United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Terminal Evaluation of the UNEP GEF project "Support to the Implementation of the Regional Environment Action Plan in Central Asia"

By

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List of acronyms & abbreviations

ABC	Atmospheric Brown Cloud
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIT-RRC.AP	Asian Institute of Technology, Regional Resource Center in Asia and the Pacific
APRs	Annual Project Reviews
BSP	Bali Strategic Plan
CA	Central Asia
CACs	Central Asian Countries
CACILM	Central Asian Countries Initiatives on Land Management
CAR	Central Asian Region
CARMC	Central Asian Regional Mountain Centre
CAYEN	Central Asian Youth Environment Network
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CS	Civil Society
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
CTA	Chief Technical Assistant
DGEF	UNEP (former) Division of GEF Coordination
DRC	UNEP/Division of Regional Cooperation
DSS	Decision Support System
EA	Executing Agency
EAP	Environmental Action Plan
eKH	Environment Knowledge Hub
FPs	Focal Points
FSP	GEF Full Size Project
FSU	Former Soviet Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEB	Global Environmental Benefits
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GEFSEC	GEF Secretariat
GIS	Geographic Information System
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GLOF	Glacial Lake Outburst Flood
IA	Implementing Agency
ICWC	Interstate Committee on Water Coordination
IEM	Integrated Ecosystems Management
IFAS	International Fund for Aral Sea
IMIS	Integrated Management Information System
ISDC	Interstate Sustainable Development Commission
LFM	Logical Framework Matrix
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreement
MHPP	Micro Hydro Power Plant
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSP	GEF Medium Size Project
MTR	Mid-Term Review
MTS	UNEP Medium Term Strategy
NAPCD	National Action Programmes to Combat Desertification
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan

NCS	National Conservation Strategy
NEAP	National Environmental Action Plan
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NSDS	National Sustainable Development Strategy
OP	EF Operational Programme
PES	Payment for Environmental Services
POPs	Persistent Organic Pollutants
ROAP	UNEP/ Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
SD	Sustainable Development
SLM	Sustainable Land Management
SSDS	Sub-regional Sustainable Development Strategy
SSFA	Small Scale Funding Agreement
TE	Terminal Evaluation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme

Project Details[1]

GEF project ID:	2175	**IMIS number:**	GFL/2328-2770-4865
Focal Area(s):	Land Degradation	**GEF OP #:**	OP15 with relevance to OP12
GEF Strategic Priority/Objective:	SLM-1, SLM-2	**GEF approval date:**	19 April, 2005
Approval date:	3 October 2005	**First Disbursement:**	27 January 2006
Actual start date:	December 2005	**Planned duration:**	36 months
Intended completion date:	December 2008	**Actual or Expected completion date:**	May 2009
Project Type:	MSP	**GEF Allocation:**	US$ 975,000
PDF GEF cost:	US$25,000	**PDF co-financing:**	US$ 82,000 (ADB US$ 25,000, others US$ 57,000 [in cash and in kind])
Expected MSP/FSP Co-financing:	US$1,715,500	**Total Cost:**	US$2,715,500
Mid-term review/eval. (planned date):	None	**Terminal Evaluation (actual date):**	March-July 2012
Mid-term review/eval. (actual date):	None	**No. of revisions:**	One
Date of last Steering Committee meeting:	November 2007	**Date of last Revision*:**	31 July 2007
Disbursement as of 30 June 2008 (UNEP):	US$ 919,959.92		
Total co-financing realized as of 30 June 2010:	US$ 566,500	**Leveraged financing:**	US$ 160,000 (Associated Financing)

[1] Source: http://www.gefonline.org/projectDetailsSQL.cfm?projID=2175

Executive Summary

1. The Terminal Evaluation (TE) of the project "*Support to the Implementation of the Regional Environment Action Plan in Central Asia*" (GEF Project ID 2175) was initiated and commissioned by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Evaluation Office, Nairobi. In line with the UNEP Evaluation Policy, the UNEP Evaluation Manual and the Guidelines for Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Agencies in conducting Terminal Evaluations, the TE was undertaken (approximately four years) after the project had ended to assess project performance (in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency), and to determine outcomes and impacts (actual and potential) stemming from the project, including their sustainability.

The project

2. The project falls under the GEF Operational Programme (OP) on Sustainable Land Management (OP15) and the OP12 on Integrated Ecosystem Management,[2] and it is also related to several other GEF Focal Areas, such as Biodiversity, International Waters, Climate Change, and Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). The project was intended to contribute to the generation of multiple Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs) in the GEF focal areas by providing efficient cross-sectoral regional coordination and integration of environmental concerns in national and regional policy planning and development. The project is broadly in line with the GEF 4 Replenishment (although developed under the GEF 3 Replenishment).
3. The project was intended to strengthen national and regional management capacity in information generation and application for decision-making, through the development of a regional decision support system and operational data exchange network. The project was also to facilitate cooperation between the Governments and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) at the regional level in the area of sustainable environmental management. A key element of the project was to enable the Governments to translate the regional and international commitments to sustainable land management (SLM) and sustainable and rational natural resources management into practice through five pilot projects.
4. The objective of the project was: "*To implement key aspects of the Regional Environmental Action Plan for Central Asia and to create enabling conditions for its further implementation through capacity building and pilot demonstrations in Sustainable Land Management*".
5. The project had four components:
   - **Component I** was intended to strengthen the mechanism for regional cooperation on issues relating to regional environmental management. The **output** was expected to be a functioning regional cooperation mechanism and an agreement on an environment for sustainable development and sustainable land management, principally a regional Framework Convention. This would result in a strengthened political and institutional basis for regional cooperation in sustainable development and sustainable land management. Component I included the following activities: (i) preparation of a needs assessment with recommendations on how to strengthen regional cooperation and a replication mechanism, (ii) implementation of the proposal for the regional mechanism, and (iii) establishing a financial mechanism to ensure sustainability for regional cooperation and REAP implementation in the future.
   - **Component II** was intended to strengthen the decision-making support system for regional environmental management. It was expected to also develop sufficient capacities for effective information generation and application through the development of a Decision Support System (DSS) for sustainable development and sustainable land management. Component II included the following activities: (i) Establishing a decentralised regional network for

[2] The second OP (12) was not included in the Project Document but appears on the GEF Project details on the GEF Website http://www.gefonline.org/projectDetailsSQL.cfm?projID=2175

information base on sustainable land management and sustainable development, (ii) enhancing information accessibility to support decision-making in sustainable land management and sustainable development, and (iii) strengthening national capacities to use information for effective decision-making in environment for sustainable development and sustainable land management.

- **Component III** was intended to develop and increase civil society participation in regional environmental management, particularly participation in the Interstate Sustainable Development Committee (ISDC). The **output** was expected to be an institutional mechanism for civil society involvement in policy dialogue. Component III included the following activities: (i) establishing a mechanism for civil society participation in decision-making and policy dialogue for strengthening regional cooperation and sustainable land management, and (ii) raising awareness on the role of civil society in regional cooperation in environmental for sustainable development and sustainable land management.
- **Component IV** was intended to provide capacity building to address regional SLM priorities and for REAP's implementation. Component IV included the following activities: (i) regional capacity building for sustainable land management and REAP implementation and monitoring, (ii) developing projects to support REAP implementation, and (iii) disseminating REAP product/experiences and best practices to a wider audience.

Conclusions of the Terminal Evaluation

6. **Achievements of outputs and activities:**

- **Component I:** The most important achievement of component I has been the development of a Framework convention. If ratified, the Framework Convention would have been the principal tool for the achievement of Outcome 1, and would have committed Ministers to binding protocols, actions and allocation of resources.
- **Component II**: This has, perhaps, been the most successful component of the REAP project. It created a unified data base, established a Central Asian component for the GEO portal and the Asia Pacific Regional Environmental Knowledge Portal (e-KH), and produced some useful reports on emerging environmental issues in the region.
- **Component III**: While the project has funded a number of NGO activities, the whole issue of Civil Society (CS) participation should have been better thought through in terms of governance. Civil society participation could have brought about transparency and accountability for ISDC, but it has turned out to be more about communicating messages from ISDC on environmental issues.
- **Component IV**: While the project appears to have put in place a mechanism to monitor environmental issues identified in REAP and in the assessment reports, there is little evidence of a critical assessment and monitoring of the performance of the ISDC itself in addressing these issues. The project appears to have had little concern over weaning the REAP and ISDC off donor support. The Regional Mountain Centre, while it still exists, has not been a success to the point that it was passed over by a proceeding UNEP project on SLM in mountainous areas of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The four demonstration projects implemented and the small grants projects through Small Scale Funding Agreements (SSFAs), that were a large part of this project component, were poorly thought through, provided little in the way of demonstration and lacked the rigorous and critical analysis necessary to learn lessons. They had little to do with the REAP per se, and were poorly implemented and monitored.

Effectiveness

7. Apart from a small number of outputs, there have been little or no higher level results from the GEF investment in the REAP project. The Convention, for example, remains un-ratified by two of the five parties. One of the principal stumbling blocks has been the lack of a financing mechanism and an estimation of the costs of the Frameworks Convention's implementation. As a result, there is little evidence of the intergovernmental and national commitments, particularly regarding financing for the activities. There is also no evidence that CSOs exert any influence on the

decision-making process: the network established during the project does not appear to have survived the project's end. Finally, while the DSS is widely held as successful amongst the scientific community, there is little evidence of influence on decision-making at a political level.

Sustainability

8. There is little evidence of any sustainability in the project's outputs and outcomes.
   - Socio-political sustainability - The REAP project has not altered the institutional power balance in the ISDC in any way that might enhance the socio-political sustainability of any project outcomes in SLD. The TE team feels the project may have even strengthened the *status quo* in some instances.
   - Financial resources - There has been no attempt to develop a financial mechanism by the project, despite the fact that the need for this was highlighted in the Project Document. A financial analysis of the costs and benefits and a financial mechanism would have had a very beneficial effect on what *could have been* the project's most significant output: the Framework Convention.
   - Institutional framework - Institutionally REAP and the ISDC are probably sustainable, the ISDC being the principle institutional framework with which the project was engaged. It is hard to gauge from an evaluation perspective just how relevant the ISDC will remain, and this becomes particularly important when we consider the OP#15 criteria and the broader mandate of the ISDC and REAP. Clearly the ISDC is valued by scientists and other technocratic personnel as a means to share information and ideas. However, as the Project Document makes clear, the ISDC is not just a platform for scientists, it also has an essentially political role which is the decision-making component of the institution.
   - Environmental sustainability - Environmental sustainability should have been at the very heart of the REAP project, in as much as the REAP was intended to address environmental challenges in the region, and the ISDC is intended as a regional decision-making forum to resolve environmental degradation. However, the TE team questions whether this is possible without the political reform and financial mechanism that never materialised under the project. There is little evidence that the demonstration projects (including the ones funded through SSFAs) are sustainable by any means.

Processes affecting attainment of project results

9. A number of compromises were made in developing the REAP project. These were mostly related to donor cycles, GEF operational programmes and the political expediency of keeping five member states engaged in the process. The REAP should have been a much larger full-sized project (FSP) and should have had considerably more external facilitation to drive the process of institutional change.

Project design

10. The project design was weak in many respects; i) it did not marry the regional priority needs with the objectives of GEF OP#15; ii) it was overambitious in estimating the challenge of building regional capacity and what was necessary to bring about collective decision-making and an adaptive change management within the organizations and the institutions; it failed to develop an appropriate financing mechanism as a project output, and to adequately thing through the inclusion of demonstration projects in the project's strategy. At the end, the project relied heavily upon conventional reporting as a means to bring about change.

Implementation approach and adaptive management

11. The implementation arrangements left much to be desired, with little emphasis on results-based management. The project featured small fund dispersal and subcontracting of many of the projects outputs to third parties, with no real coordination and supervision (especially up to 2007). The governance structure was never designed, and the results obtained showed that demonstration projects and micro-projects fund dispersal in Central Asia could not be adequately administered from Bangkok.
12. Despite the claims made in the project document, the REAP project has largely restricted itself to a narrow group of stakeholders, a contradiction that puts it at odds with the objectives of the GEF OP#15.

Co-financing

13. By any measure, the delivery of the promised co-financing has been very poor. Of the promised US$ 1,715,500 in the Project Document, only US$ 556,000 materialised, and most of this was in-kind. Given that 48% of the project's funding never materialised, it is questionable whether the project should have gone ahead.

Monitoring and evaluation

14. M&E, by UNEP/ROAP and the project partners, appears to have been extremely weak, if not completely deficient, until the end of 2007, with poor technical and financial reporting. The M&E design, and particularly the logical framework, was weak, and the indicators used are essentially either re-stating outputs or activities, or are actually targets or deliverables, making it difficult to measure effectiveness.
15. The reporting was so poor that the project was placed on the UNEP DGEF register of projects at risk in 2010[3]. However, by the time the new Task Manager was placed in charge of the project's monitoring, there was a considerable backlog of information. Obtaining the information from the project implementation partners (including the *AIT-RRC.AP*) appears to have been difficult and in some cases incomplete, at least to an acceptable standard.
16. Although not a formal requirement, a mid-term review (MTR) should have conducted. The TE team is of the opinion that the MTR would have likely indicated that it would have been financially prudent to stop the project.

Lessons Learned

17. **Lesson One:** Project implementation through state agencies is not effective in bringing about change when there is weak governance. In complex situations, the project should act as a catalyst to break out of the cycle that regional environmental planning and management had, according to the project document and for a multiplicity of reasons, found itself in. This can only really be achieved, within the limited time constraints of a project, by providing an impartial facilitator with transparent terms of reference and largely independent of any political, institutional and national financial constraints. This is not necessarily an individual, but a necessary artefact of a project - the *Project Management or Implementation Unit*.
18. **Lesson Two**: Institutional relationships are critical to environmental management. Institutional relationships are critical to the success or failure of any GEF project which is operating at a systemic scale, as was the REAP project, and particularly so in transitional environments. The project inevitably has to react to the various changes over its lifetime, rather than steering the process. Institutional relationships are essentially about power; effective environmental management (SLM by any other name) might arguably be more about rearranging these powers to where they can most effectively exert a positive influence on SLM. GEF projects do not always provide a detailed evaluation of the capacities of institutions, and neither do they reflect the dynamic nature of the relationships between various institutional players and how they interact with non-state stakeholders. From an institutional change perspective, the latter is far more interesting and informative.
19. **Lesson Three:** The difficulty of implementing demonstration projects and small grant projects, especially at distance, cannot be underestimated. The REAP project was operating at a regional scale on regional issues, and the inclusion of demonstration and micro-projects was largely meaningless (both temporally and spatially) at this scale in demonstrating the effectiveness of SLM.

Suggestion

20. **Suggestion 1 – to UNEP:** Before UNEP makes any further investment in the region, it should establish a regional office. There are considerable weaknesses in the capacity of state agencies and poor governance as whole, and it is not realistic to manage projects from the ROAP office in

[3] Memo from Director DGEF UNEP to Regional director ROAP, 22nd September 2010

Bangkok, or through a third party also located there. While the TE recognises that there are considerable financial implications in doing this, the poor performance of this project, the ineffectual implementation of the demonstration and the small grants projects suggest that, at least from the GEF perspective, it might be more cost effective to do so. Alternatively, any future projects should be implemented through the other UN agencies country offices or programmes, because these already have in place systems for efficient oversight and accountability at the local level.

