

Project Evaluation Series
[23/2023](#)

Terminal evaluation of the project “A new green line: Mainstreaming biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China’s Water Resources Management policy and Planning Practice”

**Project code: GCP/CPR/057/GFF
GEF ID: 5665**

Annex 1. Terms of reference

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Abbreviations

BD	biodiversity (GEF Focal Area)
BH	budget holder
C-I	Component I
C-II	Component II
C-III	Component III
CEO	Chief Executing Officer (GEF)
CPF	FAO Country Programming Framework
DWR	Department of Water Resource, Yunnan and Chongqing
EA	executing agency
EM	Evaluation Manager
ET	Evaluation Team
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FAO-CN	FAO-China
GCU	FAO-GEF Coordination Unit (at FAO)
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IETCEC	The International Economic and Technical Cooperation and Exchange Centre (Ministry of Water Resources)
LTO	Lead Technical Officer
LTU	Lead Technical Unit
MR	management response
MTR	mid-term review
NGL	new green line
OED	FAO Office of Evaluation
OPIM	Operational Partners Implementation Modality
PIF	Project Identification Form
PMO	Project Management Office
PSC	Project Steering Committee
PTF	Project Task Force
RBMC	River Basin Management Commissions
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
TOC	theory of change
TOR	terms of reference

1. Background and context of the project

1. The terms of reference (TORs) in this document refer to the terminal evaluation of the project “A new green line: Mainstreaming biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China’s Water Resources Management policy and Planning Practice” in China. The project has been sponsored by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) – with a grant of USD 2 639 726 and implemented and executed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), together with national partners in China. Box 1 presents basic project information:

Box 1. Basic project information

- GEF Project ID Number: 5665
- Recipient Country: China
- Implementing Agency: UN FAO
- Executing Agency: International Economic and Technical Cooperation and Exchange Centre of the Ministry of Water Resources, The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
- GEF Focal Areas: Biodiversity
- GEF Strategy programmes: BD-2
- Project Identification Form (PIF) approved: 01.07.2016
- Date of CEO endorsement: 01.12.2015
- Date of Programme and Project Review Committee (PPRC) endorsement: 06.06.2016
- Date of project start: 01.03.2016
- Revised project start: 05.04.2017
- Date of project completion: 31.05.2020
- Revised project implementation end date: 31.05.2022
- Date of mid-term evaluation: completed 11.2020

Source: Elaborated by the Evaluation Team.

1.1 Description of project, project objectives and components

2. **Project rationale:** China has rich surface water resources that include over 20 000 rivers with draining catchments of 100 km² or more. Of these, 228 have drainage basins exceeding 1000 km². The Yangtze River and rivers to the south of it carry 82 percent of the total runoff of Chinese rivers (Min of Water Resources and Power, 2012). However, in terms of fresh water resources available per capita, China has 20 percent of the world’s population but only around 7 percent of the world’s freshwater resources. This, combined with the dramatic increase in water-intensive industries, river infrastructures that block, or environmental flow (in particular relating to hydro-electric dams and flood defences), the expansion of intensified agriculture, and excessive water pollution due to the unregulated discharge of wastewater, has caused medium to high water stress. Statistics from the World Resources Institute indicate between 20–40 percent of freshwater available in China is being withdrawn for industrial, agricultural, and domestic use per annum, which is categorized as a “medium to high” water stress level.
3. The project was designed to respond to this growing problem of water stress in China. Indeed, freshwater scarcity and pollution threaten the long-term sustainability of key

sectors such as agricultural production and productivity and, therefore, food security and nutrition.

4. The project was also designed to respond to the State Council's, Decisions on Strict Water Resources Management (2012), which established "Three Red Lines" on water resource management as follows:
 - i. Red line 1: Limit total water use by strict demand management;
 - ii. Red line 2: Achieve higher water use efficiency in industry and agriculture; and
 - iii. Red line 3: Improve water quality by capping pollution loading within water functional zones.
5. The system of the "Three Red Lines" addresses central problems of water resource management in China and is making an important contribution to environmental conservation and protection in China's water bodies. It does however not systematically include the protection of biodiversity in river ecosystems. It also does not focus on river flow regimes and the environmental impacts of flow alterations by infrastructure like dams and reservoirs, embankments, etc.
6. The project's **overall objective** is to mainstream biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China's water resources management policy and planning.
7. The project is funded by a GEF grant of USD 2 639 726 and co-financing from the government of USD 25 975 000. Additional co-financing figures are listed below:¹
 - i. Ministry of Water Resources (in-kind and cash): USD 19 300 000
 - ii. Yunnan Dep. of Water Resources (in-kind and cash): USD 3 100 000
 - iii. Chongqing Dep. of Water Resources (in-kind and cash): USD 3 000 000
 - iv. The Nature Conservancy (in-kind): USD 500 000
 - v. FAO (in-kind and cash): USD 75 000

