development of, and/or modifications to, the project procurement plan.

86. The mid-term review recommendation with regard to the development of *"an informal, written protocol between FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry on the use of translation services for consultant TORs and their deliverables (reports)"* was dismissed by FAO as unnecessary. On the other hand, in-person interviews revealed that translation-related challenges remained among those most crucial, causing delays in delivery. For ease of reference, the training and information materials had to be presented in Turkish and English and were subject to multiple revisions. It resulted in unexpected extra expenses and was time-consuming (causing delays in delivery).

87. Furthermore, one of the mid-term review recommendations (Recommendation 6-3) required that *"ethical standards of working practice are introduced/maintained in all cases when government employees are allocated tasks and/or travel on mission for the project."* While the management response was positive in this regard, stating: *"This has been discussed during the Fourth Project Steering Committee Meeting: The Project will ensure equal accommodation and transport for the Ministry staff"*, the ministry staff expressed their dissatisfaction with the transportation and accommodation rules applied to them, which were different from the rules applied to international consultants and FAO personnel. The evaluation also acknowledged that this topic was rather controversial. Particularly, although national counterparts were covering the transportation and accommodation expenses of their personnel, their applied national rules, standards and guidelines were different from those of FAO. In accepting the recommendation, FAO committed to ensuring *"equal accommodation and transport for the ministry staff."* The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry was instructed to be more specific and realistic about the extent to which it could ensure equal accommodation for its staff and in what type of cases overly high or unrealistic expectations from national counterparts should be avoided. The Evaluation Team noticed that the government officials interviewed in the course of this evaluation kept raising the issue of accommodation and travel-related per diems. They claimed that this agenda item was not resolved after the mid-term review, as the implementing partners (FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry) had different administrative procedures.

EQ 11. Were the project logical framework and workplans, and any changes made to them, used as management tools during implementation?

EQ 12. Were the progress reports produced accurately and in a timely way, and did they respond to reporting requirements, including adaptive management changes?

Finding 13. The evaluation validated the development and regular updates of the project workplans. Likewise, the project team developed different versions of the results framework, which were reflected in the project progress reports and project implementation reports. The indicators

used in the results framework were specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound (SMART).

Finding 14. No evidence was found that the project's logical framework was created at the design stage of the project. Instead, the project design team incorporated the FAO/GEF Strategic Results Matrix into the project document. However, the FAO/GEF Strategic Results Matrix lacked output-level indicators and never presented any information about the project activities. Over the course of project implementation, the project team developed and kept updating the "Project Results Tracking" matrix, which constituted an adjusted version of the results framework/matrix and was used for tracking the project results. Some versions of the matrix lacked output-level indicators and any data about the project activities. In addition, the evaluation noted the case of renaming the project outputs and outcomes in the project implementation review from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022, and inconsistent reporting related to the project components, outcomes and outputs, which varied in different documents.

Finding 15. The project produced 8 out of 12 project progress reports[18] and five project implementation reviews. The latest implementation review (for 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022) was produced with a five-month delay. The progress reports and implementation reviews presented the relevant data related to project implementation. The report preparation process included many discussions, meetings, internal reviews and lengthy approvals by all the focal points.

88. The Evaluation Team acknowledged that the project team had developed and kept modifying the project workplan (which was also aligned with one of the recommendations of the project mid-term review). Moreover, the evaluation found no evidence of the logical framework being developed at the design phase of the project. Instead, the project document presented the FAO/GEF Strategic Results Matrix, which lacked output-level indicators and did not incorporate activity-level indicators. It is noteworthy that the results matrix in project progress reports and project implementation reviews differed and lacked activity-level indicators as well. Finally, the results matrix in project implementation reviews did not include output-level indicators.

89. At the same time, the project did use the results framework to track the progress of the project activities. More specifically, the FAO/GEF Strategic Results Matrix developed at the design phase lacked output-level indicators and never presented any information about the project activities. The "Project Results Tracking" matrix, developed in the course of the project implementation and used for the project progress reports, was focused on outcome-level indicators only and constituted an adjusted version of the results framework/matrix to be used for tracking the project results at outcome level. The project implementation reviews included output-level indicators but still lacked an activity-level progress tracking framework. Overall, they incorporated the following sections: baseline indicators; progress to date; percentage achieved against the target for the reporting period; and end-of-project target. The indicators applied adhered to the SMART framework.

90. Both the workplans and results framework were systematically reflected in the project progress reports and project implementation reviews (adjusted according to reporting needs). The evaluation also noticed that the latest project implementation review (covering 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022) used two sets of outcomes. The second set, de facto, replaced

[18] Due to the fact that both project implementation reviews and project progress reports were lengthy and overlapping documents in the GEF reporting system, starting from 2020, FAO decided to reduce the number of semi-annual reports.

the project outputs. In addition, the project document (at design) presented project outcomes as components as well. Finally, the evaluation noticed that the titles of project components, outcomes and outputs varied in different documents, including the project document, workplan, periodic reports, tender/procurement documents, the reports of the contractors/service providers, etc.

91. The project team produced and/or delivered to the Evaluation Team 8 out of 12 project progress reports (PPRs) (see Table 18). Taking into account that the project was not completed in the course of the project evaluation, the report covering 1 July to 31 December 2022 was understandably not prepared.[19] In addition, the project team produced five project implementation reviews. The first covered the period from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018, while the final one reported the progress made in the period from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022. The Evaluation Team noted that the final project implementation review was eventually released with an almost five-month delay, in November 2022. Both reports (PIRs and PPRs) included adequate information about the progress made.

Table 18. Snapshot of project progress reports and project implementation reviews

#	Type of report	Reporting period
1	First PPR	1 January 2017–30 June 2017
2	Second PPR	30 June 2017–31 December 2017
3	Third PPR	1 January 2018–30 June 2018
4	Fourth PPR	1 July 2018–31 December 2018
5	Fifth PPR	1 January 2019–30 June 2019
6	Sixth PPR	1 July 2019–31 December 2019
7	N/A	1 January 2020–30 June 2020*
8	Seventh PPR	1 July 2020–31 December 2020
9	N/A	1 January 2021–30 June 2021
10	Eighth PPR	1 July 2021–31 December 2021
11	N/A	1 January 2022–30 June 2022
12	N/A	1 July 2022–31 December 2022
13	First PIR	1 July 2017–30 June 2018
14	Second PIR	1 July 2018–30 June 2019
15	Third PIR	1 July 2019–30 June 2020
16	Fourth PIR	1 July 2020–30 June 2021
17	Fifth PIR	1 July 2021–30 June 2022

Note: From 2020 – and due to the fact that both project implementation reviews and project progress reports were lengthy and overlapping documents in the GEF reporting system – it was decided to reduce the number of semi-annual project progress reports to one report per year.

Source: FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

92. Some stakeholders claimed that *"the report drafting was associated with many discussions, meetings, revision of the reports and their approval by many focal points. All had to be done within a limited time span and caused certain difficulties to the actual implementation of the project."*

[19] Final evaluation and terminal reporting were initiated by the project closure period.

EQ 13. Was project implementation as cost-effective as originally proposed (planned vs. actual)?

Finding 16. The project was subject to six no-cost extensions, and about 95 percent of GEF funds were allocated for the implementation of project activities, and the remaining 5 percent was allocated for project management. No data is available on the actual expenditure of the project.

Finding 17. Due to data unavailability, the evaluation was unable to validate to what extent the GEF-funded activities were implemented cost-effectively. Overall, the utilization rate of the GEF-funded activities at completion was 99.9 percent.

93. The total project budget at design was USD 11 838 767. The GEF funding equalled USD 2 328 767 and the other USD 9 510 000 was financed by both the Government of Türkiye and FAO. The GEF funds were allocated to all three project components as well as overall project management. In total, about 95 percent of the funds were allocated to the implementation of all three components, and only 4.8 percent of the total GEF contribution was spent on project management (see Table 19). At completion (in December 2022), the project reported utilizing 99.9 percent of the funds allocated at design, and about 95 percent of the total budget was spent on carrying out the project activities under all three components.

Table 19. Project funds per component (planned vs. actual expenditure)

Component (budget line)	Allocated at design %	Utilized (%)	Amount planned (USD)	Actual amount spent (USD)
Component 1	29.6%	35%	688 500	812 839
Component 2	32.0%	34.5%	744 500	804 589
Component 3	33.7%	25.65%	784 967	597 459
Subtotal (Component 1 to 3)	95.2%	95.15%	2 217 967	2 214 887
Project management	4.8%	4.8%	110 800	110 800
TOTAL GEF	100.0%	99.86%	2 328 767	2 325 691

Source: FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

94. It is also important to highlight that the project was subject to several no-cost extensions. Likewise, the activities postponed for completion until December 2022 were subject to no-cost extensions as well.

EQ 14. Were financial resources utilized efficiently? Could financial resources have been used more efficiently?

Finding 18. The analysis of co-funding expenditure validated that cash and in-kind contributions of the Government of Türkiye and FAO constituted 224 percent of the co-funding planned at design. About 97 percent of in-kind contributions of the Government of Türkiye were spent to cover the staff fees and 99 percent of their cash contribution was allocated for investments and field-based activities under all three components. FAO's cash contribution was all spent on workshops, study tours and other capacity building activities, and about 88 percent of FAO's in-kind contributions were spent on FAO's project personnel service.

95. The Evaluation Team was unable to assess the extent to which the GEF contribution was utilized efficiently, as no relevant reports about the actual expenditure (at output level) for GEF-funded activities were received. At the same time, the analysis of the financial reports

submitted by the national implementing partners (state agencies) showed that about 99 percent of their cash contribution was allocated to investments and field-based activities under all three components of the project. Furthermore, about 97 percent of in-kind contributions from national implementing partners (state agencies) were spent on the salaries of the staff assigned to support project activities at central and field levels. FAO's cash contribution was all spent on organizing workshops, study tours and other capacity building activities. In the meantime, about 88 percent of FAO's in-kind contributions were allocated to the FAO personnel providing services to the project, about 4 percent was spent on office space, and about 9 percent was allocated to translation services.

EQ 15. Was procurement carried out making efficient use of project resources?

Finding 19. The evaluation validated the development of annual procurement plans to safeguard the efficiency and effectiveness of the procurement of the remaining consulting services. At the same time, the stakeholders reported consistent implementation delays associated with the lengthy procurement process and interlinkage of the project outputs.

96. The vast majority of the interviewed stakeholders (FAO personnel, the implementing partners and subcontractors) expressed their dissatisfaction with the lengthy procurement process throughout the project life cycle, which slowed down project implementation. The project mid-term review also noted a similar issue and recommended developing a more effective and efficient procurement plan for the remaining consultancies. The review also emphasized that unit costs and funds were higher for common activities, such as procurement of consultants, services and equipment/goods (e.g. installation of information boards/sign boards for project sites). It is noteworthy here that while the management committed to developing *"effective and efficient annual procurement plans for the remaining consultancies"* (in response to the mid-term review recommendation), the Evaluation Team found no substantial improvement to have been made in procurement processes. Furthermore, desk research and in-person interviews also validated that, in some instances, procurement could not be initiated due to mandatory technical clearance not being obtained.

97. In some instances, the key stakeholders referred to no-cost extensions of service contracts with some changes made to the scope of the services required from the subcontractors. In addition, the project team mentioned that delays had been caused by the interconnection of project outputs, as procurement delays under one output immediately affected the implementation of other activities under other connected outputs.

EQ 16. What lessons can be learned from the project regarding efficiency?

EQ 17. How could the project have more efficiently carried out implementation (in terms of management structures and procedures, partnerships arrangements, etc.)?

Finding 20. The evaluation identified several key findings related to the efficiency of the project implementation, such as the absence of the project's logical framework at the design phase and different variations and limitations of the results matrix, failure to accomplish several key recommendations of the mid-term review, lengthy procurement and tendering processes, challenges related to bilingual modalities of the project technical documentation, existing staffing pattern of the project and belated engagement, as well as the multifunctional role of the National Project Coordinator.

98. Desk research and in-person interviews confirmed the importance of an adaptive management approach in the development context. To clarify, adaptive management is

based on a learning process and constitutes a systematic and structured approach to gradually improve decision-making and associated processes in the context of ongoing uncertainty. Overall, it shifts management's focus towards planning, implementation and evaluation. In this context, the mid-term review and its recommendations play a crucial and integrated role in the adaptive management framework. Therefore, recommendation-focused, specific and detailed management responses to the mid-term review allow for coherent fulfilment of the mid-term review recommendations, thereby advancing the adaptive management practices within the project framework.

99. Furthermore, regular and coherent reporting improves project performance and makes the project team accountable through the usage of raw data metrics. In addition to reporting, the project management can successfully use other aspects that help to manage projects, such as periodic meetings (e.g. official meetings of the Project Steering Committee and Task Force, as well as unofficial project team meetings) to discuss progress, risks, financial aspects, issues, lessons learned and future actions.

100. One of the key lessons learned relates to the utilization of project resources, which is very important when it comes to understanding spending patterns and making decisions to adjust project plans, budgets and implementation timelines. Therefore, the finance reporting on actual spending for the given reporting period (e.g. reporting periods indicated in the PPRs and PIRs) supports better and more efficient project management and the proper reflection of any changes in the project implementation timeline (e.g. rationale behind project extensions – cost and no-cost).

101. As mentioned earlier, the Evaluation Team acknowledged a number of the business process-related challenges affecting the efficiency of project implementation:

i. lengthy procurement and tendering of the goods and services;

ii. lengthy recruitment of project staff;

iii. lengthy and complicated clearance of the technical deliverable. As reported, the Lead Technical Officer was the only person in charge of the technical clearance; and

iv. bilingual (Turkish and English) implementation modalities of the project causing extra expenditures and translation delays (also linked to the technical clearance of the translated technical documents).

102. Furthermore, the evaluation also acknowledged the fundamental role of the National Project Coordinator at the inception stage of the project as well as across many dimensions of the project implementation, including:

i. facilitation of communication between different groups of stakeholders and the project implementing partners;

ii. provision of technical inputs to the greatest extent possible;

iii. overall coordination of the project activities and contribution to the development of the project workplans, progress reports and other documents relevant to project management;

iv. delivery of presentations and awareness raising workshops; and

v. preparation of the project communication strategy.

103. Finally, the project procurement management plan (which encompasses the processes required to make sure project procurement is executed perfectly) is an important element of the successful and efficient completion of a project. While the project did fulfil the recommendation of the mid-term review to establish an *"effective and efficient Procurement Plan for remaining consultancies"*, the project team still reported implementation delays due to many factors, including the interrelatedness of outputs and associated activities. On the other hand, these delays demonstrate that the workplans as well as procurement management plans did not adequately reflect internal and external challenges and risk factors.

3.4 Sustainability

EQ 18. Were sustainability issues integrated into the design and implementation of the project?

EQ 19. Did the project adequately address institutional, financial and economic sustainability issues?

EQ 20. Are the recurrent costs after project completion sustainable?

EQ 21. Is there evidence that project partners will continue their activities beyond project support?

EQ 22. What are the main challenges that may hinder the sustainability of efforts? Have any of these been addressed through project management?

EQ 23. Which areas/arrangements under the project show the strongest potential for lasting long-term results?

EQ 24. What are the key challenges and obstacles to the sustainability of results of the project initiatives that must be directly and quickly addressed?

Finding 21. The project design and implementation lacked a well-structured and formulated sustainability section and/or an exit strategy. The project also failed to fulfil the relevant recommendation of the mid-term review to develop the project sustainability plan.[20]

Finding 22. The evaluation found no official evidence of recurrent costs allocated or planned to be allocated to sustain the project results. However, the representatives of the state sector agencies at national and local levels confirmed their interest in the project and its achievements. Also, the evaluation acknowledged the commitment of the state sector representatives to sustain post-project monitoring of the implementation of the strategic and action plans developed under the project.

