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Organization of the
United Nations

Terminal evaluation
of the project
“Contribution of
sustainable forest
management to a low
emission and resilient
development in Serbia”



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**Terminal evaluation of the project
“Contribution of sustainable forest
management to a low emission and
resilient development in Serbia”**

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Abstract

This report presents the findings and recommendations from an independent evaluation of the “Contribution of sustainable forest management to a low emission and resilient development in Serbia” (GCP/SRB/002/GFF) project. The evaluation was conducted for the period from 19 February 2018 to 30 June 2023. The project was managed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) (Budapest) and the Belgrade-based Project Management Unit. It was supported by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Coordination Unit at FAO headquarters. The main objective of the project was the promotion of multifunctional sustainable forest management (SFM) to conserve biodiversity, enhance and conserve carbon stocks, and secure forest ecosystem services in productive forest landscapes. It was designed around three project components: 1) an enabling environment for multifunctional SFM; 2) multifunctional forest management; and 3) monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and the dissemination of lessons learned.

The evaluation applied a mixed-method approach: 1) a review of the background documents provided by FAO headquarters and the Project Management Unit, including findings from the mid-term review (MTR) that had been conducted for the period from mid-October to the end of December 2020; and 2) semi-structured interviews from May 2023. The evaluation focused on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development assistance criterion. This aspect involved: relevance; effectiveness; efficiency; factors affecting performance; the sustainability of project results; and an assessment of the likely long-term changes or impact of the project.

The project was highly relevant to international and local policy agenda priorities. It involved the forestry sector and maximized its role in environmental protection and sustainable development. However, project ownership was concentrated among stakeholders from the state forestry sector. Other important private and non-forestry actors were only involved at minor levels. Overall, the project was implemented efficiently. It successfully mitigated external risks, especially those due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There were important outputs on data collection: the Integrated Forest Inventory System (IFIS); and the National Forest Inventory (NFI). These were important contributions to SFM in Serbia. However, the evaluation found that the legal institutionalization of results in the form of new legislation was not realized during the project’s life cycle.

For similar projects in the future, FAO and the GEF should consider the resources and time required for legal institutionalization. This should be done during project design. Also, facilitate adaptive project management. This should include not only final outputs but also intermediate targets that are formulated as milestones. The objectives should avoid being overly ambitious and be formulated based on known facts about the project’s conditions.

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The evaluation benefited from the inputs of many other stakeholders: government officers; farmers' organizations; staff from other United Nations agencies; research centres; and the private sector. Their contributions were critical to the team's work and are deeply appreciated. The team would like to thank all interviewees (see Appendix 1) for their time, during both the field mission in Serbia and additional interviews that were done remotely.

The terminal Evaluation Team had two independent consultants: an international consultant as the team leader and subject matter specialist; and a national consultant as a team member.

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Abbreviations

CCA	climate change adaptation
CCM	climate change mitigation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FDP	Forest Development Plan
FMP	Forest Management Plan
FMU	Forest Management Unit
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IFIS	Integrated Forest Inventory System
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MRV	monitoring, reporting and verification
MTR	mid-term review
NFI	National Forest Inventory
PFOA	Private Forest Owners' Association
PIR	Programme Implementation Report
PPR	project progress report
REU	Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SFM	sustainable forest management
TOC	theory of change
TOT	training of trainers

Map of Serbia



Source: United Nations. 2020. *Map of Serbia*. <https://www.un.org/geospatial/content/serbia-0>

Executive summary

Introduction

1. This report presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the independent terminal evaluation of the project: Contribution of sustainable forest management to a low emission and resilient development in Serbia (GCP/SRB/002/GFF).
2. The evaluation was conducted from March to June 2023 by two independent consultants, one from Serbia (national expert) and one from Austria (team leader). Staff from the Belgrade-based Project Management Unit, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) (Budapest), and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Coordination Unit at FAO headquarters supported it. The evaluation focused on the full project implementation period from February 2018 to 30 June 2023. It included a less intensive review of the design phase from 2016 to 2017.
3. The project's objective promoted multifunctional sustainable forest management (SFM) to: conserve biodiversity; enhance and conserve carbon stocks; and secure forest ecosystem services in productive forest landscapes. It had three components: 1) an enabling environment for multifunctional SFM; 2) multifunctional forest management; and 3) monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and the dissemination of lessons learned. The project targeted two forest administrative regions – Western Serbia and Vojvodina – and several small (from 2 000 to 5 000 ha) Forest Management Units (FMUs) within these forest regions.
4. The project was designed as a full-sized, four-year GEF-6 project with USD 3 274 658 of the GEF funding (11.1 percent of the total financing) split across three GEF-6 focal areas: biodiversity (USD 654 932); SFM (USD 1 091 552); and climate change mitigation (CCM) (USD 1 528 174) – by far the largest. Co-financing was USD 26 180 141 (88.9 percent of the total financing), out of which 61 percent was classified as cash from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, forestry institutes, national park administrations, public forest enterprises, the Chamber of Forestry and FAO. The combined project financing amount was USD 29 454 799.
5. The project started on 19 February 2018. Its official end date, as recommended by the mid-term review (MTR), was 30 June 2023. The project was managed by FAO REU and a team based at the United Nations House in Belgrade since there is no FAO Representation in Serbia. The GEF Coordination Unit at FAO headquarters supported it, especially through the Funding Liaison Officer. The national executing partner was the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management through the Forest Directorate. There were several partner institutions, including two public enterprises: Vojvodinašume and Srbijašume. It was under the public forest service, the Institute for Nature Conservation, the Institute of Forestry (Novi Sad and Belgrade), the Chamber of Forestry Engineers (Belgrade) and several protected area authorities.
6. The evaluation aimed to assess the project's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, risks to sustainability and factors that affected its performance and delivery. This included cross-cutting issues like gender and environmental and social safeguards.

7. The following key evaluation questions guided the evaluation:
- i. Evaluation question 1. How and to what extent were the project's objectives and intended outcomes consistent with national priorities, the GEF strategic programmes, and FAO's strategic objectives and operational programmes? What is the current level of ownership of the project and its results on behalf of the project partners and the target beneficiary groups?
 - ii. Evaluation question 2. To what extent did the project deliver its expected outputs, outcomes and objectives in terms of quality, quantity and timeliness?
 - iii. Evaluation question 3. How efficient was the project in its implementation and delivery of results?
 - iv. Evaluation question 4. What is the likelihood that the project's results and benefits will be sustained after project closure? What are the key risks to the sustainability of the project's results and the progress towards long-term impacts?
 - v. Evaluation question 5. What main factors affected project implementation?
 - vi. Evaluation question 6. To what extent were gender equality and other equity concerns taken into account in the design and implementation of the project?

Conclusions

8. **Overall conclusion:** the project was successful in the development of new SFM methods that considered biodiversity and CCM. It was also successful in the development and delivery of capacity building activities. The second National Forest Inventory (NFI) for Serbia was conducted. However, as of 31 May 2023, these results had not been officially published. The NFI data are the foundation for developing new policies at the national and regional levels. Stakeholder involvement was largely restricted to the forestry sector. There was only limited input from a nature conservation perspective. Private forest owners were involved in project activities, but the project only managed to involve ones that were already active in SFM. Regardless, these actors benefited from the capacity building activities. Guidelines developed through the project still require legal institutionalization in by-laws. Further, the developed strategies were only in draft form at the time of this evaluation. These documents still require legal endorsement. The number of forests for which new Forest Management Plans (FMPs) were developed was lower than the original target. Once the new guidelines are formally adopted, the forest area managed by them will steadily increase. Regarding private forest owner engagement, the project's objectives were too ambitious and additional activities are needed.

Conclusion 1. Relevance and ownership: the project was highly relevant to international, regional and national priorities. It aligned with the FAO–GEF priorities. It clearly addressed priorities from the national sustainable development agenda. In terms of ownership, the project successfully resuscitated a relevant engagement with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, two public enterprises, and, to a certain extent, the academic and scientific community that showed a strong identification with the project's objectives. Other stakeholders were active in project implementation and directly contributed to the realization of specific activities. Nonetheless, their ownership remained limited, for example, on the implementation of the FMPs. The involvement of small-scale private owners was only realized by two Private Forest

Owners' Associations (PFOAs). As such, ownership on behalf of private forest owners, civil society, commercial forestry entities and stakeholders from the non-forestry sector remained limited.

Conclusion 2. Effectiveness: progress at the technical level was good. However, the institutionalization of project results in the form of new legislation or official organizational units was not realized during the project's life cycle. The project was effective in developing SFM methodologies with biodiversity and CCM. Capacity building activities related to these innovations were created and delivered, and funding for future delivery was ensured. In addition, a new framework for the NFI was developed and done successfully. There were some delays in publishing the project's results. Although completed in a timely manner, data were not published as planned. This was mainly due to contrasting views on the methodology and reliability of the main findings from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management (as the main stakeholder) and other stakeholders. While there are plans to institutionalize the NFI at a dedicated institute, concrete steps have yet to be taken. The same was observed for the institutionalization of a national multisectoral coordination platform for multifunctional SFM. Some private forest owners and PFOAs were involved in the project's training activities, but no further steps to mobilize the private forest owners or SFM were taken.

Conclusion 3. Efficiency: the project's efficiency was hampered by external and internal factors. The external factors mainly related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Illness and unavailability made it impossible to carry out personal and remote meetings between project staff and partners. Internally, the Project Management Unit needed to get familiar with the GEF procedures during the initial project phase. This required full dedication and was time consuming.

Conclusion 4. Sustainability: the project successfully produced several important outputs. These include: the NFI; the Integrated Forest Inventory System (IFIS); capacity building mechanisms; and the FMPs for multifunctional use. These results provide a solid basis for the sustainability of the realized interventions. However, the evaluation raised concerns regarding the sustainability of the achieved results. In particular, this involves: the inability to influence revisions to the legislative framework; dependency on the Forest Directorate, which is sensitive to political risks; and limited interinstitutional collaboration, including the non-forestry sector. Also, forest management still relies on one information technology solution. This could pose a potential risk for future interventions.

Conclusion 5. Factors affecting performance: the effectiveness of the implemented project activities clearly benefited from a solid needs assessment during the design phase, as well as an experienced project team. However, the evaluation revealed several important factors in the design phase and the lack of effective collaboration and communication mechanisms. This negatively affected the achievement of the envisaged results. The project's objectives were too ambitious, particularly in terms of influencing systemic changes in privately owned forests and PFOA engagement. Some key stakeholders showed a clear potential to positively contribute to the project's activities, but they were not involved enough. Communication among project partners was, to some extent, inefficient from both an internal and external perspective. The project steering committee meetings were held irregularly, leaving the impression that members were not well informed on the planned interventions. Moreover, given the ambitious timetable, the project team invested minimal effort in external communications and promoting the achieved results.

Conclusion 6. Cross-cutting issues: the project did not underscore gender equality dimensions and largely neglected to address barriers related to female participation. However, evidence obtained during interviews and analyses of project documentation revealed that women were well engaged in the project's activities. According to the applied risk classification and following the FAO environmental and social safeguards checklist, the project was assigned an overall medium

risk. A full environmental and social impact assessment was not carried out as envisaged in Annex 5 of the project document. Environmental issues were included under Output 1.5: forest development programme and legislation revised to incorporate biodiversity, CCM and socioeconomic concerns.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. To FAO REU and the FAO project team: for similar projects in the future, the institutionalization of results – such as new legislation – should be part of the planning phase. The required time and steps should be planned accordingly. Identified political risks and potentially adverse effects of political decisions on the achievement of project outcomes should be highlighted and addressed. Adequate resources and accurate planning for specific policy support can positively influence political commitments.

Recommendation 2. To the FAO–GEF project formulators: for future projects, the Serbian field reality should be considered during the phase of the project identification form. This includes the realistic estimation of engagement among private forest owners for proper planning and sustainability purposes. A more active engagement of experts with solid field experience in Serbia could illuminate predictable issues at the project's onset (for example, problems with the acquisition of software via direct purchase order instead of public tender or the timely enactment of by-laws to facilitate the institutionalization of project results within the project's life cycle). The same applies to national actors from the fields of politics, administration, public and private forest owners, and non-governmental organizations. Their early involvement should ensure a thorough participatory approach to define project objectives. This would then improve project buy-in.

Recommendation 3. To FAO REU and the FAO project team: the main project outputs (such as the NFI, completed during the last project phases), should be planned and finalized at an early stage of implementation. This would leave enough space for the promotion and publication of important project results, including possibilities for timely and substantial debates in public or among the scientific community.

Recommendation 4. To FAO REU and the FAO project team: FAO should reconsider its monitoring efforts to elaborate new methodologies in future projects. Provide scientific support at an early stage of implementation. This would improve the professional level of scientific innovation, especially since this well-grounded methodology was applied for the first time in Serbia.

Executive summary table 1. The GEF evaluation criteria rating table

The GEF criteria/dimensions	Rating	Summary comments
A. OUTCOMES (relevance, coherence, effectiveness and progress towards impact, efficiency) ⁱ	S	There was good progress with the development of new guidelines, the NFI and capacity building measures. Long-term institutionalization only happened at the planning stage.
A1. Relevance	S	The project was highly relevant for forest sector development in Serbia. A higher rating is not possible due to issues related to engagement with the private forest owners. There was good alignment with strategic priorities. The project was very relevant to national, regional and global priorities. However, the engagement objective of the private forest owners was too ambitious.
A2. Coherence	S	There was good complementarity with existing forest sector interventions (e.g. the project was favourably mentioned: "a road map for a national forest programme will be developed, and a competency-based Training Needs Assessment conducted" (results from the European Union twinning project AT-SK-SRB)). ⁱⁱ This limited the engagement with conservation initiatives.
A3. Effectiveness	S	The no-cost extension project objectives were achieved regarding technical-methodological development and capacity building. The field implementation of new methods was at a lower level than envisaged. The impact of a new approach can only be expected over at least a decade of SFM according to new methods.
A4. Efficiency	S	By the end of the project's life cycle, all technical and scientific outputs were delivered. A no-cost extension was required in order to make up for delays in earlier phases. These delays were partly external and partly internal.
B. SUSTAINABILITY (financial, sociopolitical, institutional and governance, environmental dimensions, including risks to sustainability)	ML	The legal institutionalization of outputs is required to guarantee full sustainability. Long-term funding of the NFI and IFIS has yet to be secured. There is a need for the legal institutionalization of results. Changes on the national partner institution level (e.g. the lead of the Forest Directorate) could have a negative impact on sustainability. The project contributed positively to SFM, biodiversity and CCM. Unless project results are legally institutionalized and long-term funding is secured (e.g. through legal provisions), the replication of, for example, the NFI, is not guaranteed.
C. IMPLEMENTATION	MS	The project was well supported by FAO, but project steering committee oversight was only superficial. There was good support from FAO, but a lack of information technology experience at FAO REU caused issues related to procurement. The project steering

The GEF criteria/dimensions	Rating	Summary comments
		committee members were not fully aware of their important role in project oversight.
D. EXECUTION	S	Project management handled challenges in a competent way.
M&E design/plan	MS	The M&E was carried out as per required guidelines. The main M&E design issue was the lack of intermediate targets and ambiguity about the responsibility of partners.
M&E implementation	MU	While reporting was done according to guidelines, there is no evidence of any corrective measures taken to manage occurring problems.
Overall project rating	S	The project achieved satisfactory results overall. Some objectives were too ambitious. This should have been considered at the planning stage. Unfortunately, major results were not published by the end of the project's life cycle.

Notes: ⁱ Other dimensions may be considered, as indicated in Table 1.

ⁱⁱ The project "Improvement of forest management in Serbia as a contribution to climate change adaptation and mitigation" (Reference Number: SR 16 IPA EN 02 20) was implemented between 2021 and 2023. The main beneficiary was the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of the Republic of Serbia (Directorate of Forests) (Republic of Serbia Directorate of Forests, 2023).

1. Introduction

1. This report presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the independent terminal evaluation of the project: Contribution of sustainable forest management to a low emission and resilient development in Serbia (GCP/SRB/002/GFF).

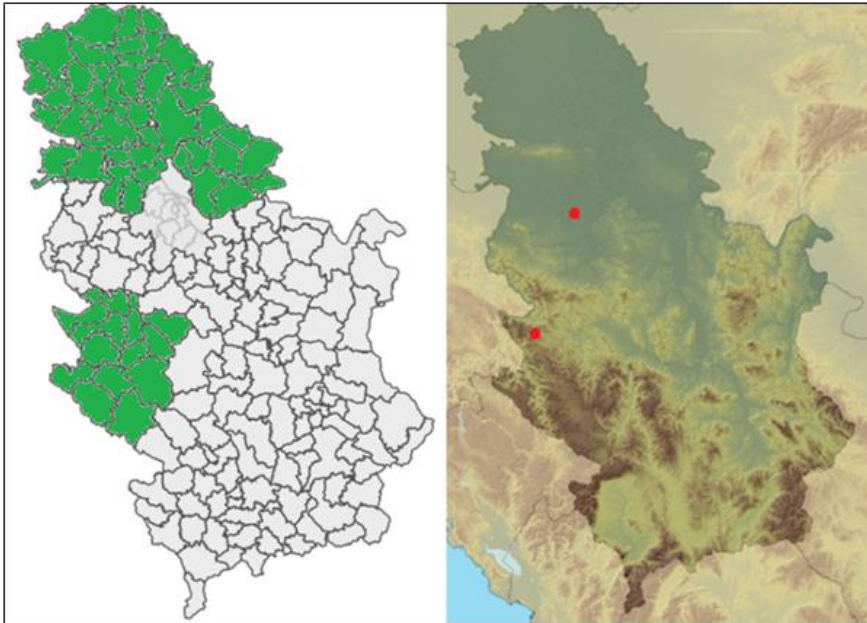
1.1 Purpose and scope of the terminal evaluation

2. The terminal evaluation is required for full-sized projects that are funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF). It also serves project monitoring and reporting purposes for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), as identified in the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plan of the project document. As stated in the terms of reference (see Annex 1), the purpose of this evaluation is to provide an independent, external assessment of the project's progress towards the expected project outputs, outcomes and objectives. It also identifies recommendations and lessons learned for future activities.
3. This evaluation serves a double purpose of accountability and learning. It assesses the project's results, or progress made in achieving the results, and their value relevant to target beneficiaries, national needs and priorities. It also documents important lessons for potential scaling up, replication or the follow up of projects and programmes in Serbia and the wider Western Balkan region that use similar approaches, target beneficiaries, tools and project design elements.
4. This evaluation was conducted from March to June 2023 by two independent consultants, one from Serbia (national expert) and one from Austria (team leader). Personnel from the Belgrade-based Project Management Unit, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia (REU) (Budapest), and the GEF Coordination Unit at FAO headquarters supported it. It focused on the full project implementation period from February 2018 to the end of June 2023. It included a short review of the project design phase from 2016 to 2017.