Total budget (GEF grant and co-financing): 28 614 726
8. According to the project document, the project is consistent with the FAO Strategic Objective 2 (enhancing equitable, productive, and sustainable natural resource management and utilization).
9. The project has three components designed to mainstream biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China's water resources management (WRM) policy and planning. Components 1 and 2 focus on integrating biodiversity conservation and e-flow protection into policies, laws, regulations, and guidelines on WRM and carrying out on-the-ground activities to demonstrate the environmental, social, and economic benefits of conserving globally important biodiversity and protecting e-flow at four pilot sites (PS): Yunnan Province: PS1 – Buma & Enle River (Zhenyuan County) and PS2 – Chuan River (Jingdong County); Chongqing Municipality: PS3 – Wubu River (Banan District) and PS4 – Tang River (Jiangjin District). Component 3 supports the development of improved

¹ These figures are as per the project document, and will be verified by the terminal evaluation.

information systems and monitoring to consolidate, upscale/expand improved WRM to increase the conservation of China's river biodiversity.

10. Each project component is associated with outcomes as detailed below:

- i. Component 1: "Changing the framework" – Institutional and planning framework for mainstreaming biodiversity into water resources management at national, provincial, and local levels.
 - Outcome 1.1: Mainstream biodiversity objectives and practices into key water resource management policies, planning, and legal stipulations at the national, provincial, prefecture, and county/district levels.
 - Outcome 1.2: Develop administrative regulations as well as technical guidelines for translating biodiversity objectives into concrete WRM practices.
 - Outcome 1.3: Establish new institutional partnerships for WRM between government and civil society organizations (CSOs).
 - Outcome 1.4: Develop a system of principles and corresponding standards to systematically measure and certify biodiversity conservation in China's water bodies.
 - Outcome 1.4: Increase levels of government investments into biodiversity conservation for river ecosystems.
- ii. Component 2: "Enhancing Implementation" – Demonstrate on-the-ground activities for mainstreaming biodiversity in pilot rivers in Chongqing and Yunnan Provinces.
 - Outcome 2.1: Broaden the alliance of stakeholders and clarify the distribution of responsibilities to strengthen the networks of partners involved in the implementation of biodiversity conservation measures.
 - Outcome 2.2: Pilot counties in Yunnan demonstrate successful implementation of local-level biodiversity conservation activities, implementing e-flows.
 - Outcome 2.3: Pilot districts in Chongqing demonstrate successful implementation of local-level biodiversity conservation activities, implementing e-flows.
 - Outcome 2.4: Compilation and internal as well as external dissemination of information and best practices gained from the project.
- iii. Component 3: "Improving Information" – Creation of improved information systems and capability to use these systems to inform better and continuously improving water management practices serving enhanced conservation of river biodiversity.
 - Outcome 3.1: Design and implement additional information systems to provide comprehensive river biodiversity analysis (including mappings, environmental flow analysis, river health assessments, and water accounting).

- Outcome 3.2: Establish a comprehensive biodiversity monitoring system for aquatic biodiversity and piloting of the system in the project areas.
 - Outcome 3.3: Develop and implement a system of multi-level and multifaceted biodiversity mainstreaming training programme targeting government officials and water management partners from local communities and civil society organizations.
 - Outcome 3.3: Project monitoring and evaluation.
11. Each outcome has several related outputs.
12. **The mid-term review (MTR)** of this project, managed by the GEF Coordination Unit (GCU) of the FAO, was completed in November 2020. Below its main conclusions are presented:
- i. Concerning relevance, the project objective was rated as satisfactory.
 - ii. In terms of efficiency, the project was considered moderately satisfactory. The project's effectiveness in achieving outputs and planned outcomes has improved, following a lengthy period of low activity due to a major institutional reshuffle.
 - iii. Project results, progress toward overall outcomes, and project effectiveness were all rated as moderately satisfactory. At the mid-term, the project has experienced difficulties in converting its resources into results in the period 2017–2018 but has improved significantly since 2019.
 - iv. In terms of sustainability, the project was ranked as moderately satisfactory since project extension was required to achieve the majority of planned outcomes and objectives.
 - v. Only moderately satisfactory factors affecting the project's performance were identified: some gaps in the project design concern the project's internal monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system, and the lack of an effective communication strategy.
 - vi. Progress towards achieving the project's development objective was ranked as moderately likely.
 - vii. Overall risk rating: moderately likely to reach the majority of its targets if an extension of at least two years is granted and the MTR recommendations are addressed.
13. The MTR offered five recommendations summarized below for the second half of the project. Further details are provided in the management response.