Finding 23. The sustainability of project results and the actual implementation of strategies, associated action and management plans, and the further usage of guidelines depended on the commitments of the Government of Türkiye. Also, the Grazing and Nature Conservation Guidelines might be effectively applied in other areas of the country to build the capacity of local institutions.

104. Desk research validated that the project design document contained some generic references to the project's sustainability. For example, the document stated that *"The sustainability of a protected area system requires that each protected area site is effectively governed and managed according to its specific demands. Some areas will require a low level of management activity while others may require a greater management effort to achieve their conservation objectives. In some instances, the most efficient way to improve the*

[20] While the project team claimed to have developed the exit strategy, the Evaluation Team did not receive the copy of the exit strategy.

system's sustainability will be to focus on improved site level management for each protected area within the system" (FAO, 2016, paragraph 210, p. 54).

105. The project design document also incorporated a section on the sustainability of results, along with subsections on social sustainability, environmental sustainability, financial and economic sustainability, and the sustainability of capacities developed. However, a detailed analysis of these subsections revealed no substantial exit strategy and/or action plan to secure the sustainability of the project results. Moreover, the mid-term review of the project also validated that *"sustainability is given serious consideration throughout the Project's design and in Section 5 of the ProDoc [project document] prominence is given to the sustainability of results, whereby each component of the Project has integrated within it a hand-over plan that specifies the financial and economic factors required to take forward Project-initiated activities. To date, there has been no significant replication or mainstreaming of project results, albeit much is anticipated in the 2017–2020 Work Plan (…)"* (FAO, 2019, p. 15).

106. Notably, the mid-term review, among other things, recommended to *"Prepare an Exit Strategy to ensure sustainability of Outputs and Outcomes post closure of the Project"* (FAO, 2019, Recommendation 6-2b[2], p. 76). To address this recommendation, FAO noted that in the context of this specific project, its sustainability fully depended on the Government of Türkiye, stating: *"The management plans, monitoring program and national and provincial steppe conservation strategies are the backbones of the project, all prepared for 10 years period. Hence, adoption of these backbone documents by MAF [the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry] is considered the exit strategy by the project. Adopted docs all have a legacy which goes far beyond the project end."*

107. According to the project team, the project exit strategy was prepared in the course of project implementation. However, the evaluation could not validate this claim, as the Evaluation Team did not receive a copy of the exit strategy. At the same time, the evaluation acknowledged that the terminal report of the project incorporated the section on project sustainability. More specifically, the terminal report referred to the developed exit strategy: *"There is an exit strategy in order to guide the beneficiary in order to follow the unfinished activities and to follow up supporting sustainability of the project outputs and results:*

i. *following up on recommendations for the nomination of Karacadağ as OECM;*
ii. *implementing and modelling the priority management interventions;*
iii. *preparing land use management plans for the sites after the management plans;*
iv. *improving and/or revising PA management plans and grazing plans according to the monitoring results;*
v. *implementing the new grazing management plans with a Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) and Trade Approach;*
vi. *developing livestock sales programmes linked to "steppe-friendly" production methods;*
vii. *continuing with grazing demonstration activities created by the project in order to obtain monitoring results;*
viii. *following up taxa/multi-taxa action plans and monitoring programmes; and*
ix. *following up signed protocols in order to monitor results of activities and outcomes."*

108. Furthermore, the terminal report pointed to the development of two partnership protocols (i.e. one for the implementation of Şanlıurfa Steppe Conservation Strategy and Action Plan, and another for the implementation of the Monitoring Programme) to contribute to the project's sustainability and incorporated follow-up actions for the government to ensure the sustainability of the results:

i. *"Following up on recommendations for the nomination of Karacadağ as OECM. In case that the project fails to deliver the final recommendation, first priority will be to finalize assessment of suitability for the respective nomination. FAOSEC [FAO Subregional Office for Central Asia] stand ready to further support upon request.*

ii. *Implementing and modelling the priority management interventions. Management plans for site management (including PA and grazing plans and Taxa/Multi-taxa action plans) developed by the project and priority management interventions listed under the management plans. These interventions should be followed by the MAF [Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry] according to the developed plans.*

iii. *Improving and/or revising all site management plans (including Overall PA plans and grazing plans) upon the findings of the relevant monitoring programs within a time frame of maximum two years. These works should specifically emphasize the alignment of the need of the farmers (women farmers especially) in order to overcome possible deficiencies experienced during the original preparation.*

iv. *Implementing the new grazing management plans with a Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) and Trade Approach. For the grazing management plans, same as in the previous paragraph applies. However, missing is the part on Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) and Trade Approach, which are to be developed and implemented in conjunction with the grazing management plans.*

v. *Developing livestock sales programmes linked to 'steppe-friendly' production methods. Livestock sales programmes linked to 'steppe-friendly' production methods should be prepared separately for all sites and their implementation should closely follow.*

vi. *Continuing with grazing demonstration activities created by the project in order to obtain monitoring results. Continuation and monitoring are critical to be done without any break after the NTE [not-to-exceed date]. It is also recommended to expand demonstration and monitoring by at least one more vegetation season to obtain more reliable impact monitoring data.*

vii. *Mainstreaming the National Steppe Conservation Strategy into the National Strategy and Action Plans.*

viii. *Signing of the Monitoring protocol between the third Regional Directorate of Agriculture and Forestry and Harran University."*

109. According to key stakeholders, the signing of the protocols and agreements between relevant authorities[21] in order to follow the activities and outputs was still ongoing in January 2023.

110. In the course of data gathering, the Evaluation Team received heterogeneous feedback about the sustainability of the project results from different groups of stakeholders. Many

[21] For example, the Şanlıurfa Governorship, third Regional Directorate of Agriculture and Forestry, Şanlıurfa Regional Directorate of Agriculture and Forestry, Şanlıurfa Regional Directorate of Forestry, Harran University.

were uncertain about and even questioned the sustainability of its achievements. Others believed in the Turkish Government's commitment to scale up some of the project activities to other regions of the country. Notably, different strategic papers produced within the project framework incorporated detailed action plans related to follow-up activities, the timeline for their implementation, and the state agencies and institutions (the project implementing partners) nominated to implement these activities. According to many respondents, the actual implementation of the strategies, associated action and management plans, and further usage of guidelines depended on the commitments of the partnering (state) institutions. Very few mentioned that the project implementing partners might face certain political pressure and thus be unable to sustain at least some of the project results. According to another viewpoint, management plans, strategic and action plans, species action plans, and grazing plans for the project sites will continue, as they were within the mandate of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. However, the evaluation did not find evidence of any official document of the Government of Türkiye confirming that it had allocated its resources (financial and human) to the continuation of the project results in the targeted area and/or replicating the results in other parts of the country. Moreover, the evaluation did not validate the activities under the Strategic and Action Plans (developed within the project framework) being integrated into any Regional/Provincial Development Plans. At the same time, the evaluation noted the support of the Government of Türkiye to the project at the national and provincial levels. Several key stakeholders also highlighted the importance of maintaining post-project monitoring of the implementation of the Strategic and Action Plans developed under the project.

111. Furthermore, almost all stakeholders interviewed in the course of the evaluation agreed that Şanlıurfa was probably the most difficult region for implementation due to social, cultural, economic and logistic reasons. For example, the local population in Şanlıurfa was believed to be experiencing project fatigue, having been exposed to miscellaneous projects implemented earlier. The Evaluation Team was informed that direct local beneficiaries tend to receive as much support as possible from public institutions and external projects, and that they were not keen to contribute to such initiatives. At the same time, many key stakeholders emphasized the tension between different groups of the local community, direct beneficiaries, and those not directly benefiting from the project. On the other hand, some experts interviewed in the course of the evaluation were certain that there are high chances of sustaining the activities carried out in Şanlıurfa Region, especially the activities associated with the protected areas (Kızılkuyu and Tek Tek).[22] Several key stakeholders also stated that the Grazing and Nature Conservation Guidelines might be effectively applied in other places of the country and can be used to build the capacity of local institutions. At the same time, key stakeholders highlighted that the non-governmental sector was very weak in the country and the targeted region as well. Therefore, the state sector plays an important role in scaling up and sustaining the project results.

EQ 25. To what extent did the project contribute towards local ownership of initiatives and results?

Finding 24. While some key stakeholders claimed that ownership of the project by local and central governmental bodies took longer than expected, they also confirmed that the project significantly contributed to increasing awareness and changing the national and local state agencies' perception regarding the importance of steppe ecosystems.

[22] Karacadağ area had no status of protected area.

112. All the interviewees from FAO and the Government of Türkiye confirmed that the national implementing partners (state agencies) were actively involved in the project design and implementation. Some of the staff of the national agencies also highlighted that they had participated in technical work and acquired knowledge through their participation in the project activities.

113. The representatives of state agencies regularly participated in the meetings of the Project Steering Committee. Moreover, several interviewees mentioned that the Steering Committee meetings were more strategic and less focused on technical details. However, the Evaluation Team could not validate this claim, as it did not receive the full package of Steering Committee meeting notes.

114. At the same time, the Evaluation Team noted the establishment of several technical working groups, which consisted of representatives of different sectors, including state agencies and academia. Notably, the functioning of these working groups was fully facilitated by the project partners and even the subcontractors. For example, the project engaged the Nature Conservation Centre[23] to facilitate, among other things, the establishment of the Şanlıurfa Steppe Conservation Technical Working Group under the Pasture Commission and National Steppe Conservation Working Group. In addition, several representatives of the Government of Türkiye mentioned developing an agenda for a new working group to modify the technical instructions.

115. In-person interviews with different groups of stakeholders also validated that the relevant staff of the national implementing partners were actively engaged in providing technical comments and securing the quality of all documents (e.g. the guidelines as well as strategic and action plans) produced within the project framework.

116. Furthermore, some interviewees mentioned that the ownership of the project by local and central governmental bodies took longer than expected (which was claimed to generally be the case for large projects in Türkiye). At some level, there was a lack of belief in the project's success due to several factors, including resistance from the local population and the challenging socioeconomic situation of the targeted Şanlıurfa Province.

117. In addition, many stakeholders pointed to an increase in awareness and interest at national and local levels in steppe conservation. They also claimed that the policymakers acknowledged the need for a change in policies and practices to secure the effective conservation of steppe ecosystems.

EQ 26. Did the project contribute to key building blocks for socioeconomic sustainability?

EQ 27. Are there risks to the environmental benefits that were created or that are expected to occur?

Finding 25. Many key stakeholders pointed out that, by default, the project outputs related to the developed guidelines, management plans and monitoring programmes for the targeted areas contributed to creating equal access to natural resources for the local population and key building blocks for socioeconomic sustainability. At the same time, all the interviewed stakeholders claimed that there were no risks to the environmental benefits created under the project.

[23] The Nature Conservation Centre is a foundation established in 2013 by a group of experienced ecologists and nature conservationists.

118. Neither desk research nor in-person interviews revealed any risks to the environmental benefits that the project had contributed to and/or created. Moreover, the key interviewees confirmed that climate change and desertification issues were well integrated into the project and that the project created opportunities for environmental benefits rather than any risks.

119. Regarding socioeconomic benefits, the evaluation noted that, by default, the project results related to the developed guidelines, management plans and monitoring programmes for the targeted areas contributed to creating equal access to natural resources for the local population. For example, Strategic Goal 3, "Improving the use of resources in the steppes within the framework of the sustainability principles" of the National Steppe Conservation Strategy and Action Plan (2021–2030) was also focused on *"solving the settlement and education problems of nomadic families living in steppes, who account for one of the vulnerable groups, and encouraging and supporting income-generating activities for the nomads."* Strategic Goal 4, "Improving the livelihood of the local people who benefit from the steppes" incorporated the following two main objectives:

   i. Objective 1. Conduct socioeconomic research, value chain analysis, geographic indication and marketing studies to increase productivity and added value;

   ii. Objective 2. Diversity and support the livelihood of the local people in order to reduce the pressure on the steppes and to ensure sustainable use of the steppes;

   iii. The Şanlıurfa Steppes Conservation Strategy and Action Plan (2021–2030) presented a very similar strategic goal (SG) and objectives with the only difference being that it focused on the Şanlıurfa Region;

   iv. Strategic Goal 3. Improving the use of resources in Şanlıurfa steppes within the framework of the sustainability principles; and

   v. Strategic Goal 4. Improving the livelihood of the local people who benefit from Şanlıurfa steppes.

120. The Evaluation Team acknowledged that the project site (Şanlıurfa Province) was one of the most challenging regions of the country in terms of its climate and sociocultural factors. However, the income-generating and awareness raising activities of the project as well as the proactive role of the National Project Coordinator (FAO) contributed to changes in the perceptions and attitudes of the targeted community. Yet, the evaluation also received reports of certain tensions between the community members benefiting from the project and those who were not direct beneficiaries of the project services/assistance. The latter felt excluded and dissatisfied.

EQ 28. Is the capacity in place at the regional, national and local levels adequate to ensure the sustainability of the results achieved to date?

Finding 26. Key stakeholders claimed that the developed technical document, guidelines, strategic and actions plans, and capacity building activities contributed to transferring the knowledge to national and local state agencies.

121. Many stakeholders named capacity building activities among the most important aspects of the project. They helped to increase awareness of steppe biodiversity and the specifics of protected areas therein. In addition, the respondents mentioned the following thematic topics from which they benefited:

i. steppe status, biodiversity in the targeted areas (including biodiversity inventory), and species protection;

ii. protection of the steppe ecosystems and increase in the productivity of steppes;

iii. grazing management in the protected areas;

iv. historical and archaeological site management in the protected areas;

v. Grazing Strategic Plan and Species Strategy and Action Plan;

vi. protection and usage of the pasturelands, including for the needs of wildlife; and

vii. increased awareness of communication about, and governance of, steppes.

122. Several key stakeholders noted the strategies and action plans, as well as different guidelines, management plans and monitoring programmes, allowing them to transfer relevant knowledge further. This remained valid even in the case of changes in senior management, as the concepts had already been acknowledged at the local level as well. Therefore, some key stakeholders believed that staff turnover would not jeopardize the capacity of the implementing partners.

EQ 29. Were project activities and results replicated nationally and/or scaled up?

EQ 30. Were project activities and results replicated or scaled up in other countries?

Finding 27. The evaluation found no evidence of the project results being replicated at national, regional or subregional levels.

123. The Evaluation Team found no evidence of the project results being replicated and/or scaled up at national or regional levels or in other countries. At the same time, some key stakeholders outlined difficulties regarding the local settings and mindset. They believed that if the project succeeded in the challenging local context of Şanlıurfa Province, then it would undoubtedly be successfully applied and replicated in other regions and provinces of the country.

124. Finally, many stakeholders highlighted the successful model of systematic works via interinstitutional collaboration and different capacity building and awareness raising activities (including about steppe conservation recommendations and instructions for 81 pasture commissions in Türkiye [Output 3.3.3]), which laid a foundation for potential scale up, while some believed the project was successful and might serve as a model/showcase for other provinces and regions.

3.5 Factors affecting performance

3.5.1 Project execution and management

EQ 31. To what extent did the execution agency effectively discharge its role and responsibilities related to the management and administration of the project?