Criterion	Summary Assessment	Rating
A. Attainment of project objectives and results	- The Project has not achieved its objectives - The activities were not efficiently implemented; - The project has had little impact	U
1. Effectiveness	- Outcome 1 – the Framework Convention is not yet ratified some 4 years after the project's ending. - Outcome 2 – the decision-support mechanism does not appear to influence the decision-making process. - Outcome 3 – Civil society participation was largely passive and ineffective. - Outcome 4 – The demonstration projects have not built any appropriate capacity and there is little evidence of civil society holding the ISDC accountable through monitoring.	U
2. Relevance	- The Project's objectives were relevant at a regional, national and local scale.	S
3. Efficiency	- The executing arrangements for the REAP project were cumbersome and complex and not very cost-effective. - The use of demonstration projects to build capacity in the project timeframe is questionable.	U
B. Sustainability of project outcomes	- The Project has not put in place the necessary mechanisms for sustainability However: - It is likely that the REAP and the ISDC will persist because they serve a function for regional governments and technocrats, but this would have been likely also without the project.	U
1. Financial	- The financing for the ISDC without regular donor support is likely to be insufficient for its effective functioning.	U
2. Socio-political	- Politically the ISDC will continue but this will not meet the criteria for civil society inclusion described as an outcome in the Project Document and it does not have any representation from rural communities nor will it utilise the emerging democratic structures in the region. In many ways it concentrates power in the hands of the Ministers and appears to have little accountability.	U
3. Institutional framework	- There is little doubt that the ISDC will persist, but, without a means of financing and the other necessary reforms and developments, it will not function effectively.	U
4. Environmental	- The project was intended to develop a framework for environmental sustainability, but the TE questions whether this is possible without the political reform and a financial mechanism, at least by the terms set out in the project's objective.	U

Criterion	Summary Assessment	Rating
C. Catalytic role	- The Project does not appear to have created much of an effect, indeed the TE feels that it may even have strengthened the status quo and a business as usual approach to environmental management.	MU
D. Stakeholders involvement	- Stakeholder participation has been within a narrow group of civil society organisations and on a level that is likely to have little actual impact on land use; - The project failed to include community-level governance structures; - The civil society participation resembled a communications programme, and participation was essentially passive and unchallenging of the existing power base within the ISDC.	U
E. Country ownership / driven-ness	- There is strong government ownership of the ISDC and of project outcomes, especially amongst some groups of technocrats	S
F. Achievement of outputs and activities	- Most of the project activities were implemented and the outputs achieved. - However, the TE judges these to be of poor quality and certain key elements such as the Framework Convention has yet to be ratified some three and a half years after the project ended - The financing mechanism mentioned in the Project Document was never developed.	MS
G. Preparation and readiness	- The Project Document underestimated the size and complexity of the challenge. - The preparations for the project governance were inappropriate. - The prodoc lacked a financial analysis. - Partnership relationships were poorly defined.	U
H. Implementation approach and adaptive management	- There was no inception phase although this was clearly needed given the complexity of the project - There was no MTR although this was clearly needed given the complexity of the project. - When there were obvious problems with the MoUs and SSFAs there were no inspections and remedial actions; - Little if any adaptive management has taken place; - Oversight and guidance by the Executing Agency was extremely weak in the early part of the project; - The diffuse "chain of command" was wholly impractical for a project of this complexity; - Co-financing was not well managed and reported; - When things were obviously not working no action was taken by project management. However, - In 2007 a new Task Manager was appointed and oversight and process improved but by this time the bulk of the budget had been spent.	U
I. Financial planning and management	- The TE has is not confident that correct procedures were followed below the level of the Executing Agency. - Co-financing was not adequately monitored and reported. - The MoU and SSFA used to disburse small grants did not have sufficient inspection and monitoring and therefore the TE cannot be convinced that there was compliance.	U

Criterion	Summary Assessment	Rating
J. Monitoring and Evaluation	- The monitoring and evaluation plan designed for the project was inadequate. - There are weaknesses in the LFM which make it extremely hard to measure the quality of changes. - The TE surmises that at the time of the project's design and inception there was little institutional culture for M&E and results-based management in UNEP/ROAP.	U
1. M&E Design	- There were no provisions for monitoring and evaluating critical points of the project cycle. - The LFM had critical weaknesses. - There should have been a scheduled Inception Phase and MTR (even though this was not a mandatory requirement at the time).	HU
2. M&E Plan Implementation	- Monitoring procedures were not fully, if at all, followed in the early part of the project (i.e. Half-yearly Reports are inadequately completed, the first PIR is missing). It is noted that the quality of M&E implementation improves in 2007 due to a new Task Manager taking over the project.	U
3. Budgeting and funding for M&E activities	- There was inadequate budget provision for the M&E activities (i.e. there was no inception report and no MTR) and insufficient travel budget for the TE	HU
K. UNEP Supervision and backstopping	- For approximately the first three quarters of the Project, there was an absence of UNEP supervision and backstopping by UNEP/ROAP, which had a detrimental effect on the Projects implementation and progress. - No attempt to independently (by the Executing or Implementing Agency) verify the demonstration projects and SGPs has been made. - However, there has been a marked improvement in the quality and quantity of supervision and backstopping from early 2008, nonetheless greater efforts might have been made to investigate issues such as the demonstration projects and the SSFAs.	U

Section I Evaluation Background

1 Context

1. The eco-regions of Central Asia (CA) harbour a great diversity of ecosystems and ecological processes, which represent global environmental values. Common geographical features, similar ecosystems, location within the Aral Sea and Caspian Sea basins, and common history of natural resources exploitation provide ground for common approaches to environment protection in CA. The region exhibits a great diversity of ecosystems[4] in all bio-geographic zones from mountains to plains[5]. The biodiversity of the region is characterized by a high degree of endemism, in some areas up to 18-20% of higher flora represented by unique species.

2. The major trans-boundary river basins in the countries of the Central Asian Region (CAR) are the Syr-Daria, Amu-Daria, Chu, Talas, Murgab, Tedzhen, Atrek, Zaravshan. Two of the most pressing trans-boundary environmental challenges are: the shortage of water, and the deteriorating quality of the water of the trans-boundary rivers, caused by land degradation related in turn to irrigated agriculture and its run-off, industrial and municipal wastes[6]. As acknowledged during a senior expert meeting in 2006, the region also suffers from a number of "emerging" issues /environmental challenges, including: Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF), Atmospheric Brown Cloud (ABC), need for renewable energy, and climate change.

3. "*Similarity of geophysical, socio-economic conditions and approaches to environmental protection resulted into a common character of environmental problems and challenges which the CA States have to address. Such common natural, environmental and socioeconomic factors also became an objective incentive for joining forces of the CA States in the protection of the environment and achieving sustainable development. The idea of cooperative solution by all CA countries of numerous environmental and socioeconomic problems finds growing support by all stakeholders, including many environmental NGOs"*[7].

4. However, at the time the project started, the region featured weak national and regional governance, as newly independent states emerged from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) had little experience of environmental management and consequent limited institutional capacity. There was a lack of coordination at the regional level; the political authority was dispersed across numerous agencies; monitoring was difficult, and; ensuring compliance to environmental regulations and Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) was challenging. "Regional environmental governance is shared among too many institutions (International Fund for Aral Sea (IFAS), Interstate Sustainable Development Commission (ISDC), Interstate Committee on Water Coordination (ICWC)) with diffuse, overlapping, or conflicting mandates at the national and regional level. Adding to this fragmentation are the national Ministries of Environment, contending for limited governmental time, limited authority, attention and financial resources without adequate technical provisions for data management and analysis"[8].

[4] There are more than 900 species of vertebrates in CA, including 172 mammals, about 600 birds, 150 fish, 120 reptiles and 15 amphibians, There are approximately 7, 000 species of superior plants, 5,000 species of fungus, and about 600 moss species.

[5] In the early 60's the Aral Sea was the 4th largest lake in the world. Recently it lost two thirds of its surface and about half of its water volume.

[6] Source: Project Document

[7] Support to the Implementation of the Regional Environmental Action Plan (REAP) in Central Asia Assessment Report, Timoshenko, A; ADB, UNDP, UNEP, undated copy made available to the TE

[8] Project document, p. 3

5. Regional economies in the five CA states were to a large extent recovering, or in transition from a planned or command economy to market-led approaches. Poverty and the collapse of the agricultural sector, which had hitherto been heavily supported without reference to social, economic or environmental sustainability, compounded the challenges faced by the region. The economic costs of environmental degradation were poorly understood amongst political decision-makers. Overall, the wide scale concerns about natural resources were not translated into budget support for addressing environmental degradation at a political level, and funding of initiatives was largely donor-led.

6. The REAP concept and methodology was proposed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to ISDC in 2000, later presented at the Ministerial Conference in Almaty, Kazakhstan, and approved by the ISDC with the request for further development and update. During a regional meeting of experts, five priority issues[9] were identified as key topics for REAP by the countries: a) Mountain eco-systems degradation; b) Air pollution; c) Land degradation; d) Water pollution, and; e) Waste management. For each of the priority areas, one country took a leading role in the preparation of a thematic Environmental Action Plan (EAP).

- Uzbekistan - Air pollution;
- Kazakhstan - Water pollution;
- Turkmenistan - Land Degradation;
- Kyrgyz Republic - Waste management, and;
- Tajikistan - Mountain ecosystems degradation.

7. In September 2001, a request was subsequently made to initiate activities to strengthen regional cooperation and public participation in the area of environment and sustainable development (SD) resulting in the UNEP-GEF Project Development Fund (PDF A) for the development of a medium-sized project (MSP). The UNEP GEF project "Support to the Implementation of the Regional Environment Action Plan in Central Asia" (REAP project[10]) was designed to strengthen regional capacity and cooperation in environment for sustainable development, and implement the REAP developed between the five participating Central Asian countries (Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), to ultimately enhance integrated ecosystem management (IEM) and improve the quality of environment.

2 The Project

2.1 Description of the project

8. The REAP project falls under the GEF Land Degradation focal area, specifically the Operational Programme (OP) on Sustainable Land Management (OP15) and OP12 on Integrated Ecosystem Management[11]. The REAP is evidently a much larger regional environmental agreement than that which is encompassed by the GEF OP #15, and it addresses a multiplicity of environmental issues that have trans-boundary significance. Arguably many of these environmental challenges have their root causes in unsustainable land management, or are causative factors of land degradation. As such, the project also relates to several other GEF Focal Areas, such as: Biodiversity, International Waters, Climate Change, and POPs. The project is broadly in line with GEF 4 Replenishment (although developed under the GEF 3 Replenishment).

9. The Project Document describes the **goal** of the REAP project as improving "*the quality of the environment through sustainable land management in CA by strengthening of regional*

[9] The countries agreed that priorities should be national priorities for two and more countries, or have a trans-boundary character which could not be solved by efforts of only one country.

[10] This report refers to *REAP* meaning the Regional Environmental Action Plan and *the REAP project*, or simply *the project* meaning the GEF-funded project ID 2175.

[11] The second OP (12) was not included in the Project Document but appears on the GEF Project details on the GEF Website http://www.gefonline.org/projectDetailsSQL.cfm?projID=2175

cooperation in environment for SD and REAP implementation. The main purpose is to implement some key aspects of the REAP and to build regional capacity for replication and up-scaling of successful practices and approaches in SLM." The **objective** of the project is stated in the log frame matrix as: "*To implement key aspects of the Regional Environmental Action Plan for Central Asia and to create enabling conditions for its further implementation through capacity building and pilot demonstrations in Sustainable Land Management*".

10. The REAP project was intended to address the barriers to environmental management in the CA region by supporting capacity building and removing political and institutional barriers that impede SLM and effective decision-making. GEF funding intended to address the inherited environmental problems from the Soviet era that are of global significance by promoting new approaches in: (1) integrating environmental considerations in the national and regional economic and social planning and development frameworks and processes and, (2) piloting demonstrations of good practices.

11. The REAP project aimed to strengthen regional decision-making, and national and regional management capacity in information generation and application for decision-making, through the development of a Framework Convention, a regional decision support system and operational data exchange network. The project was also to facilitate cooperation between the Governments and CSOs at the regional level in the area of sustainable environmental management. Finally, a key element of the project was to enable the Governments to translate the regional and international commitments to sustainable land management (SLM) and sustainable and rational natural resources management into practice through five pilot projects. The project was to operate across five countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

12. The project had four components:

- **Component I** was intended to strengthen the mechanism for regional cooperation on issues relating to regional environmental management. The **output** was expected to be a functioning regional cooperation mechanism and an agreement on an environment for sustainable development and sustainable land management, principally a regional Framework Convention. This would result in a strengthened political and institutional basis for regional cooperation in sustainable development and sustainable land management. Component I included the following activities: (i) preparation of a needs assessment with recommendations on how to strengthen regional cooperation and a replication mechanism, (ii) implementation of the proposal for the regional mechanism, and (iii) establishing a financial mechanism to ensure sustainability for regional cooperation and REAP implementation in the future.

- **Component II** was intended to strengthen the decision-making support system for regional environmental management. It was expected to also develop sufficient capacities for effective information generation and application through the development of a Decision Support System (DSS) for sustainable development and sustainable land management. Component II included the following activities: (i) Establishing a decentralised regional network for information base on sustainable land management and sustainable development, (ii) enhancing information accessibility to support decision-making in sustainable land management and sustainable development, and (iii) strengthening national capacities to use information for effective decision-making in environment for sustainable development and sustainable land management.

- **Component III** was intended to develop and increase civil society participation in regional environmental management, particularly participation in the Interstate Sustainable Development Committee (ISDC). The **output** was expected to be an institutional mechanism for civil society involvement in policy dialogue. Component III included the following activities: (i) establishing a mechanism for civil society participation in decision-making and policy dialogue for strengthening regional cooperation and sustainable land management, and (ii) raising awareness on the role of civil

society in regional cooperation in environmental for sustainable development and sustainable land management.

- **Component IV** was intended to provide capacity building to address regional SLM priorities and for REAP's implementation. Component IV included the following activities: (i) regional capacity building for sustainable land management and REAP implementation and monitoring, (ii) developing projects to support REAP implementation, and (iii) disseminating REAP product/experiences and best practices to a wider audience. Component IV relied heavily on demonstration projects and micro-projects as a means to build capacity. They intend to "*address acute regional environmental problems, improve long-term effectiveness of the regional programmes through better coordination, understanding, and accumulated information and knowledge, and expertise".* Each participating country was to have a pilot demonstration project.

13. Modifications were made to the design of the project. It is noteworthy that neither the *Inception Phase* nor the *MTR*[12] - which are critical points in the project management cycle for revising a project's design in light of changing circumstances and experience - were utilised in this project. As a result modifications have gone ahead in a largely unstructured and *ad hoc* fashion that might have been avoided, had there been a substantial inception phase and midterm review. The most significant modification followed the Global Ministerial Environmental Forum held in Dubai in 2006 after which "*the Ministries of the Environment of CACs expressed the need to conduct additional assessment reports on the so-called emerging issues like Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF), Atmospheric Brown Cloud (ABC), Renewable Energy and Waste Management. These topics, along with Climate Change, which was later added to the list of emerging sub-regional challenges, were not initially envisaged in the Project Document*".[13]

2.2. Project implementation and execution arrangements

14. The project was internally executed through the UNEP Regional Office for Asia and Pacific (ROAP). In reality, it had a relatively complex implementation and execution arrangements:
"The UNEP Division of GEF Coordination (DGEF) acted as the project's GEF implementation agency.
UNEP/Division of Regional Cooperation (DRC)/ ***ROAP*** *was the leading executing agency for this project and therefore took responsibility for overall project management, organizing donor conferences and workshops, and providing continuous briefing on the project status and implementation achievements to the interested donor agencies. Specific technical tasks were to be undertaken by regional organizations through sub-contracts, such as ISDC, SIC, REAP country focal points, AIT-RRC.AP.*
The ***REAP Secretariat****, hosted at AIT-RRC.AP, took care of day-to-day project coordination and management on behalf of UNEP/DRC/ROAP. Later during the project, the key project coordinator, as former staff of RRC-AIT, managed the project as UNEP staff based at ROAP.*
Implementation was envisioned as a cooperative effort. Since the project was based on a partnership initiative of ADB, UNDP and UNEP, a ***Project Steering Committee*** *was established with the representation of three donor agencies and ISDC. At a later stage, governing functions rested only with UNEP and ISDC.*
As REAP and regional cooperation initiatives are a long-term programme, of which this project is just an initial part, the long-term oversight and coordination was envisioned to be carried out through ***ISDC*** *or regional mechanism created in its place"*[14]

[12] It is not clear whether an Inception Phase (plus report) and a MTR were requirements for an MSP by GEF and UNEP at this time
[13] Source: REAP project Terminal Report
[14] Source: TE ToR and REAP project Terminal Report

2.3 Project financing and co-financing

Table 1 Project financing (including co-financing) from Project Document (USD)

Activity	Baseline	Alternative	Increment
Component 1	27,500	320,000	292,500
Component 2	90,400	845,900	755,500
Component 3	28,000	456,000	428,000
Component 4	55,000	942,000	887,000
Administration	0	328,000	328,000
Planning/PDFA	0	25,000	25,000
Total	200,500	2,916,000	2,715,500
GEF contribution			1,000,000
Co-financing			1,715,500

Table 2 Summary of co-financing from Project Document (USD)

Source	Classification	Type	Amount
CA Countries	Government	In kind	160,500
ADB	Grant	Cash	800,000
UNEP	Grant	Cash	215,000
UNDP	Grant	Cash	500,000
CA NGO(s)	Private	In kind	40,000
Total co-financing			1,715,500

3 Evaluation objectives, scope and methodology

15. The Terminal Evaluation (TE) of the Project "*Support to the Implementation of the Regional Environment Action Plan in Central Asia*" was initiated and commissioned by the Evaluation Office of UNEP, in Nairobi. In line with the UNEP Evaluation Policy, the UNEP Evaluation Manual and the Guidelines for GEF Agencies in Conducting Terminal Evaluations, the TE is undertaken after the project has ended, to assess project performance (in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency), and determine outcomes and impacts (actual and potential) stemming from the project, including their sustainability.

16. The evaluation has two primary purposes: i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and; ii) to promote learning, feedback, and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UNEP, the GEF and their partners. The evaluation identifies lessons of operational relevance for future project formulation and implementation.

17. The TE seeks to determine the following:

(a) How successful was the project in strengthening the political and institutional basis for regional cooperation in CA on SD and SLM and in setting up a regional cooperation mechanism?

(b) To what extent did the project strengthen capacities for information generation and information support to decision-making on SD and SLM in CA? Was a Decision Support System (DSS) established?

(c) To what degree was the project capable to involve civil society in the strengthening of regional cooperation in SD and SLM? Was an institutional mechanism for civil society involvement in policy dialogue developed?

(d) How successful was the project in building capacities for REAP implementation? What were the outcomes of the pilot projects implemented in the field?