1.2 Scope and objectives of the evaluation

5. The evaluation of the project took place between March and June 2023. It reviewed the progress of all project-related activities across all project components from the official start date of 19 February 2018 to the end date of 30 June 2023. It also reviewed key issues that had been identified during the project design phase from 2016 to 2017.
6. The intended users and beneficiaries of this evaluation are outlined in Section 1.3.
7. Serbia was the project's geographical focus, especially two regions:
 - i. Vojvodina (lowland, poplar oak and ash forests); and
 - ii. Western Serbia (mountain areas, beech and conifer forests).

Figure 1. Location of the two regions in Serbia



Source: FAO. 2017. *Terminal evaluation of the project "Contribution of sustainable forest management to a low emission and resilient development in Serbia" – Project document*. Rome. Map conforms to United Nations. 2020. *Map of Serbia*. <https://www.un.org/geospatial/content/serbia-0>

8. This evaluation addresses three components, namely:
 - i. **Component 1.** enabling environment for multifunctional sustainable forest management (SFM);
 - ii. **Component 2.** multifunctional forest management; and
 - iii. **Component 3.** M&E and the dissemination of lessons learned.
9. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's development assistance criterion for evaluation was systematically utilized to assess the project. This involved:
 - i) relevance; ii) effectiveness; iii) efficiency; iv) risks to the sustainability of the project's results; v) factors affecting performance and delivery of the project by its end date; and vi) cross-cutting dimensions (gender and environmental and social safeguards). It also sought to identify any lessons learned regarding project design, implementation and management for future activities in the fields of SFM and nature conservation in Serbia and the wider Western Balkan region. See Table 1 for the main evaluation questions.

Table 1. Main evaluation questions

1) Relevance	<p>Were the project's outcomes congruent with the GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, country priorities and the FAO Country Programming Framework?</p> <p>Was the project design appropriate for delivering the expected outcomes?</p> <p>Were the project's objectives and outcomes consistent with national legislation and strategies in the field of sustainable development, including forest management, nature protection and the management of public resources (e.g. the 2010 Law on Forests [Republic of Serbia, 2010]; the 2009 Law on Nature Conservation [Republic of Serbia, 2009]; the 2006 Forestry Development Strategy [Republic of Serbia, 2006]; and the 2019–2030 Strategy of Sustainable Urban Development [Republic of Serbia, 2019])?</p> <p>To what extent were the project's design and objectives relevant to the needs of key national stakeholders (Forest Directorate, Srbijašume, Vojvodinašume, local stakeholders, national parks, municipalities, etc.)?</p> <p>Were there any changes in the relevance of the project since its design, i.e. new national policies, plans or programmes that affect the relevance of the project's objectives and goals?</p>
2) Effectiveness	<p>To what extent were the project's objectives achieved? Were there any unintended results (including subquestions for each project outcome)?</p> <p>To what extent did the project's actual outcome commensurate with the expected outcomes?¹</p> <p>To what extent did the project contribute to improved decision-making in the management of productive forest landscapes (Outcome 1.1)?</p> <p>To what extent did the project contribute to strengthened institutional capacities for multifunctional forest management (Outcome 1.2)?</p> <p>To what extent did the project contribute to increased forest area under sustainable and multifunctional forest management (Outcome 2.1)?</p> <p>To what extent did the project's activities contribute to the achievement of an enlarged area under sustainable and multifunctional forest management (Outcome 2.2)?</p> <p>How effectively did the project contribute to the establishment of adaptive management and the implementation of SFM (Outcome 3.1)?</p> <p>To what extent did the project contribute to an enabling environment for strengthened SFM in Serbia (Medium-term outcome 1)?</p> <p>To what extent did the project contribute to improved stakeholder involvement, especially among private stakeholders in SFM (Medium-term outcome 2)?</p> <p>To what extent did the project contribute to improved knowledge, experience and best practices on effective SFM (Medium-term outcome 3)?</p> <p>To what extent can the attainment of results be attributed to the GEF-funded component?</p>
3) Efficiency	<p>To what extent was the project implemented efficiently and cost-effectively? Was management able to adapt to any changing conditions to improve the efficiency of project implementation?</p>

	<p>Was the project cost-effective? How was the project's cost/time vs output/outcomes equation compared to that of similar projects?</p> <p>What factors affected delays in the realization of project activities?</p>
<p>4) Sustainability</p>	<p>What is the likelihood that the project results will continue to be useful or remain after the end of the project?</p> <p>To what extent were stakeholders motivated and incentivized to continue contributing to the achievement of SFM?</p> <p>Which project results can be replicated or scaled up in the following period? Were there any challenges with respect to the implementation of similar interventions in other geographical areas (e.g. institutional ownership, legislation, human capacities, etc.)?</p> <p>What were the key risks (institutional, sociopolitical, financial, environmental) that may have affected the sustainability of the project's benefits? Were there any legislative barriers that could hamper the realization of project outcomes after project completion? To what extent did project sustainability depend on eventual personal changes within the Forest Directorate or other key stakeholders?</p> <p>To what extent did the project's outcomes depend on processes of industrialization and urban development?</p>
<p>5) Factors affecting performance</p>	<p>Implementation. To what extent did FAO deliver on: project identification; concept note preparation; appraisal; preparation; approval and start up; and oversight and supervision? How well were risks identified and managed?</p> <p>Was the project's causal logic (set out in its theory of change [TOC]) robust, coherent and clear? To what extent were the project's objectives and components clear, practical and feasible/realistic within the time frame?</p> <p>Was the project design appropriate for delivering the expected outcomes?</p> <p>Execution. To what extent did the execution agencies effectively discharge their roles and responsibilities related to the management and administration of the project (for direct execution modality projects, this question applies to FAO's role as executing entity)?</p> <p>To what extent did the project enjoy support from top-level stakeholders (executive, legislative, judicial)?</p> <p>M&E. M&E design: Was the M&E plan practical and sufficient? M&E implementation: Did the M&E system operate as per the M&E plan? Was information gathered in a systematic manner with appropriate methodologies?</p> <p>Was information from the M&E system appropriately used to make timely decisions and foster learning during project implementation?</p> <p>Financial management and co-financing. To what extent did the expected co-financing materialize? How did a shortfall in co-financing or the materialization of greater than expected co-financing affect the project results?</p> <p>How were the mid-term review (MTR) results handled within the project (quantitative and qualitative information)? (This refers to all MTR recommendations and comments from the project team.)</p> <p>Project partnership and stakeholder engagement. What were the main features of the collaboration between FAO and its partners?</p> <p>Was the partnership set up in the most appropriate, cost-effective and sustainable way to achieve results?</p>

	<p>Were other actors such as civil society, Indigenous populations or the private sector involved in project design or implementation? What was the effect on the project results?</p> <p>Communications, knowledge management (Stocking <i>et al.</i>, 2018) and knowledge products. How did the project assess, document and share its results, lessons learned and experiences? To what extent were the communications products and activities likely to support the sustainability and scaling up of the project's results?</p> <p>How were the project stakeholders informed and updated on the project activities and objectives, particularly those from the private sector who participated and contributed to the realization of the project's outcomes?</p>
Environmental and social safeguards	<p>To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project?</p> <p>In particular, to what extent was the socioeconomic situation of local households in the context of their forest product use (wood and non-wood) considered?</p>
Gender	<p>To what extent was gender considered in designing and implementing the project? Was the project implemented in a manner that ensured gender equitable participation and benefits?</p>
Human rights	<p>Was the project implemented in a manner that ensured respect for human rights?</p>
Progress towards impact	<p>To what extent may the progress towards long-term impact be attributed to the project?</p> <p>Was there any evidence of environmental stress reduction and environmental status change, or any change in the policy/legal/regulatory framework?</p> <p>Were there any barriers or other risks that may have prevented future progress towards long-term impact?</p>
Lessons learned	<p>What knowledge was generated from project results and experiences, which had a wider value and potential for broader application, replication and use?</p>

Note: ¹ The outcome numbering followed the theory of change (TOC) (see Figure 2).

Source: Elaborated by the Evaluation Team.

10. The Evaluation Team also assessed gender concerns, stakeholder engagement and ownership at different levels, including knowledge management. These are specific concerns for both FAO and the GEF. This also involved the extent to which the project was able to meet FAO's four gender equality objectives: i) equal decision-making; ii) equal access to productive resources; iii) equal access to goods, services and markets; and iv) the reduction of women's work burden.
11. The theory of change (TOC) was also examined to analyse the structure and causal logic of the project. This helped to identify the evaluation questions and potential interviewees.

1.3 Intended users

12. The following stakeholders are the intended users of this report:
 - i. personnel at FAO headquarters, the GEF as the donor, and FAO REU (Budapest);

- ii. the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management's Forest Directorate, as the lead executing agency with two public enterprises, Vojvodinašume and Srbijašume, under the public forest service of Serbia;
 - iii. the Institute of Forestry (Novi Sad and Belgrade);
 - iv. the Chamber of Forestry Engineers (Belgrade) and the Serbian Environmental Protection Agency, which is part of the Ministry of Environmental Protection;
 - v. the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Belgrade;
 - vi. other agencies that focus on biodiversity, climate change mitigation (CCM) and climate change adaptation (CCA), including the Institute for Nature Conservation;
 - vii. the commercial forest sector, including timber and paper industries in Serbia; and
 - viii. the estimated 800 000 to 900 000 private forest owners in Serbia and their associated Private Forest Owners' Associations (PFOAs).
13. The findings of this report are of particular interest to personnel at FAO REU (Belgrade) and FAO headquarters in order to develop and implement future projects. It is also relevant for the GEF project teams on the design of future activities. National partner institutions may also value this report to ensure project sustainability and to inform the design of future funded projects.

1.4 Methodology

14. This evaluation used a mixed methodology. It considered qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data highlighted the quality of implementation like stakeholder engagement or SFM information. The quantitative data, which was based on secondary sources, highlighted various SFM-managed forest areas in terms of biodiversity and CO₂ sequestration.
15. The following points outline the methods used.
- i. Desk review: mid-term review (MTR); project document; project identification form; project progress report (PPR); Programme Implementation Report (PIR); operational partner agreement; annual work plan; and project steering committee documentation. This included data from the project monitoring system, especially core indicators and tracking tools. If available, the evaluation also reviewed the following sources: the same project information platform; semi-annual and country progress reports; project implementation reports; national strategic documents; regional and local government documents; and forest management-related documents from organizations and institutions.
 - ii. Semi-structured interviews (in-person and online): key informants; stakeholders; and participants at the regional, national and local levels. This also involved the public and private sector. This process was based on interview protocols developed by the Evaluation Team (see Appendix 2).
 - iii. Focus group discussions: project participants; stakeholders; and local communities.
 - iv. Direct observation: field visits to Central Serbia and Vojvodina were conducted to verify achievements and gather feedback from the local partners. This involved

face-to-face interviews and meetings. This process provided updated details in order to support or adjust the findings of this report and to formulate the conclusions and recommendations.

- v. No field visit to Western Serbia: this was due to the extended travel time from Belgrade to Western Serbia. Instead, a site with similar SFM conditions in Central Serbia was visited. It was next to the University of Belgrade's Faculty of Forestry field station near Goč.
 - vi. Cancelled visit to Vojvodina: bad weather conditions made it impossible to do site visits. As a result, only focus group discussions with the Institute of Lowland Forestry and Environment in Novi Sad and staff from Vojvodina at the Karakuša Forest Lodge were carried out.
 - vii. Project documentation provided relevant information regarding the field sites in Western Serbia and Vojvodina.
16. Interviews were planned with the following stakeholders:
- i. FAO project team;
 - ii. National Project Director;
 - iii. FAO REU (Budapest); and
 - iv. project steering committee members from the Srbijašume public enterprise; the Bureau for Planning and Design in Forestry; the sector for Forestry and Environment Protection; the Vojvodinašume public enterprise; the Institute for Nature Conservation (Belgrade); the Ministry of Environmental Protection; the Institute of Lowland Forestry and Environment (Belgrade); and the PFOA representatives. Time restrictions meant that Tara National Park, the Institute of Forestry and the Chamber of Forestry could not be interviewed during the mission.

1.4.1 Level of stakeholder engagement in the evaluation

17. Relevant stakeholders were identified for potential interviews based on a stakeholder analysis.
18. Interviews with key project individuals included: FAO personnel directly involved in implementation, administration and oversight. This included the Lead Technical Officer, the National Project Coordinator, the National Project Director (Director of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management's Forest Directorate), and members of the project steering committee and Project Task Force. It also involved national and international consultants on particular project components.
19. Interviews were also held with secondary stakeholders. These actors were only indirectly or temporarily involved in the project. They included academic and research institutions like the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Belgrade, the Institute of Forestry (Belgrade), and the Institute of Lowland Forestry and Environment (Novi Sad). An interview with a PFOA representative involved in capacity building was also held.

1.4.2 Inclusion of women in the evaluation process

20. Female employment levels were low among the relevant Serbian organizations. Regardless, the evaluation managed to hold interviews with several female experts on project activities.
21. No local women who had been involved in or benefited from SFM could be interviewed due to time restrictions during the field visits.

1.4.3 Composition of the Evaluation Team

22. The Evaluation Team had:
 - i. Andreas Ottitsch, international consultant and team leader; and
 - ii. Mihajlo Dukić, national consultant and team member.

1.4.4 Limitations of the evaluation process

23. A risk matrix (see Appendix 4 of the project document) and limitations identified during the MTR (see Section 1.8 of the MTR) helped to illuminate the main impediments within the inception phase of the terminal evaluation. These are outlined as follows:
 - i. The FAO–GEF financial and in-kind contributions represent only part of the total budget. The evaluation process faced challenges in assigning responsibilities for the achieved results to specific co-financers, primarily the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management.
 - ii. Due to time constraints, the Evaluation Team had limited possibilities to verify achievements in the field. This hindered the gathering of evidence.
 - iii. There was also the potential risk that not all stakeholders would be available for the interviews. This was relevant since, according to the MTR, some stakeholders did not show particular interest in participating in the project's activities.
24. Not all stakeholders could be interviewed during the time frame of the mission. Sites in Western Serbia and Vojvodina could not be visited due to bad weather.

1.4.5 Structure of the report

25. Following this introduction, Section 2 presents the background and context of the project. Section 3 presents the main findings for each evaluation question. Conclusions and recommendations are in Section 4, followed by lessons learned in Section 5. The report has the following appendices:
 - i. Appendix 1. People interviewed;
 - ii. Appendix 2. Evaluation matrix;
 - iii. Appendix 3. Results matrix and implementation progress; and
 - iv. Appendix 4. Financial information and co-financing table.

2. Background and context of the project

2.1 Background

26. According to the National Forest Inventory (NFI) (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management – Forest Directorate, 2009), forests cover around 2 252 400 ha of the total land area in Serbia. This accounts for around 29 percent of its territory. The national strategy targeted 41.4 percent of forest coverage as its desired objective. A large share of Serbian forests is in hilly or mountainous regions. Forest ownership is almost equally balanced between the state (53 percent) and private forest owners (47 percent).
27. Overall, the forest area had high genetic quality and species and habitat diversity. However, the overall condition was poor. Serbian forests have low standing volume (about 161 m³/ha), a low annual increment (about 4.0 m³/ha) and wood production of barely 3.1 m³/ha. The main challenges for SFM were illegal timber extraction, excessive cutting for fuelwood and frequent forest fires. Additionally, forest management priorities conflicted with priorities from the construction, agriculture and energy sectors.
28. Many small private forests were owned by private entities. This presented another important challenge for SFM. Most of the privately owned forests were less than 1 ha (around 70 percent), while 98 percent of the parcels were less than 10 ha. However, there was no reliable estimate on the number of private holdings. This varied from 800 000, according to the project document, to 932 524 from the Srbijašume public enterprise. Some unofficial sources stated that there were over 1 million private holdings.
29. The SFM incentives were weak. These were mainly grants to build forest roads and free plant material. In fact, this failed to engage private owners. There were no fiscal incentives.
30. The country's strategic and legislative framework included: the 2006 Forestry Development Strategy (Republic of Serbia, 2006); the Law on Forests (Republic of Serbia, 2010; 2015), which provided the main legal framework for forest conservation and management in Serbia; and the Law on Nature Conservation (Republic of Serbia, 2009), which regulated the protection and conservation of nature and biological, geological, and landscape diversity.
31. Serbian forests and forest land are divided into seven regions based on the 2015 amendment of the Law on Forests (Republic of Serbia, 2015). Forest regions are defined as planning, geographic and natural units. They are forests, forest land from forest areas and national parks. Article 18 dictates that a regional Forest Development Plan (FDP) be prepared for each area. Regional plans direct forest and forestry development. These must complement the spatial plans. Legislation, based on the regional FDP, stipulates the adoption of a ten-year FDP. A ten-year Forest Management Plan (FMP) is then to be implemented in all state forests, regardless of size. This includes private forests of at least 100 ha. The ten-year FMP must be applied by all private forests at the municipal level for areas under 100 ha. Based on this, annual FMPs are prepared at the municipal and forest unit levels.
32. The SFM institutional framework included a set of various institutions (see Box 1).