Recommendation 1. Extend the project for a period of two years from 31 May 2020.

Recommendation 2. Establishing a mechanism to facilitate greater intra- and inter-institutional coordination and decision-making in areas of mutual interest at all levels; establish a long-term training programme with a dedicated road map to develop aquatic biodiversity monitoring and data management; enhance on-the-ground river conservation through better communication and nature education, and provide training and cases studies on how to integrate risk management and adaptation to climate change into the project's planning, implementation, and monitoring.

Recommendation 3. Review the project's communication strategy.

Recommendation 4. Establish a communication mechanism (such as an online meeting group using Zoom) to improve dialogue and find solutions to outstanding problems.

Recommendation 5. Apply sex-disaggregated data on the level of participation of rural women in project activities and, in particular, the number of women who are engaged in decision-making roles.

14. Even though the terminal evaluation will assess the project throughout its execution, its questions are built on the main elements and findings from the MTR stage.

1.2 Project stakeholders and their roles

15. Project stakeholders have been discussed at length in the project document. Below is a snapshot of their roles and participation in the project to date.
16. **United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO):** FAO is the GEF implementing agency for the project. It provides administrative, operational, and technical support (including technical assistance) and supervision to the project's national executing agency. In addition, as the GEF agency for this project, FAO is responsible for managing the project and ensuring adherence to GEF and FAO policies and procedures and that the project meets its objectives and expected outcomes and outputs as established in the project document, workplan and budget efficiently and effectively.
17. **The Land and Water Division at FAO** is the FAO Lead Technical Unit for the project and provides technical backstopping together with concerned officers and units in FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. The project is executed under the Operational Partners Implementation Modality (OPIM)/Project Management Office (PMO) modality, and FAO, as the GEF agency, is only responsible for the execution of the GEF resources and the FAO co-financing. The FAO Representative in China is the designated budget holder.
18. **The Chinese counterpart institutions** participating in the project, in particular the Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Ecology and Environment, the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, River Basin Management Commissions (RBMC).
19. **Additional government counterparts:** Provincial Departments of Water Resources, county/district-level governments of Yunnan and Chongqing.
20. **The Nature Conservancy (TNC),** which is supporting project implementation partner.
21. **Resource users:** users and beneficiaries of mainstreaming biodiversity into water management. These include the Ministry of Water Resources and local water management authorities; local communities, including ethnic minorities, and broader river management practitioners and agencies.

1.3 Theory of change

22. The project document did not propose any theory of change (TOC) but has a detailed results matrix. The MTR assessed achievements towards expected outcomes during its

review.² The theory of change was constructed by the MTR team during the inception phase and used to guide key findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

23. The reconstructed TOC has been used to guide the MTR team's assessment of the evaluation criteria applied, in particular relating to its relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability.

² The evaluation team should therefore consider the associated Annex 6 of the MTR report.

2. Terminal evaluation purpose and scope

24. This terminal evaluation is a requirement of the GEF and the FAO for project monitoring and reporting purposes. It is being conducted for both accountability and learning purposes of the GEF, FAO, national implementing partner, and other participating institutions. The main portion of the evaluation is planned to be conducted a few months before the end of the project.
25. The terminal evaluation will document important lessons to guide future actions and will serve as an input to improve the formulation and implementation of projects that may use similar approaches. Importantly, it will present strategic recommendations to maximize implementation in the remaining period of the project, aid its institutionalization and appropriation of the project's results by the government stakeholders such as the two government implementing partners, and disseminate information to authorities that could benefit from it.
26. The main audience and intended users of the evaluation are:
 - i. Project governance and implementation bodies: the Project Management Office (PMO), the Project Steering Committee (PSC), the Project Task Force (PTF), FAO-China (FAO-CN), and GCU.
 - ii. The national government counterparts, in particular the Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Ecology and Environment, and the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, will use the evaluation findings and conclusions for future planning.
 - iii. FAO China, the project management team, members of the Project Task Force will use the findings and lessons identified in the evaluation to finalize project activities; plan for sustainability of results achieved; and improve the formulation and implementation of similar projects.
 - iv. FAO HQ, technical division, FAO-GEF Coordination Unit will use findings and lessons learned.
 - v. The GEF will use the findings to inform strategic investment decisions in the future.
 - vi. Other donors, organizations, and institutions interested in supporting and/or implementing similar projects (the TNC, which co-finances the project) could equally benefit from the evaluation report.
27. The terminal evaluation will cover the entire project implementation period (1 March 2016 to 5 September 2022), while focusing on the results which took place after the MTR. As mentioned in the section above, the terminal evaluation will consider the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the MTR, and validate them where necessary. It will cover four pilot sites in Yunnan Province: Buma & Enle River (Zhenyuan County) and Chuan River (Jingdong County); and in Chongqing Municipality: Wubu River (Banan District) Tang River (Jiangjin District), where the project has been implemented. However, due particularly to the limitations posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, many project sites will not be visited, and the major part of the evaluation will be conducted remotely.