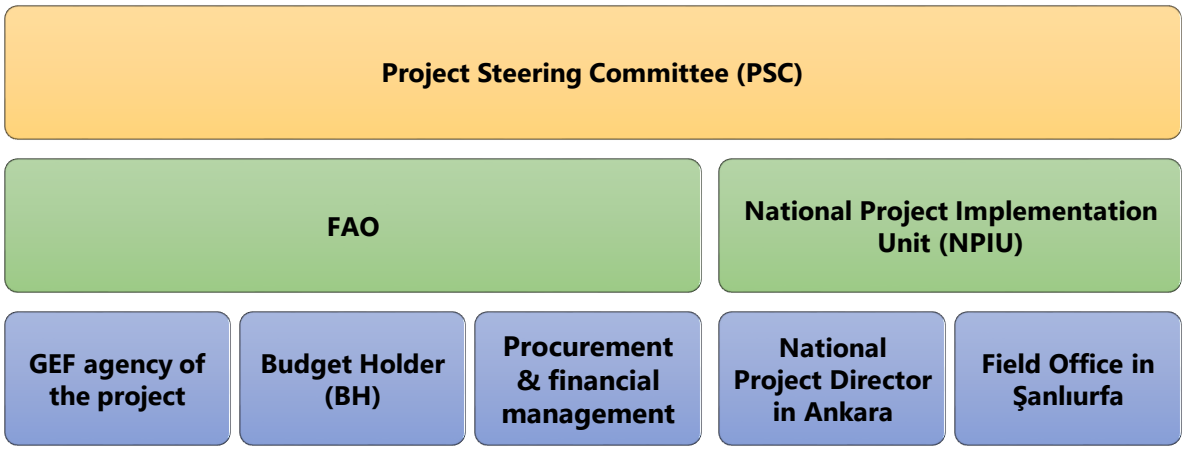
Finding 28. The project document defined the roles and responsibilities of the participating parties and the anticipated roles of international organizations and donor agencies. FAO has played a crucial role in all stages of the project life cycle, including the stages of concept preparation, appraisal, approval and start-up, oversight and supervision, and reporting on the progress. Throughout project implementation and reporting, the roles of the National Project Coordinator and Lead Technical Officer from FAO were decisive in securing the continuity of the project and the achievement of the objectives set at design.

125. Desk research validated that the project document defined the roles and responsibilities of the implementing partners, including the national governments, and regional and provincial government entities. In addition, the project document also defined the anticipated roles of international development organizations and donors (such as the Agriculture and Rural Development Support Institution [TKDK], the United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] and the Japan International Cooperation Agency [JICA]), non-governmental organizations (including the Chamber of Agricultural Engineers, Şanlıurfa Division, Nature Association, Nature Conservation Centre, KIRÇEV and Savory Institute Turkey "GÖZESİ" – Anatolian Grasslands), academia (the Harran University, GAP Agricultural Research Institute, Pistachio Research Institute, the Eastern Anatolia Forestry Research Institute and agricultural organizations), and the private sector (local women and men farmers/rural farmers).

126. The evaluation noted that the roles and level of engagement of the stakeholders defined at design were subject to adjustment in the course of project implementation. Meanwhile, the main national implementing partners from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry were actively engaged in the course of project implementation and the meetings of the Project Steering Committee.

127. Both desk research and interviews with representatives of the national agencies validated that the project was implemented in cooperation with three national counterparts, and each of the counterparts assigned their focal point to safeguard the efficient partnership between national objectives and priorities and the project activities. Provincial officers of the state agencies coordinated the work at the local and provincial levels. Overall, the partnership arrangements were set through the project governance and management structure (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Management and governance structure of the project



Source: FAO. 2017. *Project Document: Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems*. Ankara.

128. The Project Steering Committee was initially chaired by the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs and, since 2018, by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. The Ministry coordinated and implemented the project and supported impact and progress monitoring, information dissemination and national replication/scaling up of project accomplishments.

129. The Project Steering Committee was established to make strategic decisions with regard to the project and to oversee its planning and implementation. More specifically, it was responsible for:

i. overseeing the project's progress and achievement of planned results, as reported every six months;

ii. making decisions concerning the project's organization, coordination and implementation;

iii. facilitating cooperation between the National Project Implementation Unit at the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and project participating partners, and providing project support at the local level;

iv. advising the National Project Implementation Unit and facilitating collaboration between the project and other ongoing and planned programmes, projects and initiatives in Türkiye;

v. facilitating the provision of co-financing support in a timely and effective manner; and

vi. reviewing six monthly project progress and financial reports and approving annual workplans and budgets (AWPs/Bs).

130. The project was implemented by the National Project Implementation Unit Ankara, headed by the full-time National Project Director and supported by a Field Office in Şanlıurfa. The National Project Implementation Unit comprised the staff of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry's General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks, which was the lead implementing partner. The FAO Subregional Office for Central Asia and Türkiye (the project Budget Holder) were responsible for operational and financial management and supervision of the project. Moreover, FAO as a member of the Project Steering Committee and executive partner of the project (with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry) coordinated and implemented the project and supported its impact and progress monitoring and information dissemination through project-based staff and the National Project Coordinator. Meanwhile, the FAO Lead Technical Officer provided overarching subject matter technical and quality control advisory and oversight.

EQ 32. To what extent has FAO delivered on project identification, concept preparation, appraisal preparation, approval and start-up, oversight, and supervision?

EQ 33. What have been the main challenges in relation to the management and administration of the project?

EQ 34. Have there been any relevant lessons learned from project implementation that might be useful for other future projects targeted at similar objectives?

Finding 29. The evaluation observed the following key challenges associated with the implementation of the project: time-consuming recruitment of international consultants; national and international consultants lacking the expertise to deliver quality results; an extracurricular engagement of the personnel of the state agencies and FAO to review and clear the documents and guidelines produced; an overload of hired consultants who continued working on external contracts; existing FAO procedures and rules causing delays in information sharing among FAO and the implementing partners; and the delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

131. One of the main problems related to project implementation was the time-consuming recruitment of international consultants with about a three-month delay on average. Consequently, the implementation of associated technical activities, such as the development of technical specifications on baseline surveys and the preparation of

planning and monitoring guidelines, was postponed. As an alternative, the project tried to engage national consultants to speed up the process.

132. The evaluation received diverse feedback with regard to the reported engagement of national and international consultants. According to the project progress report and a few key stakeholders, national consultants lacked the necessary expertise to replace international experts effectively. At the same time, the Evaluation Team noted the dissatisfaction of the national implementing partners with respect to the qualifications of the international experts engaged within the project framework. This discontent was mainly caused by the international experts' lack of understanding of the peculiarities of the national legal framework related to the status of protected areas and/or their failure to secure deliverables of the required quality. In addition, on some occasions, the comments of the implementing partners were not approved and cleared by the FAO technical team. Reportedly, this resulted in the extended and extracurricular engagement of the staff of the implementing partners and FAO's coordination to clear the documents and guidelines produced. Moreover, a last-minute proposal to combine baseline surveys and assessments on various topics (instead of following separate surveys and assessments as stipulated in the workplan) caused an ad hoc need for coordination and increased delays.

133. Moreover, the project reported additional challenges related to an overload of hired consultants who continued to engage with other employers in addition to the FAO contracts. Reportedly, this resulted in additional delays.

134. Furthermore, both desk research and in-person interviews revealed challenges associated with information sharing among FAO and the project implementing partners. In particular, the project team was unable to share any documents (such as workshop agendas, workplans, technical reports and technical specifications) with the implementing partners for their feedback without obtaining all necessary clearances. In this regard, the interviewees referred to the FAO rules and procedures. Likewise, the project faced challenges with the translation of documents, which was time-consuming, increased costs and led to implementation delays.

135. COVID-19-related restrictions resulted in obligatory measures having to be taken for protection. This caused additional implementation delays and no-cost extensions of contracts with local subcontractors (e.g. DKM and PGlobal).

136. To avoid further delays, the project team reported continually revising the coordination and collaboration mechanisms. The evaluation logged that the project faced similar implementation delays, which led to the project implementation being extended until the end of December 2022. Obviously, these mentioned challenges caused changes to the approved workplan.

EQ 35. How well have risks been identified and managed? How well are risks, assumptions and impact drivers being managed?

Finding 30. The project document identified risks at the design/preparation stage of the project and presented the project contingency plan. However, in the course of its implementation, the project faced additional challenges (internal and external) not anticipated at the preparation stage, causing delays in project implementation. Also, the evaluation was unable to validate challenges related to the financial management of the project due to a lack of relevant data.

137. The project document defined certain types of risk and risk mitigation strategies (as well as probability grading of these risks) under its "Risk Management" sections. The types of risk incorporated the following:

i. challenging project coordination (high probability);

ii. low capacity of local and national institutions (medium probability);

iii. climate change (low probability);

iv. low level of ownership and lack of sustainability of new technologies and techniques (low probability);

v. incentives for local stakeholders are not adequate to generate engagement (medium probability); and

vi. regional political conflict may trigger security measures, thus limiting implementation (medium probability).

138. Furthermore, the project progress report also incorporated a self-assessment Risk Management Matrix. In addition, the desk research validated the development of a project contingency plan. Furthermore, in the course of project implementation, the project team faced additional challenges, which were not anticipated at the design stage (see Table 20). For example, the project reported a lengthy document exchange process between FAO, partnering institutions and national state agencies. The project team also reported delays associated with the complexity of the project framework (e.g. interdependent outputs), lengthy procurement procedures, as well as FAO rules and regulations restricting smooth data exchange and sharing of project-related documents with the national counterparts for their revision and feedback. This caused final approval and delivery delays for project outputs (e.g. challenges associated with the conservation category for Karacadağ and lengthy procurement-related delays).

139. The project team also pointed to challenges associated with the tensions between the direct beneficiaries and those not benefiting from income-generating activities. As a result, it required extra communication and efforts on the part of local state sector representatives and the FAO National Project Coordinator.

Table 20. Project-related risks vs. actual challenges

Risks identified at design		Actual challenges	
Risk	**Probability**	**Challenge**	**Anticipated at design**
Challenging project coordination	High probability	Ad hoc coordination needs	Yes
Low capacity of local and national institutions	Medium probability	Lengthy procurement and recruiting	Yes
Climate change	Low probability	Translation-related delays and additional costs	No
Low ownership and lack of sustainability of new technologies and techniques	Low probability	Sustainability-related challenges	Yes
Incentives for local stakeholders are not adequate to generate engagement	Medium probability	Resistance from local communities	Yes
Regional political conflict may stimulate security measures, limiting implementation	Medium probability	Lengthy clearance of technical reports	No
–	–	COVID-19 pandemic	No
–	–	Quality of reports produced by the external consultants	No
–	–	Information sharing delays with the national counterparts	No

Source: FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

3.5.2 Financial management and co-financing

EQ 36. What have been the challenges related to the financial management of the project?

EQ 37. Did the leveraging of funds (co-financing) happen as planned?

EQ 38. To what extent did the expected co-financing materialize?

Finding 31. The evaluation validated an approximate 161 percent increase in co-financing contribution. FAO and the Government of Türkiye together provided a USD 15 269 535 contribution (cash and in-kind) against USD 9 510 000 co-financing planned at design.

140. The Evaluation Team was unable to validate challenges related to the financial management of the project. It did not receive a detailed project-related expenditure report covering the project implementation timeline. Moreover, none of the stakeholders ever reported any challenges related to financial transactions and management of the project.

141. The Evaluation Team acknowledged that the project team gathered detailed information about the in-kind and cash contributions of both the Government of Türkiye and FAO. Notably, the co-funding reports of the Government of Türkiye (incorporating all of the partnering state sector institutions at national and field levels) were provided for March 2017 to June 2022. Meanwhile, FAO's reporting period covered 1 July 2017 to 31 December 2021. Overall, the analysis of the actual financial reports submitted by the implementing partners of the project demonstrated that both FAO and the partnering institutions of the Government of Türkiye exceeded their co-financing (cash and in-kind) commitments by 171 percent and 149 percent, respectively (see Table 21). To clarify, both FAO and the Government of Türkiye together provided a USD 15 269 535 contribution (cash and in-kind) against USD 9 510 000 co-financing planned at design. This constituted an approximate 161 percent increase in co-financing contribution.

Table 21. Co-funding (actual vs. planned) for 2017–2022 (USD)

	Planned		Actual		% (actual vs. planned)	
	Cash	In-kind	Cash	In-kind	Cash	In-kind
FAO	350 000	150 000	349 150	332 470	99.8%	221.6%
Government of Türkiye	5 110 000	3 900 000	8 760 132	5 827 783	171.4%	149.4%
Total	**5 460 000**	**4 050 000**	**9 109 282**	**6 160 253**	**166.8%**	**152 1%**
		9 510 000		**15 269 535**		**160.6%**

Source: FAO. 2017–2019. FAO Co-financing reports for the FAO/GEF project "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystem". Ankara.

142. Notably, the national implementing partners started discharging their co-financing obligations at the inception phase of the project. Thus, the project progress report for 1 January–30 June 2017 reported that at the beginning of 2017, the Şanlıurfa Regional Directorate launched provincial-level biodiversity surveys and monitoring activities in the pilot sites as part of the co-financing commitment of the Government of Türkiye, which was also part of their co-financing commitments under the National Biodiversity Assessment and Monitoring Programme.

3.5.3 Progress to impact

EQ 39. Is the globally significant biodiversity of the target area likely to be conserved?

Finding 32. The evaluation found out that different outputs of the project (e.g. guidelines, strategic and action plans, surveys and assessments of biodiversity in Karacadağ, Tek Tek Mountains National Park and Kızılkuyu) might potentially contribute to conserving biodiversity in the targeted areas. Also, the project assisted in developing the "Global Benefits Action Plan for Conservation and Sustainable Management of Turkey's Steppe Ecosystems", an implementation pathway along with a timetable and designation of the implementing agencies responsible for specific actions. However, the evaluation lacked the data to validate that the national counterparts will sustain/apply the project results and fulfil the "Global Benefits Action Plan for Conservation and Sustainable Management of Turkey's Steppe Ecosystems".

143. The Evaluation Team assessed the extent to which the outputs of the project (related to biodiversity conservation)[24] demonstrated a globally significant biodiversity impact in the targeted area. According to the national stakeholders, the project offered a holistic approach to biodiversity conservation, and all the constituents of the project served as building blocks in the biodiversity conservation agenda. At the same time, stakeholders pointed out specific tangible outputs in this regard. For example, some believed that cultural inventory surveys conducted within the project had been a very useful contribution to the biodiversity conservation agenda (see Table 22), and the Monitoring Programme developed under this project also served to enable monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of steppe ecosystems. Others highlighted the importance of developing a number of guidelines, strategies and action plans, such as action plans for endangered plant species, as these allowed for the conduct of a comprehensive evaluation of the steppe ecosystem.

[24] For ease of reference, biodiversity conservation encompasses three main constituents: i) preservation of the diversity of species; ii) sustainability of species and ecosystems; and iii) maintaining life-supporting and essential ecological processes.

Table 22. Biodiversity conservation-related tangible outputs

Output	Comment
Output 1.1.1. Carrying out surveys and assessments of biodiversity in Karacadağ, Tek Tek Mountains National Park and Kızılkuyu WDA.	
Output 1.1.2. Carrying out surveys and assessments of social and economic issues in Karacadağ, Tek Tek Mountains National Park and Kızılkuyu WDA.	
Output 1.1.3. Preparing the Guideline on Establishment of Protected Areas for the establishment of new protected areas.	
Output 1.1.4. Preparing a Protected Areas Assessment Guideline for the assessment and establishment of new protected areas.	
Output 1.2.1. Preparing Guidelines for Protected Area Management Planning.	
Output 1.2.5. Drafting a specific "Species Action Plan" for management and conservation of important (flagship) species.	- Species Action Plan for Wild Pistachio (*Pistacia palaestina*). - Species Action Plan for Cream-coloured Courser (*Cursorius cursor*). - Multi-Species Action Plan for Crop Wild Relatives. Target species include: *Triticum dicoccoides* (wild emmer); *Triticum baeoticum* (wild einkorn); *Aegilops speltoides var. ligustica* (goat grass); *Pisum sativum subsp. sativum var. arvense* (field pea); *Lens culinaris subsp. orientalis* (wild lentil); and *Cicer echinospermum* (wild chickpea).
Output 1.2.5. Developing a specific "Species Action Plan" for managing and conserving important (flag) species.	
Output 1.3.1. Generating and publishing a simple Monitoring Handbook.	Developing a Guideline for Monitoring Biodiversity.
Output 2.1.1. Guidelines on Grazing Planning and Management.	Developed Guidelines on Grazing Planning and Management.
Output 2.2.1. Developing Grazing Monitoring System and linked BD Monitoring Programme (ecosystem monitoring/impact monitoring, socioeconomic and land use applications and livestock monitoring with link BD Monitoring Programme).	Developed Grazing Monitoring System.
Output 3.1.2. Designing and developing a Model Steppe Conservation Strategy at province level (series workshops and meeting will be held during the preparation process).	A Model Steppe Conservation Strategy at province level prepared.
Output 3.2.2. Preparing the National Steppe Conservation Strategy at national level.	National Steppe Conservation Strategy and Action Plan prepared.
Output 3.3.3. Preparing and distributing the Model Steppe Conservation Recommendations and Instructions in order to raise awareness of 81 pasture commissions in Türkiye.	Drafted recommendations (under the Şanlıurfa and National Steppe Conservation Strategies and Action Plans) regarding the steppe conservation for Türkiye's steppe ecosystems.