Box 1. The SFM institutional framework

State institutions and public enterprises

- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management: the Forest Directorate was the most important project beneficiary. It guided the project with FAO. Besides providing financial resources through the Forest Fund, it translated project results into strategic documents and supported the implementation of new practices and collaboration mechanisms.
- Ministry of Environmental Protection: the Department for Nature Protection was an important stakeholder since the project was expected to have significant effects for environmental protection.
- Vojvodinašume and Srbijašume public enterprises: under the Forest Directorate, these key stakeholders managed more than 90 percent of state forests. They also provided the FMPs for small private forest owners with less than 100 ha.
- National parks: these important stakeholders provided financial resources. They also implemented SFM at the local level.
- Serbian Environmental Protection Agency: this agency informed environmental policies and institutions. It also facilitated data and information exchange with other government institutions.

Professional organizations

- Private forest owners and PFOAs: these were important beneficiaries, especially on SFM implementation and capacity building.
- Chamber of Forestry: this important beneficiary helped to disseminate project findings and recommendations. It also facilitated trainings and advisory services.

Academic and research institutes

- Institute for Nature Conservation and Vojvodina: these knowledge resources provided inputs for the SFM plans.
- Institute of Forestry (Belgrade) and Institute for Lowland Forestry and Environment (Novi Sad): these provided field expertise to monitor the forest conditions.
- Faculty of Forestry at the University of Belgrade: as the main academic institution, this department researched forests and trained forestry professionals.

Other stakeholders

- Local communities: these important stakeholders translated national policies on the ground. They supported the effective implementation of project results and recommendations. They also enhanced awareness on how the project impacted local sustainable development.
- Civil society organizations: these were key in disseminating project results and dealing with issues related to the impact on vulnerable socioeconomic groups, such as rural women and those of low income.
- Statistics office: this provided important socioeconomic data on project implementation. It also drew a relationship between SFM and the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Individual experts: these people provided expertise on developing and improving the project's outputs. Their role involved capacity building mechanisms and improvements to the strategic framework that shaped SFM practices.

Source: Elaborated by the Evaluation Team.

2.2 Theory of change

33. The Evaluation Team revised the TOC to include the applied approach of TOC 1 (see the project document, page 31, which identified the expected outputs, outcomes and long-term impact) and the revised TOC 2, developed during the MTR (see page 33). The TOC 2 had important amendments that improved the initial TOC regarding the

deconstruction of the causal logic between immediate outcomes and long-term impacts. Added key barriers, drivers and assumptions were considered rational to clarify the nature of key stakeholder relationships and the importance of their proactive role in achieving the desired results. However, too many causal relationships between outputs and additional outcomes were found to be unnecessary (Outcome 1.2. in TOC 2 was listed as Output 1.1.5 in the project document). In fact, this did not contribute to the clarity and traceability of the project's logic and its objectives: develop an enabling environment that includes a revision of the legislative framework; and develop SFM practices with functional capacity building mechanisms. As a result, this report provides a simplified TOC. It now reflects a comprehensible intervention logic per the project design. There were minor modifications to reflect findings from the interviews.

34. The main TOC revisions are detailed in the following points.
35. **Additional level of outcomes (Outcome level 1) within the TOC structure added (Outcomes 1.1.5, 2.1.3 and 2.1.4.):** there was a need to distinguish the effects that key activities and outputs (NFI and FMPs) are supposed to produce. This relates to the desired outcomes.
36. **Component 1 includes one main outcome (Outcome 1.1) on improved decision-making for productive landscapes:** all envisaged outputs within Component 1 should have developed a strengthened enabling environment for SFM. Production of the NFI was critical.
37. **Component 1 focus on NFI production:** this was key for evidence-based decision-making (Outcome 1.1.5). Other activities should be complementary. The NFI development process, compounded with improvements to forest policy, strategy and programmes, improve the institutional and regulatory framework for scaling up SFM in Serbia.
38. Component 2 aimed to develop capacities among the relevant stakeholders to deal with challenges in adopting new methodologies. Added Outcome 2.1.4 targeted the importance of functional capacity building mechanisms among developing institutions and the quality of stakeholder engagement.
39. Derived barriers, assumptions and drivers, as presented in TOC 2, were reasonable and should be kept in the final TOC. The same applies to medium-term outcomes. With respect to field research and interviews with the main stakeholders, Assumptions 6 and 7 were amended. They were considered key for the effective realization of the objectives.
40. Component 3 should remain the same, as presented in TOC 2, since it underscores M&E. These activities are critical to replicate and scale up initiatives that bring success.
41. Sections 2.2.1 Assumptions and 2.2.2 Drivers present the project's underlying intervention logic and drivers of success.

2.2.1 Assumptions

Assumption 1. Key government institutions continue to value intersectoral collaboration among forest management (information sharing) and the mainstreaming of biodiversity and CCM considerations into multisectoral policies and plans.

Assumption 2. Key stakeholder groups (government agencies, academic institutions, private forest owners and users, forest community groups) are willing to engage in a participatory, multifunctional management of forests.

Assumption 3. A continued commitment from government authorities (political support, staff and financial resources) provides sufficient capacity for forest managers, owners and users to deliver SFM across Serbia.

Assumption 4. Private sector forest owners and users are willing (or can be encouraged) and able to adopt SFM practices. These practices include tangible benefits and skills development. They are ready to accept any restrictions that may apply to their current activities.

Assumption 5. Future climate change impacts will not irreversibly affect the structure and function of ecosystem services in Serbian forest landscapes.

Assumption 6. Stakeholders from different fields (forestry, environment, climate change, agriculture) and with diverse, short-term priorities (government, public enterprises, private entities) collaborate to exchange information. They jointly participate in different initiatives and minimize conflict potential.

Assumption 7. The continuous exchange of project-related information generates awareness among the main stakeholders on the project's idea, main objectives and activities.

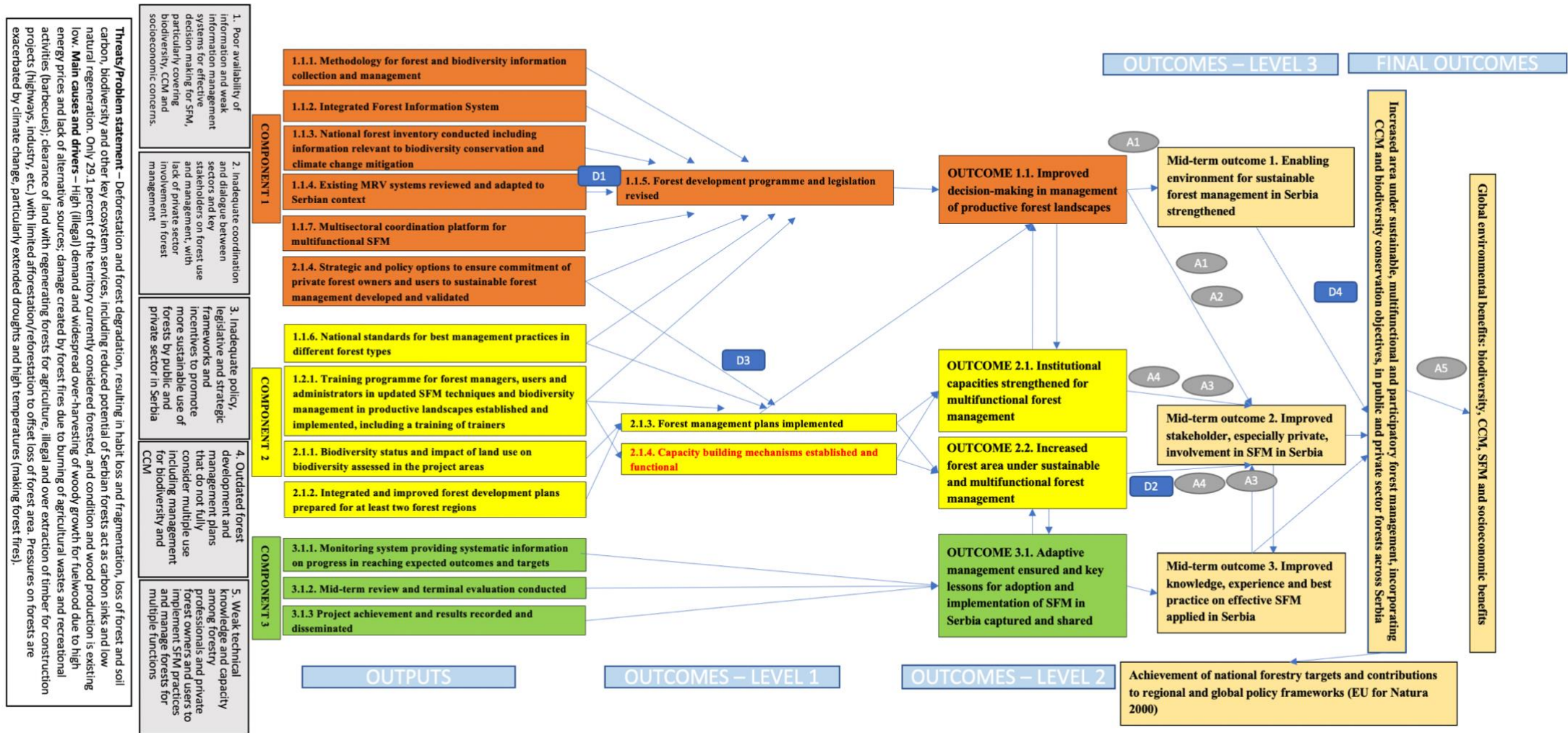
2.2.2 Drivers

Driver 1. Increase awareness and concern among policymakers, scientists, civil society and the private forestry sector on the negative impacts of climate change in Serbia. There is a need to adopt resilient, climate-adaptive development solutions.

Driver 2. Increase national, regional and global demand for sustainably sourced (certified) forestry products. Provide supportive markets.

42. See Figure 2 for the revised TOC.

Figure 2. Revised theory of change



Source: Elaborated by the Evaluation Team.

3. Findings

43. Evidence collected during the evaluation is analysed here. The findings are presented based on the evaluation questions. See Executive Summary Table 1 for the criteria ratings.

3.1 Relevance and ownership

Finding 1. The project objectives and intended outcomes were highly relevant at both the international and national levels. They clearly aligned with the strategic priorities. From an international perspective, the project was consistent with the GEF's focal areas, particularly the goals and strategies for biodiversity, climate change and land degradation (Biodiversity-4, CCM-2, and SFM-2). The project intervention also aligned with FAO's strategic objectives, especially Strategic Objective 2 on integrated national resources management and sustainable agriculture, and Regional Initiative 3 on strengthening national capacities for the sustainable management of natural resources. From a national perspective, the project's objectives were coherent with the national forestry priorities. They complemented national efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, especially on biodiversity and climate change.

Finding 2. Project ownership was largely concentrated within the Forest Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management. Other stakeholders participated in different project components to realize specific activities. Their ownership, however, was limited. This involved, for example, the implementation of the FMPs. Further, the involvement of small-scale private owners was only ensured by two PFOAs.

3.1.1 Relevance

44. The project clearly addressed the real drivers of forest loss and degradation. This involved biodiversity and carbon stocks. The project's activities were coherent with the goals and principles embedded in the main strategic documents, such as: the 2006 Forestry Development Strategy (Republic of Serbia, 2006); the 2012 National Strategy for the Sustainable Use of Natural Assets and Resources (Republic of Serbia, 2012);¹ the 2008 National Sustainable Development Strategy (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2008); and the 2011–2018 Serbian Biodiversity Strategy (Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, 2011). These tackled the main sources of forest degradation and addressed the main capacities and mechanisms that improve SFM practices.
45. The project addressed specific needs of the targeted beneficiaries. In particular, this involved better legislation and information sharing to support decision-making processes and establish capacity building mechanisms.
46. The core activities related to the development of the NFI and the Integrated Forest Inventory System (IFIS) were key in dealing with the challenges of evidence-based policymaking in the field of SFM. Documentation on the NFI and IFIS were considered essential by all relevant stakeholders for sustainable, multifunctional forest management.
47. The project outcomes complemented other national and donor-funded programmes in the field of nature conservation and climate change. Of note are *EU for Natura 2000 in Serbia* (Republic of Serbia, 2021), *EU for Green Agenda in Serbia* (UNDP Serbia, 2024a), the *Climate*

¹ This strategy has been adopted in 2012 and expired in November 2021.

Strategy and Action Plan (UNDP Serbia, 2024b), and the *Serbia and 2030 Agenda* (Secretariat for Public Policies, 2022).

48. There were no specific factors that would have seriously impacted the project's relevance. Of note, however, is that the government's efforts to meet the requirements of the Paris Agreement included decarbonization plans for a net-zero economy. This included, for example, the National Energy and Climate Plan (Ministry of Mining and Energy, 2023). Indeed, this aspect has become even more relevant. Potentially, the project's results can be used for future interventions.

3.1.2 Ownership

49. Apart from the Forest Directorate, the degree of project ownership among other stakeholders (public enterprises, private forest owners) and the non-forestry sector (Institute for Nature Conservation) was relatively low. This is because they were not involved enough during the inception phase. The interviews revealed that some institutions had limited access to project concepts. They lacked information on project achievements, making them less proactive.
50. Private forest owners were insufficiently involved during the project design phase. This is because the initial project document did not provide specific mechanisms and incentives to promote their involvement. As a result, only two PFOAs representing a few dozen private forest owners were involved in project activities. This was a very small number in relation to the 880 000 existing private forest owners in Serbia. Indeed, the project aimed to improve private sector involvement during implementation. This, however, was too complex and overambitious in terms of capacity and financial resources.

3.2 Effectiveness

3.2.1 Progress towards outputs

Output 1.1.1. Methodology for forest and biodiversity information collection and management harmonized with global and regional standards and reporting requirements.

Finding 3. The project developed new methods for forest management, biodiversity and CCM. Methods relevant to forest management planning were state-of-the-art and suitable for continuous forest management coverage. Methods for biodiversity information constituted a compromise between desirable scientific details and conditions for fieldwork. This included staff availability and the requirements needed for data collection during the off-season vegetation period. The CCM information was only obtained indirectly via quotients based on tree biomass measurements.

51. New methods for forest and biodiversity information collection and management were developed. These methods complemented global and regional standards and reporting requirements.
52. A new method for biodiversity-related information collection was applied and integrated into data collection for the FMPs. The method assessed indicator-based parameters (for example, visible on trees) or habitat potential. It also had indicators that were relevant to ground vegetation but were not implemented. This was largely due to a mosquito

infestation, which made fieldwork in Serbia's lower regions impossible during the summer. As a result, much of the inventory work needs to be done during off-season vegetation.

53. Carbon storage information, particularly carbon content in tree biomass (stem, branches, leaves) and soil was based on factors that come from stem biomass. This used quotients based on scientific information.
54. The new FMPs considered CCM and CCA. However, CCM was not a priority for the FMPs.
55. New methods for assessing detailed soil carbon are being developed at the Institute of Lowland Forestry and Environment. This information has yet to be published. Developing such methods on a level where they can be easily integrated into standard inventory work is needed for future research.

Output 1.1.2. IFIS, including biodiversity, carbon and socioeconomic information.

Finding 4. The new IFIS was developed based on specifications for new data collection methods. In the short term, IFIS will only cover land managed by state forest enterprises and large forest owners (greater than 100 ha) at the Forest Management Unit (FMU) level. The NFI data will cover national and regional levels with an analysis among administrative divisions. The IFIS will only be accessible to professional audiences. Data sharing between institutions remains an issue.

56. There is a new version of OSNOVA software. A licence was arranged to ensure that all relevant stakeholders can access the software. The IFIS is based on new data collection and analysis guidelines.
57. At the FMU level, IFIS information will also be available in the short term. This, however, will be available for just roughly 50 percent of all forest area since the FMPs were not collected for small-scale private forest owners. For these forests, information will only be available based on the NFI data (see Output 1.1.3). However, the NFI data can only be meaningfully analysed at the administrative division level.
58. The IFIS data were only accessible to professional audiences.
59. Data sharing between institutions or with the general public remains a challenge.
60. The project faced procurement difficulties for IFIS software, that is, OSNOVA. There was only one supplier: a one-person company who is a former staff member of the Forest Directorate. However, as long as the data structure is well documented, contracting a different supplier for future versions should be possible.

Output 1.1.3. The NFI conducted, including the assessment and collection of information relevant to biodiversity conservation and CCM.

Finding 5a. The NFI field data were collected and analysed. The Evaluation Team had the opportunity to study the available results and methods. These data came from the field and remote sensing in order to inform the final analysis. Assessing the validity of the methods was not a task of the Evaluation Team. However, interviews with involved experts confirmed that the NFI was conducted based on state-of-the-art methods. Regardless, no official publication of the NFI results was available during the elaboration of this report.