3. Evaluation objectives and questions

3.1 Terminal evaluation objectives

28. The objectives of the terminal evaluation are to:
- i. examine the extent and magnitude of the project achieving its stated objective and outcomes to date, and determine the likelihood of future impacts especially relating to environmental sustainability due to changes following the project's interventions;
 - ii. provide an assessment of the project's performance, gender-disaggregated achievements, and the implementation of planned project activities and planned outputs against actual results;
 - iii. understand the critical enablers for progress and the barriers to progress for the project components and activities;
 - iv. identify project successes to promote replicability; and
 - v. synthesize lessons learned that may help in the design and implementation of future FAO and FAO-GEF water management and/or river biodiversity conservation-related initiatives.

3.2 Terminal evaluation questions

25. The evaluation report will be structured around main evaluation questions corresponding to the main areas of analysis. Box 2 provides evaluation questions for each of these areas.

Box 2. Terminal evaluation questions

<p>1) Relevance (rating required)</p>	<p>1.1 Were the project outcomes congruent with the GEF programme strategies (i.e. on biodiversity), priorities of China and the FAO Country Programming Framework? Have the project's objectives been in line with the needs of the local communities located at the project sites?</p> <p>1.2 Has there been any change in the project's relevance since the MTR?</p>
<p>2) Effectiveness (rating required)</p>	<p>2.1 To what extent has the project objective to <i>mainstream biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China's water resources management policy and planning</i> been achieved? In answering this question, the terminal evaluation will assess achievements against each project outcome and main outputs.</p> <p>2.2 How far has the project contributed to the effective generation and processing of advanced information on river biodiversity and its conservation in the four pilot sites?</p> <p>2.3 Did the project produce any unintended results, either positive or negative?</p> <p>2.4 Are there any barriers or other risks that may prevent future progress towards and the achievement of the project's outcomes and objectives?</p>

<p>3) Efficiency (rating required)</p>	<p>3.1 How did the project activities, the institutional arrangements (FAO execution), the partnerships in place and the resources available contribute to, or impede, the achievement of the project's results and objectives?</p> <p>3.2 To what extent has project's implementation mechanism contributed to efficient implementation of main outputs (FAO as GEF implementing agency)?</p> <p>3.3 Is the co-financing being made available to the project as planned to contribute to meeting project outputs, outcomes and objectives?</p> <p>3.4 To what extent has the project built on synergies and complementarities with other projects, partnerships, etc. and avoided duplication of similar activities by other groups and initiatives?</p> <p>3.5 Has the Operational Partners Agreement been applied efficiently?</p> <p>3.6 Has the project been implemented efficiently, cost-effectively, and management been able to adapt to any changing conditions (the COVID-19 pandemic taking place in the last years of project implementation) to improve the efficiency of project implementation? How well have risks been identified and managed?</p> <p>3.7 Has the project established a mechanism to facilitate greater intra- and inter-institutional coordination and decision-making in areas of mutual interest at all levels?³</p>
<p>4) Sustainability (rating required)</p>	<p>4.1 What is the likelihood of the project's sustainability?</p> <p>4.2 Has the project established sustainable institutional arrangements or cross-sector partnerships?</p> <p>4.3 What project results, lessons or experiences have been replicated (in different geographic areas) or scaled up (in the same geographic area, but on a much larger scale and funded by other sources)? What results, lessons or experiences are likely to be replicated or scaled up in the near future?</p> <p>4.4 Did the OPIM contribute to ensure major ownership and sustainability of the project results? Did the OPIM contribute to increase national, regional and sub-regional ownership to support better sustainability of results? And to strengthen capacities of regional, sub-regional and/or national entities?</p> <p>4.5 The evaluation will analyze the reasons leading to increase or decrease in this likelihood, including the key risks (financial, sociopolitical, institutional, environmental) which may affect sustainability.</p>
<p>5) Factors affecting performance (rating required)</p>	<p>5.1 Is the project design suited to delivering the expected outcomes?</p> <p>5.2 Is the project's causal logic (objectives and expected outcomes) coherent and clear, practical and feasible within the time frame allowed?</p> <p>5.3 How do the various stakeholder groups see their own engagement with the project and what are the strengths and challenges of the project's partnerships?</p>

³ The MTR made a particular recommendation to effectiveness (Recommendation 2).