Source: FAO. 2022. *FAO-GEF Project Implementation Report (Period covered: 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022)*. Ankara.

144. Furthermore, according to the project reports, the development of grazing planning and species/multi-species action planning will result in the conservation of steppe species and habitats. However, by the time of this evaluation, the Government of Türkiye had not started to implement the aforementioned action plans. At the same time, some key stakeholders confirmed that, as the administrative borders of the villages and the uses of pasture were not clear, there was confusion in many places, and this made it difficult to prepare comprehensive and sound land and grazing plans.

145. Moreover, the "Global Benefits Action Plan for Conservation and Sustainable Management of Turkey's Steppe Ecosystems", developed within the framework of the project, provided an implementation pathway along with a timetable and designation of the implementing agencies responsible for specific actions. Notably, all of the implementing agencies were from the state sector. The activities under the plan were supposed to be implemented from 2020 to 2021 or by the end of the project. However, the evaluation lacked data to report on the national counterparts' fulfilling of the "Global Benefits Action Plan for Conservation and Sustainable Management of Turkey's Steppe Ecosystems".

EQ 40. What are the impacts or likely impacts of the project (on the local environment; on economic well-being; on other socioeconomic issues)?

Finding 33. The evaluation validated that the project accelerated the understanding of the importance of steppe biodiversity, created synergy and intra-institutional collaboration among state institutions (the project implementing partners), raised awareness among different stakeholders about the importance of the steppes and a results-oriented approach, and prepared biodiversity inventories in the targeted areas. However, the economic well-being and other socioeconomic impact assessment was beyond the scope of the current evaluation, and thus, it was not addressed in the course of this evaluation.

146. The key stakeholders reported that the project accelerated the understanding of the importance of steppe biodiversity. They also claimed it created synergy and intra-institutional collaboration among state institutions (the project implementing partners), raised awareness among different stakeholders (including the selected educational institutions) about the importance of the steppes and a results-oriented approach, and prepared biodiversity inventories in the targeted areas.

147. Some reported that local people could benefit from the project via increased income and controlled grazing, which in turn contributed to environmental protection. In addition, some interviewees mentioned that, while the project activities were coherent with the official mandate of all partnering institutions, the launch of the project catalysed the holistic approach taken to biodiversity conservation. Furthermore, the project facilitated the creation of a cooperation platform that allowed the implementing agencies to recognize cross-cutting problems, leverage resources (financial and human) and benefit from intra-agency cooperation among partnering state institutions on the matter.

148. In addition, according to key stakeholders, the National Biological Diversity Coordination Board, established in 2019 under the chairmanship of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, incorporated/adopted steppe biodiversity into its agenda. The Board is mandated to follow developments on the global biodiversity agenda, to bring biodiversity into the economy in a sustainable way, and to carry out the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) effectively.

149. With regard to the specific impact of the project on economic well-being and other socioeconomic issues, the evaluation is not authorized to offer any assessment without a rigorous impact analysis, which needs to be conducted at least three years after project completion. Nevertheless, to provide approximate guidance with regard to the potential impact of the project activities, the evaluation reviewed the National Steppe Conservation Strategy and Action Plan (2021–2030) and the Şanlıurfa Steppe Conservation Strategy and Action Plan (2021–2030). Both were prepared through close collaboration among FAO, the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks, the General Directorate of

Plant Production, the General Directorate of Forestry, the Şanlıurfa Third Regional Directorate, and Provincial Directorates of Agriculture and Forestry. Notably, these documents all share three Strategic Goals, with the only difference being related to the geographic coverage of each document (see Table 23). Each strategic plan also provides a detailed action plan along with objectives, indicators, designation of responsible implementing institutions and relevant implementing partners, actions to be conducted, and the implementation timeline for each action. Notably, all the implementing partners were relevant national agencies.

Table 23. Strategic Goals of the National Steppe Conservation Strategy and Action Plan (2021–2030) and the Şanlıurfa Steppe Conservation Strategy and Action Plan (2021–2030)

National Steppe Conservation Strategy and Action Plan (2021–2030)	Şanlıurfa Steppe Conservation Strategy and Action Plan (2021–2030)
SG 1. Creating an enabling environment and developing policies to ensure effective management of the steppes.	**SG 1.** Development of a governance and collaboration structure for effective management of Şanlıurfa steppes.
SG 2. Conservation of the steppe biodiversity (at ecosystems, species, genetic and ecological diversity levels).	**SG 2.** Conservation of Şanlıurfa steppe biodiversity (at ecosystems, species, genetic and ecological diversity levels).
SG 3. Improving the use of resources in the steppes within the framework of the sustainability principle.	**SG 3.** Improving the use of resources in Şanlıurfa steppes within the framework of the sustainability principle.
SG 4. Improving the livelihood of the local people who benefit from the steppes.	**SG 4.** Improving the livelihood of the local people who benefit from Şanlıurfa steppes.

Source: FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

EQ 41. To what extent may the progress towards long-term impact be attributed to the project?

Finding 34. According to the key stakeholders, the implementation of the strategy and action plans[25] as well as the management plans developed within the project framework will lead to a long-term impact related to biodiversity conservation, which is likely to be directly attributable to this project.

150. According to interviewed stakeholders, the implementation of the strategy and action plans as well as the management plans developed within the project framework will lead to long-term impacts, which is likely to be directly attributable to this project. However, the Evaluation Team could not make any assumptions in this regard, as the implementation and sustainability of the project results are to be reviewed either independently by the implementing partners or within the framework of another technical assistance intervention. Therefore, the evaluation has no evidence-based findings with respect to progress made towards long-term impact attributable to this project. For ease of reference, the Norms and Standards for Evaluation adopted by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG, 2016) state that: "The final evaluation report should be logically structured and contain evidence-based findings, conclusions, and recommendations."

[25] Grazing Strategic Plan and Species Strategy and Action Plan, National Steppe Conservation Strategy and Action Plan, and Şanlıurfa Steppe Conservation Strategy and Action Plan.

EQ 42. Was there any evidence of environmental stress reduction and environmental status change, or any change in policy/legal/regulatory framework?

EQ 43. Are there any barriers or other risks that may prevent future progress towards long-term impact?

Finding 35. The evaluation did not find any probative and measurable evidence of environmental stress being reduced by the project activities. Also, the long-term impact of the project is interconnected with the sustainability and continuation of the achieved results. While environmental stress reduction was within the project's scope, it was beyond the scope of this evaluation and was therefore not addressed.

151. The evaluation did not find any probative and measurable evidence of environmental stress being reduced by the project activities. Likewise, key stakeholders also mentioned that it was too early to determine the extent to which the project had resulted in environmental stress reduction (if at all).

152. Moreover, the evaluation found no evidence of any changes in policy, legal and regulatory frameworks being caused by the project activities. Notably, by the time of the evaluation, Karacadağ steppes had no legal protection status. Moreover, the project facilitated the evaluation of the Karacadağ steppes within the framework of "IUCN [International Union for Conservation of Nature] Category VI: Protected area with sustainable use of natural resources". Pertinently, the primary objective of protected areas in this category is to protect natural ecosystems and use natural resources sustainably, when conservation and sustainable use can be mutually beneficial. In addition, other objectives cover the promotion of social and economic benefits for local communities and the facilitation of intergenerational security for local communities' livelihoods. Furthermore, the inclusion of any site in Category VI requires the site resources to be used in an ecologically sustainable manner, to be legally disclosed at the time of the protected area's official declaration, or to be described in a management plan or any official document. In addition, the management of the site is to be carried out by a public institution that will not compromise nature protection goals and should be conducted in cooperation with the local population.

153. According to some stakeholders, the long-term impact of the project is interconnected with the sustainability and continuation of the achieved results. At the same time, the stakeholders expressed very different opinions about the likelihood of the project's sustainability. One of the risk factors cited was the absence of an officially documented commitment (financial and human resources) by the Government of Türkiye. However, all state sector representatives interviewed in the course of this evaluation supported the idea of follow-up activities and the project's continuation.

3.6 Partnerships and stakeholder engagement

EQ 44. To what extent were partnerships/linkages between institutions/organizations encouraged and supported?

EQ 45. Which partnerships/linkages were facilitated? Which ones can be considered sustainable?

EQ 46. Have other actors, such as civil society, local people or the private sector, been sufficiently involved in project implementation?

EQ 47. What has been the effect of their involvement/non-involvement on the project results?

Finding 36. The project framed different partnership modalities with different clusters of stakeholders. The representatives of the national state agencies were engaged in the Project Steering Committee meetings, took part in the project capacity building activities and coordinated the project-related work with the National Project Coordinator. The direct engagement of the NGO sector and local communities in project planning and decision-making was not supported.

154. The Evaluation Team analysed the level of engagement and scope of the project implementing partners and subcontractors, and they noted that the project conducted stakeholder analysis at the design stage. With regard to the roles and responsibilities of FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, as the project implementing agencies, the Evaluation Team also noted the extensive engagement of national non-state organizations to deliver project outputs (see Table 24), and individual experts providing technical expertise pursuant to the project outputs.

Table 24. National subcontractors and their level of engagement in the project

Organization	Roles and responsibilities	Engagement in the project		
		Component 1	Component 2	Component 3
Anadolu Çevre Ormancılık Haritacılık (ANÇEO)	**Private company and service provider**	**X**	**X**	
	Baseline surveys (biodiversity social economy, grazing, livestock)	Output 1.1.1 Output 1.1.2		
	Development of a specific "Species Action Plan"	Output 1.2.5		
	Preparing grazing plans for three pilot sites		Output 2.1.3	
	Preparing and using management plans for three pilot sites		Output 2.1.5	
Nature Conservation Centre (DKM)	**NGO** and **service provider**	**X**	**X**	**X**
	Preparing a Monitoring Programme for three pilot sites	Output 1.3.3		
	Training activities for stakeholders engaged in school education and journalism; publications of leaflets, village guides, posters, teacher guidebooks, public spots	Output 1.1.8		
	Determination of the governing monitoring protocol		Output 2.2.6	
	Set Monitoring Programme in place and training for technical staff and decision-makers		Output 2.2.4	
	Training Programme on Protected Areas: training for technical staff and decision-makers			Output 3.3
	Trainings for stakeholders involved in protected area planning and management			Output 3.3.1

Organization	Roles and responsibilities	Engagement in the project		
		Component 1	Component 2	Component 3
	including study tour outside Türkiye (Spain) separately			
	Model Steppe Conservation Strategy and Action Plan for Şanlıurfa			Output 3.1.2
	National Steppe Conservation Strategy and Action Plan			Output 3.2.2
	Establishing Şanlıurfa Steppe Conservation Technical Working Group under the Pasture Commission			Output 3.1.1
	Establishing National Steppe Conservation Working Group			Output 3.2.1
	Developing Steppe Conservation and Management Training Programme for agriculture extension and national parks extension officers			Output 3.3.1
	Organizing annual steppe conservation seminars/workshops			Output 3.3.2
Uyum	**Private company and service provider**		**X**	
	Developing Grazing Monitoring System and linked BD Monitoring Programme		Output 2.2.1	
PGlobal	**Private company and service provider**		**X**	
	Creating a project training strategy and training programme on steppe management and monitoring		Output 2.3.1	
	Developing training manual and resource materials for trainings		Output 2.3.2	
	Implementing the training programme in line with the demonstrations		Output 2.3.3	
	Integrating the training programme into government operations		Output 2.3.4	

Source: FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

155. Moreover, the project design incorporated some activities related to strengthening partnerships and cooperation between different groups of national stakeholders (see Table 25). In addition, according to the project reports, FAO engaged the local subcontractors to establish the Şanlıurfa Steppe Conservation Technical Working Group under the Pasture Commission and the National Steppe Conservation Working Group. The project also reported establishing the Grazing Working Group to ensure that lessons learned are captured and disseminated among the relevant parties.

Table 25. Project activities related to partnership and cooperation

Activity	Output	Comments
Developing and circulating the "Stakeholder Engagement Guideline".	Output 1.1.6	Instead, the project developed the "Guideline for Engaging Stakeholders in the Managing of Protected Areas". High possibility of sustainability.
Establishing and functionalizing an effective coordination system between government agencies and livestock producers.	Output 2.1.6	Linked to Output 2.1.3; sustainability is unclear.
Establishing the Grazing Working Group to ensure that lessons learned are captured and disseminated.	Output 2.1.7	Was initiated in March 2021 as it was linked to Output 2.1.3; sustainability is unclear.
Establishing the Şanlıurfa Steppe Conservation Technical Working Group under the Pasture Commission.	Output 3.1.1	Established in January–June 2020 reporting period; sustainability is unclear.
Establishing a Steppe Conservation Working Group as a joint initiative of the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock and Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs.	Output 3.2.1	Established in July–December 2019 reporting period; sustainability is unclear.

Source: FAO. 2022. *FAO-GEF Project Implementation Report (Period covered: 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022)*. Ankara.

156. Furthermore, one of the project activities was focused on developing the "Guideline for Engaging Stakeholders in the Management of Protected Areas". This guideline, if followed and applied by the national implementing partners after the project's completion, has a high likelihood of sustainability. It was aimed at providing strategies and practical tools for the engagement of stakeholders during the establishment, planning and management of protected areas. The guideline was developed *"to provide specialized support for protected area planners, decision-makers, managers and Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry staff, with a view to maximizing stakeholder participation and facilitate participatory conservation and management of protected areas."*

157. The evaluation was unable to answer whether *"Establishing and functionalizing an effective coordination system between government agencies and livestock producers"* under Output 2.1.6 and *"Establishing the Grazing Working Group to ensure that lessons learned are captured and disseminated"* under Output 2.1.7 were sustainable, as these outputs were yet to have been completed by the end of June 2022, and as planned. During interviews conducted in June 2022, the Evaluation Team did not receive any concrete feedback from key stakeholders on the matter.

158. The Steppe Conservation Working Group and the Şanlıurfa Steppe Conservation Technical Working Group were established in the July to December 2019 and January to June 2020 reporting periods, respectively. The working group members were reported to have been engaged in all of the relevant meetings. However, according to interviews, the sustainability of these initiatives fully depended on the Government of Türkiye taking ownership to continue facilitating the work of these working groups. Many stakeholders believed that the Government of Türkiye would keep engaging with members of the working groups, but the evaluation found no probative evidence to support this claim.

EQ 48. What was the level of efficiency of cooperation and collaboration arrangements?

EQ 49. Which methods were successful or not, and why?

EQ 50. Was there effective collaboration between institutions responsible for implementing the project?

EQ 51. What are strengths and challenges of the project's partnerships?

Finding 37. The project facilitated the implementation of different activities (including the development of the "Stakeholder Engagement Guideline") related to strengthening partnerships and cooperation among different sectors and the sustainability of partnership arrangements depending on the modality of these partnerships (e.g. among state sector agencies, between FAO and subcontractors representing private and non-governmental sectors, between FAO and state sector). Local communities were engaged in the capacity of the direct beneficiaries of the project. In the meantime, partnerships with civil society and academia were limited to the roles of the subcontractor or participants of the workshop or technical working groups.