Finding 5b. The NFI report was officially requested during the presentation of intermediate evaluation findings. The FAO project team confirmed this request and followed through on all of the necessary efforts to ensure the publication of the NFI report before project closure.

Finding 5c. There is a need to institutionalize the NFI work in Serbia.

61. The NFI field data collection was completed.
62. The NFI analysis software was developed and implemented.
63. The Evaluation Team could study results that were considered plausible.
64. Documented quality control measures were in place.
65. The NFI results had not been officially published by 13 June 2023.
66. During the interviews, the Evaluation Team was informed about discussions among forest stakeholders on the inconsistencies of results (for example, forest area increase) compared to the 2009 NFI. Also, the NFI experts were still involved in data clearing activities. This may have been a reason for the delay in the official publication.
67. Underscored is the need to institutionalize the NFI within the appropriate Serbian institutions. Many national or regional forest research institutions in other countries have been provided with relevant resources and asked to carry out regular NFIs. In doing so, a designated, well-equipped institution would refine the NFI methodologies and allow for the most up-to-date know-how. Ideally, the creation of an NFI institution should have been initiated upon project launch, or at least measures should have been taken to define the appropriate outputs.

Output 1.1.4. Existing carbon monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) systems reviewed and adapted to the Serbian context.

Finding 6. An MRV system was designed and validated. However, regulations and by-laws for formal adoption had not been enacted as of 13 June 2023.

68. An MRV system was designed.
69. The MRV system was validated by 20 experts from the forestry and environmental sectors.
70. A follow-up plan for the inclusion of the MRV recommendations into IFIS was developed.
71. The new version of IFIS includes findings from the new MRV system.
72. The MRV system still needs to be institutionalized through new legislation.

Output 1.1.5. Forest development programme and legislation revised to incorporate biodiversity, CCM and socioeconomic concerns.

Finding 7. There was not much progress on Output 1.1.5. Stakeholder dialogue was initiated, and a draft document exists, but legal changes were not enacted.

73. The output had advanced to stakeholder consultations by 13 June 2023. This led to a draft for the relevant legislation.

74. New FDP guidelines refer to forest functions, as defined in the Law on Forests. These include the function of forests to mitigate the harmful impact of the greenhouse effect. This is done by sequestering carbon and producing oxygen and biomass, as well as creating a favourable impact on the climate (Republic of Serbia, 2010, Article 6, General Functions 4 and 10). Examples include aesthetic value, human health, recreation and education, but none were considered priority functions. Although CCM was considered important for all forests, it was not possible to assign it a priority function in an FDP.
75. The draft guidelines did not include specific details on how the climate change-related functions of forests should be given specific consideration in forest management.
76. In addition, biodiversity was not mentioned in either the Law on Forests or the new regulation on the FDPs. It was, however, considered in the context of existing nature reserves and in connection with protected species.

Output 1.1.6. National standards for best management practices of different forest types.

Finding 8. National standards for best management practices of different forest types were developed for 20 types of forests in Serbia. These included guidelines relevant to biodiversity, CCM and CCA. This level of detail was considered appropriate given the diversity of conditions in Serbia. In fact, it allowed for individual adaptation based on the knowledge and experience of local staff.

77. Forest management guidelines for the 20 types of forests in Serbia were developed as a result of the project.
78. Forest management guidelines also included information relevant to conservation and the improvement of biodiversity values. These were formulated at practical, reasonable levels. The guidelines tracked any existing biodiversity-relevant information on protected species, habitats and areas, as well as the presence of microhabitats and key biotopes. This was done through nature value assessments on the identification of zones to be retained during forest operations or when active management to enhance biodiversity was required. The level of detail in the guidelines was kept at a practical level. This left room for forest managers to adapt their measures according to local conditions. This approach was considered appropriate for national guidelines. In fact, diverse conditions, like those found in Serbia, and the identification of 20 types of forest require a high level of generality.
79. Similarly, CCM- and CCA-relevant guidelines were more general. While climate change tendencies are based on scientific evidence, local variations within the same forest type in different locations may necessitate the adaptation of forest management measures (species selection, cutting regime). Eventually, the forest management guidelines will be legally institutionalized through by-laws. This subsidiarity-based approach is preferred over centralized measures that may be inappropriate at the individual level.

Output 1.1.7. A national, multisectoral coordination platform for multifunctional SFM established.

Finding 9. The project initiated a regular opinion exchange among major official actors from the forestry and conservation sectors, including private forest owners. However, such a dialogue was not extended to environmental non-governmental organizations. No institutionalized platform had been created by 13 June 2023. There are plans to create a National Forestry Institute as a key institution for vocational training and continuous professional development.

80. Regular monthly consultations were held among multi-actor working groups. This involved forest information, the FDP, the FMP and private forest owner integration. There were

representatives from the Srbijašume and Vojvodinašume public enterprises, the Institute of Forestry (Novi Sad and Belgrade), the Forest Directorate, the national parks and the Serbian Environmental Protection Agency.

81. Overall, these activities contributed to a regular opinion exchange among important actors from the forestry and conservation sectors. However, they were largely restricted to project stakeholders that directly engaged with the project. For example, there was no involvement of actors from the wider conservation sector, such as non-governmental organizations in the field of nature conservation.
82. While the project's meetings and opinion exchanges contributed to widening the perspectives on SFM, there was no institutionalized platform. There are, however, plans to establish a National Forestry Institute as the main institution for vocational training and continuous professional development. This institution can serve as the envisaged platform for this output.

Output 1.2.1. A training programme for forest managers, users and administrators on updated SFM techniques and biodiversity management on productive landscapes established and implemented (including training of trainers).

Finding 10. Although the trainings were somewhat delayed, the project managed to develop all training materials on time. Quantitative targets like the number of trainings, training of trainers (TOT) sessions and trainees were achieved according to plan.

83. Training needs, design and materials were assessed.
84. A capacity development strategy, including the elaboration of training modules, was developed. Training modules, relevant for FDP- and FMU-level planning and monitoring and IFIS, were developed and delivered on time.
85. A list of required training courses was agreed upon with the Serbian Chamber of Forestry Engineers (signed letter of agreement).
86. A training implementation plan, including the definition of demonstration plots for the trainings, was agreed upon with the Serbian Chamber of Forestry (signed letter of agreement).
87. All planned trainings were delivered.
88. In total, over 120 trainees and more than 20 potential trainers completed the trainings.
89. A participant survey was conducted for all trainings. The results indicated good acceptance of training content and conditions.
90. A limited number of private forest owners participated in the training activities. An interviewed PFOA representative confirmed that private forest owners highly valued the trainings. However, the number of PFOAs in Serbia needs to increase. Unfortunately, a lack of ownership or interest in regular forest management activities, particularly among very small-scale forest owners, was noted. This applies to not only the Western Balkan region but also throughout many European regions – especially where there is no form of obligatory membership in the PFOAs or similar institutions.

Output 2.1.1. Biodiversity status and impact of land use on biodiversity assessed in the project areas.

Finding 11. The biodiversity status and impact of forest management activities were collected within project areas. This was in the context of data collection according to the new FMP and NFI guidelines. The influence of land use beyond SFM was not considered.

91. A report on forest biodiversity, threats and impacts in the project areas (Vojvodina and Western Serbia) was produced. It was based on the review of existing knowledge and data, as well as the valuation of the actual status of forest biodiversity, impacts and threats for the Obedska bara and Tara National Parks. Regarding biodiversity, CCM and CCA, these were amended with the NFI data analysis alongside previously known data.
92. Additional information was collected in the context of the FMP data collection activities. This included the nature value assessment and the mapping of key biotopes according to the new SFM guidelines.

Output 2.1.2. Integrated and improved FDPs prepared for at least two forest regions.

Finding 12. Two FDP drafts were expected by project closure. This was contingent on the official publication of the NFI data required for the quantitative FDP elements. A more detailed statement on this output could not be made at the time of this evaluation.

93. Work to collect the necessary information for the two FDPs was done. The plans were not ready by 31 May 2023. The project team announced their completion in mid-June 2023.
94. The FDPs were to be unreviewed, unapproved drafts by project closure on 30 June 2023.
95. The FDPs will not be implemented within the project's life cycle. As a result, neither an assessment of their quality and stakeholder involvement nor long-term effects was possible for this evaluation.

Output 2.1.3. FMPs implemented.

Finding 13. According to the new guidelines, the FMPs were developed for only two out of eight targeted FMUs. The main reason for this unsatisfactory result may be attributed to the reluctance of regional decision-makers. In fact, the new guidelines developed by the project have yet to be formally institutionalized via by-laws.

96. Eight FMUs were selected for data collection. This was required for the development and implementation of new FMPs based on the new guidelines.
97. According to interviewees, two FMPs were developed by 31 May 2023. They were based on the new guidelines and submitted to the Forest Directorate for approval. For one additional FMU, data were collected based on both the old and new guidelines. An FMP was based on the new guidelines and elaborated within a short period of time.
98. Interviewees stated that the main barrier for the inclusion of more FMUs was the reluctance of local supervisory staff at the selected FMUs to initiate the FMP work. This aspect was based on the new guidelines that still need to be legally institutionalized in the form of by-laws. An FMP rejection was a risk due to formal reasons. Other interviewees, however, stated that this fear was unfounded since there was a strong willingness among decision-makers to approve the drafted plans according to the new guidelines.

99. The argument of only acting within existing legislation put regional decision-makers in a favourable position to justify their inaction. This led to considerable delays in the development of the FDPs that are consistent with the new guidelines.
100. This output underperformed due to delays in the development of new forest management and FDP guidelines.
101. In terms of sustainability, one could argue that the availability of new SFM guidelines and FMP development – including legal institutionalization – will most likely result in improved SFM standards throughout Serbia. In the medium to long term, this may be considered more important than the number of hectares achieved for this output.
102. In total, 16 demonstration plots were established for training and demonstration activities.

Output 2.1.4. Strategic and policy options to ensure the commitment of private forest owners and users to SFM developed and validated.

Finding 14. Output 2.1.4 was limited to the development of a concept note based on a project steering committee decision. This document is available and aligns with international forest policy findings. However, the issue of incentivizing very small-scale private forest owners for SFM activities, or raising their interest in SFM, remains another required activity – not only in Serbia but also across Europe, particularly in countries with high levels of absentee owners.

103. Private forest owners were not so involved in activities like trainings or the project steering committee meetings. The objective of mobilizing more owners to be active in the PFOAs was not achieved.
104. There was insufficient interest in regular forest management activities for most of the very small-scale private forest owners. This was due to average plot sizes of less than 1 ha and the fact that many of them no longer live close to their forests. Instead, they make a living from other economic activities.
105. The project stakeholders therefore decided to develop a concept note. This would address comprehensive forest extension service options for private owners. It aimed to include potential incentives for private forest owners.
106. The document was in draft form by the time of this evaluation. Its content aligned with findings from scientific forest policy studies. However, mobilizing absentee urban forest owners has become a bigger problem among high shares of small-scale private owners throughout Europe and the world.
107. Data collection from private forest owners was also a problem. This aspect depended on their attitudes, willingness, availability and engagement towards regular SFM activities.
108. Options to engage small-scale private forest owners in forest management include: 1) voluntarily (for example, forest management services provided on a voluntary basis to a local PFOA); or 2) mandatory associations (for example, all forest land within a municipality or district gets incorporated into one community forest where the owner holds a share as per his or her former individual property size). However, both options are not very feasible in the Serbian context. Option 1 is difficult to realize as hundreds of owners would require incentives and coordination. Option 2 would be politically too sensitive and unrealistic as it would bring back memories of forced collectivization under communism.

Output 3.1.1. The monitoring system provides systematic information on progress in reaching the expected outcomes and targets.

Finding 15. Monitoring and reporting activities were implemented through regular, half-year reports, annual PIRs and project steering committee meetings. The lack of intermediate-level targets for the achievement of outputs and outcomes made it difficult to regularly track activities that identify potential remedial measures. The project's activities also relied heavily on inputs from partners. This created external dependence. For future projects, mechanisms to ensure and demand commitments from partners should be considered.

109. Project activities were monitored via PPRs with standard templates. This provided information on the project's progress towards the defined outputs. However, there were no indicators on the expected completion levels per reporting period (by the end of June and the end of December each year). This made it difficult to receive a good overview on specific, intermediate-level outputs that would require additional attention and dedicated resources to achieve the final deliverables.
110. The formulated outputs required the completion of previous outputs and activities. For example, the completion of Outcome 1 outputs was required before the activities for Outcome 2 could get started. This resulted in considerable project delays. It was clear that many activities were still ongoing at the time of this evaluation.
111. Important contributions towards progress were required from the project partners. However, the project did not have any disciplinary power to accelerate the process. The project team therefore depended on the willingness of partners to engage with the project.
112. Other issues affected engagement. For instance, delivery delays of important field equipment meant that one project partner was less available. This impacted the work plan.
113. The project team, especially the National Project Coordinator, had to get familiar with FAO's reporting standards. This required time and on-the-job learning. Such efforts were not in the project design.
114. Considerable delays were encountered due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The project team could not modify the planned activities with ease.

Output 3.1.2. MTR and terminal evaluation conducted.

Finding 16. A review process was conducted as required. Delays in implementing the MTR and the terminal evaluation were due to overall project delays.

115. The MTR was conducted from November to December 2020 after a delay. Its final report was published in April 2021. This terminal evaluation was conducted from March to June 2023. The project team provided all of the necessary assistance and resources.

Output 3.1.3. Project achievements and results recorded and disseminated.

Finding 17. Project achievements were recorded and disseminated through internal recording and dissemination procedures. Public, external communications were limited. This resulted in a low profile of project achievements among stakeholders that were not directly involved in the project. Dissemination activities should have been given more attention during the inception phase.

116. Achievements and results were recorded as per the required standard reports. Copies are available in the office of the project team.

117. A strengthening and professionalization effort for external communications was recommended by the MTR. For this, additional resources should have been mobilized. A professional communications strategy was developed with support from FAO. However, the project team had difficulties in mobilizing staff resources to carry out such activities like texting press releases, proactively contacting the press on project activities and communicating project activities to stakeholders not directly involved in the process. Consequently, such activities were not implemented in a sufficient manner.
118. The project design had planned for a part-time consultant as a Communication Specialist. Unfortunately, this position was never filled. This gap may explain the challenges related to communications.
119. A forward-looking approach is suggested for future communications. This requires the involvement of outside professional expertise, including an adequate understanding of the project's objectives.
120. Even institutions that represented project specialists showed little awareness about the project's activities.
121. There was, however, a reasonable number of project appearances in the media.
122. Publications on lessons learned still need to be authored and published.
123. Scientific publications related to the project's methods were published.
124. The project was presented at FAO events, but there were no signs of presentations at any other international conferences. Conference restrictions may be among the reasons.

3.2.2 Progress towards outcomes

Outcome 1.1. Improved decision-making in the management of productive forest landscapes.

Finding 18. In general, the project managed to develop new guidelines for the provision of improved data on SFM at the FMU level, on the FDPs at the regional level and on the NFI for the national decision-making level. However, the planning guidelines at the FMU and regional levels had not been legally institutionalized by 31 May 2023. Also, the available NFI results had not been published. However, once the new guidelines are institutionalized, the sustainable impact of project results for the mid- to long-term will be ensured.

125. For this outcome, progress towards Outputs 1.1.1–1.1.7, 1.2.1 and 2.1.4 are evaluated in summary.
126. At the technical level, the guidelines for new data collection methods that are relevant to SFM – including biodiversity and CCM considerations – were developed and used for NFI and FMP data collection.
127. Newly collected data provided detailed information. An IFIS analysis verified data and allowed authorized personnel to access them.
128. The collected data, however, have yet to be formally published. No official NFI data were available by 31 May 2023.

129. There is a need to institutionalize NFI activities through a separate technical and administrative unit at the national level.
130. A new MRV system was prepared but needs to be legally institutionalized.
131. Guidelines for the incorporation of biodiversity and CCM concerns in the FDPs were developed but not legally institutionalized.
132. Wider access to data is still an issue. This involves, for example, cloud-based data storage or internet-based query tools.
133. Interviewees reported problems among field staff when implementing the new guidelines. For instance, the level of botanical knowledge on some of the biodiversity indicators was insufficient. Further, the seasonality of some indicators like ground vegetation made their assessment impossible. The biodiversity assessment was therefore mostly relegated to indicators like mosses, lichens, habitats and artificial structures that could be assessed throughout the year.
134. Involve field staff at earlier stages of method development when it comes to future data collection changes. This will adapt the methods to the available skills and increase their acceptance.
135. The new methods have yet to be legally institutionalized via by-laws. This negatively impacted their full-scale implementation during the project's life cycle.
136. Strategy documents need to be developed for this outcome (Outputs 1.1.4 and 1.1.5).

Outcome 1.2. Institutional capacities strengthened for multifunctional forest management.

Finding 19. The development and delivery of trainings and the establishment of demonstration plots related to new methods was completed as planned. However, the number of private forest owners in trainings was limited to a few members of well-established PFOAs. National resources to continue the training activities after project closure are still available.

137. The evaluation for this outcome is based on results for Output 1.2.1 (see section 3.2 Effectiveness).
138. Trainings for new methods related to SFM, biodiversity and CCM were delivered as planned. The capacity level of participants from institutions was strengthened.
139. Training records and feedback results were available. These indicated a good acceptance by the trainees.
140. The TOT sessions were conducted and strengthened institutional capacity.
141. Sixteen training plots were established and are available for future training activities.
142. Future funds from the Forest Directorate for trainings were confirmed.
143. There are plans within the Forest Directorate to create a dedicated forestry training institution based on international examples. Such an institution would allow for the continuous improvement of training capacities.