18. In the absence of a mid-term evaluation or a MTR[15], the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the TE has identified two issues the TE should focus on:

i. Understanding any implementation issue and variations from the project design, as highlighted in the project implementation report (PIR) in 2008[16], including:
   - Limited project focus on SLM and implementation of SLM related activities in the field - no specific or focussed mechanism towards SLM established;
   - Weak participation of CS;
   - A regional framework convention on environmental protection (the *Convention on Environmental Protection for Sustainable Development in Central Asia*) for SD not signed by all countries;
   - Little replication or follow up recorded;

ii. Assessing the validity of the statements included in the terminal report (March 2011) about the project having been instrumental in providing a comprehensive support to the CA countries in a wide range of areas, including bringing together top level environment decision-makers, scientific circles, civil society organizations as well as grassroots organizations involved in environment in CA. The TE will measure it against the acknowledged low level of financial and political commitment of country partners towards implementing and sustaining project outcomes

3.1 Evaluation methodology

19. The TE follows a number of critical stages:

i. Inception phase: the inception phase, and subsequent report, aimed to: undertake a desk review of the project's documentation; review the quality of the project design and a draft the projects' Theory of Change (ToC); finalise the evaluation plan and organise the logistical arrangements and an itinerary for the country visits and field work.

ii. Country visits and fieldwork: the TE team, consisting of an international (Team Leader) and regional consultant (Supporting Consultant), carried out interviews and visited institutions and individuals involved in the project and demonstration projects in two sample countries (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), during a period comprised between mid-May and mid-June 2012.

iii. Interviews with institutions and individuals in countries not visited by the TE team: where possible, individuals were contacted by telephone and email in the countries not visited by the TE. The TE team found it difficult to locate and contact people who had been involved in the project.

iv. Visit to Implementing Agency (IA), Executing Agency (EA) and project Secretariat: following the country visits, the Team Leader visited Bangkok to discuss with the ROAP Director and Deputy-Director, the GEF Task Manager and staff of the Division of Environmental Policy Implementation (DEPI), and staff of the AIT-RRC.AP which acted as the Secretariat for the project. These visits took place on 13-15 June 2012.

v. Analysis and report writing: following the country visits and the field work, the Supporting Consultant produced a Technical Report, and the Team Leader a draft TE Report for review and comment by the UNEP Evaluation Office and the UNEP Task Manager. A subsequent draft was reviewed by the main project partners prior to the finalisation of the evaluation report.

20. For the evaluation timeframe, places visited and types of stakeholders interviewed please see Annex 3 Evaluation Programme.

[15] [15] It was not a requirement not a habit to have MTR on MSP at the time of GEF III finding cycle. Around 2006/2007 rules were applied to GEF IV requiring MSPs to have an MTR

[16] 4865 REAP – PIR 2008 - final

3.2 Limitations of the terminal evaluation

21. There are obvious limits to carrying out any evaluation three and a half years after a project has ended, not least of these is that the recollections of stakeholders become less accurate over time. Furthermore, there are limitations on how long certain records are kept, and the job of evaluating a project accurately is made that much harder if, as in the case of the REAP project, there was no MTR of the project. Despite considerable efforts by the TE team to establish contact with those involved in the REAP project, the team found a general unwillingness to meet and discuss the project on a number of occasions, which included site visits to the demonstration projects (a major component of the project's strategy) in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and any of the small grants projects. Furthermore, information about the project - including a number of project-related documents - was available in Russian only.

22. The diffuse nature (across five countries in the CAR) and the insufficient budget for the TE to visit all five countries made it difficult for the TE team to meet, interview and visit all stakeholders and demonstration projects. It was often necessary to rely on secondary material to form an understanding of the project. Therefore, the TE team sampled countries to be visited (two out of five) rather than visiting all of them. Moreover, the TE country visits were originally planned around a scheduled meeting of the ISDC that would have provided an opportunity for the TE team to meet and interview some of the main stakeholders involved in the project. However, the ISDC meeting was postponed until after the TE mission, to a date unknown.

Section II. Project Performance and Impact

4 Attainment of objectives and planned results

4.1 Achievement of outputs and activities

Given the time passed since the end of the project, the TE team found it hard to assess both the quantity and quality of all of the activities implemented and outputs achieved. Clearly some of the outputs are of good quality and appear to have been delivered in a timely and efficient fashion. However, the reporting procedures appear to have been chaotic through most of the project's lifetime (admittedly with a marked improvement in the latter part of the project when a new Task Manager was appointed). This makes it very difficult for the TE team to judge the timeliness of these outputs, and to understand how they were contributing to the project's overall strategy to achieve the outcomes and objective.

23. Overall, the project appears to have performed best in component II, although a number of these "deliverables" were provided by the Executing Agency (e.g. the ecoportal) and arguably, while useful, had little impact on building the capacity of the regional and national institutions. A brief assessment of the outputs is made in the table overleaf.

Overall rating: Moderately Satisfactory

Component	Output	Planned Elements/sub-outputs[17]	TE comments
Component I: Strengthen mechanisms for regional cooperation	Output 1: Regional cooperation mechanism and agreement on environment for SD and SLM	• Regular ISDC meetings • 5 national and 1 regional workshops completed • Implementation plan agreed by ISDC and donors • Operational mechanism for regional cooperation and replication of best practices established • Proposed mechanism endorsed by the ISDC • Donors and countries' funding for a number of REAP project proposals secured • Clear process of funds utilization developed • Clear procedures for reporting and accountability developed	Workshops and ISDC meetings were carried out, including CSO representatives, and it appears that this was a useful function of the REAP project. The Framework Convention remains to be ratified by two out of five countries. There is little evidence to suggest that the ISDC is coordinating donor effort, including ADB and UNDP funding. The issue of the Financing Mechanism appears to have been lost in both the project's design and its implementation. There is no clear chain of authority that is necessary for accountability.
Component II: Strengthen decision-making support system	Output II: Sufficient capacities for effective generation and application through development of Decision Support System (DSS) in environment for SD and SLM	• Needs assessment report and conceptual framework for DSS presented and approved at the regional workshop • Agreements on free data exchange between the countries across the network reached • Effective decentralised data network established • Implementation plan approved • Capacity of the network through training and provision of hardware/software increased • Core datasets and indicators on SLM and SD identified • Network of data-holding organisations created by end of the first year of the project • Data accessible across the network and between data holding institutions at the national and regional levels • Workshops reports prepared • Use of DSS by different user groups as a repository on information on environment and SD increased by end of the project • Needs of decision-making organisations identified • Analytical tools (models, hot spot case studies, publications) identified and results effectively communicated for replication • GIS interface and SW developed	The REAP project effectively established a system for data sharing between CAR countries and it is clear that there is strong support for the ISDC from academics and technocrats as a mechanism for regional cooperation (see section 4.3 for the effect of this on the project's outcomes).

[17] Terminology and information from REAP project Terminal Report.

		• At least 5 training workshops on data application at the national level completed	
Component III: Civil society participation	Output III: Institutional mechanism for civil society involvement in policy dialogue	• Needs and opportunities for CS participation identified and a mechanism for CS participation proposed • Workshop reports prepared • CS participation mechanism endorsed during a regional workshop on NGOs/CS • Implementation plan for the CS mechanism prepared • Operational Public Council established under ISDC • Effective information dissemination system established • Best practice handbook and review on CS projects prepared • Workshop reports completed • Partnership with existing training and advisory centres established • At least 3 regional training courses for representatives of CS organised • Regional programmes for CS capacity-building prepared, including intersectoral bridging programmes and computer networks • A number of NGO projects on support to regional cooperation and key regional REAP priorities developed	The project has had a number of initiatives on CS participation, but the TE considers that the project has not challenged the *status quo* sufficiently. The inclusion of CS in the political process as it relates to SLM requires a significant transfer of powers from the state, from technocrats as well as from donors (see section 4.3 for the effect of this on the project's outcomes and section 6.3 for a brief description of the CS activities)..
Component IV: Capacity building for REAP implementation	Output IV: Sufficient regional capacities and increased investments in SLM and environment for SD through implementation of REAP projects	• Possible constraints for REAP implementation identified • Mechanism to address the possible constrains defined • Specific priorities for REAP projects defined • Five REAP pilot demonstration activities established that address REAP priorities • Methodologies, guidelines and knowledge accumulated during the REAP process summarized and disseminated • Results of REAP preparation and implementation regularly communicated • REAP experience recognised by the involved national, regional and international organisations in the region and outside • Best practices and lessons learnt from pilot activities collected and disseminated	The REAP project was essentially about making the ISDC work and become sustainable. Yet this component appears to be expecting the implementation of REAP to progress through projects. As four out of five demonstration projects were not based upon REAP, nor OP#15 priorities, their lessons were not widely communicated, and generated little, if any, best practices. REAP and the ISDC are relevant in the region, but this is still not largely recognised by other international organisations working in the region. Four of the five planned demo projects were actually implemented. In addition to the demonstration projects, the project also funded a number of micro-projects through SSFAs. The

project's terminal Report identifies 35 demonstration projects and micro-projects. The available information on SSFAs was very limited and the TE Team found it hard to understand the topics of the SSFAs from the information provided by RRC-AP/AIT. The TE was provided with information on only 14 micro-projects and was unable to find any information relating to the other 17 reported by the Terminal Report. Please refer to Annex 7 for a fuller account of the demonstration and the micro-projects.

4.2 Relevance

24. Annex 6 provides a review of the project's relevance from a design perspective. This section provides a retrospective analysis of the relevance of the outputs and outcomes.

4.2.1 Sub-regional environmental relevance

25. The Project Document provided a convincing argument for the need to support the REAP in Central Asia, listing a range of pressing environmental issues and challenges that require inter-governmental collaboration and agreements, including: land degradation, air pollution, water pollution, waste management and mountain ecosystem degradation (Project Document p. 3).

26. As it is documented in the project's Terminal Report (Section 3.3 p. 26), in 2006 a number of "emerging" issues were added to the project's list of environmental challenges that the REAP project was intended to address. These included: GLOF, ABC, renewable energy and climate change. The inclusion of these "emerging issues" is at the same time a measure of the project's relevance to emerging needs, but also a reflection of weaknesses in both the project and the ISDC, which requested additional support from UNEP, rather than trying to find a broad political agreement and allocating resources from national budgets to address the issues.

4.2.2 Sub-regional policy relevance

27. The preparation of REAP for Central Asia was initiated after the official request of the Ministers of Environment of the five participating CA countries in February 2000. REAP was based on priorities identified in National Environmental Action Plans (NEAPs)[18], National Action Programmes to Combat Desertification (NAPCD)[19], National Communications to the Framework Convention on Climate Change[20] and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans[21], the Interstate Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) as well as on-going national and regional projects and programmes. It was a collaborative effort of National Focal Points and Collaborative Centres from each participating country, and a number of national NGOs. The REAP project was thus clearly embedded in the regional environmental policy framework.

4.2.3 UNEP mandate and policy relevance

28. The objectives of the REAP project were relevant to the UNEP mandate and its policies of the time, although the conformity to the latter is not fully described in the project document. The project is fully in line with the work UNEP conducts on ecosystem management, as expressed by the objective of the UNEP Sub-Programme on Ecosystem Management (2010-11) - "to enhance the human, technical and institutional capacity of Governments and other stakeholders to implement environmental policy and to improve environmental management" – and some of its outcomes:

- "*Strengthened capacity of Governments and other relevant stakeholders in the implementation of environmental policies and programmes for environmental management in the context of sustainable development*"
- *"Enhanced capacity at the international, regional and national levels to better prevent, prepare for, respond to and mitigate the impacts of environmental emergencies and/or disasters with impacts on the environment"*
- *"Greater availability and use of biodiversity information and policy analysis products for developing countries and multilateral environmental agreements bodies"*

4.2.4 GEF focal areas, strategic priorities and operational programmes relevance

29. The project is set within the context of a number of GEF Focal Areas, such as: Biodiversity, International Waters, Climate Change, and POPs. The TE team agrees, to an extent, with the statement in the Project Document (Section C, p. 9) that acknowledges the consistency of the project

[18] Prepared in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan.
[19] Prepared in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan.
[20] Prepared in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan
[21] Prepared in Kazakhstan

with the GEF OP15 on SLM. The expected outcomes of GEF-supported activities on sustainable land management include the following:

- Institutional and human resource capacity is strengthened to improve sustainable land management planning and implementation to achieve global environment benefits within the context of sustainable development.
- The policy, regulatory and economic incentive framework is strengthened to facilitate wider adoption of sustainable land management practices across sectors as a country addresses multiple demands on land resources for economic activities, preservation of the structure and functional integrity of ecosystems, and other activities.
- Improvement in the economic productivity of land under sustainable management and the preservation or restoration of the structure and functional integrity of ecosystems.

30. The REAP and ISDC have evidently a much wider remit than that of OP#15 (*e.g.* on waste disposal). OP#15 was thus used for what is essentially a cross-cutting issue of resource governance at a regional scale. Effectively all of the issues that the REAP project was involved with had SLM implications. The development of the draft Framework Convention was obviously highly relevant to OP#15, and the apparent divergence away from core SLM issues (as noted in the two PIRs and the Terminal Report) is actually a feature of the complexity of SLM. However, when it came to the issue of the demonstration projects, it is harder to understand just how these were relevant, and where they fitted into the project's SLM strategy[22].

Overall rating: Satisfactory

4.2 Effectiveness

31. The effectiveness of the REAP project is largely measured against the expected outcomes of each project component,

- Strengthened political and institutional basis for regional cooperation in SD and SLM;
- Strengthened information support to decision-making on SD and SLM;
- Involvement of CS in strengthening of regional cooperation in SD and SLM;
- Enhanced capacities to address regional SLM priorities and to implement the REAP.

32. The TE team found it difficult to use monitoring information to assess the project's effectivess: the design of the project's logical framework is weak, and the indicators are essentially either re-stating outputs or activities, or are actually targets or deliverables. As the evaluation took place so long after the end of the project, the TE used the information from the project's Terminal Report to assess the progress towards the achievement of the project outcomes (Annex 9).

33. Overall, the TE team considers that:

- Outcome 1 has not been achieved: the Framework Convention was developed but not ratified by two countries. It would have provided some measure by which ministers and the ISDC could be held accountable. The failure to develop an appropriate financing mechanism – mentioned in the prodoc, but never accomplished – is also important in this respect.
- Outcome 2 has been partially achieved, as regional data sharing mechanisms have been strengthened. On many environmental issues, there is arguably sufficient data to make some of the necessary decisions. However, it is less clear the extent to which this then influenced the decision-making process. The mechanism to make the trade-offs between short term political and development gains and long term system sustainability or resilience seems to be missing.
- Outcome 3 has not been achieved: the mere creation of NGOs does not per se enhance the inclusive nature of the decision-making process on SD and SLM. This component should have been about addressing the enabling environment for CS participation in environmental

[22] A point that was noted in the PIRs

(particularly SLM) governance and management. The term enabling environment has numerous interpretations and can be extremely broad; or focused very closely on the legal, bureaucratic, fiscal, informational, political and cultural factors that might impact on the stakeholders to engage in a process (Brinkerhoff 2004). Regardless, in this instance this component appears to have been no more than a broader communication programme and there is little evidence to suggest that CS organisations are holding decision-makers to account, or that there is any greater transparency in decision-making. There are a number of CS initiatives on-going in the region and this component should have been linked with these.

- Outcome 4 was to be measured by the results achieved by the demonstration projects, micro-projects and the monitoring of the ISDC with greater civil society participation, the outcome reflecting an improved capacity for stakeholders to plan and implement projects related to, and components of, the REAP. The demonstration projects had a number of serious shortcomings (see Annex 7 for more details), and there is little evidence of any increased ability or opportunity for civil society to monitor the implementation of the REAP and the performance of the ISDC.

Overall rating: Unsatisfactory

4.3 Efficiency

34. The REAP project was designed within pre-existing institutions (the IFAS, ISDC, SIC, *etc.*) and agreements (the REAP itself) and a range of other initiatives such as, *inter alia,* the ADB-funded Central Asian Initiative for Land Management (CACILM) and various national reform processes taking place in agriculture, pastures, forestry and biodiversity conservation. The Project Document makes clear that the purpose of the project was to make these initiatives work more efficiently and at a larger regional scale, in many ways a justification for placing it within the broad remit of OP#15. However, it does not appear to have "reached out" to these other developments. One might surmise this happened as a result of its largely academic base, or because UNEP does not have a regional presence in the way that many other donor organisations do, or again because the EA was located in Bangkok.

35. The executing arrangements for the REAP project were cumbersome and complex, and not cost-effective. The TE questions the efficiency of having the Executing Agency located remotely (outside the project area) in Bangkok, and hosted in an organisation (the AIT-RRC.AP) with apparently no experience of UNEP procedures.

36. The project execution arrangements can easily be challenged on the grounds of cost-effectiveness. For instance, US$ 22,623 was spent for ROAP and AIT-RRC.AP staff travel. Yet, there is no evidence that the demonstration projects - a significant part of the fourth project component (with a budget of US$ 206,272 spent and a further US$ 55,000 earmarked for Kazakhstan which was never spent) – have ever been visited either during or after the project by ROAP, AIT-RRC.AP or UNEP representatives.