	<p>5.4 Were local actors – civil society or private sector – involved in project design or implementation and what was the effect on project results?</p> <p>5.5 Did the project include a stakeholder engagement strategy? How effectively and continuously has it been able to engage the relevant project stakeholders?</p> <p>5.6 Does the terminal evaluation have any recommendations to increase engagement with any of these stakeholders?</p> <p>5.7 Are there sufficient human resources, financial resources, etc. for the PMO operation and does it have the capacity to support project implementation?</p> <p>5.8 What have been the main challenges in terms of project management and administration?</p> <p>5.9 How well have risks been identified and managed?</p> <p>5.10 What have been the financial management challenges of the project? To what extent has pledged co-financing been delivered? Has any additional leveraged co-financing been provided since implementation?</p> <p>5.11 To what extent has FAO delivered oversight and supervision and backstopping (technical, administrative and operational) during project identification, formulation, approval, start-up and execution? What kind of support or changes are expected from FAO by the execution partners? How effective has the project's internal M&E system been in supporting project planning and the development of a communication strategy to inform and promoting its key messages and results to partners, stakeholders and a general audience?</p>
Environmental and social safeguards	To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the design of the project, and were these reflected on and adapted as necessary during implementation?
Gender⁴	To what extent were gender considerations taken into account in designing, implementing, monitoring and reporting of the project? Was the project implemented in a manner that ensures gender equitable participation and benefits?
Co-financing	<p>The MTR constituted that the co-financing delivery is on track, where the Ministry of Water Resources has provided over 60 percent of the planned co-finance in the form of cash and in kind at the mid-term. How has this situation changed thereafter, concerning both in-kind and cash contributions from each of the co-financing partners?</p> <p>Which factors either enabled or hindered materialization of the planned co-financing? What conclusions for future FAO-GEF projects can be gained from these insights?</p>
Progress to impact	To what extent can the progress towards long-term impact be attributed to the project? Namely, as a result of the project, is there evidence that there are

⁴ Additional areas of enquiry relating to the project's degree of promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment will be developed in the evaluation inception stage.

	<p>a) improved legal frameworks for water and biodiversity management; b) modern approaches to sustainable water and biodiversity management; and c) increased capacities in the relevant local institutions?</p> <p>What changes in the policy/legal/regulatory framework has this project actively contributed to (working together with its national partners)?</p> <p>What barriers or other risks could prevent future progress towards long-term impact?</p>
Knowledge management⁵	<p>How effective has the communication of project aims, progress, results and key messages been, along with any structured lesson, knowledge product and experience sharing between project partners and interested groups?</p> <p>To what extent are communication and knowledge products and activities likely to support the sustainability and scaling up of project results?</p>
Additionality (for GEF programmes only)	<p>What can be concluded on the added value of project interventions compared to comparable alternatives?</p>

Source: Elaborated by the Evaluation Team.

26. During the inception phase, the Evaluation Team will further develop the evaluation questions and is responsible for developing the evaluation matrix.

⁵ See for reference: Stocking, M. et al. 2018. *Managing knowledge for a sustainable global future*. Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel to the Global Environment Facility. Washington, DC. The evaluation will also prepare a verified list of the knowledge products developed and disseminated by the project.

4. Methodology

27. The evaluation will adhere to the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms & Standards⁶ and be in line with FAO Office of Evaluation (OED) Manual and methodological guidelines and practices. The evaluation will adopt a consultative and transparent approach with internal and external stakeholders throughout the evaluation process.
28. In answering questions related to the achievement of results, efficiency, and the project's implementation and execution, the evaluation should utilize as a starting point for project documentation (such as progress reports, GEF tracking tools), but also necessarily qualitative methods for data collection, particularly key informant interviews with stakeholders. On the other hand, the evaluation questions related to the project's relevance, environmental and social safeguards, and co-financing will be primarily answered through a desk review, importantly, considering, verifying, and building upon the findings of the mid-term review. The Evaluation Team will further develop a framework for the desk review in the inception report for this evaluation.
29. Triangulation of evidence and information gathered will underpin validation and analysis and will support the evaluation's conclusions and recommendations. For instance, questions on M&E, sustainability, progress to impact, and knowledge management will be answered through a desk review of the relevant documentation (list of M&E indicators, knowledge products, etc.), but also through the qualitative methods described above, including interviews with project staff. The methodology of the final evaluation will adopt the following steps, as per the FAO Evaluation Manual:
 30. Step 1: preparation.
 - i. Review and assess the quality of the documents designed for the project;
 - ii. Review and validate the project progress reports, including the Project Implementation Review Reports, monthly reports, etc;
 - iii. Review the mid-term review report and take notes for future reference during the data collection and analysis stage;
 - iv. Prepare an inception report which identifies key evaluation partners, and refines the evaluation questions, methods, and techniques for data collection. The inception report will provide the following aspects:
 - As relevant, a reconstructed theory of change of the project shows the causal relationships between project outputs, outcomes, objectives, and impact as well as the assumptions made for one level of change to lead to the next. This will be a preliminary version, to be further validated during the evaluation.
 - Evaluation matrix: will present the specific evaluation questions under each evaluation criterion and the sources for data collection.