144. Only a few members of well-established PFOAs participated in the trainings. The problem of mobilizing private forest owners for SFM-related activities was evident: none of the forest sector institutions had any means to contact private forest owners, nor did the private forest owners look to contact these institutions. In addition, and unlike countries like Austria, Serbia has no official register of forest owners.
145. No quality assessment of the trainings was made during project implementation since there was no capacity assessment carried out during the inception phase.

Outcome 2.1. Increased forest area under sustainable and multifunctional forest management.

Finding 20. The total amount of forest area under SFM was lower than predicted in the project plan. Only two (or potentially three) out of the eight planned FMPs were prepared. Data for the development of new FMPs were collected for only 5 000 ha instead of the 20 000 ha envisaged in the project design. The completion of new FDPs depends on the NFI results. These were not officially published until mid-June 2023, so only qualitative elements of the FDPs were developed. In addition, biodiversity-related reports were prepared for the two project areas based on existing information. Quantitative results for avoided CO₂ emissions through the implementation of project activities were not available at the time of this evaluation. This was due to the late completion of the FDPs and the fact that major measures had not been implemented over a longer period.

146. For this outcome, results for Outputs 2.1.1–2.1.4 are assessed in the following points.
147. Only three FMUs that cover 5 000 ha will be under the project guidelines-based FMPs. This is considerably less than the 20 000 ha envisaged in the project plan.
148. No major impact of new approaches was expected during the project's life cycle since the FMP work was completed in 2022.
149. Important effects are expected in the long term since the FMPs cover a 10-year horizon.
150. With the new guidelines implemented at all FMUs in Serbia, the final contribution to this outcome will be considerably higher than the targeted 20 000 ha. This is positive in terms of sustainability.
151. The FDPs will cover a total of 475 000 ha. Creating the FDPs depended on the publication of official NFI data that had not been prepared until 13 June 2023.
152. A concept note for a comprehensive forest extension service was developed. This did not include concrete suggestions like sustainable funding for such a service.
153. Potential incentives for private forest owners were developed in a draft action plan that awaits publication.

Outcome 3.1. Adaptive management ensured and key lessons shared.

Finding 21. Internal progress reporting, work plan development and budgeting processes were carried out according to the FAO–GEF requirements. There was little awareness of project activities among forest sector actors that were not directly involved in them, as well as little awareness among potential stakeholders outside the immediate forest sector. The external dissemination of project results was limited.

154. Regular progress reporting was carried out according to FAO–GEF requirements.

155. Annual work plans and budgets were prepared as required.
156. Project activities were published in scientific publications.
157. There was a little awareness of project activities among forest sector stakeholders that were not directly involved in project activities.
158. There was little awareness of the project among potential stakeholders outside the forest sector.
159. A communications plan was developed, but little was realized due to a lack of resources.
160. Major project results like the NFI were not published by 31 May 2023.
161. Publications on lessons learned were not available by 31 May 2023.

3.2.3 Progress towards the overall project objective: the promotion of multifunctional SFM to conserve biodiversity, enhance and conserve carbon stocks, and secure forest ecosystem services in productive forest landscapes

Finding 22. The actual forest area affected by project activities upon project closure was small. The target of 20 000 ha was not achieved. However, the project's wider long-term impact has yet to be seen through the new SFM guidelines with biodiversity and CCM. In fact, this will help to develop new management plans on the roughly 50 percent of Serbian forest area that is covered by such plans in both state forests and large private forests. The objective of engaging the vast amount of small-scale private forest owners was too ambitious. Future donor-funded activities related to Serbian private forest owners should focus on pilot activities at a limited amount of project sites.

162. By 31 May 2023, there was only a relatively small amount of forest area for which guidelines-based management plans were developed. However, there were guidelines for improved, sustainable and multifunctional forest management for all types of Serbian forests. These were communicated through TOT sessions for more than 120 forest and forest sector stakeholders acting as knowledge multipliers.
163. Areas directly impacted by FMU-level project activities constitute about 50 percent of Serbian forests. Small-scale private forest land will only be impacted to the extent in which it is managed by the few PFOAs active in forest management. This is only a few thousand hectares of forest.
164. The FDPs were developed with biodiversity and CCM considerations. These were only available towards project closure due to the late availability of the NFI results. There was not enough time to assess their impact on SFM, biodiversity and CCM.
165. The project could not find ways to engage many of the very small-scale private forest owners – over 880 000 Serbians. Many private forest owners do not live close to their properties or are not permanent residents in the country. Further, there is not an official register of forest owners.
166. This was, however, a well-known fact during the project's conception phase. The objectives related to private forest owners were probably too ambitious. As such, this component should have been limited to a smaller geographical area with just a few administrative

divisions. This would have facilitated more detailed assessments so that the project could engage with them. Knowledge gained from such pilot activities could have then formed the basis for a wider private forest owner mobilization strategy.

3.2.4 Likelihood of impact

Finding 23. The project's results will directly impact all state forests and large private forests that require the FMPs. In addition, the availability of the NFI data provides a good basis for future forest policy activities. This includes the development of incentive measures.

167. The new guidelines will develop the FMPs for both state forests and large private forest owners once they are legally institutionalized via by-laws. Management requires forest authority approval. Forest areas that have these plans will be managed according to the concept notes developed by project.
168. New guidelines for the FDPs will ensure that multifunctional SFM with biodiversity and CCM is given appropriate attention at the landscape level.
169. A more detailed analysis of subnational NFI data will inform forest and conservation policies for the administrative divisions. It will also outline the differences between state and private forests.
170. This will further develop pilot activities for a focused, closer engagement with private forest owners. It also involves incentive and extension measures.

3.2.5 Additional findings required for terminal evaluation reporting

3.2.5.1 Progress towards achieving the project's development objectives

Finding 24. The project was beneficial for rural inhabitants. It also promoted global economic development. This was done by enhancing SFM in Serbia and developing guidelines with biodiversity and CCM considerations.

3.2.5.2 Overall progress on implementation

Finding 25. Overall, the project's implementation progress was limited. This was due to internal factors, but also external factors like the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, M&E-related issues were not anticipated during the project's inception phase.

3.2.5.3 Overall risk rating

Finding 26. This evaluation concludes that, overall, the project's sustainability is promising. This is possible if confirmed plans, as expressed by stakeholders during the interviews, are implemented.

3.3 Efficiency

Finding 27. External factors, especially the COVID-19 pandemic, caused efficiency problems. Internal efficiency problems stemmed from other difficulties. For example, there was the project team's adaptation to the GEF requirements and the lack of adequate trainings prior to the intervention. Also, there was not a detailed implementation plan in the project document, and this created a challenge for the main stakeholders.

171. The project benefited from the availability of knowledge and resources from earlier activities, such as externally funded projects on new forest management planning methods by the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture. This included earlier investments to develop forest information system software for IFIS, as well as data analysis for both the FMPs and the NFI.
172. The delays during project inception were also due to missing details on how to achieve the specific outcomes and outputs. The project team was responsible for defining and translating relevant tasks for each output so that the terms of reference could be developed for the national and international consultants.
173. Consultants who had already collaborated on earlier activities were contracted for SFM- and NFI-related knowledge and expertise. This contributed to better project efficiency, but neutral selection procedures should be questioned.
174. There was conflict among some of the consultants. This evaluation observed little team spirit among certain individuals.
175. The COVID-19 pandemic led to additional delays. Mandated safeguard procedures prevented personal meetings among project partners and training activities. Moreover, key people on the project team and from partner institutions fell ill. Any joint activities involving them were postponed. These delays were also connected to contributions from national partners who were responsible for data collection activities in the field.
176. FAO's direct budget contribution was low compared to national in-kind and cash contributions. However, proper assessment of the actual national contribution remains limited. This is because some of the claimed contributions include activities that concern regular work carried out by the national partners. Therefore, the additionality of the listed contributions may not be rated.
177. The IFIS needed an existing software package. This caused delays because the procedure required direct procurement and specific considerations of due diligence.

3.4 Sustainability

Finding 28. The intervention plan aimed to ensure project sustainability. The sustainability strategy included social, environmental, economic, financial and capacity building perspectives. Sustainability was also considered through the prism of innovation, technology, and the replication and scaling up potential of the results. The overall likelihood of further implementation based on the project's results in the Serbian forestry sector is very likely. The evaluation found important project legacies that provide a solid basis for sustainability.

178. **Achieved main outputs to be used for SFM:** the main factor that strengthened sustainability was the nature of the realized project outputs, primarily the NFI, IFIS and the methodologies to integrate environmental information and forest management planning into decision-making processes. The outputs provided an important basis for evidence-based policymaking. They also have solid replication and scaling up potential.
179. **Drafted by-laws:** the second important sustainability element refers to inputs for draft legislative changes. These will be the legal basis for SFM practices as soon as they are

adopted. Most of the stakeholders considered project sustainability through legislative changes and the adoption of related by-laws, which was handled by project management.

180. **Capacity building:** the third key sustainability factor concerns capacity building mechanisms that were developed and envisaged to last beyond project closure. The TOT sessions and other types of trainings were initiated and realized throughout implementation. Capacity building activities were developed and supported by the Forest Directorate, whereas the Chamber of Forestry and individual experts from academia and the scientific community played a key role in knowledge transfer.
181. **Adopted new methodological approach:** of note is that the project succeeded in developing local capacities for the NFI. This facilitated the application of the new methodology for the first time in Serbia. In particular, local stakeholders got acquainted with technical capacities and expertise to realize similar interventions in the future.
182. **Reliance on a single software provider:** reliance on a single software provider for analysing and presenting the main outputs (IFIS, NFI, FMPs, FDPs) is a sustainability risk. This is because the provider is one person. The databases are the main value of the project's outputs. These data are generic, have accessible formats and can easily be adapted to different software products.

Finding 29. Despite noticeable results, the Evaluation Team identified several risks and challenges to the sustainability of some results. The main risks are detailed in the following points.

183. **Political and legal risks:** the institutionalization of the project's results is a relevant risk. The Forest Directorate guided the project, and this improved the chances of participation among other stakeholders. In fact, the Forest Directorate is key for continuing capacity building activities and the replication of SFM practices. However, over-reliance on the Forest Directorate could negatively affect the sustainability of outcomes. This risk stems from high staff turnover or changes to policy priorities. This also applies to necessary budgets that need to be allocated. The integration of capacity building mechanisms, mandatory application and funds for new forest management planning were crucial elements. This involved updated forest assessment and monitoring, improved assessments of biodiversity and CCM, and the institutionalization of the NFI practices.
184. **Institutional collaboration:** the interviews revealed certain issues related to institutional buy-in. This depended on the willingness and capacity of stakeholders that are key actors in successful implementation. Therefore, interinstitutional agreements on assigned tasks and responsibilities, particularly for the NFI and IFIS, are vital for sustainability. Some institutions were under different ministries. For example, the Institute for Lowland Forestry and Environment (Novi Sad) and the Institute of Forestry (Belgrade) were both under the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation. Further, some institutions operate under the same ministry, that is, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, but are independent from the Forest Directorate. These arrangements are time consuming as they require high-level consultations and formal agreements between the different parties.
185. **Information system:** the concentration of knowledge and skills associated with the forest management information and technology system is another concern. This mainly refers to the OSNOVA software, which has no current alternative. This software is critical for the effective realization of many activities, including forest management, forest inventory and

the NFI. It is used by all stakeholders, particularly the Forest Directorate, public enterprises and national parks. Reliance on one information technology solution in terms of maintenance and functionality led to implementation delays and could create further challenges.

3.5 Factors affecting performance

3.5.1 Design and readiness

Finding 30. The project document provided a clear rationale for the proposed intervention. It had a detailed description of the project background, the current situation in the forestry sector, and existing institutional and legislative frameworks. The intervention logic was based on an in-depth needs assessment and analysis of the main barriers to be addressed. These targeted: the weakness of the information system, policy and strategic frameworks, and sectoral coordination; the lack of private sector involvement; and the general lack of understanding and technical capacity on SFM. However, the project had failed to engage stakeholders extensively during the inception phase. This may have created a lack of interest that negatively impacted the ownership of stakeholders who were not directly involved in project activities. Private forest owners and the PFOAs, the commercial sector, important biodiversity and climate change actors, civil society organizations, and, to a certain extent, the scientific and academic community, were only assigned limited roles during project design. The fact that some of the main stakeholders were not consulted when setting up some of the main activities (for example, Output 2.1.3 on the FMP implementation) reduced the probability of long-term institutional ownership.

186. Despite a detailed analysis of the project's context and main barriers, the inception phase lacked a preliminary stakeholder analysis from an interest and influence matrix perspective. A stakeholder analysis would have identified risks connected to the non-participation of important stakeholders. It also would have determined overlapping interest areas to reduce potential conflict among the main actors. In addition, the risk of insufficient interest among certain stakeholders was not appropriately addressed during project implementation. Although the low involvement of private forest owners and the PFOAs had been identified during the inception phase, this aspect represented a significant weakness and a missed opportunity for the project. A stakeholder analysis would have certainly defined incentives for greater participation.
187. The project document's TOC reflected the main objectives, outcomes and outputs. However, as stated in the MTR, the initial TOC failed to clarify interdependencies between project outputs (for example, the achievement of Medium-term outcomes 1, 2 and 3 depended on the delivery of Output 1.1.3). It also did not address the missing main assumptions and key drivers for the successful delivery of key outputs. The delay of the NFI impacted the further delivery of Output 3.1.3 on the effective dissemination of project results and the sharing of lessons learned. Further – with no underlying assumptions or key drivers of successful project implementation – some outputs became too ambitious. For instance, on sociopolitical risks, the revised legislation (for example, Output 1.1.5 on a forest development strategy with biodiversity, CCM and socioeconomic concerns) was unrealistic and well beyond the project's control. Moreover, local actors did not have to apply new forest management guidelines in the absence of specific legal requirements.
188. These issues were not addressed, as recommended by the MTR.

189. The design phase did not envisage the establishment of an appropriate project monitoring system. This limited immediate insight into the realization of specific activities. Perhaps this was due to the vacant M&E Specialist position during the inception phase.

3.5.2 Monitoring and evaluation system

Finding 31. The project document outlined the M&E framework, which was based on the FAO–GEF experience from similar project interventions. The project outputs were consistent and included specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound indicators. However, legislative changes were not in the hands of the project team. This created challenges in assessing Outcome 1.1 on improved decision-making. The outcomes were insufficiently considered during the project's design and inception phases. Monitoring the progress towards achieving the desired outcomes was quite challenging since adequate tools were not always in place. For instance, Outcome 1.2 on institutional capacities was not quantifiable without prior development of the appropriate assessment tools.

190. The monitoring system lacked an appropriate design. There was no systematized information on indicators that had been outlined during the design phase. Some outcome indicators, for example, multifunctional forest management, should have been revised following the specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound requirements. This was also emphasized in the MTR, along with recommendations for hiring an M&E Specialist. In terms of lessons learned, the TOC should have provided more detailed information on interdependencies between the project's outputs, specific assumptions and key drivers, as well as information on stakeholder engagement. These aspects proved critical during implementation.

3.5.3 Quality of implementation

Finding 32. Despite limited FAO Representation in Belgrade, efficient support was provided to the project. Key support for the NFI activities was provided by the Lead Technical Officer, as well as FAO experts at headquarters.

191. FAO REU personnel supported the introduction of the GEF guidelines. They helped to overcome difficulties in the context of financial administration and guidelines, such as the direct procurement of IFIS software.
192. FAO REU personnel were involved in many other projects that required frequent international travel. Oftentimes, FAO REU (Budapest) personnel could not be immediately available when problems arose. The project would have benefited from greater FAO presence in Belgrade.
193. FAO project coordination was shared among FAO REU (Budapest), FAO headquarters and FAO REU (Belgrade). This sometimes caused difficulties related to project administration. The coordination of personnel agendas was time consuming.

3.5.4 Quality of execution

Finding 33. The planned outputs and outcomes were very ambitious. This situation required good professionals, a dedicated management team and supportive staff at the local level.

194. The Project Management Unit, adequately supported by FAO REU (Budapest), had experienced team members. There was a strong local network. Despite unexpected delays, the project team managed the project professionally. Potential delays were properly

mitigated to the extent possible. However, communication with stakeholders, including the dissemination of project results (Output 3.1.3), remained rather weak. This was mainly due to an understaffed team at the local level. In fact, there was only one Project Coordinator and one part-time administrative staff member.

Finding 34. The COVID-19 pandemic and the procurement process were the main challenges during implementation.

195. The COVID-19 pandemic forced remote working conditions and social distancing among staff. This led to delays in completing the NFI activities (see section 3.3 Efficiency). Regardless, the management team adequately responded to a constantly changing situation. A 12-month no-cost extension was granted. Delayed activities, such as demonstration plots and training activities, were successfully delivered at a later stage. The COVID-19 pandemic was an external factor. However, the procurement process was one of the top internal factors that caused implementation delays. The IFIS software purchase was delayed due to FAO's procurement process. This hampered the direct procurement method, as instructed by the Forest Directorate. Additionally, the Information Technology Department at FAO headquarters did not promptly respond to the proposed information technology solutions. Further, the identification and recruitment of professional national consultants was time consuming and required additional efforts.

Finding 35. The risk management procedures were in accordance with the risk matrix from the project document. However, the Evaluation Team determined that the risk of staffing arrangements and the procurement of goods and services were not appropriately identified during the design phase.