Overall rating: Unsatisfactory

4.4 Review of outcomes to impacts (ROtI)

37. Part of the UNEP-GEF project evaluation methodology requires the TE team to carry out a Theory of Change (ToC) exercise in order to assess the quality of project design and the actual project results (outputs, outcomes and impacts, expected and unexpected) achieved. A ToC exercise also identifies what are termed "intermediate states", i.e. whether is the project following a trajectory likely to result in an impact that equates to the GEBs of GEF funding. The ToC recognizes that the project and the social, ecological and economic processes are often operating at a different time, and

invariably there will be an intermediate state between completion of the project and the appearance of the impact(s) of the intervention. Therefore the ToC attempts to recreate the logical hierarchy of the project's logical framework, that is, how activities led to outputs, outputs contributed to outcomes and these outcomes would eventually result in an impact bringing about desirable change as measured by the GEF GEB, which themselves can be determined from the relevant OP (in this instance OP#15 Sustainable Land Management, see Annex 6).

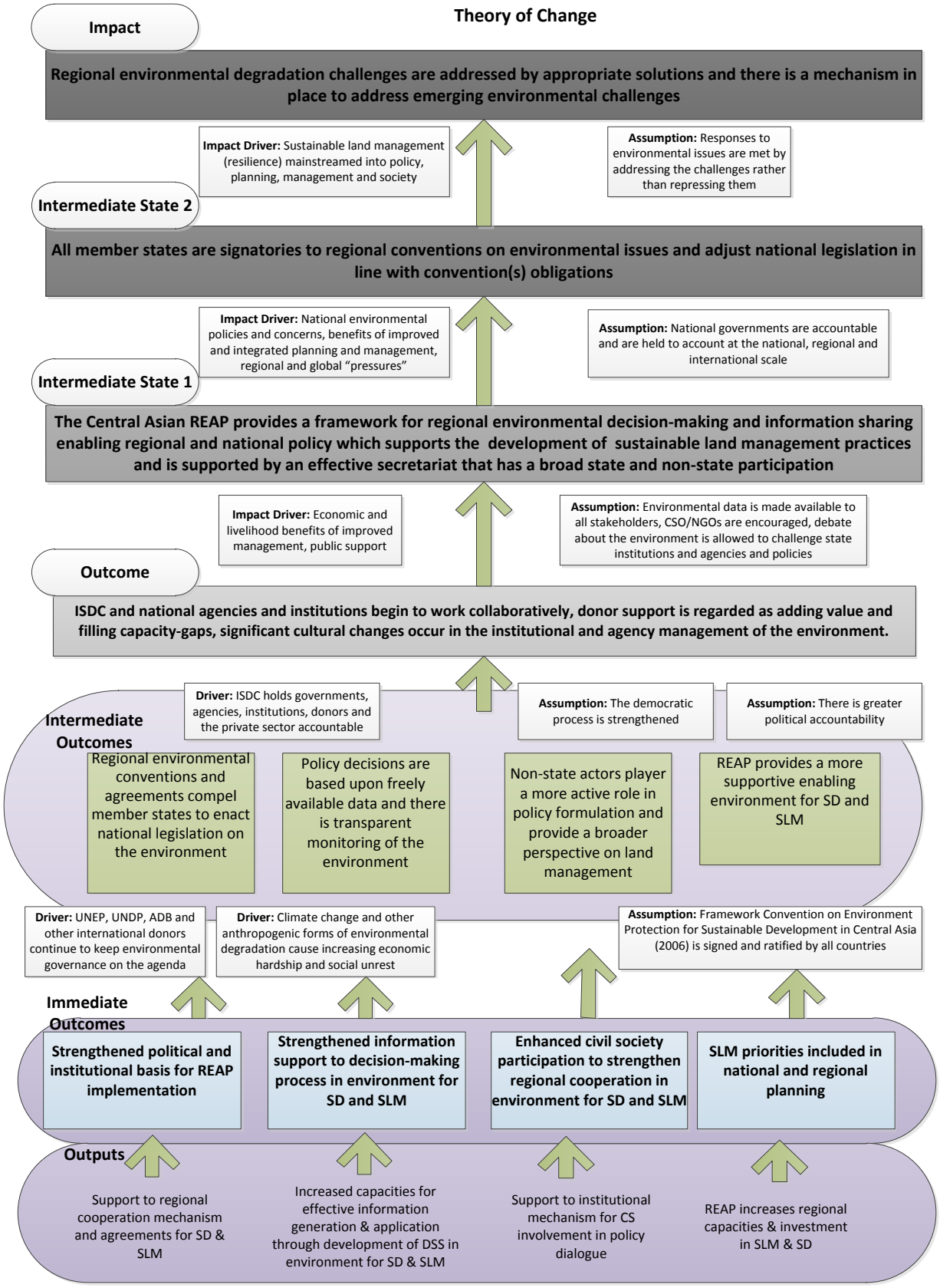
38. From this, it is then theoretically possible to determine the drivers (the significant factors that if present are expected to contribute to the realization of the intended impacts and can be influenced by the project) at different levels, and the assumptions (the significant factors that if present are expected to contribute to the realization of the intended impacts but are largely beyond the control of the project). Based upon this analysis, it should be possible to recognize if a project has produced sufficient changes and to identify the intermediate states, that is, whether what the project has put in place will bring about the long term changes and have a lasting impact (see Annex 6).

39. The TE team designed two ToC. The first (graph 1, overleaf) was drafted during the inception phase, to be then quality-assured through interviews and field visits in collaboration with some of the project staff. It tracks the project against the initial ToC theoretical "trajectory" resulting from the project document. The second (graph 2) was formulated later to understand to which extent design issues actually affected the implementation of the project. The difference between the two graphs shows a poor understanding of logical chains, and confusion between drivers and assumption. The TE team is of the opinion that the project design was overambitious in estimating the challenge of building regional capacity and what was necessary to bring about change in collective decision-making and an adaptive change management within the organizations and the institutions. It did not also adequately thing through the inclusion of demonstration projects in the project's strategy, which proved not to have produced any results higher than at output level. At the end, the project relied heavily upon conventional reporting as a means to bring about change.

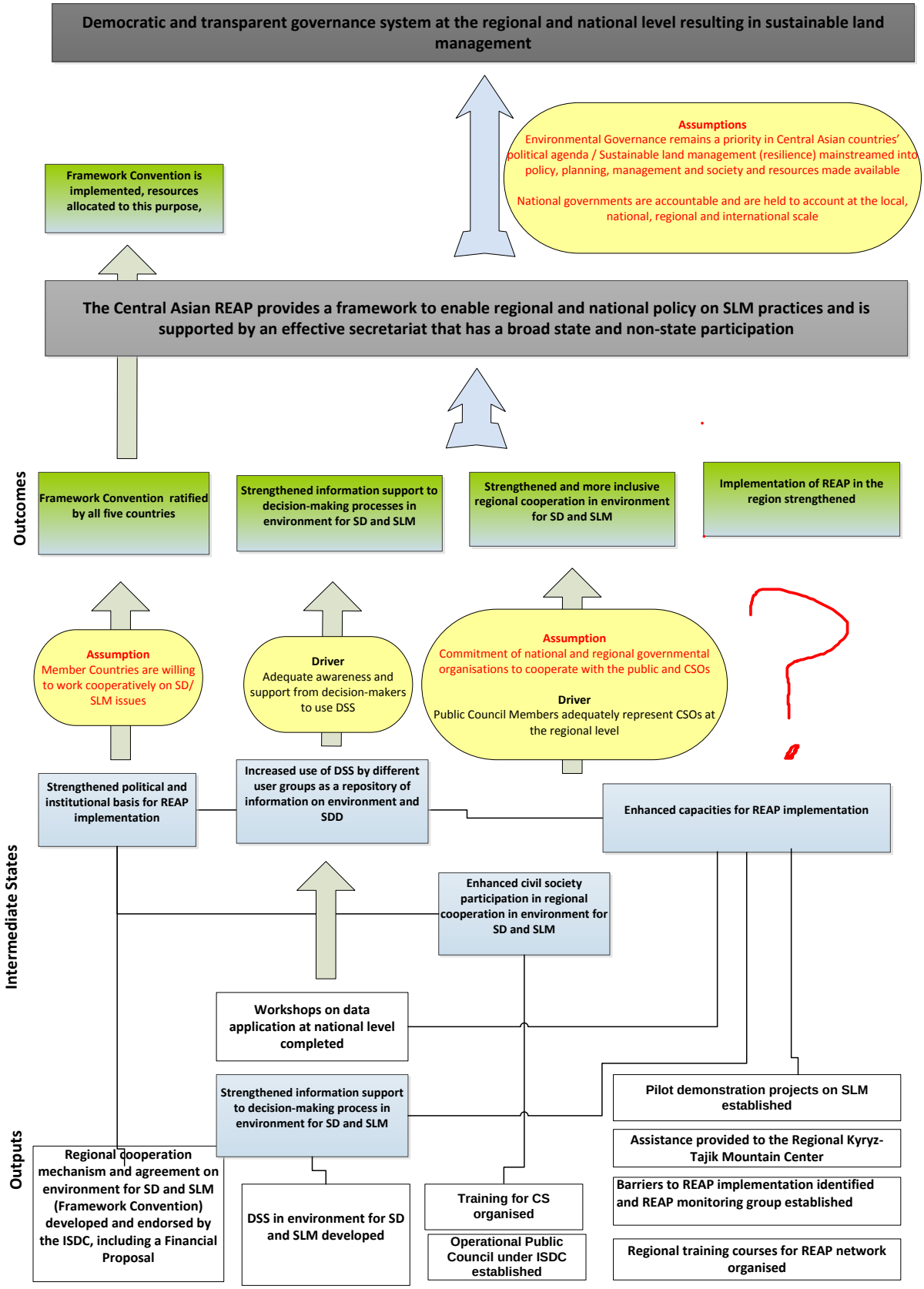
40. The TE team also believes that the REAP project did not achieve its expected results because the implementation, execution and monitoring, certainly in the early days, was so appalling that some of the planned activities were implemented and outputs achieved, but none of them in a coherent way. The project suffered from a lack of supervision, very little accountability and transparency. The inclusion of the demonstration projects, and the amount of resources allocated to them, has shifted the project away from core issues.

41. Overall, the review of outcomes to impacts (ROTi) presents a number of challenges to the evaluation, not least being that it is hard to gauge the difference between the "*with project*" and "*without project*" scenarios. The likely reason for this is the failure of the project to hold together as a driver of change. It is clear that the ISDC and REAP are broadly accepted by the five member countries and regionally REAP is felt to be needed; however the project lacked any real leadership in driving the process. Compared to the pre-project scenario, there is more regional cooperation, and civil society organisations are slightly more active but the TE team feels that this would have occurred anyway. To link the production of the various outputs produced during the project (*e.g.* the report on emerging issues, the appraisal reports on priority issues, the Public Council, *ecoportal*, the CA RMC) with any future global benefits as determined by the GEF OP#15 would be tenuous indeed.

Graph 1: Project Theory of Change (at inception stage)



Graph 2: Project Theory of Change



42. The overall rating from the ROTi analysis, in the opinion of the TE team, indicates that the project did not effectively achieve its outcomes and therefore it is not possible detect any signs of an intermediate state. Therefore, the *attainment of the project objectives and outcomes is considered to be unlikely*.

Table 3 Outcome Ratings

Results rating of project entitled:	***Terminal Evaluation of the UNEP GEF project "Support to the Implementation of the Regional Environment Action Plan in Central Asia" GEF Project ID 2175***						
Outputs	**Outcomes**	**Rating (D – A)**	**Intermediary**	**Rating (D – A)**	**Impact (GEBs)**	**Rating (+)**	**Overall**
1. D	1. D	D	1.		1.		
2. C	2. C		2.		2.		
3.D	3. D		3.		3.		
4. D	4. D		4.		4.		
	Rating justification:		**Rating justification:**		**Rating justification:**		
	D = Funds were spent, outputs were produced, but nothing in terms of outcomes was achieved. People attended training courses but there is no evidence of increased capacity. C = Outcomes achieved but are dead ends; no forward linkages to intermediary states in the future.		"Outcomes" scored C or D. Since the outcomes above scored C or D, then there is no need to continue forward to score intermediate states given that achievement of such is then not possible.				

5 Sustainability and catalytic role

Issue	Rating
Sustainability	**Unlikely**
Financial sustainability	**Unlikely**
Socio-political sustainability	**Unlikely**
Institutional sustainability	**Unlikely**
Environmental sustainability	**Unlikely**

43. It is important to distinguish between the sustainability and catalytic role of the ISDC and the outcomes of the UNEP-GEF financed *REAP project.* This section essentially deals with the latter. The TE team found difficult to separate the *project per se* from the ISDC, REAP, and the earlier efforts that went into creating both of these. Ordinarily an evaluation might judge this to be positive in that the projects outcomes were firmly embedded in the process. However, there is sufficient evidence in this case to suggest that the REAP project has had little impact upon this underlying process and that the outputs and outcomes as they relate to SLM and SD, have not survived much longer than the project financing.

44. In many ways the REAP and the ISDC are essentially technocratic organisations/institutions, with roots firmly in the scientific community. It is important to recognise the essential role that a technocratic and scientific regional committee has, does, and will play in the field of environmental (including SLM and SD) management. However, the principal purpose of the REAP project was to provide the basis for decision-making in order to avoid environmental catastrophes, and ensure that social and economic development does not exceed the ecosystems capacity to provide for society across a range of issue.

5.1 Sustainability

45. The Project Document describes the project's likelihood for sustainability (see annex 6, section 3.3) that is unrealistic vis-à-vis the findings of the TE.

5.1.1 Socio-political sustainability

46. The TE team would expect to have seen a more detailed analysis of the prospect of, and issues facing, the sustainability of the project's outcomes in the Project Document. The statement that there was a "solid foundation for its long-term sustainability" is not borne out by the subsequent commitment by national governments and international stakeholders, including in terms of co-financing. For instance, the delivery of financial resources has been derisory, and a cursory examination of the ISDC minutes from the "Chair Rotation Meeting" shows that a number of requests for financial assistance for items might have reasonably been met from national budgets, such as the Anniversary Meeting in the Republic of Uzbekistan in November-December 2009 or the continued operation of the SIC ISDC "eco-portal" (ISDC Decision, 26th May 2006). In many ways there appears to have been a dependence upon UNEP for the continued function of the ISDC and, by association, the implementation of REAP.

47. The addition of the "emerging issues"[23] to the REAP project may have been a genuine effort to include these in the overall framework of the project, or arguably it might also have simply been a means to address these issues without actually allocating national budgetary funds. It is still not clear whether there was genuine commitment from the participating countries. The TE team is of the opinion that there was genuine concern about these issues by the ISDC technical members, but this failed to register itself at the political (Ministerial) level, and the CS participation in the process was demonstrably ineffective in forcing this issue upon the Ministers.

[23] Project Document, Section 3.2, para. 28

48. The argument, put forward in the Project Document, that greater civil society involvement in the project was likely to enhance the prospects of sustainability was very reasonable, and can be supported by logical arguments. However, this hinged upon the nature of this participation. The way the project was designed could only really lead to passive participation, and it appears that this was considered "threatening enough", in as much as some time was taken up trying to control the CS organisations during the Steering Committee meetings.
49. By failing to interact with emerging grassroots and community-based groups and initiatives, the project missed an opportunity to provide these groups with a "*seat at the table"* where they might have had some tangible impact on holding decision-makers to account. What has emerged is a somewhat sanitized CS participation where the needs of CS are apparently broadly in line with the needs of the state, which in environmental management and SLM is an extremely rare occurrence.

5.1.2 Financial resources

50. The development of a "*financial mechanism for regional initiatives under REAP implementation"* first appears under outcome 1[24]. However the *financial mechanism* is not elaborated anywhere within the Project Document, and importantly it does not appear to make it into the project's log frame matrix. The *Framework Convention,* a critical component of the project's strategy, has still to be ratified some three and a half years after the project has finished. The most reasonable explanation for this is that it would force the member states to considerable financial commitments. The Framework Convention is clever in making provisions for binding protocols related to specific issues or actions. While a financial assessment would not necessarily be normal, it would have been prudent to do it as it would have helped to establish national funding to the convention, which it requires. As this was supported by external donors, the parties have every right to request such an analysis, because its implementation appears to be costly.
51. An important aspect of the project's financial sustainability, at least of its potential outcomes, lies in understanding where the region lies in what might be loosely termed *the development cycle, i.e.* whether funds from donors will target projects (with tight financial controls), or programmes (with loser financial control seeding greater responsibility to national institutions), or move into budget support (where accountability is wholly the responsibility of national governments and there is a tacit acceptance that finance (and not governance) is the barrier to achieving development goals). A financial analysis - including a clear indication of what national and regional finance resources are, what would be the donor commitment, and what the various gaps might be – would have been of utmost importance to understand the financial sustainability of the initiative. An example of this was observed by the TE team when they visited the small-scale hydro-electric plant in the Gissar Region of Tajikistan: there were no measures for cost recovery, payment for benefits, maintenance, *ad infinitum.* Despite the fact that the demonstration project had very little connection with the aims and objectives of REAP and the project *per se*, it might still have provided a useful example of payment for ecosystem services (PES). It did not.

5.1.3 Institutional framework

52. Institutionally REAP and the ISDC are probably sustainable, the ISDC being the principle institutional framework with which the project was engaged. However, as already mentioned, this framework existed, albeit with UNEP support, prior to the project, and it is likely to continue after the project[25].