⁶ United Nations Evaluation Group. 2005. *2005 Norms for Evaluation in the UN System*. <http://www.uneval.org/document/detail/21>

- Elaboration on the methodological tools, and data sources, for each evaluation question.
 - If applicable: details on the intended field visits (site selection criteria, duration, etc.).⁷
 - Timetable: Preliminary dates and deadlines are provided in this TOR. Any suggested changes will be discussed with OED, FAO China and other country-level stakeholders, and the GCU.
31. Step 2: desk review. A desk review of the project and other relevant documents.
32. Step 3: field mission and data collection. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the interviews, meetings, and assessments which would normally be conducted during a mission of the Evaluation Team to the country might be performed remotely by the Evaluation Team Leader. These will include:
- i. interviews and additional data gathered from the Project Task Force, including the relevant personnel at the FAO headquarters (FLO, LTO);
 - ii. meeting with the project authorities (e.g. project management team and PSC) and key stakeholders (e.g. the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs) to discuss project results, implementation modalities, and agency support to project implementation;
 - iii. semi-structured interviews with other key stakeholders and other informants that were involved in – or affected by – the project design and/or implementation will serve to collect primary data to answer the evaluation questions; and
 - iv. review and assessment of the project’s implementation; results achieved outcomes at the regional (oblast) and national levels; challenges experienced and solutions adopted.
33. COVID-19 restrictions permitting, a national consultant will be hired to visit select field sites to assess the results achieved, outcomes at the local level, and barriers to implementation experienced. The sites for field visits will be selected based on 1) breadth and progress of project activities; 2) accessibility (time, geography, resources available); and 3) project performance (both well-performing and under-performing areas as identified via preliminary assessment by the Evaluation Team).
34. All interviews (remote and/or in-person) will be supported by checklists and/or interview protocols to be developed by the Evaluation Team at the beginning of the evaluation.

4.1 Risks and limitations

35. The main limitation is a COVID-19 pandemic, which prevents travel for international consultants and also presents risks for any activities this evaluation may be able to undertake in China. Any domestic travel and meetings of national consultant(s) will need to be assessed first in regard to national laws and COVID-19-related restrictions, as well as the “do no harm” principle.

⁷ To be conducted by a national consultant only if COVID-19 conditions in the country allow. See the Limitations section for details.

36. The fact that the not to exceed (NTE) of the project is 31 May 2022 presents a limitation for the conduct of the evaluation, by binding it to a tight time frame. Following the NTE, certain project staff may no longer be available for consultations with the Evaluation Team, for comments on the various versions of the evaluation report, etc.
37. No other serious limitations with regard to access to project's stakeholders, recipients, and data have been identified as of yet.
38. The methodology described above is based on an initial assessment. Final decisions about the specific design and methods for the evaluation should emerge from consultations among the project team, the Evaluation Team, and key stakeholders about what is appropriate and feasible to meet the evaluation purpose and objectives and answer the evaluation questions.