3.5.5 Financial management and the mobilization of expected co-financing

Finding 36. There were no issues regarding the project's financial management. The slow disbursement of funds was observed during the first phase of implementation. Seventy-four percent of the total project budget was disbursed by 31 December 2022.

Finding 37. Quantifying the value of in-kind contributions was difficult without detailed reports from the partners.

Table 2. Total project budget and expenditure by 31 December 2022

Component/outcome	Estimated cost as per the latest budget revision for the total project duration (USD)	Expenditure by 31 December 2022 (cumulative) (USD)	Expenditure ratio actual/planned
Component 1	2 295 372	1 848 294	80%
Outcome 1.1	2 164 345	1 742 868	80%
Outcome 1.2	131 027	105 426	80%
Component 2	661 953	414 132	63%
Outcome 2.1	0	0	0
Component 3	161 399	48 723	30%
Outcome 3.1	0	0	0
Project management	155 936	104 265	67%
Project total	3 274 659	2 415 414	74%

Source: FAO. 2022. *Project Progress Report (PPR), 1 July to 31 December 2022*. Rome.

196. A financial assessment of cash and in-kind contributions was not possible. The Forest Directorate represented a major part of the forest budget in terms of cash.

3.5.6 Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement

Finding 38. The project developed good partnerships among different actors in the forest sector. Collaboration with actors outside of the forest sector remained limited. While collaboration with a few private forest owners and the PFOAs was established, this seemed very little compared to the large number of existing private forest owners in the country. Engagement with private forest owners remains an issue in Serbia and should be actively considered.

197. A list of stakeholders in the project document provided solid insight into the main institutions in the field and their respective roles. Despite an analysis of the strategic and institutional framework, less attention was placed on the relationship between stakeholders (conflicting interests) and potential limits regarding their involvement (private forest owners). Consequently, some stakeholders were not involved enough during project implementation. For instance, the role of the Institute for Lowland Forestry and Environment Protection in realizing Component 1 was rather limited.
198. The project opened up the possibility for greater collaboration between the Forest Directorate as the government institution, and the Institute for Forestry and the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Belgrade as the academic and scientific institutions. Such collaboration could facilitate potential formal partnerships and provide possibilities to integrate scientific knowledge into policymaking processes, for example, assigning the NFI management roles to the National Forestry Institute.
199. Private forest owner and PFOA involvement was clearly needed to achieve Medium-term outcome 2 on greater stakeholder engagement in SFM. The private forest owners and their PFOAs were considered the main project beneficiaries. Despite the large number of private owners in the country, the project did not plan for an outreach strategy to engage these actors in the intervention. Perhaps this was due to the lack of relevant representatives at the inception meeting.
200. The importance of developing partnerships with other ministries was neglected. This involved the Ministry of Environmental Protection and government institutions from the non-forestry sector, such as the Serbian Environmental Protection Agency. This would have been highly relevant for the integration of biodiversity issues in forest management (Output 1.1.3) and broader challenges in the fields of environmental protection and climate change (Republic of Serbia, 2021). Moreover, the evaluation found absolutely no relationships with civil society and the commercial forestry sector. These relationships seemed to have been completely overlooked. In fact, no strategic communications approach with these stakeholders was elaborated.

3.5.7 Communications, knowledge management and knowledge products

Finding 39. The project focused on producing key outputs, namely the NFI, IFIS, and SFM guidelines and practices. This involved the related capacity building mechanisms, as well as the elaboration of the FMPs and the FDPs. Beyond the forest sector, only limited external communications and dissemination activities were implemented.

201. Limited resources meant that the project focused on key outputs tied to the NFI, IFIS, and SFM guidelines and practices. This involved capacity building mechanisms. Communications were second. After the MTR, the project team put more effort into promotion and public announcements via television appearances. However, the project's results were not shared through social media, and a specific project website was never created. Basic project information is available on a Forest Directorate webpage. The evaluation found that project awareness and the achieved results were mainly shared with key stakeholders. Perhaps this was due to not having a substantial communications strategy and the fact that the Communication Officer was only engaged during the very last phase of project operation.
202. Interviews highlighted that limited external communications prior to producing the main outcomes on the NFI was decided upon by the Forest Directorate. However, the project achieved many important results for multiple use. These should be shared with a broader audience – beyond the forestry sector and beyond project completion.

3.6 Cross-cutting issues

3.6.1 Gender

Finding 40. A gender analysis was undertaken during the project's inception phase. However, no formal gender monitoring was conducted during implementation. The share of women engaged in training activities was higher than the share of women actively involved in the forestry sector.

203. A gender analysis was undertaken during inception. It included a gender mainstreaming strategy in order to incorporate gender-specific barriers for women so that they could become more active in the forest sector.
204. Documents and reports showed that the project did not consider gender-related dimensions. In fact, there were no gender-specific indicators. However, according to the interviewees and based on internal monitoring, women were well represented in capacity building activities. There were no particular barriers to their involvement.

3.6.2 Environmental and social safeguards, risk classification and risk mitigation provisions identified at the project's formulation stage

Finding 41. Environmental and social issues were incorporated into the project document based on FAO's environmental and social screening. The project was assigned an overall medium risk based on classifications that had been applied during project design.

205. A medium risk was considered for Safeguard 3 on plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, and Safeguard 7 on decent work. The risk related to Safeguard 2 on biodiversity, ecosystems and natural habitats was considered high. This was due to the nature of the pilot projects of Obedska bara and Tara National Parks, which fall under a specific protection regime. These areas required a full environmental and social impact assessment. Documentation showed that environmental issues were dealt with through Output 1.5 on incorporating biodiversity, CCM and socioeconomic concerns into forest development programming and revised legislation. This stemmed from informal consultations with stakeholders. No official document was available at the time of this evaluation. Full environmental and social impact assessments were not realized, as envisaged in the project document (see Annex 5 of the project document).

4. Recommendations

4.1 Specific actions for future interventions

Recommendation 1. To FAO REU and the FAO project team: for similar projects in the future, the institutionalization of results – such as new legislation – should be part of the planning phase. The required time and steps should be planned accordingly. Identified political risks and potentially adverse effects of political decisions on the achievement of project outcomes should be highlighted and addressed. Adequate resources and accurate planning for specific policy support can positively influence political commitments.

206. The project was successful in developing methodologies, technologies and capacity building. However, the following should be included to ensure the institutionalization of results:

- i. An institutional home for the NFI within the Institute of Forestry (and perhaps the Institute of Lowland Forestry and Environment) should be identified.
- ii. The establishment of a permanent institution or sustainable interinstitutional mechanisms for capacity building within the forest sector, including the required infrastructure, should be envisaged.
- iii. The formal enactment of by-laws to institutionalize new guidelines and methods should be enforced.

207. Future projects should consider the time and resources required for such efforts. For instance, at least the question of an institutional home for the NFI could have been initiated upon project launch. In this light, potential administrative and political issues related to such steps are well known. Unlike many other countries, the Institute of Forestry (Belgrade) is not under the Forest Directorate.

Recommendation 2. To the FAO–GEF project formulators: for future projects, the Serbian field reality should be considered during the phase of the project identification form. This includes the realistic estimation of engagement among private forest owners for proper planning and sustainability purposes. A more active engagement of experts with solid field experience in Serbia could illuminate predictable issues at the project's onset (for example, problems on the acquisition of software via direct purchase order instead of public tender or the timely enactment of by-laws to facilitate the institutionalization of project results within the project's life cycle). The same applies to national actors from the fields of politics and administration, public and private forest owners, and non-governmental organizations. Their early involvement should ensure a thorough participatory approach to define project objectives. This would then improve project buy-in.

208. The project was only able to engage with a very small number of forest owners. This was an important finding during the MTR. Actors in the forest sector cannot access private forest owners unless they come forward with grant requests. The issue of absent private forest owners is a problem not just in Serbia, but also Central European countries with well-established extension service programmes. Country-specific sensitivities like a reluctance to engage with communal management organizations, either voluntarily or mandatorily, represent another problem that requires appropriate consideration and concrete action.

Recommendation 3. To FAO REU and the FAO project team: the main project outputs (such as the NFI, completed during the last project phases), should be planned and finalized at an early stage of implementation. This would leave enough space for the promotion and publication of important project results, including possibilities for timely and substantial debates in public or among the scientific community.

209. The project's work plan should envisage and ensure the delivery of the main outputs during an early implementation phase. The first draft should be shared among all interested stakeholders with important information: database location; potential users; usage potential; and the importance for forestry development at the national and local levels.

Recommendation 4. To FAO REU and the FAO project team: FAO should reconsider its monitoring efforts to elaborate new methodologies in future projects. Provide scientific support at an early stage of implementation. This would improve the professional level of scientific innovation, especially since this well-grounded methodology was applied for the first time in Serbia.

210. The NFI development was based on a scientific methodology. It was applied for the first time, and some professionals were sceptical about its results. Regardless, the project positively benefited from using external FAO resources.

211. Having experts monitor research progress would positively impact the project if capacity building among local staff could be introduced at an early implementation stage. This would favourably contribute to resolving potential conflict and opposing views on new methodologies.

5. Lessons learned

212. Lessons learned refer to the way in which future FAO–GEF projects should be formulated and managed. They could be structured around two broader groups: 1) project design, including the TOC and the initial setting of project objectives; and 2) project monitoring and reporting activities.

5.1 Project design and inception phase

213. An analysis of the initial TOC showed that links between the envisaged activities and outputs vis-à-vis the project outcomes were not sufficiently elaborated during the design phase. Project staff and other important partners were not fully aware of the important relationship between performed activities and the change that the project was trying to achieve. Further, the project design phase should have placed more attention on specific drivers of change, as well as barriers and risks on the path to achieving the desired objectives. In order to facilitate structured and adaptive project management, and to formulate project objectives as outcomes and outputs, the path towards achieving the objectives should also be structured on intermediate objectives. They should be described as milestones to be achieved at specific points during the project's life cycle.
214. The evaluation found that the project's objectives were too ambitious. The realization of critical outputs resulted in postponements, which negatively impacted the envisaged outcomes. This was already an important MTR finding. The project design and inception phase should therefore include a brainstorming activity to review and adapt the designed logical framework. This should include defined intermediate targets or milestones.
215. The evaluation found that project planning lacked clear tasks on the achievement of outputs and outcomes. This resulted in unclear responsibilities for specific tasks. For future interventions, tasks should be clearly assigned to project partners. Concrete responsibilities need to be outlined with a detailed breakdown of budget lines. This should include sources and types of co-financing like FAO–GEF contributions, national cash contributions and in-kind contributions.
216. Insufficient capacity among new staff means that the onboarding phase should be a specific task for new projects. Either formal trainings or an informal introduction by FAO REU should be part of this activity.
217. Project partners were not fully aware of the FAO–GEF project management procedures and reporting requirements. The time and resources for appropriate training activities should have been envisaged from the start.

5.2 Project monitoring, reporting and external resources

218. Project monitoring was not thoroughly planned, and detailed monitoring rules and procedures were not developed in a sufficient manner. Progress towards the targets was not reported according to regular reporting activities. This made proper project monitoring a challenge. Regular field missions would have benefited from the active involvement of staff to develop the monitoring framework with measurable indicators.

219. The project steering committee did not regularly report on delays of project activities and specific outcomes. Sometimes, the project steering committee seemed detached from project implementation. If progress is behind schedule, then the regular reports – approved by the project steering committee – must include mitigating measures.
220. The project outputs that followed a new methodology (NFI development) proved to be quite challenging due to different scientific views from local experts. These challenges would have diminished if adequate risk mitigation measures could have been developed upon project launch. The smooth completion of project activities was the result of significant expertise that was acquired through important FAO knowledge resources.
221. The development and implementation of the NFI and the new SFM guidelines significantly benefited from the contribution of international funding, that is, from the GEF.

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Further resources

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The Evaluation Team also consulted the following documents:

1. Project identification form
2. Comments received from the GEF Secretariat, the GEF Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel, and the GEF council members on the project design and FAO's responses
3. FAO concept note and FAO Project Review Committee report
4. Request for the GEF CEO endorsement

5. FAO–GEF project preparation grant document²
6. Project inception report
7. Half-monthly FAO PPRs
8. Annual work plans and budgets (including budget revisions)
9. All annual GEF PIRs³
10. Any documentation detailing changes to the project’s framework and components, e.g. changes to initial outcomes and outputs
11. List of stakeholders
12. List of project sites and map locations (for mission itineraries and fieldwork plans)
13. Execution agreements if under Operational Partners Implementation Modality and letters of agreement
14. Relevant technical, backstopping and project supervision mission reports, including the back-to-office reports of relevant project and FAO personnel, and any reports on technical support provided by FAO headquarters or FAO REU personnel
15. Project steering committee, Project Task Force and other relevant meeting minutes
16. Any environmental and social safeguards analysis and mitigation plan produced during project design, and online records from the Field Programme Management Information System
17. Any awareness-raising and communications materials produced by the project, e.g. brochures, leaflets, meeting presentations, project website address, etc.
18. FAO policy documents, e.g. FAO’s strategic objectives and gender policy
19. All other monitoring reports prepared by the project
20. Finalized GEF focal area tracking tools at CEO endorsement and updated tracking tools at mid-term for the GEF-5 projects, or review of the contribution to the GEF-7 core indicators (retrofitted) for the GEF-6 projects and the GEF-7 core indicators for the GEF-7 approved projects
21. Financial management information, including an up-to-date co-financing table, a summary report on the project’s financial management and expenditures to date, a summary of any financial revisions made to the project and their purpose, and copies of any completed audits for comment (as appropriate)
22. MTR and management response
23. FAO’s Country Programming Framework and Guide to the Project Cycle

² This applies to full-sized projects, medium-sized projects and projects under programmes for which a project preparation grant was approved by the GEF.

³ A PPR is an FAO requirement, due every six months with yearly deadlines on: 31 July for a reporting period from 1 January to 30 June; and 31 January for a reporting period from 1 July to 31 December. The PIR is a GEF requirement due every year, usually in July, until project closure for projects that were under implementation for one year or longer.

Appendix 1. Interviewed stakeholders

Last name	First name	Position	Institution/organization	Role in the project
Berczi	Andrea	Operations Specialist	FAO REU (Budapest)	Operations Specialist
Borota	Dragan	Chair of Forest Management and Planning	Faculty of Forestry, University of Belgrade	Outputs 1.1.1 and 1.1.3 subject matter expert
Bozanić	Danijela	Independent consultant	Independent consultant	MRV report (key expert for Output 1.1.4)
Jančić	Gordana	Sector for Forestry and Environmental Protection	Srbijašume public enterprise	Project steering committee member
Jovic	Predrag	National Project Coordinator	FAO (Belgrade)	National Project Coordinator
Krsteski	Biljana	Expert Associate for Nature Conservation	Nature Conservation Institute (Belgrade)	Project steering committee member
Lazarević	Predrag	Associate at the Botanical Garden	Faculty of Biology, University of Belgrade	Outputs 1.1.1 and 1.1.3 subject matter expert
Marinković	Marko	Executive Director	Vojvodinašume public enterprise	Project steering committee member, NFI implementation (Output 1.1.3)
Mentov	Aleksandar	National Project Manager	FAO (Belgrade)	FAO Representative (Belgrade)
Miletić	Dejan	Nature Protection Department	Srbijašume public enterprise	Outputs 1.1.1 and 1.1.3 subject matter key expert
Orlović	Saša	Director	Institute of Lowland Forestry and Environment, University of Novi Sad	In-kind contributor
Petrović	Nenad	Chair of Forest Management and Planning	Faculty of Forestry, University of Belgrade	Component 2 leader
Ponjarac	Radenko	Senior Officer for Forest Management Planning	Vojvodinašume public enterprise	NFI implementation (Output 1.1.3)
Šljukić	Biljana	Chair of Forest Management and Planning	Faculty of Forestry, University of Belgrade	Component 2 expert
Srejić	Staniša	PFOA President	PFOA	PFOA representative
Stajić	Branko	Dean	Faculty of Forestry, University of Belgrade	Component 1 expert

Appendix 1. Interviewed stakeholders

Last name	First name	Position	Institution/organization	Role in the project
Stamatović	Saša	Director, Forest Directorate	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management	National Project Director
Stanković	Predrag	Senior Officer for Forest Management Planning	Vojvodinašume public enterprise	NFI implementation (Output 1.1.3)
Stojanović	Dejan	Researcher	Institute of Lowland Forestry and Environment, University of Novi Sad	Component 2 expert
Swanvick	Alexander	M&E Officer	FAO (Belgrade)	FAO Representative (Belgrade)
Tubic	Bojan	Senior Officer for Forest Management Planning	Vojvodinašume public enterprise	NFI implementation (Output 1.1.3)
Vasiljević	Aleksandar	Director	GreenFor consultancy (Belgrade)	Software provider (Output 1.1.2)
Weinreich	Axel	International consultant	Unique Forestry	Component 2 expert
Winkler	Norbert	Technical Officer	FAO REU (Budapest)	Lead Technical Officer

Appendix 2. Evaluation matrix (draft working document)