159. The key stakeholders, representing the implementing partners, confirmed regular communication between FAO and state sector agencies. All of the relevant national stakeholders confirmed that the scope of the project fell within the mandate of all of the General Directorates and the project's national implementing partners. Moreover, the top- and mid-level staff of the national implementing partners were engaged throughout the Project Steering Committee meetings. According to the feedback of key stakeholders, the relevant staff of state agencies (from mid- to top-levels) and the project implementing partners took part in all capacity building activities organized within the project framework. At the same time, the key stakeholders pointed out that the project's participatory approach was less focused on the NGO sector, as they were not consulted either at the project design stage nor in the process of developing project deliverables, and they were further not invited to take part in the project's capacity building activities. At the same time, the project facilitated partnership arrangements with the private sector and NGOs as local service providers. Some key stakeholders believed this arrangement to be efficient.

160. In addition, some state sector representatives shared their vision about certain key potential partners not being sufficiently engaged. For example, according to some key national stakeholders, the General Directorate of Plant Production of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry had to be the principal implementing partner of the project, as it managed most of the steppe areas and was linked to the status and usage of steppes in the country. In many areas, steppes were used as pasturelands. Moreover, while some had protected status, other parts of steppes were registered as forest, and some were not registered at all. Therefore, a few key national stakeholders (from state agencies) pointed out that the General Directorate of Forestry of Türkiye was not sufficiently engaged in the design stage of the project.

161. Furthermore, the Evaluation Team found evidence of direct communication of the National Project Coordinator with local communities. At the same time, key interviewees mentioned that the needs of local communities were transferred to the project team by representatives of state agencies and that the local communities were not engaged in project planning and decision-making.

3.7 Communication and knowledge management

EQ 52. How is the project assessing, documenting and sharing its results, lessons learned and experiences?

EQ 53. To what extent are communication products and activities likely to support the sustainability and scaling up of project results?

Finding 38. The project document neither considered developing a communication strategy nor did it allocate funds for this purpose. However, the National Project Coordinator drafted the project communication strategy and shared it with the FAO Communication Specialist to get comments in line with FAO's visual and communication rules and procedures. The project issued different printed materials, including books and other materials for local schools, developing and printing posters for the project sites, developing a project webpage to raise awareness about the project, posting guidelines on the FAO website, as well as creating YouTube videos.

162. The project document incorporated a section about the communication and visibility of the project. However, this section mainly referred to workshops for information sharing, engagement of media reporting on project activities, launching a project website and creating Farmer Field Schools in pilot areas.

163. The evaluation noted that the project design neither considered developing a communication strategy nor did it allocate funds for this purpose. However, de facto, the project communication strategy was drafted by the National Project Coordinator and then shared with the FAO Communication Specialist to get comments, in line with FAO's visual and communication rules and procedures. The final draft communication strategy (in Turkish and English) was delivered to the National Project Implementation Unit. The project communication strategy aimed *"to respond to the need to create better understanding across the country of steppes and the biodiversity they contain. Towards that end, the strategy places heightened emphasis on utilizing below-the-line information products as well as available channels of above-the-line media in order to reach the general public, especially in rural areas."* The Evaluation Team analysed the content of the communication strategy and verified that it provided a comprehensive approach and tools to be used to reach out to a diverse group of stakeholders, direct and indirect beneficiaries, and policymakers in public institutions. Furthermore, according to the project team, the absence of a budget line related to communication strategy development led to an additional delay. The communication strategy was developed in June 2017 and revised/updated in August 2021. According to the project reports, FAO recruited a communication specialist to support communication-related assignments. Yet, the Evaluation Team noted that many tasks associated with awareness raising and presentations and the delivery of communication materials were implemented by the National Project Coordinator.

Figure 5. Educational materials printed for local schools

164. The evaluation also verified the project's issuing of different printed materials, including books and other materials for local schools (FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2022a; 2022b), developing and printing posters for the project sites, developing a project webpage (Bozkirprojesi, 2022) to raise awareness about the project, posting guidelines on the FAO website (Jungmeier and Yenilmez Arpa, 2022a; 2022b; Karadeniz and Yenilmez Arpa, 2022a; 2022b; Dudu, 2022), and creating YouTube videos. The information posted online is open and accessible to the broader public and is provided in the local (Turkish) language. Some key stakeholders believed that the published materials and videos contributed to the project's visibility and the sharing of information about the results after project completion.

3.7.1 M&E design and implementation

EQ 54. Is the M&E plan practical and sufficient?

EQ 55. Did the M&E system operate as per the M&E plan?

EQ 56. Was information gathered in a systematic manner, using appropriate methodologies?

EQ 57. Was the information from the M&E system appropriately used to make timely decisions and foster learning during project implementation?

Finding 39. The evaluation found no evidence of the project M&E being developed in spite of the commitments expressed in the project document. Also, at design, the project allocated USD 184 500 for M&E activities. The project team developed the results framework along with SMART indicators to track the progress of the project activities. The progress was presented in project progress reports and project implementation reviews.

165. The evaluation noted that the project document incorporated sections related to project monitoring, evaluation and overall oversight. At design, the project allocated USD 184 500 for M&E activities and committed to developing an M&E Plan and Results Framework for the project. The project document also outlined that the day-to-day monitoring of the project would have been conducted by the project management team, in close collaboration with the National Project Implementation Unit. The monitoring of results had to be reported through the project progress reports and project implementation reviews.

166. The Evaluation Team could not validate the extent to which the M&E Plan was either effective or practical, and whether the M&E System operated as per the M&E Plan, as the evaluation found no evidence of the M&E Plan being developed. Nevertheless, the Results Framework of the project included key performance indicators (KPIs), as well as baseline and target indicators at outcome and output levels. The evaluation found these indicators

to be specific and adherent to the SMART framework, as the target indicators were linked to the project's completion.

167. Furthermore, according to the project document, the project's M&E had to incorporate several key activities. The evaluation validated some of these M&E activities but was unable to validate others due to having no access to the relevant data (see Table 26).

Table 26. Planned vs. validated M&E activities

At design	Validated by the evaluation
Participative progress monitoring and workshops with beneficiaries	Validated
On-site monitoring of implementation	Validated
Project progress reports prepared by the Project Management Team	Validated
Consultants' reports	Partially validated
Participants' training tests and evaluations	Unable to validate
Mid-term and final evaluations completed by independent consultants	Validated
Financial reports and budget revisions	Unable to validate
Project implementation reviews	Validated
FAO supervision mission reports	Unable to validate
Post-project impact and evaluation studies	Unable to validate

Source: FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

168. Finally, the evaluation validated the development of 8 out of 12 project progress reports (semi-annual progress reports) and five annual project implementation reviews. Notably, the latest project progress report covered the period of 1 July to 31 December 2021, and the Evaluation Team did not receive PPRs for 1 January to 30 June 2022 and, obviously, for 1 July to 31 December 2022. According to the project team, from 2020, due to the fact that both the project implementation reviews and semi-annual project progress reports were lengthy and overlapping documents in the GEF reporting system, it was decided to reduce the number of semi-annual project progress reports and produce only those covering July–December. The latest project implementation review covered the period of 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022. Notably, project progress reports incorporated data on the achievement of the project's outcome indicators, updated information about the workplan and budget implementation for the reporting period, key achievements and major challenges, follow-up actions (planned/suggested), financial statements for the reporting period and co-financing reports.

3.8 Cross-cutting dimensions

3.8.1 Environmental and social safeguards

EQ 58. To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the implementation of the project?

Finding 40. The project addressed the environmental and social concerns of the targeted area at both the design and implementation phases. Moreover, the project considered a social aspect concerning environmental degradation and biodiversity to be vital parts of all agricultural production, having a direct impact on the surrounding communities.

169. Desk research and in-person interviews validated that the project design and implementation addressed the environmental and social concerns of the targeted area. Notably, all of the outputs and outcomes of the project were directly centred around the environmental stress reduction and biodiversity conservation agenda. At the same time, the project also had a social aspect concerning environmental degradation and biodiversity

as vital parts of all agricultural production and having a direct impact on the surrounding communities (see Table 27).

Table 27. Environmental and social aspects of the project outputs and outcomes

Outcomes and outputs	Environmental	Social
Outcomes		
Outcome 1. Effectiveness of protected area system to conserve steppe biodiversity increased.	Yes	Yes
Outcome 2. Steppe biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into production landscapes.	Yes	Yes
Outcome 3. Enabling environment established for the effective conservation of steppe biodiversity across large landscapes.	Yes	Yes
Outputs		
Output 1.1. New steppe-protected area established and operational.	Yes	Yes
Output 1.2. Effective Management Plans for three steppe protected areas created and implemented.	Yes	Yes
Output 1.3. Rigorous Monitoring Programme for three steppe protected areas established.	Yes	Yes
Output 2.1. Sustainable Grazing Management Programme operational across three steppe protected areas and associated buffer zones.	Yes	Yes
Output 2.2. Sustainable Grazing Management Programme impacts monitored at three steppe protected areas.	Yes	Yes
Output 2.3. Model Steppe Conservation Training Programme for pastoralists emplaced.	Yes	Yes
Output 3.1. Şanlıurfa Province Steppe Conservation Strategy and associated enabling environment improvements implemented.	Yes	Yes
Output 3.2. National Steppe Conservation Strategy and associated enabling environment improvements established.	Yes	Yes
Output 3.3. National Steppe Conservation Training and Awareness Programme for decision-makers and resource managers.	Yes	Yes

Source: FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

170. Moreover, the following project outputs were exclusively focused on supporting local communities through alternative income-generating opportunities and engaged directly with local livestock owners/farmers:

i. Output 2.2.4, *"Developing an alternative income-generating activity/opportunity for three project sites";* and

ii. Output 3.1.3, *"Identifying alternative income-generating activities in the Steppe Conservation Strategy"*.

3.8.2 Gender

EQ 59. To what extent were gender considerations taken into account in implementing the project?

EQ 60. Was the project implemented in a manner that ensures gender equitable participation and benefits?

Finding 41. The project was not specifically focused on the gender mainstreaming agenda, but rather on the environmental, biodiversity conservation and social facets of the targeted areas.

171. Desk research and in-person interviews validated that the project was not specifically focused on gender mainstreaming, but rather on environmental, biodiversity conservation and social (directly and indirectly) facets of the targeted areas. In general, the project

offered incentives for local community members to engage in better and more environmentally friendly practices.

172. In-person interviews confirmed that safeguarding gender balance during the on-site capacity building and awareness raising events was often beyond the control of the project.[26] At the same time, the applied communication strategy to post the project-related information made the information easily accessible to the general public, including women.

Figure 6. National Project Coordinator's meeting with local community members

173. Furthermore, with regard to the direct engagement of local community members, some key stakeholders highlighted the different roles assumed by men and women. In particular, the latter were usually responsible for animal breeding and cultivating crops. In addition, due to local social norms, women were less observable in communication with the project team, except for the female National Project Coordinator.

[26] The state sector staff was nominated by the state implementing partners.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

174. Based on the data and evidence gathered, the evaluation presents the following conclusions:

Conclusion 1. Relevance. While the project was fully aligned with the overall strategic priorities and needs of the Government of Türkiye, it was directly relevant to the mandate (determined by the provisions of international conventions and protocols and Turkish legislation and regulations) of the state institutions engaged in project implementation (i.e. the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks[27] of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry; the General Directorate of Plant Production of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry; and the General Directorate of Forestry). While the project team conducted stakeholder mapping (at the project's design phase), this exercise appeared to be less relevant in the course of the project implementation, due to the country and regional specifics and structural reforms that took place within the Government of Türkiye. In addition, the inconsistency of focal point team composition from the Government of Türkiye during the design and implementation phases of the project caused overambitious planning of the project outputs and outcomes (e.g. the project design document anticipated to change the status of Karacadağ in the course of the project implementation).

175. Also, the project was fully aligned with two out of five Biodiversity Objectives of the GEF-5 Focal Area Strategies (BD-1: "Improve the sustainability of protected area systems"; and BD-2: "Mainstream biodiversity conservation and sustainable use into production landscapes/seascapes and sectors"). Finally, the project was fully aligned with the food and agriculture-related (as defined by FAO) SDG targets under SDG 1: "No poverty: End poverty in all its forms everywhere"; SDG 2: "Zero hunger: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture"; SDG 5: "Gender equality: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"; SDG 6: "Clean water and sanitation: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all", SDG 10: "Reduced inequalities: Reduce inequality within and among countries"; SDG 12: "Responsible consumption and production"; SDG 14: "Life below water: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources"; and SDG 15: "Life on land: Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss", as well as several SDG targets not directly related to hunger and food insecurity under SDG 12: "Responsible consumption and production" and SDG 17: "Partnerships for the Goals".

Conclusion 2. Effectiveness. The project significantly increased the awareness and capacity of different stakeholders (at national and provincial levels) about the importance of the biodiversity conservation agenda and sustainable management of steppe ecosystems in the country. The project facilitated the creation of methodological and technical documents and guidelines as well as strategic and action plans, which serve as valuable and practical tools for the Government of Türkiye to facilitate and replicate further interventions on sustainable management of the steppe ecosystem and biodiversity in the country.

[27] At the project design phase, the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks was under the Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs.

176. At the same time, the project design demonstrated specific challenges associated with an ambitious project timeline, its design specifics (interlinked outputs), and inefficient risk analytics on the internal challenges (extended inception phase, delays with the project staff recruitment, translation-related issues, delays with tendering and procurement, technical clearance procedure, time-consuming FAO rules related to information sharing between FAO and the national implementing partners) and external challenges (not anticipated at the design, including the COVID-19 pandemic and tension among the community groups in the targeted areas). Altogether, it led to unplanned adjustments to the project workplan and an extension of the completion dates. As a result, the project was still ongoing, and the anticipated deliverables were achieved partially by the time of the evaluation. The main strategic achievements covered the development of technical documents (guidelines and strategic action plans, surveys and assessments, monitoring plans, etc.). Overall, by the time of the evaluation, the project fully achieved 64 percent (7 out of 11), and partially achieved 36 percent (4 out of 11) of the outcome indicators.

Conclusion 3. Efficiency. The project's existing governance and management structure was efficient, as it allowed for the adjustment (to a certain extent) of the project implementation to the challenging internal and external factors that impeded the timely accomplishment of the anticipated targets. Notably, the efficiency of the project implementation was also affected by the failure of the project to fully address the recommendations of the mid-term review, inconsistent reporting related to the project components, outcomes and outputs (varied in different documents), and actual project expenditures at output level, the absence of the rigorous M&E approach and logical framework, inefficient procurement and technical clearance, as well as inadequate project staffing structure. The latter included multiple/overburdening obligations of the National Project Coordinator and belated hiring of the National Project Coordinator, which prevented her from fully contributing to the inception phase of the project implementation.

Conclusion 4. Sustainability. While the sustainability of the project results was linked to the interest and willingness of the Government of Türkiye to contribute its financial and human resources for this purpose, FAO failed to address the project's sustainability agenda in its design phase. While the sustainability plan/narrative was incorporated into the terminal report of the project, and not introduced in the course of the project implementation, FAO reported engaging with the Government of Türkiye to ensure the approval of the protocols, guidelines and methodologies produced within the project implementation. Overall, FAO did not receive an official approval of the project follow-up plan from the Government of Türkiye to monitor and sustain the project achievements, and to scale up and replicate them at subregional or national levels.