5. Roles and responsibilities

39. The **FAO Office of Evaluation (OED)**, in particular, the Evaluation Manager (EM) develops the first draft TOR. The EM is responsible for the finalization of the TOR and the selection of the Evaluation Team members.⁸ OED has the responsibility of following up with the budget holder for the timely preparation of the management response (MR) and the follow-up report to the MR.
40. **The budget holder (BH)** and project **Lead Technical Officer (LTO)** assist the EM in drafting the TOR, the identification of potential consultants, and in the organization of the missions. The BH, through FAO China, will provide the Evaluation Team with all project documents necessary for the evaluation. In case of field visits, the Evaluation Team will rely on logistical support from the FAO China office. The BH is also responsible for sharing the evaluation report with the GEF Operational Focal Point, the Execution Partner, the project team and national partners and for leading and coordinating the preparation of the FAO management response and the follow-up report, fully supported by the LTO.⁹
41. The **FAO-GEF Coordination Unit** provides inputs to the TOR, and information to the Evaluation Team during its work. They are required to meet with Evaluation Team, to aid the project team in making available information and documentation as necessary, and comment on the draft evaluation reports. Designated members of the Unit, including the FLO and an M&E officer, participate in the debriefing session with the Evaluation Team.
42. The **Evaluation Manager** shall brief the Evaluation Team on the evaluation methodology and process and will review the final draft report for quality assurance purposes in terms of presentation, compliance with the TORs and timely delivery, quality, clarity, and soundness of evidence provided and the analysis supporting conclusions and recommendations in the evaluation report.
43. The **Evaluation Team (ET)** is responsible for further developing and applying the evaluation methodology, conducting the evaluation, and for producing the evaluation report. All team members, including the Evaluation Team Leader, will participate in briefing and debriefing meetings, discussions, and field visits, and will contribute to the evaluation with written inputs for the final draft and final report. The Evaluation Team will agree on the outline of the report early in the evaluation process, based on a reporting outline. The ET will also be free to expand the scope, criteria, questions, and issues listed above, as well as develop its evaluation tools and framework, within the time and resources available and based on discussions with the EM, and consultations with the BH and the project team and the GCU where necessary. The ET is fully responsible for its report which may not reflect the views of the government or FAO. An evaluation report is not subject to technical clearance by FAO although OED is responsible for quality assurance of all evaluation reports.
44. The **Evaluation Team Leader** leads the team in data collection and analysis, to arrive at the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the evaluation. The Team Leader

⁸ The responsibility for the administrative procedures for recruitment of the team, will lie with the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific for the Team Leader selection and the FAO China office for the national consultant Team Member.

⁹ OED guidelines for the management response and the follow-up report provide necessary details on this process.

prepares the final draft and the final report, consolidating the inputs from the team members with his/her own.¹⁰

¹⁰ For further details related to the tasks of the ET members, please refer to their specific job descriptions prepared at the time of their recruitment.

6. Evaluation team composition and profile

45. The Evaluation Team will consist of a Team Leader (international consultant) and a Team Member (national consultant). The Evaluation Team Leader, under the guidance of the OED, is responsible for all the deliverables outlined in Section 7 of these TORs. The Evaluation Team Member's role is to support the Team Leader in evaluation preparations, data collection, analysis, and report writing, capitalizing on their knowledge and experience in China, as well as subject matter expertise (water management, including biodiversity). Additionally, the Evaluation Team is expected to hold a series of briefings related to the evaluation. Notably, these include one before the start of the field mission, describing the evaluation design and process, and another at the end, sharing with the evaluation stakeholders preliminary findings and conclusions and discussing together emerging recommendations. The audience for these briefings is OED, GCU, the project team, and interested parties in the FAO China office.

46. The following are the desired qualifications for the Team Leader position:

- i. advanced university degree in natural resource management (water and biodiversity), or related disciplines;
- ii. at least seven years of experience in leading and conducting evaluations (independent) on subjects related to natural resources management, water resources, and biodiversity conservation. Ideally, previous experience with GEF project evaluations;
- iii. fluency in spoken and written English. Fluency in Chinese is a distinct asset;
- iv. stakeholder engagement, facilitation skills, and interviewing skills;
- v. technical knowledge of sustainable water management, and a good understanding of community participatory approaches and capacity building for sustainable natural resource management; and
- vi. work experience in China and/or Asia is a distinct asset.

And for the Team Member:

- i. advanced university degree in natural resource management (water and biodiversity), or related disciplines;
- ii. at least seven years of relevant experience in conducting or supporting evaluations (independent) on subjects related to natural resources management, biodiversity conservation, and community engagement. Previous experience with GEF project evaluations. Work experience at the national, provincial, and community levels in China. Good understanding of the country's context and its political institutions;
- iii. fluency in spoken and written Chinese and knowledge of English;
- iv. stakeholder engagement, facilitation skills, and interviewing skills; and
- v. technical knowledge of sustainable water management, and a good understanding of community participatory approaches and capacity building for sustainable natural resource management.

47. Both the evaluators should be independent of having been involved in the design, execution, or advice (to a significant extent) to any aspect of the project that is the subject of the evaluation.