53. It is hard to gauge from an evaluation perspective just how relevant the ISDC will remain, and this becomes particularly important when we consider the OP#15 criteria and the broader mandate of the ISDC and REAP. Clearly the ISDC is valued by scientists and other technocratic personnel as a means to share information and ideas. However, as the Project Document makes clear, the ISDC is not just a platform for scientists, it also has an essentially political role which is the decision-making component of the institution. The importance of the ISDC has been elevated because it brings together decision-makers at a political level. However, the institution, at least from the REAP project

[24] Project document, p. 10 – it appears twice more in the document
[25] It is still functioning, although the TE were unable to meet with any substantial members of the Committee during the TE

perspective, appears lacking in the mechanisms to make decisions at different scales, and it appears to lack the ability to make the important decisions. Those decisions made by the ISDC are on the whole dependent upon donor funding or requiring further study.

54. This might reasonably start in motion a process where initiatives with a more "local" scale such as the Jamoat Resource Centres, the Pasture Committees, Joint Forestry Management initiatives, *etc.*, might easily find the ISDC unresponsive or even obstructive. Clearly the ISDC has a role to play in regional sustainable development. However, under the direction of the UNEP-GEF project when the ISDC was required to "step down" policy and "decision-making" to the site level through the demonstration projects, it left much to be desired, and the very governance of these projects became questionable. The TE makes it clear that this was largely due to the approach by UNEP in the implementation and execution of the project, a lack of oversight and accountability, as well as flaws in the design which did not sufficiently address the institutional strengthening and governance.

5.1.4 Environmental sustainability

55. Environmental sustainability should have been at the very heart of the REAP project: the REAP was intended to address environmental challenges in the region; the ISDC is intended as an regional decision-making forum to resolve environmental degradation, and; measures outlined in the Project Document are intended to put in place a framework for environmental sustainability. The TE questions whether this is possible without the political reform and financial mechanism discussed in section 5.1.1 and the issues of governance raised in section 5.1.2.

56. The demonstration projects proved to be poorly sustainable from an environmental point of view (See Annex 7).

5.2 Catalytic role

57. "*The catalytic role of GEF-funded interventions is embodied in their approach of supporting the creation of an enabling environment and of investing in pilot activities which are innovative and showing how new approaches can work*"[26]. There is little that, with any confidence, the TE can point to as an indication that the project has created an enabling environment for replication and follow-up actions. An obvious example, on the surface, might be the Framework Convention. But the term *enabling environment* has numerous interpretations and can be extremely broad; or focused very closely on the legal, bureaucratic, fiscal, informational, political and cultural factors that might impact on the stakeholders to engage in a process (Brinkerhoff 2004). "Getting more specific about the enabling environment requires, first, elaborating a comprehensive set of influential environmental factors; and second, clarifying the nature of their impacts on various development actors" (Brinkerhoff 2004). To date, the Framework Convention has not been ratified by two of the five parties[27], therefore it is reasonable to state that the project, while it has produced a good Framework Convention document, has not impacted the enabling environment (regardless of how we define it) sufficiently to have the Convention ratified even this long after the GEF financing has finished.

5.2.1 Catalyzed behavioural changes

58. The TE finds little, if any, evidence of the behaviour changes usually expected from a successful GEF MSP. The Sub-regional Sustainable Development Strategy (SSDS), the Framework Convention, the Ecoportal, Public Council, etc., were largely project driven and there is very little evidence that the project has left a culture of monitoring and evaluating the performance of environmental agencies and governments. The need to assess the statuses of the environment through reports had already been identified before the project. As such, while the project was instrumental to

[26] Source: TE ToR guidance notes

[27] The Task Manager has stated that the framework Convention has been ratified by a fourth country but the TE could not find any evidence that this is the case or indeed which of the remaining countries (Uzbekistan or Kazakhstan) had ratified the Convention.

their development and financing, it would be misleading to attribute their perceived requirement to the GEF funding.

5.2.2 Incentives

59. There is no evidence that the REAP project advanced as far as developing any types of social, economic, market-based or other incentives for SLM, or indeed any other type of environmental goods or services management. For instance, the Medium-Sized Hydroelectric Power Plants (MHPP, demonstration project) had not addressed the issue of pricing and paying for the electricity generated. Indeed it was striking how little thought had gone into the planning and design of this component of the demonstration project.

5.2.3 Institutional changes

60. The pilot projects were effectively "*one off"* events. In Tajikistan the TE was shown project proposals for two more MHPPs that had apparently been submitted to the project unit but (quite reasonably) declined for funding, suggesting that there was a gap in the understanding of the purpose of these demonstration projects.

61. The TE also points to the apparent reluctance of the ISDC to meet with the TE team to discuss the project as an indicator that the ISDC appears to be reluctant to engage in any challenging debate on issues of governance. On the contrary, individual scientific or academic members of the ISDC were extremely open in their discussions. In this regard the postponement to a date unknown of the ISDC meeting - which the TE team was supposed to attend - was indeed a missed opportunity. Therefore the TE must conclude that there has been little in the way of lasting impact upon institutional behaviour.

5.2.4 Policy changes

62. There are a number of important policy developments taking place in the region with regards to SLM which are mostly being driven by donors (*e.g.* ADB, UNDP, GIZ). However, the REAP project appears to have been less involved in these developments, performing well on a scientific and technocratic level but poorly on a governance one. It might be argued that the policy changes such as the development of the SSDS, the Public Council and even the Framework Convention have contributed to these "external" developments and reforms, but the TE was unable to come up with any credible or convincing evidence to link the project initiative with these others. The withdrawal of the ADB and UNDP co-financing at an early stage[28] rather supports the view that there was considerable distance between the REAP project and many of the pasture, integrated forest management and biodiversity management developments on-going in the region.

5.2.5 Catalytic financing

63. Without having had the chance to meet with the ISDC management staff and with no formal financing mechanism or plan, it is hard to gauge the status of the ISDC's financing and the likely financial sustainability of the REAP itself. The financial implications of the Convention's ratification by the Member States has been discussed, but there is no coherent plan to either calculate the costs (including the likely short term opportunity costs across different policy sectors) or to actively source finances and identify the funding gaps. A remarkable aspect of the REAP project and the ISDC is that it never appears to have broadened out its funding base. In many ways it has remained dependent upon UNEP for financial support, or it would seem that it only considered UNEP a source of financing. This is remarkable because the REAP and the ISDC are regionally important as well as broadly accepted (at least at a political level) regional bodies/mechanisms for guiding environmental issues. Yet, despite the GEF project, there is no estimation of the costs or plan to finance them.

[28] TE has no evidence that their commitments of US$ 800,000 and US$ 500,000 respectively, were ever confirmed by Letters of Commitment.

5.2.6 Created opportunities

64. The ISDC has certainly created champions and supporters amongst academics and scientists in the region, who regard it as an important regional forum for their work, a view that is broadly shared by the TE. However, this loyalty and high regard for the ISDC and REAP appears to stem from a former time (admittedly supported by UNEP). There is little evidence that the REAP project *per se* has contributing enhancing this situation. For example, in several instances, the TE team found themselves talking at cross-purposes, as interviewees having praised the ISDC and REAP then admitted to never having heard of the UNEP-funded *REAP project.*

5.3 Replication

65. The TE has already documented the shortcomings with the project in its ability to facilitate institutional change, to create an ISDC that is capable of "translating" scientific information into policy decisions and ultimately into actions on the ground, that is to address collective and inherently adaptive challenges[29] facing environmental management, and particularly SLM in the CAR. The not-fully ratified Framework Convention, the lack of any financing mechanism, the absence of any scaling up of project outcomes, an absence of any meaningful lessons on SLM from the demonstration projects, a lack of any constructive analysis of the demonstration projects, the failure of the small grants projects, the irrelevance of the Public Council on matters of SLM, *etc.*, all indicate that the job might be half-started. There is no evidence of any replication that can be directly attributed to the project *per se*. It would be risky to try to replicate the experience in other projects.

Overall rating: Moderately Unsatisfactory

6. Processes affecting attainment of project results

- The project suffered from very weak project management. Overall the TE team feels that the project has lacked sufficient drive, and this has resulted in a lack of "ownership" and progress towards the objective. The initial design phase underestimated the capacities of the ISDC to implement a project.

66. The following sections examine what might be described as the operational issues that will have affected the performance, outcomes and long term impacts of the GEF-funded project.

6.1 Preparation and readiness

67. Addressing this component of the evaluation, more than most sections, allows one to see where the REAP project was, in many ways, handicapped from the very beginning. The issue of the REAP, and support to the ISDC, is a very clear and important need. It had grown out of donors and CAR countries gradually aligning their interests on environmental issues within the region and the long term support that had been provided by donors, but particularly by UNEP, to the development of a regional approach to addressing the many and pressing environmental challenges. Therefore the development of a GEF-funded project to support the implementation of the REAP and the institutional development of the ISDC appears to be a very logical outcome.

68. However, a project development is influenced by donor cycles, and the requirements of different funding programmes. The elements of careful design can easily become sacrificed to the vagaries of opportunity and the expedience of fitting within external donor cycles. The REAP project was placed within the GEF OP#15, and furthermore, it was conceived as a small to medium-sized project (SMP), limiting the financing available to a maximum of US$ 1 million from the GEF fund.

[29] An *adaptive challenge* describes the more difficult work needed, particularly in times of change. A *technical challenge* is one in which the expertise exists within the institution or can be developed, and simply needs to be accessed and applied to the situation at hand.

Within this budget, the project tried to address numerous issues, including the "*emerging issues"* added while still trying to meet the objectives of OP#15.

69. The TE team is of the opinion that: i) the REAP project was arguably under-financed[30] for the challenge of forging regional agreements on environmental management; ii) it mixed up core GEF OP#15 SLM issues with broader environmental issues[31] such as GLOF, POPs, climate change, *etc*., and; iii) the issue of water management (except in terms of pollution) was, importantly, excluded for political and institutional reasons.

70. The project's objectives were reasonably clear and practicable within the timeframe, at least in terms of moving the process forwards. However, the components, as means to achieve these objectives, were not carefully planned and lacked the necessary tools and methodologies for driving such a process. The TE has repeatedly stressed that meaningful regional collaboration on environmental issues is an adaptive challenge. Technologies will play a part in this, but problems cannot be fixed by technology alone. The objectives of the project can only be achieved by changing perspectives, and developing the capacity of the ISDC to make the trade-offs between ecosystem resilience and short term development on one side, and economic gains on the other. Expecting this to happen without providing a substantial Chief Technical Assistant with experience of institutional change and reform was wholly unrealistic.

71. In addition, the project design suffered from major shortcomings, including:

- The Project Document did not marry the regional priority needs with the objectives of GEF OP#15.
- The very good barrier analysis, included in the project document, has not been coherently translated into an appropriate intervention response. This should have been raised during the GEFSEC review;
- The project underestimated the scale of the challenge of *building regional capacity for replication and scaling up of successful practices and approaches in SLM*, and missed the appropriate tools to facilitate institutional change, collective decision-making and adaptive change. The project has relied heavily on conventional reporting or the development of discrete outputs as a means to bring about change. There are a number of tried and tested methodologies and tools for facilitating adaptive change, and for understanding and changing institutional cultures and practices. However, these were not employed by the project to facilitate *the process.*
- The failure to include a comprehensive financial analysis, and to develop a financial mechanism, admittedly a hugely time consuming and costly undertaking, was inevitably going to lead to a situation of inertia, particularly as it relates to decision-making without any plausible indication of the likely financial repercussions. The Project Document presented a good idea that had been subsequently "reduced" to meet the needs of fund management and, as such, was unrealistic.
- The concept of demonstrating effective environmental management at a regional level with a demonstration project in each country has to be challenged. At USD 1 million (the cost to GEF), or USD 200,000 per country, the inclusion of these demonstration projects was both an irrelevance and a distraction to the original project design. Given the amounts allocated to them, it is highly questionable just what the project was trying to achieve. To step down from the very difficult task of facilitating a collective action amongst five nations to site-level activities to demonstrate the effectiveness of the project's actions (bearing in mind that certain key aspects of the intervention, such as the Framework Convention, was never even ratified) is really "*putting the cart before the horse*"[32] (see Section 9, Lessons Learned 3).

[30] The issue of financing will be elaborated further in section 6.5

[31] In many ways this is an artificial distinction created by the need to programme funding within GEF but it does impact on project design.

[32] "*Putting the cart before the horse"* is an English idiom that translates easily regionally and means to get things in the wrong order or to do something without sufficient preparation.

Overall rating: Unsatisfactory

6.2 Implementation approach and adaptive management

72. The execution and implementation arrangements for a complex project in a challenging operational environment where good governance and accountability, as well as a culture of monitoring and evaluation, are known to be weak were not well-thought through and were clearly inadequate. Implementation arrangements and description of these arrangements post project left much to be desired, something that, given the emphasis on results-results based management and accountability professed by the GEF and UNEP, the TE finds surprising. The project has had a mixture of project and small fund dispersal, effectively subcontracting many of the projects outputs to third parties. However, the governance structure was never designed to do this. The very idea that demonstration projects and micro-projects fund dispersal in Central Asia can be adequately administered from Bangkok has to be challenged, and yet a considerable proportion of the project's funds were allocated to this without adequate monitoring and evaluation or even *due diligence* procedures in place.

73. The project implementation arrangements were largely dispensed with during the first half of the project. At its start, the project planned to have a vaguely defined Project Implementation Unit (PIU) or Project Management Unit (PMU) in the ISDC Secretariat based in Turkmenistan (although it should be noted that the Secretariat for the ISDC rotates between member states and appears to be in some ways separate to the Ashgabat secretariat), with a Project Secretariat and a Project Leader sitting in the AIT/RRC.AP. As stated above and - as far as the TE team understands - the Ashgabat secretariat appears to have fulfilled the role of a PIU/PMU, on paper at least, but it lacked a central leadership role necessary for this purpose. If the ISDC Secretariat was expected to play this role, then the project's support (from the AIT/RRC.AP) to it was insufficient and questionable, given that capacity building was a key aspect of the project. No mention of the Ashgabat Secretariat is made in the Project Document, but the Terminal Report suggests that the Ashgabat Secretariat lacked the capacity to manage the project. The same Terminal Report acknowledges that the governance structure could have worked for implementation if "clear and standardized reporting lines would have been kept to support the oversight of the GEF funded project"[33] . This however seems to ignore the fact that the ISDC Secretariat rotates on a biannual basis between countries.

74. Putting this aside, in the final analysis it depends upon where one judges that the decision-making for the project lay. A logical conclusion would suggest that the executive for the project lay with the AIT/RRC.AP and thus the responsibility for its success or otherwise should lie here. However, during the evaluation, there appeared to be little ownership of the project's outcomes and a general unwillingness to accept responsibility for the project.

75. If one accepts that the *AIT-RRC.AP* was mainly responsible for the poor management, it is however worth acknowledging that there was also very little guidance, or even ownership, of the project by the IA/EA at this point. The latter's oversight role during the first years of the project was deplorable. This situation persisted until 2007 when a new Task Manager was appointed, and a change in the management approach appeared, with a noticeable difference in the project reporting (see section 6.7). It was only with the arrival of a new Task Manager at ROAP that some control over this "mission creep"[34] was exerted. The TM describes this as establishing a "firewall" between the IA and the EA. By this time though, the majority of the project's funds had been dispersed, and little could be done to re-focus the project towards its core areas.

76. The project's Steering Committee was described in the Project Document as including the ADB, UNDP, UNEP, ISDC, IFAD and the WB. At the end, as acknowledged in the Terminal Report, it included just UNEP/ROAP, UNEP-DGEF and the ISDC members. The TE team found no explanation for why this happened. UNDP and ADB were not involved in the project as co-financiers;

[33] REAP project Terminal Report, p. 33
[34] The expansion of a project or mission beyond its original objectives and goals.

yet, no explanation has been forthcoming for the non-participation of these other proposed project partners. The Steering Committee appears, in many ways, to have been subordinate to the EA, limiting its effectiveness. Coupled with the already mentioned lack of IA's supervision in the early part of the project, there was little direction given to the project and certainly no adaptation of the overall strategy.

77. Overall, the project suffered from weak project management, and sufficient drive. This has resulted in a lack of "ownership" and progress towards the objective. In many instances, there has been a very poor understanding of the REAP project and what its objectives were; in short it has lacked an "identity". There are a number of critical points in a project's cycle where the inevitable weakness and "mistakes" that arise in the design of any project can be addressed. In a GEF project these points are, inter alia, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) endorsement, the Inception Phase and the MTR. The TE observes that none of these opportunities was utilised to critically review the project, and take adaptive actions. Importantly, the TE team could not find any evidence of any visit to the four[35] demonstrations sites. Until 2007 there was very little in the way of reporting on progress from the project. In the TE's opinion it is justifiable that such a project could have been cancelled *had it had* a mid-term review (MTR).