Conclusion 5. Factors affecting performance: execution and management. Noticeably, both FAO and national implementing partners played essential roles in all stages of the project life cycle. At the same time, FAO's role was indispensable in facilitating and guiding the project implementation agenda. At the design stage, FAO assessed the implementation risks of the project to a certain extent and introduced a contingency plan. However, it did not take into account a number of apparent challenges related to the local context that could have affected the implementation of the project (e.g. a complex local context and potential tensions among the communities in the targeted sites of Şanlıurfa Province, as well as limited awareness of the project implementing partners about FAO's rules and procedures) and FAO's decision-making, technical clearance, recruitment, logistical and procurement procedures.

177. The role of FAO project team members (i.e. National Project Coordinator and Lead Technical Officer) was also crucial in securing the smooth implementation of the project

activities. However, the FAO project team's staffing pattern proved inefficient, leading to implementation delays and dissatisfaction among the implementing partners representing the Government of Türkiye.

Conclusion 6. Factors affecting performance: oversight, M&E. The project's M&E system suffered certain deficiencies. First and foremost, the weakness of the M&E system was linked to the unsatisfactory project design and the lack of a logical framework. Also, the project failed to produce the M&E plan as required by the project document at the project design stage. Furthermore, the M&E system deficiency resulted in inconsistencies in reporting on the indicators and reporting delays (i.e. PIR and PPR).

Conclusion 7. Factors affecting performance: co-financing. The project implementing partners significantly exceeded their initial co-funding (cash and in-kind) commitments and provided detailed annual reports on funds in cash and in-kind modalities.

Conclusion 8. Progress to impact. The impact of the project activities can only be observed in the long run. Therefore, the project's impact is closely tied up with the project sustainability, as the Government of Türkiye (an owner of the project results) is expected to scale up and replicate the project achievements.

Conclusion 9. Factors affecting performance: partnerships. The diverse partnership modalities developed within the project framework served as an information sharing platform among different sectors (e.g. state sector, academia, private sector, local communities and non-governmental organizations). At the same time, while the state sector served as a primary partner for FAO to deliver on the project objectives, FAO also engaged non-state actors (as subcontractors and workshop participants) to diversify the pool of indirect project beneficiaries and implementing partners.

Conclusion 10. Factors affecting performance: communication and knowledge management. At the project's design stage, FAO significantly lacked a holistic approach to connect properly with the direct and indirect beneficiaries through well-defined communication approaches. Nevertheless, FAO actively pursued adaptive management tactics and developed a communication strategy for the project. In addition, FAO's systematic sharing of project-related information (including basic inventory studies, training and capacity building materials) through digital communication means (online posting) increased the reach and the impact of project-based learning, as well as encouraging potential replication and scale up of the project results.

Conclusion 11. Cross-cutting dimensions: gender and environmental and social safeguards. The project's focus (at design and implementation phase) on gender equality and opportunities for women has been weak, as the project was mainly focused on addressing the overall environmental, steppe biodiversity and conservation agenda.

4.2 Recommendations

178. Below is a set of strategic and operational recommendations to be taken into account for the further planning and design of similar interventions.

Recommendation 1. Operational. The relevant FAO project team is highly recommended to advance the design and preparation phase of the new upcoming GEF-funded projects. In this regard, FAO needs to conduct a comprehensive and rigorous risk assessment, develop detailed risk mitigation strategies, and set realistic and feasible timelines for the projects aligned with the risks

identified. Also, FAO needs to allocate financial and human resources for developing communication strategies for the new upcoming projects.

Recommendation 2. Operational. The FAO project team needs to thoroughly address the recommendations of the mid-term review conducted within the framework of other projects and report on the progress made with regard to fulfilling the recommendations against the timeline set in the management response to the mid-term review recommendations. The reporting on the progress shall be incorporated into the project progress report and project implementation review and presented to the Project Steering Committee during the Steering Committee meeting. Consequently, the meeting notes of the Project Steering Committee meeting shall reflect the discussion topics related to the reporting on the progress made on mid-term review recommendations.

Recommendation 3. Operational. The FAO Country Office needs to strengthen its M&E system and ensure that the personnel have sufficient capacity to elaborate a detailed and gender-sensitive M&E plan. In this regard, it would also be highly advisable to strengthen the capacity of FAO personnel on M&E practices with the support and guidance of FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (for example, FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia experts providing advisory on the results and logical frameworks, reviewing, advising on and validating the M&E plans, guiding the national M&E specialists throughout the process, etc.).

Recommendation 4. Operational. The FAO Country Office needs to strengthen the projectized[28] and project management approaches through a number of measures, such as the introduction of project operation manuals (POMs) to be adjusted to the management and oversight needs of the new projects implemented by FAO. The POMs shall be tailored to the compliance and quality control requirements of the implementing partners (i.e. FAO and the Government of Türkiye) and donor agency (i.e. the GEF), and encompass the detailed procurement rules of the implementing agencies, roles and responsibilities of each counterpart (which might differ from the ones designed at the design stage of the project). Moreover, the relevant project teams and focal points from the national counterparts should be debriefed about each project's content and operational peculiarities outlined in the POM.

179. Furthermore, the FAO Country Office and headquarters need to reconsider the project staffing and hiring practices. The personnel hiring should be completed as soon as possible to ensure that at least the National Project Coordinator is actively engaged in the project's inception phase. At the same time, it is advisable to scope the role of the National Project Coordinator to project management functions, which should be reflected in the project title by adding the function 'Project Manager'. Moreover, the roles and responsibilities of the National Project Coordinator and Lead Technical Officer shall be adequate to the scope of the project, which means that FAO should engage additional project personnel to ensure efficient and smooth coordination and implementation of the project. Finally, FAO needs to adjust the financial analytics to ensure that the project's detailed expenditures are reported at output level.

Recommendation 5. Strategic. The FAO project teams are strongly advised to develop the project exit strategy at the early/design stage of the project to ensure its effective implementation. Obviously, the exit strategy addresses the sustainability of the project achievements after project completion, and the sustainability fully depends on the interest, ownership and commitment of the

[28] Projectized approach refers to developing a structure that focuses on the project, its process as well as the comprised tasks.

Government of Türkiye to allocate the financial and human resources to continue, scale up and replicate the project results. Therefore, FAO is recommended to initiate and maintain dialogue with the Government of Türkiye throughout project implementation regarding similar projects and on post-project resource allocation and action plans for post-project monitoring and reporting on sustainability. This Action Plan of the national government, as well as any official commitments to allocate the resources and any evidence of the resources being allocated, shall be incorporated into the final report of the project to validate the commitment of the counterpart to sustain the project results.

Recommendation 6. Strategic. The FAO Country Office is recommended to negotiate with the GEF or the Government of Türkiye for the planning and conducting of an impact evaluation of GEF-funded interventions in order to assess mid- and/or long-term environmental and socioeconomic impacts of this type of project. Obviously, an impact evaluation constitutes a resource and time-consuming exercise that needs to be planned before project implementation, and which should be conducted several years after project completion. Moreover, the impact evaluation (as well as the baseline analysis) shall be incorporated as part of the project design, which implies increased financial contributions (i.e. co-financing) from the participating parties. The impact evaluation is also directly linked and contributes to the project sustainability agenda.

5. Lessons learned

180. Based on the key lessons learned in the course of this evaluation, the evaluation issued the recommendations below to enhance the impact of the FAO-GEF funded interventions.

181. FAO needs to advance its financial reporting modality to be able to analyse and present the actual expenditure of the project at output level. The evaluation noted that the actual expenditure of the project was presented only across the outcome level, which impeded the analysis of the project efficiency.

182. FAO needs to develop an adequate and efficient M&E system at country portfolio level to cover all the work carried out during and/or after projects/programmes and define, select, collect, analyse and use the project- and programme-related information, corporate data tools, etc.

183. FAO needs to introduce a projectized approach and advance its project management approaches through the introduction of project operation manuals, which should be adjusted to the management and oversight needs of the new projects.

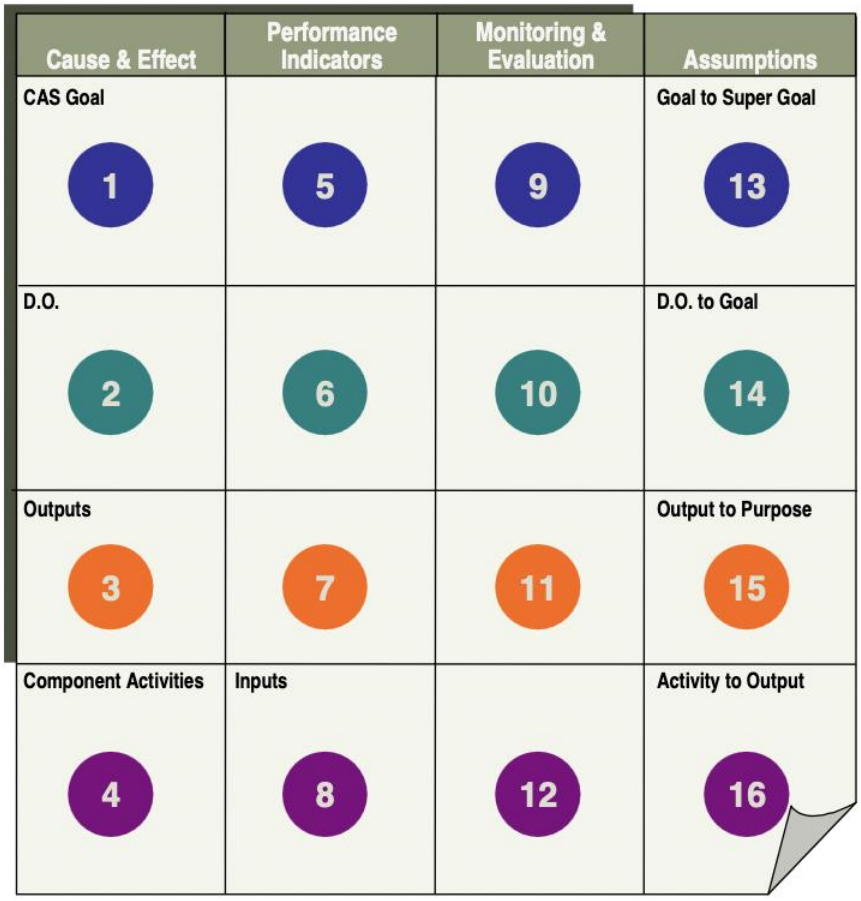
184. FAO needs to pay more attention to developing and updating the logical framework of its projects. Both the results and logical frameworks are substantial tools for monitoring and evaluating the project results. The Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) of the World Bank defines a results framework as *"an explicit articulation (graphic display, matrix, or summary) of the different levels, or chains, of results expected from a particular intervention project, program, or development strategy. The results specified typically comprise the longer-term objectives (often referred to as "outcomes" or "impact") and the intermediate outcomes and outputs that precede, and lead to, those desired longer-term objectives"* (The World Bank, 2012). The same document also outlines that: *"Outcomes and impacts are the main focus of a results framework; project inputs and implementation processes are generally not emphasized, although outputs are often noted. This conceptual presentation of a results chain (outputs, outcomes, and impacts) is often accompanied by a more detailed plan for monitoring progress towards the ultimate objectives through measuring the achievement of outputs, outcomes, and impacts at different intervals of time. Results are typically defined through indicators, which are often, but not always, quantifiable and measurable or observable (some indicators are qualitative). The monitoring plan typically includes baseline values and targets expected for outputs and outcomes, and it specifies the measures that will be used for data gathering to ensure that the results framework is actually populated with data, updated with information at key points during program/project implementation, and used in decision making"* (The World Bank, 2012).

185. Elsewhere, the World Bank defines a logical framework (logframe) as "*a tool that has the power to communicate the essential elements of a complex project clearly, and succinctly throughout the project cycle. It is used to develop the overall design of a project, improve project implementation monitoring, and strengthen periodic project evaluations. In essence, the Logframe is a 'cause and effect' model of project interventions to create desired impacts for the beneficiaries*" (The World Bank, n.d.).

186. The World Bank's logical framework constitutes a 16-box matrix to structure a project design (see Figure 7), described as follows: *"Link with the CAS (1); Set project objectives (1-4); Define performance indicators (5-8); Distinguish between project impact and project*

deliverables (2 versus 3); Define critical assumptions & risks on which the project is based (13-16); Define the system for monitoring, evaluation and supervision (9-12); Identify the basic Component clusters for implementation planning (4); Define resources required for implementation (8)" (The World Bank, n.d.).

Figure 7. The World Bank Logical Framework



Source: The World Bank. n.d. *The Logframe Handbook*. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/783001468134383368/pdf/31240b0LFhandbook.pdf

Bibliography

References

Bozkirprojesi. 2022. Türkiye'nin Bozkir Ekosistemlerinin [Steppe Ecosystems of Türkiye]. In: Bozkirprojesi. Ankara. https://bozkirprojesi.org/ or https://en.bozkirprojesi.org

Dudu, D. 2022. *Guidelines for grazing and livestock monitoring*. Ankara, FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. https://doi.org/10.4060/cb8361en

FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) & the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. 2022a. *Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems Project. GCP/TUR/061/GFF. I am learning the steppes – Student's activity book. Animals of the Steppe*. Ankara. https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb8386en

FAO & Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. 2022b. *Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems Project. GCP/TUR/061/GFF. I am learning the steppes – Teacher's guide*. Ankara. https://www.fao.org/3/cb8382en/cb8382en.pdf

GEF (Global Environment Facility). 2011. *GEF 5 Focal Area Strategies*. https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/documents/GEF-5_FOCAL_AREA_STRATEGIES.pdf

Jungmeier, M. and Yenilmez Arpa, N. 2022a. *Guidelines for establishing protected areas*. Ankara, FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. https://doi.org/10.4060/cb8356en

Jungmeier, M. and Yenilmez Arpa, N. 2022b. *Guidelines for biodiversity monitoring*. Ankara, FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. https://doi.org/10.4060/cb8370en

Karadeniz N. and Yenilmez Arpa, N. 2022a. *Guidelines for engaging stakeholders in managing protected areas*. Ankara, FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. https://doi.org/10.4060/cb8347en

Karadeniz, N. and Yenilmez Arpa, N. 2022b. *Guidelines for assessing the management effectiveness of protected areas*. Ankara, FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. https://doi.org/10.4060/cb8349en

Republic of Türkiye & Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. 2023. *Genel Müdürlüğümüz merkez teşkilatı; 1 Genel Müdürlük, 4 Genel Müdür Yardımcılığı, 7 Daire Başkanlığı, 42 çalışma grubu şeklinde yapılandırılmıştır* [The General Directorate's central organization is structured as follows: 1 General Directorate, 4 Deputy General Directorates, 7 Department Heads, and 42 working groups]. https://www.tarimorman.gov.tr/DKMP/Menu/16/Teskilat-Yapisi#

Republic of Türkiye & Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs. n.d. National strategy and action plan to combat desertification 2015–2023. https://webdosya.csb.gov.tr/db/cem/icerikler/cem-stj-eylem-bros-ing-20211108095837.pdf

The World Bank. 2012. *Designing a results framework for achieving results: a how-to guide*. Washington, DC. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/32158/Designing-a-Results-Framework-for-Achieving-Results-A-How-to-Guide.pdf

The World Bank. n.d. *The Logframe Handbook. A logical framework approach to project cycle management*. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/783001468134383368/pdf/31240b0LFhandbook.pdf

UNEG (United Nations Evaluation Group). 2016. *Norms and Standards for Evaluation (2016)*. https://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914

Additional resources

BÜGEM (Bitkisel Üretim Genel Müdürlüğü/General Directorate of Plant Production). 2017–2020. *BUGEM Co-financing reports for the FAO/GEF project "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems"*. Ankara.

DKMPGM (Doğa Koruma ve Milli Parklar Genel Müdürlüğü/General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks). 2018–2020. *DKMPGM Co-financing reports for the FAO/GEF project "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems"*. Ankara.

FAO & OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). 2016. *International Regulatory Co-operation and International Organizations: The Case of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)*. Rome.