Evaluation questions	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources
1. Relevance			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent were the project's objectives and intended outcomes consistent with: the GEF focal areas, strategic priorities and operational programmes; FAO's mandate and policy; agricultural biodiversity initiatives; and the FAO Country Programming Framework? To what extent was the project in line with national and local priorities and sustainable forestry, biodiversity, and CCM strategies and objectives? What about the needs and priorities of the target beneficiaries, e.g. forest managers and local private forest owners? Have there been any changes in the relevance of the project since its formulation, such as new national policies, plans or programmes that affect the relevance of the project's objectives and goals? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent did the project address the real drivers of forest loss and degradation, and the associated biodiversity and carbon stocks in Serbia? To what extent did the project address the specific needs of the target beneficiaries? How relevant was the project to other donor-funded development programmes, especially in the forest, nature conservation and climate change sectors? Were there any changes that needed to be made to the project to make it more relevant? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of coherence with the GEF policies Existence of a clear relationship between project objectives and FAO's regional programme objectives Alignment with the FAO Country Programming Framework Level of coherence between project design and implementation, and national priorities and existing capacity, e.g. alignment of the project's priorities with the forest development strategy Alignment of partner agencies and stakeholder mandates with SFM, biodiversity conservation and CCM promotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The GEF documents FAO Country Programming Framework FAO strategy documents Project documents PPRs National forest, environment and development policies and plans, national forest policy and strategy Project and national needs assessment studies FAO personnel and project team The GEF policies and strategies Key government officials Private forest owners Representatives of other donor, policy and programming documents
<p>Ownership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the current level of ownership of the project by the project partners and the target beneficiary groups? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent were the intended beneficiaries and stakeholders involved in project design and implementation? To what extent did government agencies assume responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of involvement of national and local stakeholders in project design and implementation, including private forest owner representatives 	

Evaluation questions	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent have project partners and stakeholders adopted and begun to implement the project's initiatives? 	<p>for the project and provide adequate support to project execution (including the degree of cooperation from the various government agencies involved in the project)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did the private forest owners assess the ownership and usefulness of the project and its aims? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public and private sector contribution to the project activities Degree to which project results built on clearly identified national priorities and were adopted, or are progressing towards adoption, at the national level 	
2. Effectiveness			
<p>Overall questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent did the project's actual outcome commensurate with the expected outcomes? To what extent did the project contribute to strengthening an enabling environment for SFM in Serbia (Medium-term outcome 1)? To what extent did the project contribute to improved stakeholder, especially private, involvement in SFM in Serbia (Medium-term outcome 2)? To what extent did the project contribute to improved knowledge, experience and best practices on effective SFM (Medium-term outcome 3)? To what extent can the attainment of results be attributed to the GEF-funded component? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What was the quality of the project's outcomes? To what extent was each outcome identified in the revised TOC delivered? Component 1. Did the implemented project activities result in an SFM-enabling environment? How did the SFM enabling environment change compared to the period prior to project implementation? Component 2. Did the implemented project activities lead to greater stakeholder engagement in SFM in Serbia? How did stakeholder engagement change, and compared to the period prior to project implementation? Component 3. Did the implemented project activities result in improved knowledge, experience and best practices on effective SFM? What were the most effective best 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of success on outputs, difference between expected (planned) results and attained results (quantitative and qualitative) Degree to which planned milestones and indicator targets were achieved (qualitative and quantitative) Feedback from project stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PPRs, especially the PIR and FAO PPRs Project correspondence Budget reports Project stakeholders from national, provincial, municipal and local levels FAO personnel and project team Project steering committee members

Evaluation questions	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources
	<p>practices compared to the period prior to project implementation?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What, if any, wider results did the project have at national or local levels to date? • Were there any unintended results? • To what extent can the attainment of results be attributed to the GEF-funded component (as opposed to other projects/interventions)? 		
<p>Outcome level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent did the project contribute to improved decision-making in the management of productive forest landscapes (Outcome 1.1)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did the project contribute to the improvement of decision-making practices in the management of productive forest landscapes? What are some examples of improved decision-making practices? • How did the methodology for forest and biodiversity information collection and management contribute to improved decision-making? • How did the NFI and IFIS contribute to the management of productive forest landscapes? • How did the MRV systems, the multisectoral coordination platform and the strategic framework revisions influence improved decision-making? <p>Results per output:</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PPRs • Project team • Project steering committee members • Outcome- and output-level experts • Other stakeholders

Evaluation questions	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 1.1.1. Methodology for forest and biodiversity information collection and management harmonized with global and regional standards and reporting requirements • Output 1.1.2. IFIS, including biodiversity, carbon and socioeconomic information • Output 1.1.3. The NFI conducted, including the assessment and collection of information relevant to biodiversity conservation and CCM • Output 1.1.4. Existing carbon MRV systems reviewed and adapted to the Serbian context • Output 1.1.5. Forest development programme and legislation revised to incorporate biodiversity, CCM and socioeconomic concerns • Output 1.1.6. National standards for best management practices of different forest types • Output 1.1.7. A national, multisectoral coordination platform for multifunctional SFM established 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent did the project contribute to institutional capacities that strengthened multifunctional forest management (Outcome 1.2)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did national standards for best management practices contribute to strengthening the institutional capacities for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of administrative forestry staff members who participated in trainings • Number of trainers from public enterprises, forestry faculty and 	

Evaluation questions	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources
	<p>multifunctional forest management?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the implementation of the FMPs contribute to institutional capacities for multifunctional forest management? • Did the established capacity building mechanisms contribute to strengthened institutional capacities for multifunctional forest management? <p>Results as per output:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 1.2.1. A training programme for forest managers, users and administrators on updated SFM techniques, and biodiversity management on productive landscapes established and implemented (including TOT) 	<p>institutes who developed capacities to conduct trainings</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent did the project contribute to increased forest area under sustainable and multifunctional forest management (Outcome 2.1)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the FMPs contribute to more area under the SFM? • Did established capacity building mechanisms contribute to enhanced area under the SFM? • Was there an impact on biodiversity and CO₂ sequestration? <p>Results as per output:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 2.1.1. Biodiversity status and impact of land use on biodiversity assessed in the project areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest area, for which biodiversity status, impact and threats were assessed • Forest area for which nature value assessment and biotope mapping were carried out • Area for which improved FDPs were prepared • Number of professionals trained in the application of new procedures • Number of FMUs for which FMPs based on new procedures were prepared 	

Evaluation questions	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 2.1.2. Integrated and improved FDPs prepared for at least two forest regions • Output 2.1.3. FMPs implemented • Output 2.1.4. Strategic and policy options to ensure the commitment of private forest owners and users to SFM developed and validated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concept note, a comprehensive forest extension service for private forest owners • Action plan and recommendation to mainstream SFM incentives for private forest owners • Two study tours for private forest owners to visit successful SFM sites in other European countries (target: 16 participants) 	
<p>Adaptive management ensured and key lessons shared (Outcome 3.1)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the monitoring system provide a basis for adaptive SFM? How did the M&E results influence adaptive SFM? <p>Results as per output:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Output 3.1.1. The monitoring system provides systematic information on progress in reaching the expected outcomes and targets • Output 3.1.2. MTR and terminal evaluation conducted • Output 3.1.3. Project achievements and results recorded and disseminated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M&E system in place, complying with FAO–GEF standards • MTR and management response, implementation of MTR comments, mission and report • Communications strategy • Communications activities (articles, interviews, features) in local media • Social media activities • Project website • Information leaflets • Publications on lessons learned • Presentation of project results at international forum/conference on SFM 	
<p>Final outcomes Increased area under sustainable, multifunctional and participatory forest management incorporating CCM, biodiversity and biodiversity</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional forest area managed to these standards (as compared to the <i>status quo ante</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents • State forest services • Department of Forestry • Project steering committee members • Beneficiaries

Evaluation questions	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources
conservation objectives in the public and private forestry sector in Serbia			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders
Global environmental benefits: biodiversity, CCM, SFM and socioeconomic benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biodiversity CCM SFM Socioeconomic benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional forest area managed for these targets Evaluation of global impact (e.g. global share) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents State forest services Department of Forestry Project steering committee members Beneficiaries Stakeholders
3. Efficiency			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent was the project designed and implemented efficiently, cost-effectively and in a timely manner? To what extent was management able to adapt to any changing conditions in order to improve the efficiency of project implementation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was the project appropriately designed/adapted in relation to the duration and/or levels of secured funding? To what degree were inputs available at planned costs and outputs up to expected standards? Were there sufficient resources to achieve the project's intended outcomes? To what extent did the project put in place measures for cost and time sharing? Where there any delays? If so, why, and how did these affect project execution, costs and effectiveness? What efforts were made to overcome these problems? How could efficiency be improved? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of utilization and the rate of delivery of the project budget (extent to which project funds were converted into outcomes as per expectations in the project document) Comparison of the actual funding of activities relevant to specific components/outcomes/outputs and their overall role (weight) in the project plan Degree of difference in planned and actual expenses Availability and quality of financial and progress reports Quality of the delivered outputs Comparison of the delivery of project activities/results with the defined timeline in the project document (and comparison with similar interventions) Quality of results-based management system (MRV) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project financial documents (at a general level that allows for the assessment of funding allocation to components/outcomes/ outputs) Procurement plans Work plans Meeting reports/minutes Monitoring data PPRs FAO personnel and project team Beneficiaries and key implementing partners

Evaluation questions	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment of efforts made to use or build on related pre-existing data sources, initiatives/projects, institutions, agreements and partnerships, etc. Level of satisfaction among partners on the responsiveness (adaptive management) of the project 	
4. Sustainability and progress towards impact			
<p>Likelihood of project results to be further implemented in the Serbian forest sector after project closure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How was sustainability taken into account in project planning and delivery? What could be the constraints or risks to sustainability, e.g. financial? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the project's sustainability strategy? How can sustainability be increased? Is there a financial sustainability plan? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence for sustainability strategy Evidence for the availability of future funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents FAO personnel and project team PPRs Beneficiaries (national, regional, local) Stakeholders (national, regional, local) Government policy statements and plans
<p>Political and social risks to sustainability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is participation and the ownership of stakeholders ensured after project closure? What will be the involvement of the public and private forest owners after project closure? What will be the extent of government support for the continuation of the project's results? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of stakeholder ownership Level of government support Evidence of legislative and policy change Promotion of SFM, biodiversity conservation and CCM within national development planning processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents FAO personnel and project team PPRs Beneficiaries (national, regional, local) Stakeholders (national, regional, local) Government policy statements and plans
5. Factors affecting performance/M&E			
<p>Project design and readiness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did the project document present a clear rationale for the project with a coherent problem and barrier analysis? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of coherence between the project's expected results and the project design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project document Results matrix PPRs

Evaluation questions	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the causal pathways from the project's outputs (goods and services) through outcomes (changes in stakeholder behaviours) towards impacts (long-term, collective change of state or systems) clearly and convincingly described in the project documents? • Does the project have an explicit and coherent TOC? • What were the key challenges in designing the project, and how can the process be improved for future projects? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of the project design, results matrix and project indicators • Evidence that the necessary preparation and readiness factors, conditions and other processes were considered in the project design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FAO personnel and project team • Project focal points at the implementing agencies • Key stakeholders and beneficiaries from national, provincial and municipal levels • Project steering committee members and meeting minutes
<p>Project execution and management, including risk management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the main challenges? • How did FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management perform their roles regarding project execution and management? • How did administrative procedures perform? • Was staffing adequate (quantitatively and qualitatively, e.g. share of senior/junior staff, available expertise)? • Were there any unforeseen developments, and how were they handled? • What risk management procedures were put in place, and how were they executed? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the project management structure clear, coherent and efficient? Were the management structure and mechanisms outlined in the project document followed and effective in the delivery of project milestones, outputs and outcomes? • To what extent did FAO administrative processes such as staff recruitment, the procurement of goods and services (including consultants), and the preparation and negotiation of cooperation agreements influence the project's performance? • Were adequate project management arrangements in place? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend the delivery of results • Evidence of approaches and adaptive management used in the implementation of the project to ensure the attainment of project results, including the extent to which the project responded to identified and emerging risks • Extent to which project partners committed time and resources to the delivery of the project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents • Results matrix • PPRs • FAO personnel and project team • Project focal points at implementing agencies • Beneficiaries • Stakeholders • Project steering committee members and meeting minutes • Results framework • Risk assessment reports and evidence for risk management activities

Evaluation questions	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were all potentially negative social, economic and environmental impacts of the project identified? Was the mitigation strategy adequate? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were staffing arrangements adequate to deliver the project in the remaining time frame? Were work plans clear, adequate, realistic and actively used by project management? Were there any changes to the planned activities? If so, how well were these changes managed? Was the capacity of the executing agency properly considered when the project was designed? 		
<p>Project governance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was project governance comprehensive and effective? How effective was co-ordination among the project steering committee, the project team and the implementing agencies? To what extent did FAO provide oversight and supervision/backstopping during project design and implementation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was FAO project supervision and backstopping effective in terms of: the adequacy of supervisory plans formulated and inputs/processes provided; the application of a results-based project management approach (outcome monitoring); the accuracy of reporting and rating systems applied; the documentation of project supervision activities; and financial, administrative and other fiduciary aspects of project implementation supervision? How efficiently did the Lead Technical Officer, the Budget Holder and the Project Task Force provide administrative and technical support? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence on the effectiveness of FAO project supervision and backstopping Views from the project steering committee and Project Task Force members Views from key implementing partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FAO personnel Project team Project steering committee and Project Task Force members
<p>Partnerships and stakeholder engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were selected implementing partners and beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of approaches used to identify and engage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FAO personnel and project team

Evaluation questions	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were all relevant stakeholders identified and engaged with? In what stages were stakeholders involved? Did the project's activities develop new/enhance partnerships? How could the effectiveness of partnerships have been improved? How can stakeholder engagement be improved? Were stakeholders made aware of the environmental and social safeguards plan and the grievance mechanism? 	<p>relevant in achieving the project's outcomes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent did the design phase consider the capacity of the main stakeholders to be involved in the project? Were the roles and responsibilities of key actors and stakeholders clear and appropriate for their capacities? Was there sufficient capacity among key partners to enable them to properly participate in the project? To what extent were the different government departments and government stakeholders involved in project implementation? Were other actors such as civil society and the private sector sufficiently involved in project design and implementation? What was the effect? 	<p>stakeholders in project design and implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysis of strengths and weaknesses of partnership strategy and arrangements Degree of effectiveness of the partnership and collaboration arrangements with stakeholders Quality of the utilization of partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Main partner organizations Key stakeholders from national, provincial and municipal levels Other international donors supporting forestry in Serbia PPRs Meeting minutes Monitoring data
<p>Communications, awareness raising and knowledge management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How effective was the project in communications and promoting key messages, results and lessons learned to partners, stakeholders and the general public? How visible was the project to partners, stakeholders and potentially interested parties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How effective were awareness-raising, information dissemination and public outreach approaches and activities? Were there any issues with the sharing and/or management of knowledge, e.g. confidential or commercially sensitive data? If so, how was this resolved? Were the project's communications materials, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degree of effectiveness of awareness-raising activities and strategies applied to project implementation Review and analysis of project communications materials, e.g. online presence, project reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> FAO personnel and project team Main partner organizations Key stakeholders from national and local levels Other international donors supporting project documents PPRs Project communications materials, including online presence and social media

Evaluation questions	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources
<p>outside the immediate project scope?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How was communications and awareness raising documented? 	<p>including the project document, clear and comprehensible?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent did the project identify appropriate methods, channels and networks for communication with key stakeholders, including gendered/minority groups? Did the project have a formal, structured system for capturing and communicating experiences and lessons learned from the project? 		
<p>M&E</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What was the M&E design? How was the design of stakeholder involvement in M&E design? How was M&E implemented? How were stakeholders involved in M&E implementation? How were gender or minority aspects considered in M&E design and implementation? How was information from the M&E process considered to adapt to project implementation? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were the project's indicators specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound? Were the targets and milestones sufficient, realistic and achievable? How were baseline data collected and considered within the M&E process? Were the roles and responsibilities for M&E clear? How were results from the MTR taken into consideration? Was the GEF tracking tool applied well at the design phase and correctly updated at mid-term? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence and review of the M&E plan to monitor results and track progress towards achieving the project's objectives Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound indicators identified and used, adequate baselines set M&E budget allocated M&E arrangements made Timing and implementation of M&E activities Degree and timeliness of the completion of M&E reports, e.g. PIRs Use of the project's results matrix as a management tool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management response to MTR Completed the GEF tracking tool for the mid-term M&E reports PPRs, especially PIRs Other project M&E documents Key local stakeholder groups (farmers' associations) Key stakeholders from national and local levels
6. Environmental and social safeguards			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How were environmental and social safeguards designed and implemented? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were any risks identified in the environmental and social safeguards plan incorporated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Degrees and impact of project activities and results on the local environment and society at project sites/regions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project staff Beneficiaries Stakeholders (especially from project sites/regions)

Evaluation questions	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent were environmental and social concerns considered in project design and implementation? Were all requirements of the environmental and social safeguards plan complied with? 	<p>into the M&E plan and monitored by the project?</p>		
7. Gender and human rights			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent was gender considered in project design, implementation, and management and integrated into the project's objectives and results framework? Were any gender analyses undertaken during project design and implementation? Did the project have any impact on gender equality and economic empowerment for women and other marginalized groups? To what extent did the project conform to FAO-GEF goals and standards on gender equity? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent were gender equality considerations reflected in the project's objectives and design to address the needs, priorities and constraints of both women and men? Was the project designed and implemented in a manner that ensured gender equitable participation and benefits? What targeted efforts were made by the project and the implementing partners to ensure that women can participate in the project? To what extent did women participate in decision-making processes and frameworks within the project? To what extent were their voices heard? Did the decisions reflect their concerns? Did the project's M&E strategy consider women and men separately, e.g. in gender-disaggregated reporting data? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant passages in project documentation and statements from sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project documents Project staff Beneficiaries Stakeholders Project steering committee members