Overall rating: Unsatisfactory

6.3 Stakeholder participation and public awareness

78. Despite the claims made in the project document, the REAP project has largely restricted itself to a narrow group of stakeholders, a contradiction that puts it at odds with the objectives of the GEF OP#15. The TE discriminates between the scientific community who have benefited considerably from the ISDC, and perhaps to some extent from the REAP project, and a wider group of stakeholders such as civil society or rural communities. There is little evidence to suggest that the latter have been included, particularly when one measures this participation against the objectives of OP#15. The project has failed to engage community-based and civil society organisations in any meaningful way. The manner in which CSOs have been able to participate in the project and ISDC meetings has arguably been on the terms set by the ISDC, or more precisely the Ministerial element of the ISDC.

79. A brief examination of all the material produced by the "approved" CSOs suggests that they are being used in one direction only, that is, to communicate messages from the ISDC to a broader public. The idea that there might be a two-way flow of information, that is, from CS and CBOs back to the Ministers appears not to be considered.

80. The TE notes that the Terminal Report regards the very act of CS attending the ISDC meetings as an achievement and there is some merit in this. However, the TE team feels that more should be expected from a GEF SMP in driving CS participation in environmental governance.

81. The SGP was intended, according to the Terminal Report, to engage CS at a site-based level. The SGP "*was aimed at reduction of and prevention from overexploitation of natural resources in Central Asia through funding projects on alternative livelihoods which are more sustainable in terms of use of natural resources. The program resulted in improvement of economic and environmental development at the local level. This program was a component of the REAP implementation involving local communities*"[36]. On the surface this is a commendable, but on the evidence available, the TE feels that this is a statement not supported by evidence.

[35] There were five demonstration projects planned but none was implemented in Kazakhstan.
[36] REAP project Terminal Report, p. 18

Overall rating: Unsatisfactory

6.4 Country ownership and driven-ness

82. Section 3.3 of this report makes clear the limitations of the TE, particularly given that it is taking place so long after the event. The TE team has the impression that there is a clear government ownership of the ISDC and REAP. The preparation of REAP for Central Asia was initiated after the official request of Ministers of Environment of five participating Central Asian countries in February 2000. REAP was based on national priorities identified in a number of documents[37], as well as on-going national and regional projects and programmes. Therefore the UNEP-GEF REAP project designed to implement REAP was clearly embedded in the regional environmental policy framework, even if that process was being driven by donors to a large extent.

83. The overall support in terms of taking responsibility for, and "ownership" of, the project is less clear. Given poor project reporting, it is hard to make out whether the counterpart funding was provided in a timely manner. In kind contributions are always difficult to account for, and are often only visible in a project's success or failure. In the case of the REAP project, one might surmise that the divergence of ISDC regional environmental interest from GEF OP#15 SLM suggests that ISDC objectives were not wholly aligned with GEF objectives. The root of this can be found in the selection of OP#15 as a vehicle for the implementation of the REAP.

84. Regardless of this divergence of interests, the single largest measure of project performance would have been the ratification by all five member states of the Framework Convention; to this date it remains unsigned by Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

85. The participation of rural communities would have been a good measure of meeting the objectives of OP#15 which could have been achieved through outcome three and four. However, there is sufficient evidence that the SGP and the demonstration projects were inadequate, and the CS participation was not at a level where rural communities could engage with the ISDC in any meaningful way that would affect SLM. As it has already been discussed, the CS participation was, in the opinion of the TE, somewhat elitist and on the terms of the ISDC rather than those of CS as equal partners, and certainly it did not step down to a level that would affect the behaviour of people working with land.

Overall rating: Satisfactory

6.5 Financial planning and management

86. The Terminal Report states that: "*The project was managed by UNEP DRC/ROAP and consequently all financial management procedures and transactions conformed to the United Nations Rules and Regulations. The UNEP financial instruments under which funds were transferred to the national level executing agencies were Small Scale Funding Agreements (SSFA), formerly Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs). Payments were usually split in to two instalments with the first payment made upon signing of the Agreement and final being made upon reporting on delivery of outputs and provision of final financial statement. While providing an administrative control mechanism, this mode at some instances proved to be inefficient as national implementing agencies found it complicated completing all outputs without the final instalment paid*"[38].
87. While this may be correct in the assumption that procedures and transactions conformed to the UN Rules and Regulations at the UNEP DRC/ROAP level, the TE is not confident, on the basis of the

[37] National Environmental Action Plans (NEAPs) , National Action Programmes to Combat Desertification (NAPCD) , National communications to FCCC and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans

[38] REAP Terminal Report, p. 30

evidence found, that, once the funds had gone below the UNEP level, there was adequate oversight and accountability. The use of the MoU and later the SSFAs was not sufficient, and there was no replacement for physical checking on the outputs of projects, an area where UNEP is particularly weak not having a substantial "on the ground" presence (see Annex 7 Review of SGPs and Demonstration Projects). There is little in the way of "paperwork" supporting administrative decisions, processes, procurement procedures and even the preparation of the MoUs and SSFAs. Certainly there is little accountability about SSFAs: it appears to have been left up to those actually implementing the projects to decide what level of detail to report.

6.5.1 Co-financing

88. Of the US$1,715,000 promised in co-financing in the Project Document, only 33% (US$566,000) was delivered at the close of the project in December 2008. The most significant shortfalls were from the ADB (US$ 800,000) and UNDP (US$ 500,000). In kind contributions were leveraged from other sources including: UNDP (US$ 50,000), WWF (US$40,000), BAYER (US$ 30,000) and Central Asian civil society organizations (US$ 40,000)[39]. These are associated funding sources, which are not integral part of the project co-funding as they did not deliver directly on the work-plan implementation

The Project Document that the TE has seen does not appear to be the one endorsed by the CEO, as there are still draft comments on it, and, importantly, no Letters of Commitment. Thus it is hard to gauge whether these co-financing amounts were actually confirmed as they were stated in what is essentially a draft Project Document, and reiterated in the project Terminal Report. While not wanting to understate the issue, the TE is mildly surprised with this situation[40]. It is reported that two significant co-financing partners, the ADB and UNDP withdrew their support at the start of the project. This amounted to a cut in the available budget of US$ 1,300,000. No reason is given in the Terminal Report or Progress Reports, and the project did not appear to consider revising its strategy in light of this considerable deficit. Co-financing should be subject to continuous monitoring in order to determine whether, and how, it continues to complement the GEF funds invested in the project. This was not the case for the REAP project.

Table 4 Actual co-financing from Terminal Report (US$)[41]

Co-financing type	Implementing Agency		Government		Other sources		Total	
	Proposed	Actual	Proposed	Actual	Proposed	Actual	Proposed	Actual
Grant	215,000	210,000			1,300,000	120,000	1,515,000	330,000
In kind		36,000	160,500	160,500	40,000	40,000	200,500	236,500
Total	215,000	246,000	160,500	160,500	1,340,000	160,000	1,715,500	566,500

89. The TE is required to "analyze the effects on project performance of any irregularities in procurement, use of financial resources and human resource management, and the measures taken by the EA or IA to prevent such irregularities in the future. Assess whether the measures taken were adequate"[42]. The TE team noted an extremely poor reporting, particularly in the earlier part of the project, the lack of site inspections by both IA and EA, and a number of inconsistencies related to the MoUs and the SSFAs. It is widely accepted that there are weaknesses in the fiduciary capacities of many institutions within the region. Therefore, there should have been tighter controls on accounting and inspections, in particular of the SGPs. The financial planning and management (for instance the issues of banking arrangements and the difficulties encountered by the project) should have been addressed prior to the project start, as they are well known within the donor community. Finally, the

[39] Source: Terminal Report
[40] Despite several requests, UNEP could not find the final project document
[41] A full account of co-financing is given in Annex 5
[42] TE ToR, p. 12

EA prepared the budget according to the UNEP format (by categories of expenditures), while the GEF ToRs require the TE team to fill the project budget table by project component budget.

Table 5 Project costs: Budgeted vs. Actual

Component	Estimated cost at design	Actual cost	Expenditure ratio (actual/planned)
Project personnel	43,200	30,840	0.713
Sub-contracts	638,265	463,260	0.725
Training	201,035	233,136	1.109
Equipment and premises	0	50,000	NA
Miscellaneous	92,500	100,984	1.091
Total	975,000	868,222	0.890

Overall rating: Unsatisfactory

6.6 UNEP supervision and backstopping

90. Clearly the REAP project was not in a good state when, in October 2007, a new TM was appointed. Reporting, and the normal monitoring and evaluation procedures, (see section 6.7) was simply not being carried out. The procedures for project execution had been set out in the Project Document, but even here there are inconsistencies. As discussed in section 4.3, the Project Document posted on the GEF website did not qualify as a CEO-endorsed document. Until the arrival of a new TM, ROAP appears to have been unaware of the necessary procedures and responsibilities of an Executing Agency with little, if any, guidance and support by DGEF.

91. The only plausible explanation for this is that there was little accountability within the organisation prior to, and in the early stages of, the project. There were no identifiable efforts to bring the project in line with reporting, and there was no evidence of any move towards results-based management. An example of this can be seen in the co-financing. How a project is expected to achieve the same results with only 52% of the financing is a question unanswered by the TE. The TE has not unearthed any evidence that what amounted to a funding crisis (the withdrawal of 48% of the projects cash financing) raised anything other than a "*business as usual*" approach. The basic understanding that a project has a start, middle and finish and is expected to deliver or achieve a number of set deliverables, outputs, and outcomes, and make a lasting impact, appears to have been largely missing at an institutional level.

92. The risk assessments in the Project Document were unrealistic. Admittedly, it is hard to develop projects, particularly regional projects, and there is sometimes a need for "political expediency", but this should not extend to financial control. There were no unannounced visits to the demonstration projects. 35% of the GEF budget was spent with little, if any inspection, by the Executing or Implementing Agency. The responsibility lies with the Implementing Agency. By the time that the new Task Manager was appointed in late 2007, and tried to close the metaphorical "stable door", as far as the TE can comprehend, metaphorically, the "horse had already left the stable".

Overall rating: Unsatisfactory

6.7 Monitoring and evaluation

93. The Project Document describes a relatively standard approach to project M&E. It states that: "Component 2 of the project will establish a monitoring and evaluation and decision-support system, which includes the identification of environmental indicators that will be used when assessing impacts of pilot demonstrations in this and future projects". The TE has found no evidence that this has taken place, but feels that this would have been an extremely useful process.

94. The TE notes that the same concept of M&E and the issue of accountability, within the context of countries still operating under a highly centralised and authoritarian system, are still poorly understood and not widely accepted. However, from the project documentation, it would appear that this was also an issue with both the Implementing Agency and Executing Agency, at least until the arrival of a new Task Manager in 2007.

Overall rating: Unsatisfactory

6.7.1 Monitoring and evaluation design

95. The M&E programme in the Project Document is not well-developed. It provides little in the way of pathways, and the sort of feedback loop that is so important for adaptive management, particularly when applied at this scale.

96. The project's log frame matrix is weak. The indicators in it are essentially targets, or a means of verification, or merely restating an output (see section 4.3, para. 56). There is little evidence to suggest that the project execution followed the log-frame in the early part of the project's life. Even if they had, it would have provided little in the way of monitoring the progress and the project results. It was not until the arrival of a new Task Manager in 2007 that there is any evidence that the log-frame was considered as reference. It is surmised by the TE that, in this type of dispersed project execution arrangements, this results in a number of the project partners, who are responsible for critical components of the project's implementation, unaware of the log frame approach to project management and the fact that this is the metre by which the project's performance and outcomes will be judged.

97. An important aspect of any project, and more so a GEF project dealing with SLM, is that it follows some sort of project cycle procedures. As mentioned before, the project did not have an inception phase, nor a MTR. While neither of these were mandatory for a MSP at the time, it would have been very prudent to have included them within the project cycle. It is not clear to the evaluators whether this was UNEP or GEF policy at the time, but it seems extraordinary that, for a project of such obvious complexity, there was neither a scheduled inception phase nor any MTR.

Overall rating: Highly Unsatisfactory

6.7.2 Monitoring and evaluation plan implementation

98. The project's monitoring and evaluation system was very poor, from the design stage throughout implementation, especially until the end of 2007. By the time the new TM was placed in charge of the project's monitoring (which is what the TE assumes was the cause of the improved monitoring), there was a considerable backlog of information, although it appears that obtaining information from the project implementation partners (including the AIT-RRC.AP) has been difficult and in some cases incomplete, at least to an acceptable standard.

99. Especially in the first part of the project, the implementation of the M&E plan lacked legitimacy, appears to have had no "feedback loop" necessary to keep the project on track towards its objectives, was unable to track results against expenditures or to even establish a basic level of audit and accountability. There is no evidence that even the small amount of information provided by the monitoring system was used to adapt or improve the project, indeed to the contrary, the project appears to have ploughed on regardless. It might be argued that this is a characteristic of countries emerging from a command and highly centralised, authoritarian system, to implement a plan whatever. However, GEF projects are essentially about change, and the project should have acted as an agent of change, changing institutional cultures and encouraging individuals and institutions to challenge assumptions and existing practices in light of experience. Indeed, adaptive management is not mentioned once in the project document, and there was no attempt to develop an institutional culture of monitoring and evaluation, to challenge conventional wisdom or to question anything. Given that the project was addressing systemic management in an extremely complex and unpredictable system, the project appears to have assumed that it had *got it all right from the start*, and that it would not need the mechanisms that normally are used to adjust a project's strategy in light of experience. It has been noted by military strategists that, in the rapidly evolving conditions of warfare, "*no plan of operations extends with certainty beyond the first encounter with the enemy's main strength* (*i.e.* no battle plan survives first contact with the enemy)"[43]. Certainly this applies to environmental and SLM projects. The greatest risk for management is that the plans are being implemented for a situation that may have existed in the past, rather than the present, or certain assumptions made during the planning phase do not hold true when the plan is rolled out.

100. The project's risk ratings are, in the opinion of the TE, and to a large extent demonstrated by the project's poor performance, wildly optimistic. For instance the risk factor for co-financing was given a "medium" risk defined as: co-financing "*is secured but payments are slow and bureaucratic*".

101. For the first year of the project 2005 – 2006 there was no PIR and the Half-yearly reports contained little, if any, information. An MTR had never been carried out. The TE team is of the opinion that, had there been more funds left in the budget at that time, it would have been financially prudent to have stopped the project.

Overall rating: Unsatisfactory

6.7.2 Budgeting and funding for M&E Activities

102. There were insufficient funds available for M&E activities. The TE team feels that, together with money allocated to this assessment, there should have been funds also earmarked for an inception phase with some external technical assistance, and an MTR. Also the budget available for the TE's travel costs is considered insufficient, given that five countries participated in the project. The TE was constrained in its scope by the budget available.

Overall rating: Highly Unsatisfactory

7. Alignment with the Bali Strategic Plan (BSP) and South South Cooperation

103. The REAP project was closely aligned with the Bali Strategic Plan, which in many ways is an agreement for cooperation at a very technocratic level. The issue of South South Cooperation is reasonably, if not adequately, addressed by the Framework Convention, which has yet to be ratified though.

[43] Helmuth Karl Bernhard Graf von Moltke, German military strategist.

8. Gender

104. There is no indication that gender was ever addressed in the project design, implementation and monitoring. This is surprising, as there is a body of evidence to demonstrate that SLM is of real concern to women, more so where women are actively involved in agricultural practices as is often the case in countries that have high male migration for work rates, and women play a considerable role in SLM.

105. The Framework Convention did not include the issue of gender, which might have reasonably been addressed in Article 18.

9. Complementarities with UNDP and UNIDO programmes and strategies

106. On paper, the REAP project had considerable synergies with UNDP programmes, such as the on-going CACILM project(s), which are working on SLM through a number of national demonstration projects as well as partnering with the regional ADB implemented regional project. UNDP has a number of civil society and local governance initiatives both regionally and nationally. The project well aligns with the emerging role of UNIDO, which has sustainable development at the centre of its policies, and thus provides an important link between economic sustainability and environmental sustainability. While these complementarities exist between the different agencies programmes and strategies, it is hard to see where the REAP project interacted with these.

III. Conclusions and Recommendations

9. Conclusions

107. Regional environmental action plans, and the idea of having a regional body for sharing information and addressing regional environmental challenges through collective actions, are clearly a need for the Central Asia countries. Existing organizations and institutions, such as the ISDC and REAP, could fulfil this role.

108. The REAP project was well embedded in the regional environmental policy framework, and it provided a convincing argument for the need to support on a range of pressing environmental issues and challenges that require inter-governmental collaboration and agreements, including: land degradation, air pollution, water pollution, waste management and mountain ecosystem degradation. However, the weaknesses in the project's design, the poor implementation and execution, the lack of supervision and accountability and leadership coming too late to the project, have hampered the effectiveness of the project and its ability to achieve behavioural changes and sustainable results.

109. The REAP project was intended to address regional environmental challenges (in particular those related to SLM) on two levels: i) technically, through data sharing, research, *etc.*, and; ii) managerially, through streamlining the decision-making process of the ISDC at a political level. While it would appear that the project has contributed to enhancing collaboration on technical data and monitoring specific environmental factors, there is sufficient indication that it has not achieved long-term results on the second level. The likely reason for this, amongst several, is principally that it lacked the specific tools and methodologies to facilitate institutional change, and the project relied on the production of individual outputs (e.g. scientific reports, data sharing system) to bring about change. The mechanisms for developing civil society participation were insufficient and did not contribute to enhancing the inclusiveness of the decision-making process.