FAO. 2016. Country programming framework for Türkiye (2016–2020). Rome.

FAO. 2017. *Project Document: Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems*. Ankara.

FAO. 2017. PPR for 1 January 2017 to 30 June 2017. Ankara.

FAO. 2017. PPR for 30 June 2017 to 31 December 2017. Ankara.

FAO. 2017–2019. FAO Co-financing reports for the FAO/GEF project "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems". Ankara.

FAO. 2017–2021. Project HR plans. Ankara.

FAO. 2017–2021. Project procurement plans. Ankara.

FAO. 2017–2021. Project Workplans. Ankara.

FAO. 2018. PIR for 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2018. Ankara.

FAO. 2018. PPR for 1 January 2018 to 30 June 2018. Ankara.

FAO. 2018. PPR for 1 July 2018 to 31 December 2018. Ankara.

FAO. 2019. Mid-Term Review of the FAO/GEF project "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems". Ankara.

FAO. 2019. PIR for 1 July 1 July 2018 to 30 June 2019. Ankara.

FAO. 2019. PPR for 1 January 2019 to 30 June 2019. Ankara.

FAO. 2019. PPR for 1 July 2019 to 31 December 2019. Ankara.

FAO. 2019. PPR for 1 July 2020 to 31 December 2020. Ankara.

FAO. 2019. PPR for 1 July 2021 to 31 December 2021. Ankara.

FAO. 2020. Management response to the Mid-Term Review of the FAO/GEF project "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems". Ankara.

FAO. 2020. PIR for 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020. Ankara.

FAO. 2021. PIR for 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021. Ankara.

FAO. 2022. *Complementation of the Monitoring Program for Periodical Assessment of Pilot Sites. Technical Report 1.1 Proposal of a governance system for periodical data collection and analysis (monitoring cycle and responsible authorities, legal reflection)*. Ankara.

FAO. 2022. *FAO-GEF Project Implementation Report (Period covered: 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022)*. Ankara.

FAO. 2022. *Site-level tool for identifying other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)***.** Ankara.

FAO. 2022. *Tracking Progress on Food and Agriculture-related SDG Indicators 2022***.** Rome. https://www.fao.org/3/cc1403en/cc1403en.pdf.

FAO. n.d.a. Project Communication Strategy. Ankara.

FAO. n.d.b. Project component report. Ankara.

Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock. 2017. *Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock/GDPP Co-financing report for the FAO/GEF project "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems"*. Ankara.

Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs. 2017. *Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs / GDNCN Co-financing report for the FAO/GEF project "Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems"*. Ankara.

Republic of Türkiye. 2007. *The National Biological Diversity Strategy and Action Plan*. Ankara

UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme). 2011. *Strategic plan for biodiversity and the Aichi targets (2011–2020): "living in harmony with nature"*. Nairobi.

Appendix 1. People interviewed

#	Surname	First name	Organization	Job title or area
1	Acar	Mr Zeki	Academia	Scientific Consultant of Uyum and ANÇEO
2	Arpa	Ms Nihan Yenilmez	FAO	National Project Coordinator (NPC)
3	Arslan	Mr Murat	General Directorate for European Union and Foreign Relations (GDEUFR)	Project Monitoring Expert
4	Aslan	Mr Ömer Faruk	Nature Conservation and National Parks (NCNP)	Expert
5	Ayan	Ms İlknur	ANÇEO (consulting firm)	Scientific Consultant (for all pilot sites)
6	Başkent	Mr Emin Zeki	ANÇEO	Scientific Consultant
7	Berberoğlu	Mr Süha	ANÇEO	Scientific Consultant
8	Beşirbelli	Ms Gülden	ANÇEO	Manager
9	Bilensoy	Mr Yılmaz	ANÇEO	Manager
10	Çiçek	Mr Hacı Ahmet	NCNP	Regional Director
11	Çiftçi	Mr Erol	PPGD	Sivas Provincial Directorate
12	Çiftçi	Mr Mehmet	NCNP	
13	Coşkun	Ms Selda	GDEUFR	Expert
14	Çullu	Mr Mehmet Ali	Harran University	Independent Expert Group Member
15	Ektiren	Mr Reşat	NCNP	Field Officer
16	Erdem	Mr Caner	GDEUFR	M&E Officer
17	Esina	Ms Esra	PPGD	Focal Point
18	Geçgülen	Mr Seyido	NCNP	
19	Girayalp	Mr Alpaslan	PGlobal (Global Advisory and Training Services)	Head
20	Gökçe	Ms Umay	GDEUFR	International Organizations
21	Gonzales	Mr Hernan	FAO	Technical Officer
22	Güngören	Mr Ahmet Volkan	GDEUFR	Deputy Director General
23	Gürsel	Mr Burçak	GDEUFR	M&E Officer
24	İnan	Mr Onur	NCNP	Field Officer
25	İnanç	Mr Mehmet Latif	PPGD	Mardin Provincial Directorate
26	Keleş	Ms Kıymet	GDF (General Directorate of Forestry)	Former Focal Point
27	Noyon	Mr Mahmut	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry/Siverek District Agriculture Directorate	Field Officer
28	Orhan	Mr Hakan	NCNP	Head
29	Örnek	Mr Fecir	NCNP	Field Officer
30	Özcanlı	Ms Cemre	GDEUFR	M&E Officer
31	Özevren	Mr Erdoğan	FAO	HR Officer
32	Özgür	Mr Davut	PPGD	Head of Meadow and Pastureland
33	Özkan	Mr Yıldıray Lise	DKM (Nature Conservation Centre)	Deputy General Director
34	Pechacek	Mr Peter	FAO	Lead Technical Officer (LTO)
35	Polat	Mr Tahir	Harran University	Independent Expert Group Member
36	Şeker	Mr Yunus	Uyum (Private Company)	Field Officer

#	Surname	First name	Organization	Job title or area
37	Selışık	Ms Ayşegül	FAO	Deputy Country Representative
38	Sungur	Ms Güher	FAO	M&E Officer
39	Talan	Mr Özgün	PPGD	Antalya Provincial Directorate
40	Tatar	Mr Burak	NCNP	Expert
41	Topal	Mr Bahadır	FAO	M&E Officer
42	Toros	Ms Şafak	FAO	Communication
43	Ün	Mr Cemil	Uyum	Service Provider
44	Usta	Ms Tuba	NCNP	Focal Point
45	Velioğlu	Mr Hikmet	FAO	Administrative Assistant
46	Yavuz	Ms Kiraz Erciyas	19 Mayıs University	Scientific Consultant
47	Yılmaz	Mr Ergün	PPGD	Kayseri Provincial Directorate
48	Yılmaz	Ms Neslihan	GDEUFR	Expert
49	Yüzer	Mr İbrahim	GDF	Deputy General Director

Appendix 2. Key evaluation questions

Evaluation criteria	Key evaluation questions
Relevance	1. To what extent are the project's intended outcomes and its outputs responding to the national/regional biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of the protected area needs and priorities set by the Government of Türkiye? 2. To what extent did the project results contribute towards the achievement of FAO's commitments to the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets and relevant international treaties and conventions on biodiversity conservation and large landscape management? 3. How is the project supporting the project partners in the achievement of their institutional targets related to the project outcomes? 4. How does the project support the GEF biodiversity focal area and strategic priorities? 5. To what extent did the project implementation address the needs of all relevant stakeholders? 6. Were local beneficiaries and stakeholders adequately involved in project design and implementation?
Effectiveness	7. Has the project been effective in achieving its expected results (outputs and outcomes) (institutional capacity, pastoralist capacity, monitoring, national policies, etc.)? 8. What lessons have been learned from the project regarding the achievement of its outputs and outcomes? 9. What changes could have been made (if any) to the project design or its implementation approaches in order to improve the achievement of the project's expected results?
Efficiency	10. Was adaptive management used or needed to ensure efficient resource use? 11. Were the project logical framework and workplans, and any changes made to them, used as management tools during implementation? 12. Were progress reports produced accurately and in a timely way, and did they respond to reporting requirements including adaptive management changes? 13. Was project implementation as cost-effective as originally proposed (planned vs. actual)? 14. Were financial resources utilized efficiently? Could financial resources have been used more efficiently? 15. Was procurement carried out making efficient use of project resources? 16. What lessons can be learned from the project regarding efficiency? 17. How could the project have more efficiently carried out implementation (in terms of management structures and procedures, partnerships arrangements, etc.)?
Sustainability	18. Were sustainability issues integrated into the design and implementation of the project? 19. Did the project adequately address institutional, financial and economic sustainability issues? 20. Are the recurrent costs after project completion sustainable? 21. Is there evidence that project partners will continue their activities beyond project support? 22. What are the main challenges that may hinder the sustainability of efforts? Have any of these been addressed through project management? 23. Which areas/arrangements under the project show the strongest potential for lasting long-term results? 24. What are the key challenges and obstacles to the sustainability of results of the project initiatives that must be directly and quickly addressed? 25. To what extent did the project contribute towards local ownership of initiatives and results? 26. Did the project contribute to key building blocks for socioeconomic sustainability?

	27. Are there risks to the environmental benefits that were created or that are expected to occur? 28. Is the capacity in place at the regional, national and local levels adequate to ensure the sustainability of the results achieved to date? 29. Were project activities and results replicated nationally and/or scaled up? 30. Were project activities and results replicated or scaled up in other countries?
Factors affecting performance	**Project execution and management** 31. To what extent did the execution agency effectively discharge its role and responsibilities related to the management and administration of the project? **Project oversight, implementation role** 32. To what extent has FAO delivered on project identification, concept preparation, appraisal preparation, approval and start-up, oversight, and supervision? 33. What have been the main challenges in relation to the management and administration of the project? 34. Have there been any relevant lessons learned from project implementation that might be useful for other future projects targeted at similar objectives? 35. How well have risks been identified and managed? How well are risks, assumptions and impact drivers being managed? **Financial management and co-financing** 36. What have been the challenges related to the financial management of the project? 37. Did the leveraging of funds (co-financing) happen as planned? 38. To what extent did the expected co-financing materialize? **Progress to impact** 39. Is the globally significant biodiversity of the target area likely to be conserved? 40. What are the impacts or likely impacts of the project (on the local environment; on economic well-being; on other socioeconomic issues)? 41. To what extent may the progress towards long-term impact be attributed to the project? 42. Was there any evidence of environmental stress reduction and environmental status change, or any change in policy/legal/regulatory framework? 43. Are there any barriers or other risks that may prevent future progress towards long-term impact? **Partnerships and stakeholder engagement** 44. To what extent were partnerships/linkages between institutions/organizations encouraged and supported? 45. Which partnerships/linkages were facilitated? Which ones can be considered sustainable? 46. Have other actors, such as civil society, local people or the private sector, been sufficiently involved in project implementation? 47. What has been the effect of their involvement/non-involvement on the project results? 48. What was the level of efficiency of cooperation and collaboration arrangements? 49. Which methods were successful or not, and why? 50. Was there effective collaboration between institutions responsible for implementing the project? 51. What are strengths and challenges of the project's partnerships? **Communication and knowledge management** 52. How is the project assessing, documenting and sharing its results, lessons learned and experiences? 53. To what extent are communication products and activities likely to support the sustainability and scaling up of project results? **M&E design and implementation** 54. Is the M&E plan practical and sufficient? 55. Did the M&E system operate as per the M&E plan?

	56. Was information gathered in a systematic manner, using appropriate methodologies? 57. Was the information from the M&E system appropriately used to make timely decisions and foster learning during project implementation?
Cross-cutting dimensions	**Environmental and social safeguards** 58. To what extent where environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the implementation of the project? **Gender** 59. To what extent were gender considerations taken into account in implementing the project? 60. Was the project implemented in a manner that ensures gender equitable participation and benefits?

Source: FAO. 2022. *Conservation and Sustainable Management of Türkiye's Steppe Ecosystems – Terms of Reference*. Ankara.

Appendix 3. Project logical framework (simplified version)

Activity	Outputs	Outcome	Objective
Component 1: Effectiveness of protected area system to conserve steppe biodiversity increased			
Activity 1.1.1: Biodiversity surveys of three protected areas (PAs) **Activity 1.1.2: Socioeconomic assessments planned for project villages in Karacadağ, Tek Tek Mountains NP and Kızılkuyu WDA – PAs** **Activity 1.1.3: Guidelines on PA establishment** **Activity 1.1.4. Guidelines on PA assessment** **Activity 1.1.5: Stakeholder consultations** **Activity 1.1.6: Guidelines on stakeholder engagement** **Activity 1.1.7: Prepare and submit PA dossier** **Activity 1.1.8: Communication and awareness raising** **Activity 1.1.9: Training activities** **Activity 1.1.10: PA declaration**	**Output 1.1:** New steppe protected area established and operational.	**Outcome 1:** Effectiveness of protected area system to conserve steppe biodiversity increased.	Improve the conservation of Turkey's steppe ecosystems through effective protected area management and mainstreaming steppe biodiversity conservation into production landscapes.
Activity 1.2.1: Guidelines for PA management plans **Activity 1.2.2: Revise Kizilkuyu management plan** **Activity 1.2.3: Finalize three management plans** **Activity 1.2.4: Implement priority management interventions** **Activity 1.2.5: Species Action Plans**	**Output 1.2:** Effective management plans for three steppe protected areas created and implemented.		

Activity	Outputs	Outcome	Objective
Activity 1.2.6: Infrastructural PA investments **Activity 1.2.7: Build management planning capacity**			
Activity 1.3.1: Monitoring Handbook **Activity 1.3.2: Monitoring Group to advise PAs** **Activity 1.3.3: Monitoring Programme for each of the three PAs** **Activity 1.3.4: Monitoring tools and equipment**	**Output 1.3:** Rigorous Monitoring Programme for three steppe protected areas established.		
Component 2: Steppe biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into production landscapes			
Activity 2.1.1: Guidelines on Grazing Planning and Management **Activity 2.1.2: Conduct a comprehensive analysis of baseline survey on-going grazing activities within each of the protected areas* to inform PA management.** **Activity 2.1.3: Prepare three PA Grazing Plans.** **Activity 2.1.4: Implement three PA Grazing Plans with the CAP and Trade Approach.** **Activity 2.1.5: Support preparation of three Grazing Management Plans.** **Activity 2.1.6: Support the development of government/ livestock producer coordination system.** **Activity 2.1.7: Support the establishment of Grazing Working Groups.** **Activity 2.1.8: Conduct grazing management demonstration.** **Activity 2.1.9: Provide tools/equipment to deliver Grazing Management Plans.**	**Output 2.1:** Sustainable Grazing Management Programme operational across three steppe protected areas and associated buffer zones.	**Outcome 2:** Steppe biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into production landscapes.	