Evaluation questions	Subquestions	Indicators	Sources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is likelihood of increased gender equity after project closure? 		
Human rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What precautions were taken to ensure proper human rights considerations of potentially affected groups (e.g. local inhabitants in or close to forest areas, and the rights of minority groups)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant passages in project documents, SFM guidelines, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project documents • Project team • Project steering committee members
8. Lessons learned			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the main lessons to be learned from the project? • What could be recommendations for future projects to improve SFM, including biodiversity and CO₂ sequestration in Serbia? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the main successful outcomes (2–3) of the project? • What were the potential reasons for success? • What were the main unsuccessful outcomes (2–3) of the project? • What were the potential reasons for unsuccessful outcomes? • What could have been done to increase successes and decrease unsuccessful outcomes? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of successful and less successful outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project team • Beneficiaries • Stakeholders • Project steering committee members

Appendix 3. Results matrix (summary of progress, June 2023)

Project or development objective	Outcomes	Outcome indicators	Baseline	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Cumulative progress since project start level on 30 June 2023	Progress rating
To support government institutions and private forest owners in applying SFM practices at national, regional and local levels in selected ecosystems through better knowledge, capacities, information and incentives	Outcome 1.1. Improved decision-making in the management of productive forest landscapes	Indicator CCM-9. Degree of support for low greenhouse gas development in policy, planning and regulations	Rating 2. CCM contribution in the forest sector mentioned in the national CCM strategy but outdated; no sectoral strategy and implementation		Rating 6. CCM considerations reflected in sectoral documents and action plans, as well as the FDPs and the FMPs under implementation	Forestry. Regulations in the field of forest management planning under implementation in pilot areas because of clear guidelines and the improved capacities of forest managers	S
		Indicator CCM-10. Quality of the MRV systems	Rating 2. Very rudimentary MRV available that only takes into account forest area with assigned C-factor values; no dynamics included nor coverage of the whole forest area, and not up to international standards		Rating 8. Strong standardized measurement processes established and implemented through the NFI; reporting is widely available in multiple formats through IFIS; verification of information through IFIS	Proposal for a new MRV system for the forest sector available (deliverable of this GEF project)	S
		Indicator Biodiversity-4. Mainstreaming biodiversity into policy and regulatory frameworks	Forestry. Regulations are in place to implement the legislation: the Law on Forests and the forest development strategy include biodiversity considerations; FMPs only exist for part of the FMUs		Forestry. The regulations are under implementation in pilot areas because of clear guidelines and the improved capacities of forest managers	21 guidelines for the management of specific forest types developed and already in use	S

Project or development objective	Outcomes	Outcome indicators	Baseline	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Cumulative progress since project start level on 30 June 2023	Progress rating
	<u>Outcome 1.2.</u> Institutional capacities strengthened for multifunctional forest management	Public, private, academic and civil society institutions with increased capacities in SFM	Public, private, academic and civil society institutions with limited capacities in SFM	Ten institutions with a higher ranking than the baseline	15 institutions with a higher ranking than baseline	13 recognized institutions are active partners in the project; multifunctional forest management/planning tools on which the trainings and other capacity development activities will be based are under finalization	S
	<u>Outcome 2.1.</u> Increased forest area under sustainable and multifunctional forest management	Indicator SFM-3. Area of sustainably managed forest (based on new guidelines), stratified by forest management actors (ha)	State forests (Srbijašume and Vojvodinašume public enterprises/Tara and Fruška Gora National Parks): 0 ha Church forests: 0 ha Private forests: 0 ha Total: 0 ha		State forests (Srbijašume and Vojvodinašume public enterprises/Tara and Fruška Gora National Parks): 18 000 ha Church forests and private forests: 2 000 ha Total: 20 000 ha in addition to baseline	Guidelines for the management of specific forest types implemented; areas for the related fieldwork selected in close cooperation with the Srbijašume and Vojvodinašume public enterprises; process to establish the demonstration plots finalized	S
		Indicator Biodiversity-1. Area under which the project will directly and indirectly contribute to biodiversity conservation (ha)	Direct coverage: 0 ha Indirect coverage: 0 ha		Direct coverage: 20 000 ha Indirect coverage: 476 010 ha	Guidelines for the management of specific forest types implemented; areas for the related fieldwork selected in close cooperation with the Srbijašume and Vojvodinašume public enterprises; process to establish the demonstration plots finalized	S
	<u>Outcome 3.1.</u> Adaptive management	M&E system to ensure the timely delivery of project	No M&E system in place	Up-to-date monitoring and reporting on	Up-to-date monitoring and reporting on	Up-to-date monitoring and reporting on outcomes, outputs and activities (fifth PIR)	S

Project or development objective	Outcomes	Outcome indicators	Baseline	Mid-term target	End-of-project target	Cumulative progress since project start level on 30 June 2023	Progress rating
	ensured and key lessons shared	benefits and adaptive results-based management		outcomes, outputs and activities	outcomes, outputs and activities		

Implementation progress

Outcomes and outputs	Indicators	Main achievements	Variance in delivering outputs
<u>Outcome 1.1.</u> Improved decision-making in the management of productive forest landscapes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased degree of support for low greenhouse gas development in policy, planning and regulations Quality of MRV systems Mainstreaming biodiversity into policy and regulatory frameworks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft of a climate strategy and action plan for Serbia (project identification number: EuropeAid/1365966/DH/SER/RS) available, reflecting CCM considerations in relation to the forest sector Proposal for a new MRV system for the forest sector available (deliverable of this GEF project) 	
Output 1.1.1. Methodology for forest and biodiversity information collection and management harmonized with global and regional standards and reporting requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Methodology and guidelines for biodiversity information collection in the NFI available, following international standards Methodology and guidelines for biodiversity assessment and management for forest planning at the regional and management unit levels, following international standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Methodology for collecting and analysing biodiversity and carbon information for the NFI Methodology for assessing forest biodiversity and nature values as part of SFM for forest development and management planning Two technical guidelines documents for integrating CCM and biodiversity conservation into the FDPs and the FMPs Biodiversity guidelines as part of the FMP for at least 15 forest management types 	100% implemented

Outcomes and outputs	Indicators	Main achievements	Variance in delivering outputs
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity manual 1: nature value assessment of forest plots (biodiversity indicators and field guides for the NFI in Serbia) • Biodiversity manual 2: nature value assessment of forest stands (biodiversity indicators and field guides for the FMPs in Serbia) • Nature value assessment field form • Training needs assessment related to the nature value assessment and the mapping of key habitats in Serbia • Biodiversity report: Obedska bara and Tara National Parks 	
Output 1.1.2. IFIS, including biodiversity, carbon and socioeconomic information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IFIS, including web-based user interface, operational and regularly used 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical specification of equipment and software developed (based on IFIS functionality list prepared by working group of the Forest Directorate) • Interoperability standards for the information technology infrastructure • Equipment for the NFI and IFIS procured (tablets, graphic stations, server) • Forest management software OSNOVA 2020 (as core of IFIS) procured and operational • Procurement for a remaining part of IFIS finalized • Web portal operational • Additional IFIS modules under development 	<p>95% implemented Delays due to the complexity and number of institutions involved</p>

Outcomes and outputs	Indicators	Main achievements	Variance in delivering outputs
<p>Output 1.1.3. The NFI conducted, including the assessment and collection of information relevant to biodiversity conservation and CCM</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest area inventoried, including the identification of priority areas for biodiversity conservation according to the updated methodology 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photointerpretation on 4 x 4 km grid (for the NFI design) and on the 1 x 1 km grid (for land use changes) • NFI methodology (field manual) • Field training done (August 2019) • Letter of agreement with the Srbijašume and Vojvodinašume public enterprises for the NFI fieldwork (ten teams) • NFI data entry software developed and in use • Field measurements finalized • Control team produced the final report • Data analyses and the final NFI report to be finalized by 30 June 2023 	<p>95% implemented</p>
<p>Output 1.1.4. Existing carbon MRV systems reviewed and adapted to the Serbian context</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MRV system based on international standards designed and validated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal for a new MRV system for the forest sector, including institutional set up, choice and description of the protocol • Validation 26 September 2019 • One MRV system designed and validated 	<p>100% implemented Follow-up activity introduced based on the related MTR recommendations</p>
<p>Output 1.1.5. Forest development programme and legislation revised to incorporate biodiversity, CCM and socioeconomic concerns</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations to mainstream biodiversity and CCM concerns in forest development planning and legislation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final round of consultations with key stakeholders on forest development programme, including legislation issues to incorporate biodiversity and CCM • First round of consultations on changes to the Law on Forests • By-law on the FMP in use • Roadmap towards a national forest plan and contents of a future national forest plan produced 	<p>80% implemented The national forest plan will not be produced because of delivery delays in the NFI report.</p>

Outcomes and outputs	Indicators	Main achievements	Variance in delivering outputs
Output 1.1.6. National standards for best management practices of different forest types	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidelines for sustainable silvicultural practices on different forest types, integrating climate-smart forestry and biodiversity conservation based on the European Union habitats directive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultations with researchers and forest managers on best management practices for different forest types Revision of the existing SFM guidelines 21 SFM guidelines for silvicultural practices in different forest types, integrating climate-smart forestry considerations and biodiversity conservation based on the European Union habitats directive in the revision stage completed 	100% implemented
Output 1.1.7. A national, multisectoral coordination platform for multifunctional SFM established	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High-level roundtable consultation on SFM with at least 30 participants from the public, academia, civil society and the private sector Thematic multi-actor working groups established and at least two meetings conducted per year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular monthly consultations in multi-actor working groups on forest information, the FDP, the FMP and private forest owner integration (representatives of the Srbijašume and Vojvodinašume public enterprises/Institute of Forestry [Belgrade and Novi Sad]/Forest Directorate/national parks/Serbian Environmental Protection Agency) 	90% implemented Following stakeholder decisions, coordination remained on a regular yet informal level; formal platform still reconsidered by the Forest Directorate based on the related MTR recommendation
<u>Outcome 1.2.</u> Institutional capacities strengthened for multifunctional forest management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public, private, academic and civil society institutions with increased capacities in SFM 		15 institutions with a higher ranking than baseline (to be determined at inception)
Output 1.2.1. A training programme for forest managers, users and administrators on updated SFM techniques, and biodiversity management on productive landscapes established and implemented (including TOT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forest managers in state forest enterprises and PFOAs trained on the application of SFM techniques and biodiversity management in productive landscapes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A capacity development strategy and training modules under development: FDP- and FMU-level planning, management and monitoring; forest information system SFM training needs assessment and design (including training materials) for 	100% implemented

Outcomes and outputs	Indicators	Main achievements	Variance in delivering outputs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trainers in SFM and biodiversity management for national capacity building activities 	forest professionals and forest owners (Part 1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> List of training courses for the letter of agreement with the Serbian Chamber of Forestry Engineers Letter of agreement with the Serbian Chamber of Forestry on trainings and the establishment of demonstration plots Trainings implemented by the Serbian Chamber of Forestry 	
<p><u>Outcome 2.1.</u> Increased forest area under sustainable and multifunctional forest management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indicator CCM-1. Total lifetime direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions avoided (t CO₂ e) Indicator SFM-3. Area of SFM, stratified by forest management actors (ha) Indicator Biodiversity-1. Area under which the project will directly and indirectly contribute to biodiversity conservation (ha) 		
<p>Output 2.1.1. Biodiversity status and impact of land use on biodiversity assessed in the project areas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Status of forest biodiversity, impacts and threats in the Obedska bara and Tara National Parks assessed Nature value assessment and biotope mapping in four to eight FMUs covering 20 000 ha of public and private forest land, including the Obedska bara and Tara National Parks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report on forest biodiversity, threats and impacts in the project areas (Western Serbia and Vojvodina) based on the review of existing knowledge, data and valuation of the status of forest biodiversity, impacts and threats for the Obedska bara and Tara National Parks Training materials and training of identified staff of forest management planning units of the public enterprises who are responsible for the FMP: 	<p>100% implemented</p>

Outcomes and outputs	Indicators	Main achievements	Variance in delivering outputs
		1) nature value assessment incorporated by the FMP team; and 2) the mapping of key biotopes in two selected FMUs within and outside the protected areas	
Output 2.1.2. Integrated and improved FDPs prepared for at least two forest regions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The FDPs of Western Serbia and Vojvodina developed and monitored based on the new FDP procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft content of the FDPs 	<p>20% implemented</p> <p>Draft FDPs to incorporate the NFI results as soon as they are available</p>
Output 2.1.3. FMPs implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pilot FMUs in Western Serbia and Vojvodina covering at least 20 000 ha with updated and monitored management and operational plans based on the new FMP procedures Demonstration plots for typical management measures in common forest types 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the selected FMUs, activities related to forest site mapping, erosion risk assessment, landslide cadastre, forest function mapping, the assessment of restrictions and management options of <i>EU for Natura 2000 in Serbia</i> (Republic of Serbia, 2021) under implementation 16 demonstration plots for typical management measures in common forest types established 	<p>100% implemented</p>
Output 2.1.4. Strategic and policy options to ensure the commitment of private forest owners and users to SFM developed and validated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concept note for a comprehensive forest extension service for private forest owners and users Action plan and recommendations to mainstream SFM incentives for private forest owners into forest policy developed and validated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One concept note for a comprehensive forest extension service for private forest owners under development Analysis of potential incentives for forest owners to implement SFM (fiscal incentives, ecosystem services, market access, certification schemes) ongoing 	<p>20% implemented</p> <p>Original activities planned under this output were replaced by developing a concept note for a follow-up project based on the related MTR recommendation</p> <p>Concept note under development</p>
<u>Outcome 3.1.</u> Adaptive management ensured and key lessons shared	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> M&E system to ensure the timely delivery of project benefits and adaptive results-based management 		
Output 3.1.1. The monitoring system provides systematic information on progress in reaching the expected outcomes and targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> M&E system operational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparation of an annual work plan and budget Preparation of the PPRs 	<p>40% implemented</p> <p>M&E system established but no mechanism to follow up on; identified shortcomings implemented</p>

Outcomes and outputs	Indicators	Main achievements	Variance in delivering outputs
Output 3.1.2. MTR and terminal evaluation conducted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MTR conducted • Terminal evaluation conducted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MTR conducted and recommendations provided 	100% implemented
Output 3.1.3. Project achievements and results recorded and disseminated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appearances in local and national media • Project website and presence on social media • Publications on lessons learned • Presentation at international SFM events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website updated 	<p>50% implemented Delays due to the cancellation of the recruitment of a communications expert; activities stopped</p>

Appendix 4. Financial information

These financial data do not represent the project's final financial report as the project team has six months after the project's end date to finalize all payments. The project team expects that all hard commitments will be paid, and that there will be a few additional unmatched payments (without commitment). As a result, the final expenditure figure will be close to the amount of the total actuals and hard commitments (USD 2 926 334).

Components and outcomes	Estimated cost as per the latest budget revision for the total duration of the project (USD)	Actual expenditure until 30 June 2023 (cumulative) (USD)	Commitments until 30 June 2023 (USD)	Total actual expenditures plus hard commitments until 30 June 2023 (USD)	Expenditure ratio
Component 1	2 295 372	1 957 007	250 815	2 207 822	96%
Outcome 1.1	2 164 345	1 839 867	243 111	2 082 978	96%
Outcome 1.2	131 027	117 140	7 704	124 844	95%
Component 2	661 953	474 022	55 538	529 560	80%
Outcome 2.1		474 022	55 538	529 560	
Component 3	161 399	55 564	28 824	84 388	52%
Outcome 3.1		55 564	28 824	84 388	
Project management	155 936	104 264	300	104 564	67%
Project total	3 274 659	2 590 857	335 477	2 926 334	89%

Co-financing table

Sources of co-financing	Name of co-financer	Type of co-financing	Amount confirmed at CEO endorsement/approval	Actual amount materialized on 30 June 2023	Actual amount materialized at closure (confirmed by the review/Evaluation Team) ⁱ	Expected total disbursement by the end of the project
National government	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management	Cash	15 486 141	15 311 834		15 000 000
National government	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management	In-kind	5 545 000	5 367 750		5 545 000
Beneficiary	Institute of Forestry	In-kind	445 000	432 750		445 000
Beneficiary	University of Novi Sad (Institute for Lowland Forestry and Environmental Protection)	In-kind	445 000	422 750		445 000
Beneficiary	Fruška Gora National Park	In-kind	285 200	276 940		285 200
Beneficiary	Djerdap National Park	In-kind	142 600	135 470		142 600
Beneficiary	Tara National Park	In-kind	855 600	822 820		855 600
Beneficiary	Srbijašum public enterprise	In-kind	980 000	943 000		980 000
Beneficiary	Vojvodinašume public enterprise	In-kind	420 000	409 000		420 000
Beneficiary	Forest Technical School (Kraljevo)	In-kind	713 000	687 350		713 000
Beneficiary	Chamber of Forestry	In-kind	220 000	211 000		220 000
Beneficiary	Kopaonik National Park	In-kind	142 600	139 470		142 600
	FAO	Cash	300 000			300 000
	FAO	In-kind	200 000			200 000
	Total		26 180 141	25 160 134		25 694 000

Note: ⁱ On co-financing, no other data are available. This is part of the final PIR draft, which was prepared in June 2023. Separate calculations on project co-financing were not obtained.

Annex

Annex 1. Terms of reference (excerpt)

<https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/cd0876en>

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