110. The projects execution and implementation have been weak. Overall the project's governance structure was poor, meaning that accountability was diffuse across the project's management structure. In addition to this, there appears to have been a lack of understanding of basic project management procedures with poor (sometimes absent) project reporting in the early years. This situation appears to have improved considerably in 2007 with the appointment of a Task Manager but, by this time, it was too late to salvage the project. The project's M&E, as described in the Project Document, was inadequate. There was no scheduled inception phase, nor MTR, which - although not mandatory - should have been considered necessary.

Attainment of Project objective and outcomes

111. The TE makes a guarded judgement given the issues outlined in section 3.3 of this report.

Objective: To implement key aspects of the Regional Environmental Action Plan for Central Asia and to create enabling conditions for its further implementation through capacity building and pilot demonstrations in Sustainable Land Management

The project has contributed to some extent in ensuring that the ISDC met regularly during the lifetime of the project, and a number of important reports (mostly assessments) were produced using project funds. However, the financing mechanism mentioned in the Project Document was never developed, and thus there are still critical challenges to the long term financial sustainability of the REAP and the ISDC. The principle mechanism for creating the enabling conditions, the Framework Convention, is a reasonably good document, which commits the member states to a number of binding protocols. However, it still remains to be ratified. The Sustainable Development Strategy for CA (SSDS) has been developed and is also a reasonable document, but there is little evidence of the intergovernmental and national commitments, particularly regarding financing for the activities. The demonstration projects are not sufficient in the issues they are dealing with, the scale they are

operating at, or their linkages to the REAP and in particular the Framework Convention, to be considered a success.

Outcome 1: Strengthened political and institutional basis for REAP implementation through regional cooperation and replication of best practices in SLM.
The principal tool for this would have been the Framework Convention, because it would have committed Ministers to binding protocols, actions and allocation of resources, if it had been ratified. The greater participation of civil society would have strengthened the political basis for decision-making, improved governance, allowed opposing views to be heard. However, the nature of CS participation has been weak, in as much as the project has not allowed civil society to participate in a meaningful way in the ISDC. There has not been the fundamental shift in power from state to civil society necessary to hold the ISDC to account. An example of this might be evidence that the civil society organisations had arranged a vigorous campaign to persuade Ministers in the two countries yet to ratify the Framework Convention to do so, or there was a Parliamentarian group included in the ISDC to hold the executive to account.

Outcome 2: Strengthened information support to decision-making on SD and SLM.
Outcome 2 has perhaps been the most successful component of the REAP project. It created a unified sustainable data base, established a Central Asian component for the GEO portal and the Asia Pacific Regional Environmental Knowledge Portal (e-KH) and produced some useful reports on emerging environmental issues in the region. However, there is little to suggest that the use of this data is positively affecting the decision-making process and in the strictest sense of OP#15 a number of the issues are largely outside the OP#15.

Outcome 3: Enhanced CS participation to strengthen regional cooperation in SD and SLM
The project, in the Terminal Report, feels that it has made great strides in promoting civil society. However, the TE team is less optimistic about this, and it feels that the whole issue of CS participation should have been better thought through in terms of governance. This is more so when one considers that the civil society participation should have been largely framed within the scope of OP#15. At the end, the project turned out to be more about communicating messages from the ISDC about environmental issues. Furthermore, the level at which civil society is participating is somewhat elitist and, in the framework of OP#15, greater use should have been made of rural community-level structures and organisations to address issues of authority and responsibility, resource tenure, and access to/ costs and benefits of environmental management and degradation.

Outcome 4: Enhanced capacities to address regional SLM priorities and to implement REAP
While the project appears to have put in place a mechanism to monitor environmental issues identified in REAP and the assessment reports, there is little evidence that there is the sort of critical assessment and monitoring of the performance of the ISDC itself in addressing these issues.
The project appears to have had little concern over weaning the REAP and ISDC off donor support. As mentioned earlier, the inclusion of a financial mechanism in the projects outputs would have been a very big step in this direction. The meetings by the ISDC, and to some extent the project's Steering Committee, resulted in the request for more donor funding (in particular UNEP funding).

The demonstration projects and the small grant projects, a large part of this project component, were poorly thought through, provided little in the way of demonstration and lacked the rigorous and critical analysis necessary to learn lessons. In many ways they should not have been included in the project's design. If investment was needed in SLM, then this should have been through other channels.

Table 6 Project ratings

Criterion	Summary Assessment	Rating
A. Attainment of project objectives and results	- The Project has not achieved its objectives - The activities were not efficiently implemented; - The project has had little impact	U
1. Effectiveness	- Outcome 1 – the Framework Convention is not yet ratified some 4 years after the project's ending. - Outcome 2 – the decision-support mechanism does not appear to influence the decision-making process. - Outcome 3 – Civil society participation was largely passive and ineffective. - Outcome 4 – The demonstration projects have not built any appropriate capacity and there is little evidence of civil society holding the ISDC accountable through monitoring.	U
2. Relevance	- The Project's objectives were relevant at a regional, national and local scale.	S
3. Efficiency	- The executing arrangements for the REAP project were cumbersome and complex and not very cost-effective. - The use of demonstration projects to build capacity in the project timeframe is questionable.	U
B. Sustainability of project outcomes	- The Project has not put in place the necessary mechanisms for sustainability However: - It is likely that the REAP and the ISDC will persist because they serve a function for regional governments and technocrats, but this would have been likely also without the project.	U
1. Financial	- The financing for the ISDC without regular donor support is likely to be insufficient for its effective functioning.	U
2. Socio-political	- Politically the ISDC will continue but this will not meet the criteria for civil society inclusion described as an outcome in the Project Document and it does not have any representation from rural communities nor will it utilise the emerging democratic structures in the region. In many ways it concentrates power in the hands of the Ministers and appears to have little accountability.	U
3. Institutional framework	- There is little doubt that the ISDC will persist, but, without a means of financing and the other necessary reforms and developments, it will not function effectively.	U
4. Environmental	- The project was intended to develop a framework for environmental sustainability, but the TE questions whether this is possible without the political reform and a financial mechanism, at least by the terms set out in the project's objective.	U
C. Catalytic role	- The Project does not appear to have created much of an effect, indeed the TE feels that it may even have strengthened the status quo and a business as usual approach to environmental management.	MU
D. Stakeholders involvement	- Stakeholder participation has been within a narrow group of civil society organisations and on a level that is likely to have little actual impact on land use; - The project failed to include community-level governance structures;	U

Criterion	Summary Assessment	Rating
	- The civil society participation resembled a communications programme, and participation was essentially passive and unchallenging of the existing power base within the ISDC.	
E. Country ownership / driven-ness	- There is strong government ownership of the ISDC and of project outcomes, especially amongst some groups of technocrats	S
F. Achievement of outputs and activities	- Most of the project activities were implemented and the outputs achieved. - However, the TE judges these to be of poor quality and certain key elements such as the Framework Convention has yet to be ratified some three and a half years after the project ended - The financing mechanism mentioned in the Project Document was never developed.	MS
G. Preparation and readiness	- The Project Document underestimated the size and complexity of the challenge. - The preparations for the project governance were inappropriate. - The prodoc lacked a financial analysis. - Partnership relationships were poorly defined.	U
H. Implementation approach and adaptive management	- There was no inception phase although this was clearly needed given the complexity of the project - There was no MTR although this was clearly needed given the complexity of the project. - When there were obvious problems with the MoUs and SSFAs there were no inspections and remedial actions; - Little if any adaptive management has taken place; - Oversight and guidance by the Executing Agency was extremely weak in the early part of the project; - The diffuse "chain of command" was wholly impractical for a project of this complexity; - Co-financing was not well managed and reported; - When things were obviously not working no action was taken by project management. However, - In 2007 a new Task Manager was appointed and oversight and process improved but by this time the bulk of the budget had been spent.	U
I. Financial planning and management	- The TE has is not confident that correct procedures were followed below the level of the Executing Agency. - Co-financing was not adequately monitored and reported. - The MoU and SSFA used to disburse small grants did not have sufficient inspection and monitoring and therefore the TE cannot be convinced that there was compliance.	U
J. Monitoring and Evaluation	- The monitoring and evaluation plan designed for the project was inadequate. - There are weaknesses in the LFM which make it extremely hard to measure the quality of changes. - The TE surmises that at the time of the project's design and inception there was little institutional culture for M&E and results-based management in UNEP/ROAP.	U
1. M&E Design	- There were no provisions for monitoring and evaluating critical points of the project cycle. - The LFM had critical weaknesses.	HU

Criterion	Summary Assessment	Rating
	- There should have been a scheduled Inception Phase and MTR (even though this was not a mandatory requirement at the time).	
2. M&E Plan Implementation	- Monitoring procedures were not fully, if at all, followed in the early part of the project (i.e. Half-yearly Reports are inadequately completed, the first PIR is missing). It is noted that the quality of M&E implementation improves in 2007 due to a new Task Manager taking over the project.	U
3. Budgeting and funding for M&E activities	- There was inadequate budget provision for the M&E activities (i.e. there was no inception report and no MTR) and insufficient travel budget for the TE	HU
K. UNEP Supervision and backstopping	- For approximately the first three quarters of the Project, there was an absence of UNEP supervision and backstopping by UNEP/ROAP, which had a detrimental effect on the Projects implementation and progress. - No attempt to independently (by the Executing or Implementing Agency) verify the demonstration projects and SGPs has been made. - However, there has been a marked improvement in the quality and quantity of supervision and backstopping from early 2008, nonetheless greater efforts might have been made to investigate issues such as the demonstration projects and the SSFAs.	U

Criteria rated on a six-point scale as follows: Highly Satisfactory (HS); Satisfactory (S); Moderately Satisfactory (MS); Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU); Unsatisfactory (U); Highly Unsatisfactory (HU). Sustainability is rated from Highly Likely (HL) down to Highly Unlikely (HU).

10. Lessons Learned and Suggestions

21. **Lesson One:** Project implementation through state agencies is not effective in bringing about change when there is weak governance. In complex situations, the project should act as a catalyst to break out of the cycle that regional environmental planning and management had, according to the project document and for a multiplicity of reasons, found itself in. This can only really be achieved, within the limited time constraints of a project, by providing an impartial facilitator with transparent terms of reference and largely independent of any political, institutional and national financial constraints. This is not necessarily an individual, but a necessary artefact of a project - the *Project Management or Implementation Unit*.
22. **Lesson Two**: Institutional relationships are critical to environmental management. Institutional relationships are critical to the success or failure of any GEF project which is operating at a systemic scale, as was the REAP project, and particularly so in transitional environments. The project inevitably has to react to the various changes over its lifetime, rather than steering the process. Institutional relationships are essentially about power; effective environmental management (SLM by any other name) might arguably be more about rearranging these powers to where they can most effectively exert a positive influence on SLM. GEF projects do not always provide a detailed evaluation of the capacities of institutions, and neither do they reflect the dynamic nature of the relationships between various institutional players and how they interact with non-state stakeholders. From an institutional change perspective, the latter is far more interesting and informative.
23. **Lesson Three:** The difficulty of implementing demonstration projects and small grant projects, especially at distance, cannot be underestimated. The REAP project was operating at a regional scale on regional issues, and the inclusion of demonstration and micro-projects was largely meaningless (both temporally and spatially) at this scale in demonstrating the effectiveness of SLM.

24. **Suggestion 1 – to UNEP:** Before UNEP makes any further investment in the region, it should establish a regional office. There are considerable weaknesses in the capacity of state agencies and poor governance as a whole, and it is not realistic to manage projects from the ROAP office in Bangkok, or through a third party also located there. While the TE recognises that there are considerable financial implications in doing this, the poor performance of this project, the ineffectual implementation of the demonstration and the small grants projects suggest that, at least from the GEF perspective, it might be more cost effective to do so. Alternatively, any future projects should be implemented through the other UN agencies country offices or programmes, because these already have in place systems for efficient oversight and accountability at the local level.

Annex 1 – Evaluation Terms of Reference

Terminal Evaluation of the Project "Support to the Implementation of the Regional Environment Action Plan in Central Asia" REAP (GFL/2328-2770-4685/or 2175)

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

Project General Information44

Table 1. Project summary

GEF project ID:	2175	**IMIS number:**	GFL/2328-2770-4865
Focal Area(s):	Land Degradation	**GEF OP #:**	OP15 with relevance to OP12
GEF Strategic Priority/Objective:	SLM-1, SLM-2	**GEF approval date:**	19 April, 2005
Approval date:	3 October 2005	**First Disbursement:**	27 January 2006
Actual start date:	December 2005	**Planned duration:**	36 months
Intended completion date:	December 2008	**Actual or Expected completion date:**	May 2009
Project Type:	MSP	**GEF Allocation:**	US$975,000
PDF GEF cost:	US$25,000	**PDF co-financing:**	
Expected MSP/FSP Co-financing:	US$1,715,500	**Total Cost:**	US$2,715,500
Mid-term review/eval. (planned date):	None	**Terminal Evaluation (actual date):**	March 2012
Mid-term review/eval. (actual date):	none	**No. of revisions:**	One
Date of last Steering Committee meeting:	November 2007	**Date of last Revision*:**	31 July 2007
Disbursement as of 30 June 2008 (UNEP):	US$919,959.92		
Total co-financing realized as of 30 June 2010:	UNEP ROAP to provide	**Leveraged financing:**	

Project Rationale

112. The eco-regions of Central Asia (CA) harbour a great diversity of ecosystems and ecological processes which represent global environmental values. The biodiversity of the region is characterized by a high degree of endemism, in some areas up to 18-20% of higher flora represented by unique species. The climatic and geological conditions contribute to a set of highly specific adaptations, unique population dynamics and reproductive cycles, as well as to the extremely valuable genetic resources. Common geographical features, similar eco-systems, location within the Aral Sea and Caspian Sea basins, and common history of natural resources exploitation provide ground for common approaches to environment protection in CA.

113. A set of key environmental challenges for CA that urgently need to be addressed include: i) Land Degradation whose root causes are linked to socio-economic and policy factors and land-use regimes inherited from the Soviet era. Immediate causes are related to inappropriate agricultural practices that cause soil contamination and soil erosion, poor management of irrigation systems that leads to salinization and water logging of soils, as well as radio-chemical pollution and solid waste

[44] Source: UNEP GEF Project Implementation Report (PIR) Fiscal Year 2008

from the industrial sector; ii) Air Pollution, especially urban and industrial transboundary, that poses serious environmental problems and contributes to global warming; iii) Water Pollution. Recycled water (drainage water and waste water) are the main sources of water pollution. The prevailing pollutants are sulfates, chlorides, and sodium ions, pesticides, compounds of nitrogen, phosphates as well as heavy metals from mining and metal industries, etc. (toxins); organic substances from specific industries (toxins and non-toxins); non-toxic and toxic organic substances from different types of industrial plants. In addition, persistent organics pollutants (POPs) pose a serious threat to public health and environment; iv) Waste Management. The majority of industrial waste in the region is non-ferrous, including radioactive and heavy metals. Mining dumps and tailings occupy vast areas and contain dangerous contaminants as mercury, antimony, fluorite, lead, prussic acid, cyanides, and heavy metal salts. A danger of transboundary contamination by waste mostly exists with regard to non-ferrous metallurgic waste and radioactive waste storage sites located in the basins of the transboundary Syr Daria, Zeravshan, and Chu Rivers. v) Mountain Ecosystems Degradation due to natural disasters, anthropogenic impact, irrational use of arable lands, extension of mining enterprises, uncontrolled cattle grazing, urbanization, extension of communication infrastructure, etc.

114. The following barriers need to be removed in order for CA to be able to address the abovementioned regional and transboundary environmental problems and embark on a path of sustainable environmental management: 1) Lack of sufficient and adequate regional institutional, political, regulatory and financial mechanism for sustainable environmental management; 2) Lack of harmonized and unified data, as well as an efficient mechanism for data management and exchange; 3) Insufficient public participation at all political levels in environmental management; 4) Insufficient capacity for project development, implementation and resource mobilization.

115. Strengthening regional capacity and cooperation in sustainable environmental management has been a high priority for CA since the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Governments of five CA countries – Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Republic of Uzbekistan - have been making continuous efforts to address the regional environmental problems in a concerted way. A common position on promotion of regional cooperation was presented during various international fora and through adhering to international and regional agreements. In CA, a regional institutional structure was established to address environmental problems at the intergovernmental level through cooperation between different national governmental bodies, scientific institutions, and cooperation between the Governments, and civil society (CS).

Project objectives and components

116. The project on "Support to the Implementation of the Regional Environment Action Plan-REAP in Central Asia" seeks to promote an integrated and coordinated approach to cooperate with national governments, experts, and civil society to plan and carry out needed new approaches to environmental sustainability and sustainable land management (SLM).

117. The project's overall development goal is to contribute to the improvement of the environmental quality in CA through promotion of SLM, strengthened regional capacity and cooperation in the environment for sustainable development (SD) and support the implementation of REAP in CA. Its main objective is to implement key aspects of the REAP for CA and to build regional capacity for replication and scaling up of successful practices and approaches in SLM. The project has four components, each with its own component objective as presented in table 2.