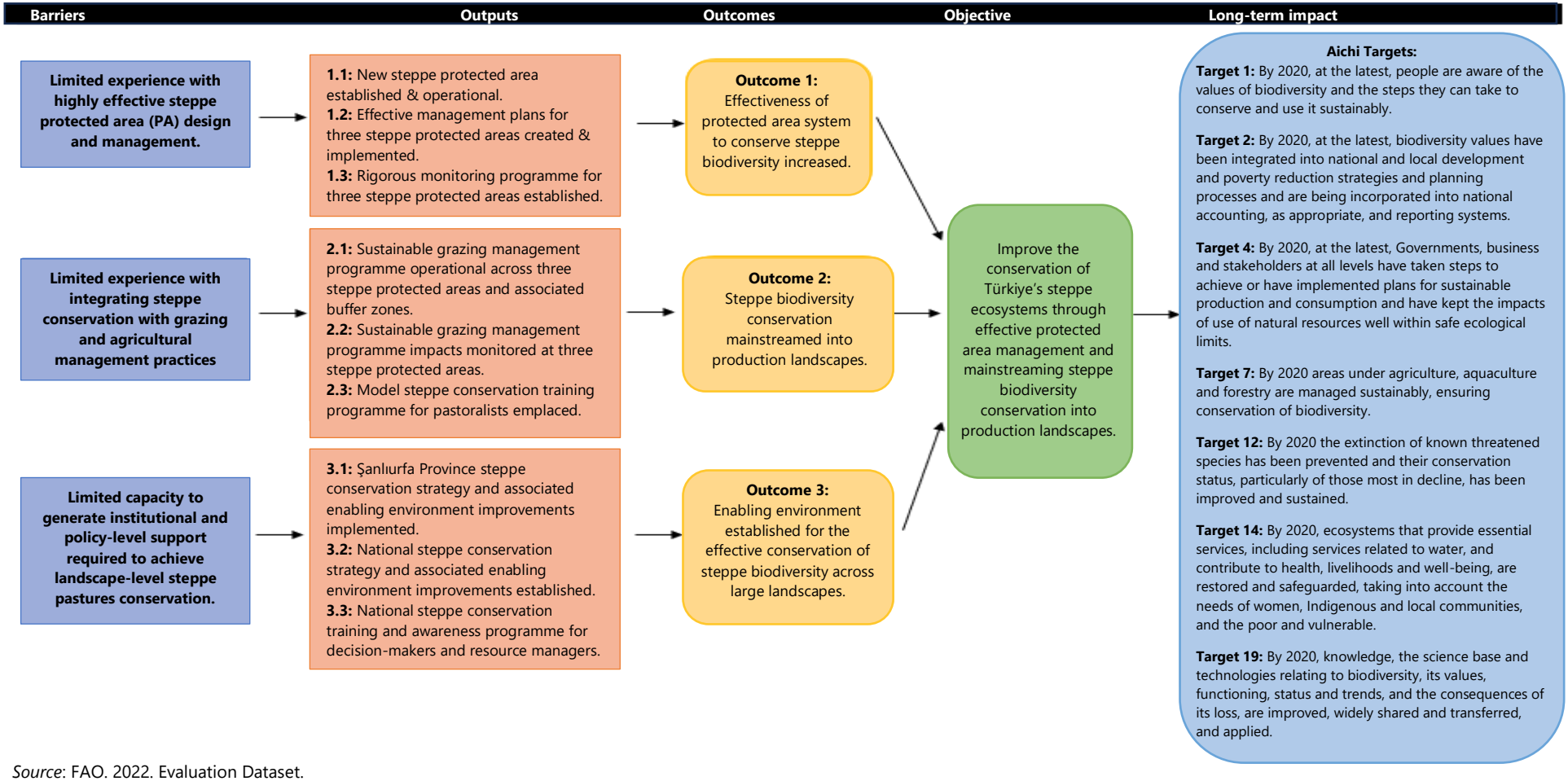
Activity	Outputs	Outcome	Objective
Activity 2.2.1: To develop guidelines for Grazing & Livestock Monitoring **Activity 2.2.2: Livestock Monitoring Programme** **Activity 2.2.3: Livestock Sales Programme** **Activity 2.2.4: Alternative income generation** **Activity 2.2.5: Develop livestock monitoring protocols** **Activity 2.2.6: Implement livestock monitoring protocols** **Activity 2.2.7: Revise Grazing Management Plans, based on monitoring** **Activity 2.2.8: Provide tools/equipment to monitor Impact of Grazing Plan**	**Output 2.2:** Sustainable Grazing Management Programme impacts monitored at three steppe protected areas.		
Activity 2.3.1: Develop training strategy and programme **Activity 2.3.2: Develop training manual and resources** **Activity 2.3.3: Deliver training programme** **Activity 2.3.4: Institutionalize training programme**	**Output 2.3:** Model Steppe Conservation Training Programme for pastoralists emplaced.		
Component 3: Enabling environment established for the effective conservation of steppe biodiversity across large landscapes.			
Activity 3.1.1: Establish Şanlıurfa Steppe Conservation Technical Working Group under the Pasture Commission **Activity 3.1.2: Design and develop a model Steppe Conservation Strategy at provincial level** **Activity 3.1.3: Identify income generation activities** **Activity 3.1.4: Mainstream the strategy objectives and priorities into operational**	**Output 3.1:** Şanlıurfa Province Steppe Conservation Strategy and associated enabling environment improvements implemented.	**Outcome 3:** Enabling environment established for the effective conservation of steppe biodiversity across large landscapes.	

Activity	Outputs	Outcome	Objective
budgets, human resources and policies of local and regional organizations			
Activity 3.2.1: Establish Steppe Conservation Working Group under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry **Activity 3.2.2: National Steppe Conservation Strategy** **Activity 3.2.3: Mainstream National Strategy**	**Output 3.2:** National steppe conservation strategy and associated enabling environment improvements established.		
Activity 3.3.1: Design Steppe Conservation & Management Training Programme **Activity 3.3.2: Annual steppe conservation event** **Activity 3.3.3: Mainstream steppe conservation across 81 Pasture Commissions** **Activity 3.3.4: Create and publish training materials**	**Output 3.3:** National Steppe Conservation Training and Awareness Programme for decision-makers and resource managers.		

Note: * This will be supported and informed by the model assessment conducted for the Karacadağ steppe ecosystem under Output 1.1.

Sources: FAO. 2017. *Project Document: Conservation and sustainable management of Türkiye's steppe ecosystems.* Ankara; and FAO. 2019. *Mid-term Review of the FAO/GEF project (GCP/TUR/061/GFF)*. Ankara.

Appendix 4. Theory of change



Source: FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

Appendix 5. Food and agriculture-related SDGs and associated targets

SDG	Associated targets
SDG 1 ("No poverty: End poverty in all its forms everywhere")	Target 1.4: By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance. Target 1.5: By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters.
SDG 2 ("Zero hunger: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture")	Target 2.1: By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round. Target 2.3: By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, Indigenous Peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment. Target 2.4: By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality. Target 2.5: By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional, and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed. Target 2.a: Increase investment, including through enhanced international cooperation, in rural infrastructure, agricultural research and extension services, technology development and plant and livestock gene banks in order to enhance agricultural productive capacity in developing countries, in particular least developed countries. Target 2.b: Correct and prevent trade restrictions and distortions in world agricultural markets, including through the parallel elimination of all forms of agricultural export subsidies and all export measures with equivalent effect, in accordance with the mandate of the Doha Development Round. Target 2.c: Adopt measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives and facilitate timely access to market information, including on food reserves, in order to help limit extreme food price volatility.
SDG 5 ("Gender equality: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls")	Target 5.a: Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.
SDG 6 ("Clean water and sanitation: Ensure availability and sustainable management	Target 6.4: By 2030, substantially increase water use efficiency across all sectors and ensure sustainable withdrawals and supply of freshwater to address water

SDG	Associated targets
of water and sanitation for all")	scarcity and substantially reduce the number of people suffering from water scarcity.
SDG 10 ("Reduced inequalities: Reduce inequality within and among countries")	Target 10.a: Implement the principle of special and differential treatment for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, in accordance with World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements.
SDG 12 ("Responsible consumption and production")	Target 12.3: By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses.
SDG 14 ("Life below water: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources")	Target 14.4: By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics. Target 14.6: By 2020, prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies, which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognizing that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the World Trade Organization fisheries subsidies negotiation. Target 14.7: By 2030, increase the economic benefits to small island developing states (SIDS) and least developed countries (LDCs) from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism. Target 14.b: Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and market.
SDG 15 ("Life on land: Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss")	Target 15.1: By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements. Target 15.2: By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally. Target 15.4: By 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development. Target 15.6: Promote fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and promote appropriate access to such resources, as internationally agreed.

Source: FAO. 2022. *Tracking Progress on Food and Agriculture-related SDG Indicators*. Rome. https://www.fao.org/3/cc1403en/cc1403en.pdf

Appendix 6. Relevant SDGs and targets

SDG	Relevant targets	Food and agriculture-related targets as defined by FAO
SDG 1 ("No poverty: End poverty in all its forms everywhere")	**Target 1.4:** By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance. **Target 1.5:** By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters.	**Yes**
SDG 2 ("Zero hunger: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture")	**Target 2.3:** By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment. **Target 2.4:** By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality. **Target 2.5:** By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional, and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed.	**Yes**
SDG 12 ("Responsible consumption and production")	**Target 12.2:** By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources. **Target 12.8:** By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.	**No**
SDG 15 ("Life on land: Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss")	**Target 15.1:** By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements. **Target 15.2**: By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally. **Target 15.3:** By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world. **Target 15.4:** By 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development.	**Yes** (Targets 15.1, 15.2, 15.4) **No** (Targets 15.3, 15.5, 15.a, 15.b, 15.c)

SDG	Relevant targets	Food and agriculture-related targets as defined by FAO
	Target 15.5: Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species. **Target 15.a:** Mobilize and significantly increase financial resources from all sources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems. **Target 15.b:** Mobilize significant resources from all sources and at all levels to finance sustainable forest management and provide adequate incentives to developing countries to advance such management, including for conservation and reforestation. **Target 15.c:** Enhance global support for efforts to combat poaching and trafficking of protected species, including by increasing the capacity of local communities to pursue sustainable livelihood opportunities.	
SDG 17 ("Partnerships for the Goals")	**Target 17.15:** Respect each country's policy space and leadership to establish and implement policies for poverty eradication and sustainable development. **Target 17.16:** Enhance the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all countries, in particular developing countries. **Target 17.17:** Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.	**No**

Source: FAO. 2022. Evaluation Dataset.

Appendix 7. GEF evaluation criteria rating table

GEF criteria/subcriteria	Rating	Summary comments
A. STRATEGIC RELEVANCE		
A1. Overall strategic relevance	Highly Satisfactory	Highly relevant to the needs and priorities of the country and provincial priorities.
A1.1. Alignment with GEF and FAO strategic priorities	Highly Satisfactory	It is fully aligned with GEF and FAO strategic priorities.
A1.2. Relevance to national, regional and global priorities and beneficiary needs	Highly Satisfactory	Fully relevant to the national, local and regional needs.
A1.3. Complementarity with existing interventions	Highly Satisfactory	Was fully aligned with other similar projects implemented in the country.
B. EFFECTIVENESS		
B1. Overall assessment of project results	Satisfactory	Mixed results, most strategic dimensions of the project were fully achieved.
B1.1 Delivery of project outputs	Satisfactory	Full achievement of 87 percent (3 out of 11) of outcome indicators by December 2022 (the project was extended through the end of December 2022).
B1.2 Progress towards outcomes and project objectives	Satisfactory	Full achievement of 73 percent (8 out of 11) of outcome indicators by December 2022 (the project was extended through the end of December 2022).
Outcome 1: Effectiveness of the protected area system to conserve steppe biodiversity increased	Satisfactory	Partially achieved; 50 percent (two out of four) of outcome indicators were fully achieved and seven out of ten target indicators were fully achieved.
Outcome 2: Steppe biodiversity conservation mainstreamed into production landscapes	Highly Satisfactory	Fully achieved; all four outcome indicators were fully achieved.
Outcome 3: Enabling environment established for the effective conservation of steppe biodiversity across large landscapes	Satisfactory	Partially achieved; two out of three outcome indicators were fully achieved.
Overall rating of progress towards achieving objectives/outcomes	Satisfactory	The activities related to the development of guidelines, technical documents, monitoring plans and strategic and action plans were fully achieved.
B1.3 Likelihood of impact	Moderately Satisfactory	It depends on the project sustainability and the willingness of the Government of Türkiye to scale up the project results.
C. EFFICIENCY		
C1. Efficiency*	Moderately Satisfactory	The project was subject to several no-cost extensions caused by internal and external factors (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic). The project document demonstrated deficiencies with regard to the internal and external challenges and risks but applied an adaptive management approach to resolve the issues in the course of the project implementation.
D. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES		

GEF criteria/subcriteria	Rating	Summary comments
D1. Overall likelihood of risks to sustainability	Moderately Likely	It fully depends on the will of the Government of Türkiye to allocate funds and resources to sustain the project results.
D1.1. Financial risks	Moderately Likely	While the Government of Türkiye did not officially report allocating financial resources to sustain the project results, it expressed a verbal commitment and interest in scaling up and replicating the project activities.
D1.2. Sociopolitical risks	Unlikely	A stable sociopolitical environment was observed.
D1.3. Institutional and governance risks	Unlikely	The only challenge is associated with structural reforms within the Government of Türkiye.
D1.4. Environmental risks	Unlikely	No environmental risks were identified whatsoever.
D2. Catalysis and replication	Moderately Likely	The Government of Türkiye expressed a verbal commitment and interest in scaling up and replicating the project activities (beyond the pilot areas).
E. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE		
E1. Project design and readiness**	Moderately Satisfactory	The project time frame was too ambitious. It lacked risk assessment and mitigation measures.
E2. Quality of project implementation	Moderately Satisfactory	Mixed results: partial achievement of outcomes and partial achievement of others; shortcomings in M&E, procurement and tendering, project staffing and recruitment.
E2.1 Quality of project implementation by FAO (Budget Holder [BH], Lead Technical Officer [LTO], Project Task Force [PTF], etc.)	Moderately Satisfactory	Mixed results: full achievement of 73 percent of outcome and 87 percent of output indicators, shortcomings in M&E, procurement and tendering, project staffing and recruitment, delays in internal clearance of the project documents, and six no-cost extensions (some caused by external factors and others by the project design and implementation). Also, the multifunctional role of the National Project Coordinator (NPC) significantly contributed to resolving the design and implementation shortcomings.
E2.2 Project oversight (PSC, project working group, etc.)	Satisfactory	Steering Committee meetings were organized on a regular basis (semi-annually). Facilitated the establishment of technical working groups.
E3. Quality of project execution For Direct Execution Modality (DEX) projects: Project Management Unit/BH. For Operational Partners Implementation Modality (OPIM) projects: Executing Agency	Moderately Satisfactory	Shortcomings in M&E, procurement and tendering, project staffing and recruitment. Needs to strengthen the projectized approach.
E4. Financial management and co-financing	Moderately Satisfactory	The project did not provide an actual expenditure report at output level. Co-financing exceeded the anticipated targets set at design.
E5. Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement	Moderately Satisfactory	Exclusively with the state sector with some engagement of non-state actors in the capacity of project subcontractors.
E6. Communication, knowledge management and knowledge products	Moderately Satisfactory	Successful delivery of printed and online materials. However, the project design did not consider the development of the communication plan and no funds were allocated for this purpose.

GEF criteria/subcriteria	Rating	Summary comments
E7. Overall quality of M&E	Moderately Satisfactory	No M&E plan and logical framework were developed at design stage; some versions of the results matrix lacked the output-level indicators and all of them never incorporated activity-level results tracking framework. Also, the results framework incorporated the consolidated a SMART approach with respect to the project indicators. Some delays with reporting.
E7.1 M&E design	Unsatisfactory	No M&E plan developed.
E7.2 M&E plan implementation (including financial and human resources)	Highly Unsatisfactory	No M&E plan developed.
E8. Overall assessment of factors affecting performance	Moderately Satisfactory	Mixed results.
F. CROSS-CUTTING CONCERNS		
F1. Gender and other equity dimensions	Moderately Unsatisfactory	No specific gender focus and gender-disaggregated data were reported. The project document did not incorporate the gender equity dimension.
F2. Human rights issues/Indigenous Peoples	Satisfactory	Indirectly contributed to the human rights agenda.
F3. Environmental and social safeguards	Highly Satisfactory	The project was fully aligned with environmental and social safeguards.
Overall project rating	**Satisfactory**	

Notes: * Includes cost-efficiency and timeliness.

** This refers to factors affecting the project's ability to start as expected, such as the presence of sufficient capacity among executing partners at project launch.

Office of Evaluation
evaluation@fao.org
www.fao.org/evaluation

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Rome, Italy

CC9352EN/1/01.24