7. Evaluation products (deliverables)

48. Deliverables of the terminal evaluation include:

- i. Inception report: The inception report should be prepared before the field mission and include the Evaluation Team's additions to the methodology proposed in these TORs (Section 4) and an elaboration on the sources of data and data collection procedures. The inception report should also include a proposed schedule of tasks, activities, and deliverables, stakeholder analysis, and the terminal evaluation matrix.
- ii. Zero draft evaluation report: a clear, concise (30-40 pages excluding appendices and annexes), professionally written, and high-quality draft evaluation report is expected. It should be written in English, follow a template and the FAO style of writing.¹¹ The zero draft should be sent by the Evaluation Team to OED for comments, peer review, and clearance, and will then be circulated by OED for comments to internal and external stakeholders (BH, FLO, LTO, GCU, project team, executing partners, PSC members, other key project partners). The feedback should focus on any errors of fact or substantive gaps in the evaluation report. The Evaluation Team should consolidate the received comments in a matrix and respond to these comments. OED will support the Evaluation Team in collecting and collating the received feedback.
- iii. Terminal evaluation report: this is the result of the incorporation of comments received on the zero draft. The final report will be submitted by OED to all the stakeholders and will be revised by an editor and graphic designer, before publication on the OED website.
 - The evaluation report should be prepared in MS Word Format and submitted electronically by the Evaluation Team Leader to OED. As the main author of the report, OED will have the final decision as to how the report should be composed.
 - Supporting Evidence – Electronic or hard copies of the survey data and report, minutes or notes of interviews and discussions, and other sources of the primary data/information collected by the Evaluation Team and used in the report should be sent to OED. Sources of secondary data/information used in the report should be cited in the footnotes and included in the list of documents reviewed which is appended in the evaluation report.
 - The evaluation report should include an executive summary and illustrate the evidence found that responds to the evaluation questions listed in the TOR. The executive summary should include the following paragraphs, to update the GEF Portal: i) information on progress, challenges, and outcomes on stakeholder engagement; ii) information on progress on gender-responsive measures; and iii) information on knowledge activities/products.
 - Evaluation reports should have numbered paragraphs, following the GEF OED reporting outline. Supporting data and analysis should be annexed to the report when considered important to complement the main report.

¹¹ For reference, samples of FAO evaluation reports can also be accessed at <https://www.fao.org/evaluation/list/completed/en>.

- The evaluation report should include the GEF Rating table.

Table 1. GEF rating scheme

FAO-GEF rating scheme	Rating	Summary comments
A. Strategic relevance		
A1. Alignment with GEF and FAO strategic priorities		
A2. Relevance to national, regional and global priorities		
A3. Complementarity with existing interventions		
A4. Overall strategic relevance		
B. Effectiveness		
B1. Overall assessment of project results		
B1.1 Delivery of outputs		
B1.2 Progress towards outcomes and project objectives		
B1.3 Likelihood of impact		
C. Efficiency		
C1. Efficiency		
D. Sustainability of project outcomes		
D1. Overall likelihood of risks to sustainability		
D2. Financial risks		
D3. Sociopolitical risks		
D4. Institutional and governance risks		
D5. Environmental risks		
D6. Catalysis and replication		
E. Factors affecting performance		
E1. Project design and readiness ¹		
E2. Quality of project implementation		
E2.1 Project oversight (FAO, PSC, PTF, etc)		
E3. Quality of project execution		
E3.1 Project management arrangements and delivery (PMU, financial management, etc.)		
E4. Co-financing		
E5. Project partnerships and stakeholder involvement		
E6. Communication and knowledge management		
E7. Overall quality of monitoring and evaluation (M&E)		
E7.1 M&E Design		
E7.2 M&E plan implementation (including financial and human resources)		
F. Cross-cutting concerns		
F1. Gender and other equity dimensions		
F2.1 Human rights issues		
F2.2 Environmental and social safeguards		

FAO-GEF rating scheme	Rating	Summary comments
Overall project rating		

Note: ⁱ Refers to factors affecting the project's ability to start as expected, such as the presence of sufficient capacity among executing partners at the project's launch.

49. Evaluation briefs and other knowledge may be prepared in the course of this evaluation.

8. Evaluation time frame

Task	Dates (TBC)	Duration	Responsibility and remarks
Reading background documentation	April 2022	2 weeks	Evaluation team for preparation of the evaluation
TOR preparation	April 2022		EM, with comments from the LTO, FLO, GCU evaluation focal point, other project team members
TOR finalization	May 2022		EM
Team identification recruitment	May 2022		OED with support from the project team (especially for a national consultant)
Briefing of Evaluation Team	May 2022	0.5 days	EM, key members of the project team
Evaluation Inception Report	June 2021	2 weeks	Evaluation team
Evaluation remote interviews	June–July 2022	2 weeks	
Evaluation mission	June/July 2021	1–1.5 weeks	National consultant(s) with support of country office ¹²
Draft evaluation report	Late July–early August 2022	2 weeks	Evaluation team
Circulation and comments on the draft evaluation report	August 2022	10 days	EM, PMU, GCU evaluation focal point, LTO for comments and quality control (organized by EM)
Production of final report	September 2021	1 week	Evaluation team
Management response (MR)	1 month following final report	30 days	BH
Follow-up report to the evaluation	1 year following final report		BH

¹² The missions will take place to the extent possible, in line with the national COVID-19 restrictions on travel and meetings.

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