Table 2. Project components and component objectives

Components	**Component objectives**
Component I Strengthen Mechanism for Regional Cooperation	To Strengthen political and institutional basis for regional cooperation in SD and SLM

Component II Strengthen Decision making Support System	To Strengthen information support to decision-making on SD and SLM
Component III Civil Society Participation	To Involve civil society (CS) in strengthening of regional cooperation in SD and SLM
Component IV Capacity Building for REAP Implementation	To build capacity for REAP implementation

118. The planned outputs under each component, as per the Logical Framework Matrix are presented in Annex 1 of the TORs. Component I of the project seeks to strengthen regional cooperation mechanism on the basis of existing institutions and to develop and promote legal binding tools, namely Subregional Framework Convention on Environment Protection for Sustainable Development in Central Asia (Ashgabad Convention) and establishing a Central Asia Regional Mountain Center (CARMC). A sound regional political and institutional basis is required to enable effective environmental governance system, which will create a favourable environment for efficient regional policy development and regulation in environment for SD and SLM. A strengthened cooperation mechanism will be aimed at translating into practice regional commitments to SD and sustainable land and integrated ecosystems management. In addition, an efficient financial mechanism will be developed and established.

119. Components II seeks to provide technical support to the data and information network coordinated by the Scientific Information Centre (SIC) under the Interstate Sustainable Development Commission (ISDC) for Central Asia including capacity building in efficient environmental data management and SD Indicators. The project supports information dissemination for decision makers and general public through different channels. SIC is to develop a regional decision support system (DSS) on SD in particular working on issues related to data access and data gaps on natural resources and environment. Information management tools would assist in making existing data easily accessible to users across the region. Demonstration models and pilot studies would provide the national and regional decision-makers with updated and full information needed to choose effective policy options, and required regulations.

120. Component III seeks to support subregional civil society organizations (CSO)/Youth Forums. The project supports dialogue between the ISDC and the networks. Strengthening of CS participation in decision-making was identified as one of the elements lacking in regional cooperation during the WSSD sub-regional consultations in September 2001. The activities will include preparation of a proposal for a CS participation mechanism in the proposed regional cooperation structure, regional CSOs networking activities, improved tools for awareness-raising among a wide circle of stakeholders and general public on the issues of regional cooperation and REAP implementation. The project will facilitate preparation of regional projects with CS participation components. The project will target at wider participation and awareness raising on regional cooperation issues among CSOs at the national and regional level.

121. Component IV implements pilot projects on the ground, assesses subregional priority issues to provide recommendations to better handle them and to get support from international donor organisations. Implementation of pilot demonstration activities on sustainable land management will involve local communities and civil society into the project activities in specific areas of the subregion. The results and lessons learnt from these activities, as well as best practices identified, will be replicated throughout Central Asia. A strengthened REAP SC will ensure cooperation with other regional projects, programmes and organisations involved in environment for SD.

Executing Arrangements

122. The UNEP Division of GEF Coordination (DGEF) acted as the project's GEF implementation agency.

123. UNEP/Division of Regional Cooperation (DRC)/ Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) was the leading executing agency for this project and therefore took responsibility for overall project management organizing donor conferences and workshops, and providing continuous briefing on the project status and implementation achievements to the interested donor agencies. Specific technical tasks were to be undertaken by regional organizations through sub-contracts, such as ISDC, SIC, REAP country focal points, Regional Resource Center of the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT-RRC.AP.).

124. The REAP Secretariat, hosted at the Regional Resource Center of the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT-RRC.AP) took care of day-to-day project coordination and management on behalf of UNEP/DRC/ROAP. Later during the project the key project coordinator, as former staff of RRC-AIT, managed the project as UNEP staff based at ROAP.

125. Implementation was envisioned as a cooperative effort. Since the project was based on a partnership initiative of ADB, UNDP and UNEP, a Project Steering Committee was established with the representation of three donor agencies and ISDC. At a later stage, governing functions rested only with UNEP and ISDC.

126. As REAP and regional cooperation initiative is a long-term programme, of which this project is just an initial part, the long-term oversight and coordination was envisioned to be carried out through ISDC or regional mechanism created in its place.

Project Cost and Financing

127. Table 3 presents a summary of expected financing sources for the project as presented in the Project Document. The GEF provides US$ 975,000 of external financing to the project and US$ 25,000 for PDF cost. That would finance both capacity building at regional level as well as pilot demonstrations of SLM in the five CA countries.

128. The project is therefore in the Medium-Size Project category. The project was expected to mobilize another US$ 1,715,500 million in co-financing from project partners, including the five countries, ADB, UNEP, UNDP and NGOs for a total project cost of US$ 2,715,500. Table 3 also summarizes expected costs per component and financing sources.

129. The most recent Project Implementation Review (PIR) for fiscal year 2008 reports that by 30 June 2008 the project had effectively disbursed US$ 919,959.92 of the GEF grant to UNEP – close to 92 percent. The draft terminal report (March 2011) shows that in December 2008 the project had mobilized a total of US$ 566,500 in co-financing, below the target of USS$ 1,715,500. The shortfall is mainly due to the funds from ADB and UNDP that did not materialize.

Table 3. Estimated project costs per component and financing source

Component	Co-financing Governments and NGOs	Co-financing ABD	Co-financing UNDP	UNEP	GEF	TOTAL	%
<u>Comp I</u>: Strengthen Mechanism for Regional Cooperation	27,500	170,000	65,000	15,000	15,000	292,500	11

Comp II: Strengthen Decision making Support System	90,400	515,000	0	20,000	130,000	755,000	28
Comp III: Civil Society Participation	28,000	15,000	215,000	10,000	160,000	428,000	16
Comp IV: Capacity Building for REAP Implementation	55,000	80,000	115,000	20,000	617,000	887,000	33
Administration	0	20,000	105,000	150,000	53,000	328,000	12
PDF (A)					25,000	25,000	1
Total Project Financing	200,500	800,000	500,000	215,000	1,000,000	2,715,000	100

Source: Project Document for CEO Approval – 03-04-2005

Project Implementation Issues

130. No mid-term Evaluation or Review was conducted during project life.

131. The latest project implementation report from 2008 highlighted following issues: i) no specific or focussed mechanism towards SLM was established; ii) civil society participation was still weak; iii) a regional framework convention on environmental protection for SD was not yet fully signed by all countries; iv) little replication or follow up was recorded; vi) limited project's focus on SLM and implementation of SLM related activities in the field.

132. The terminal report (draft March 2011) pointed out that the project was instrumental in providing a comprehensive support to the CA countries in a wide range of areas including bringing together top level environment decision-makers, scientific circles, civil society organizations as well as grassroots organizations involved in environment in CA. The low level of financial and political commitment of country partners towards implementing and sustaining project outcomes and other issues affected project implementation.

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE EVALUATION

Objective and Scope of the Evaluation

133. In line with the UNEP Evaluation Policy[45], the UNEP Evaluation Manual[46] and the Guidelines for GEF Agencies in Conducting Terminal Evaluations[47], the terminal evaluation of the Project "Support to the Implementation of the Regional Environment Action Plan in Central Asia" (REAP)" is undertaken at the end of the project to assess project performance (in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency), and determine outcomes and impacts (actual and potential) stemming from the project, including their sustainability. The evaluation has two primary purposes: (i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and (ii) to promote learning, feedback, and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UNEP, ADB, UNDP, CA countries, the GEF and their partners. Therefore, the evaluation will identify lessons of operational relevance for future project formulation and implementation. It will focus on the

[45] http://www.unep.org/eou/StandardsPolicyandPractices/UNEPEvaluationPolicy/tabid/3050/language/en-US/Default.aspx

[46] http://www.unep.org/eou/StandardsPolicyandPractices/UNEPEvaluationManual/tabid/2314/language/en-US/Default.aspx

[47] http://www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/documents/TE_guidelines7-31.pdf

following sets of **key questions**, based on the project's intended outcomes, which may be expanded by the consultants as deemed appropriate:

(a) How successful was the project in strengthening the political and institutional basis for regional cooperation in CA on SD and SLM and in setting up a regional cooperation mechanism?

(b) To what extent did the project strengthen capacities for information generation and information support to decision-making on SD and SLM in CA? Was a Decision Support System (DSS) established?

(c) To what degree was the project capable to involve civil society in the strengthening of regional cooperation in SD and SLM? Was an institutional mechanism for civil society involvement in policy dialogue developed?

(d) How successful was the project in building capacities for REAP implementation? What were the outcomes of the pilot projects implemented in the field?

Overall Approach and Methods

134. The terminal evaluation of the Project "Support to the Implementation of the Regional Environment Action Plan in Central Asia (REAP)" will be conducted by a team of independent consultants under the overall responsibility and management of the UNEP Evaluation Office (Nairobi), in consultation with the UNEP GEF Coordination Office (Nairobi) and the UNEP Task Manager at UNEP/DRC/ROAP.

135. It will be an in-depth evaluation using a participatory approach whereby key stakeholders are kept informed and consulted throughout the evaluation process. Both quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods will be used to determine project achievements against the expected outputs, outcomes and impacts.

136. The findings of the evaluation will be based on the following:

(a) A **desk review** of project documents[48] including, but not limited to:

- Relevant background documentation, inter alia UNEP and GEF policies, strategies and programmes pertaining to land degradation and sustainable land management;
- Project design documents; Annual Work Plans and Budgets or equivalent, revisions to the logical framework and project financing;
- Project reports such as progress and financial reports from countries to the EA and from the EA to UNEP; Steering Committee meeting minutes; annual Project Implementation Reviews and relevant correspondence;
- The draft terminal report;
- Documentation related to project outputs such as: strategies, Eco-portal, assessment reports on environmental issues, convention framework, SD and environmental database, CAYEN outputs, small grant programme reports, best practices handbook, pilot projects reports.

(b) **Interviews**[49] with:

- Project management and execution support;
- UNEP Task Manager (Bangkok) and Fund Management Officer (Nairobi);

[48] Documents to be provided by the UNEP and UNDP are listed in Annex 7.

[49] Face-to-face or through any other appropriate means of communication

- UNEP/DRC/ROAP lead executing agency's senior management and other relevant partners – specifically RRC-AIT, (Bangkok);
- Relevant staff of GEF country units;
- Representatives of other relevant organisations in the countries.

(c) **Country visits.** The evaluation team will visit a sample of two countries where the project implemented pilot projects in the field as well as conducted numerous regional coordination and technical meetings. The Team Leader will also visit Bangkok to hold talks with project IAs and EAs and Kazakhstan to join the ISDC meeting where a number of project stakeholders will be present.

Key Evaluation principles

137. Evaluation findings and judgements should be based on **sound evidence and analysis**, clearly documented in the evaluation report. Information will be triangulated (i.e. verified from different sources) to the extent possible, and when verification was not possible, the single source will be mentioned[50]. Analysis leading to evaluative judgements should always be clearly spelled out.

138. The evaluation will assess the project with respect to **a minimum set of evaluation criteria** grouped in four categories: (1) Attainment of objectives and planned results, which comprises the assessment of outputs achieved, relevance, effectiveness and efficiency and the review of outcomes towards impacts; (2) Sustainability and catalytic role, which focuses on financial, socio-political, institutional and ecological factors conditioning sustainability of project outcomes, and also assesses efforts and achievements in terms of replication and up-scaling of project lessons and good practices; (3) Processes affecting attainment of project results, which covers project preparation and readiness, implementation approach and management, stakeholder participation and public awareness, country ownership/driven-ness, project finance, UNEP supervision and backstopping, and project monitoring and evaluation systems; and (4) Complementarity with the UNEP strategies and programmes. The lead consultant can propose other evaluation criteria as deemed appropriate.

139. **Ratings**. All evaluation criteria will be rated on a six-point scale. However, complementarity of the project with the UNEP strategies and programmes is not rated. Annex 3 provides detailed guidance on how the different criteria should be rated and how ratings should be aggregated for the different evaluation criterion categories.

140. In attempting to attribute any outcomes and impacts to the project, the evaluators should consider the difference between **what has happened with** and **what would have happened without** the project. This implies that there should be consideration of the baseline conditions and trends in relation to the intended project outcomes and impacts. This also means that there should be plausible evidence to attribute such outcomes and impacts to the actions of the project. Sometimes, adequate information on baseline conditions and trends is lacking. In such cases this should be clearly highlighted by the evaluators, along with any simplifying assumptions that were taken to enable the evaluator to make informed judgements about project performance.

141. As this is a terminal evaluation, particular attention should be given to learning from the experience. Therefore, **the "why?" question** should be at front of the consultants' minds all through the evaluation exercise. This means that the consultants needs to go beyond the assessment of "what" the project performance was, and make a serious effort to provide a deeper understanding of "why" the performance was as it was, i.e. of processes affecting attainment of project results (criteria under category 3). This should provide the basis for the lessons that can be drawn from the project. In fact, the usefulness of the evaluation will be determined to a large extent by the capacity of the consultants to explain "why things happened" as they happened and are likely to evolve in this or that direction, which goes well beyond the mere assessment of "where things stand" today.

[50] Individuals should not be mentioned by name if anonymity needs to be preserved.

Evaluation criteria

Attainment of Objectives and Planned Results

142. The evaluation should assess the relevance of the project's objectives and the extent to which these were effectively and efficiently achieved or are expected to be achieved.

(a) *Achievement of Outputs and Activities:* Assess, for each component, the project's success in producing the programmed outputs as presented in Table A1.1 (Annex 1), both in quantity and quality, as well as their usefulness and timeliness. Briefly explain the degree of success of the project in achieving its different outputs, cross-referencing as needed to more detailed explanations provided under Section 3 (which covers the processes affecting attainment of project objectives). The achievements under the regional and national demonstration projects will receive particular attention.

(b) *Relevance*: Assess, in retrospect, whether the project's objectives and implementation strategies were consistent with: i) Sub-regional environmental issues and needs; ii) the UNEP mandate and policies at the time of design and implementation; and iii) the relevant GEF focal areas, strategic priorities and operational programme(s).

(c) *Effectiveness:* Assess to what extent the project has achieved its main objective **to implement key aspects of the REAP for Central Asia and to build regional capacity for replication and scaling up of successful practices and approaches in SLM** and its component objectives as presented in Table 2 above. To measure achievement, use as much as appropriate the indicators for achievement proposed in the Logical Framework Matrix (Logframe) of the project, adding other relevant indicators as appropriate. Briefly explain what factors affected the project's success in achieving its objectives, cross-referencing as needed to more detailed explanations provided under Section 3.

(d) *Efficiency*: Assess the cost-effectiveness and timeliness of project execution. Describe any cost- or time-saving measures put in place in attempting to bring the project to a successful conclusion within its programmed budget and (extended) time. Analyse how delays, if any, have affected project execution, costs and effectiveness. Wherever possible, compare the cost and time over results ratios of the project with that of other similar projects. Give special attention to efforts by the project teams to make use of / build upon pre-existing institutions, agreements and partnerships, data sources, synergies and complementarities with other initiatives, programmes and projects etc. to increase project efficiency.

(e) *Review of Outcomes to Impacts (ROtI)*: Reconstruct the logical pathways from project outputs over achieved objectives towards impacts, taking into account performance and impact drivers, assumptions and the roles and capacities of key actors and stakeholders, using the methodology presented in the GEF Evaluation Office's ROtI Practitioner's Handbook[51] (summarized in Annex 8 of the TORs). Assess to what extent the project has to date contributed, and is likely in the future to further contribute to changes in stakeholder behaviour as regards: i) strengthened regional cooperation, information support, civil society enhanced participation to regional cooperation in SD and SLM and the likelihood of those leading to changes in the environmental quality in CA: SLM improved, regional capacity and cooperation in environment for SD improved and regional capacity for replication and scaling up of successful practices and approaches in SLM strengthened.

[51] http://www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/documents/Impact_Eval-Review_of_Outcomes_to_Impacts-RotI_handbook.pdf

Sustainability and catalytic role

143. **Sustainability** is understood as the probability of continued long-term project-derived results and impacts after the external project funding and assistance ends. The evaluation will identify and assess the key conditions or factors that are likely to undermine or contribute to the persistence of benefits. Some of these factors might be direct results of the project while others will include contextual circumstances or developments that are not under control of the project but that may condition sustainability of benefits. The evaluation should ascertain to what extent follow-up work has been initiated and how project results will be sustained and enhanced over time. Application of the ROtI method will assist in the evaluation of sustainability.

144. Four aspects of sustainability will be addressed:

(a) *Socio-political sustainability.* Are there any social or political factors that may influence positively or negatively the sustenance of project results and progress towards impacts? Is the level of ownership by the main national and regional stakeholders sufficient to allow for the project results to be sustained? Are there sufficient government and stakeholder awareness, interests, commitment and incentives to execute, enforce and pursue the programmes, plans, agreements, monitoring systems etc. prepared and agreed upon under the project?

(b) *Financial resources.* To what extent are the continuation of project results and the eventual impact of the project dependent on continued financial support? What is the likelihood that adequate financial resources [52] will be or will become available to implement the programmes, plans, agreements, monitoring systems etc. prepared and agreed upon under the project? Are there any financial risks that may jeopardize sustenance of project results and onward progress towards impact?

(c) *Institutional framework.* To what extent is the sustenance of the results and onward progress towards impact dependent on issues relating to institutional frameworks and governance? How robust are the institutional achievements such as governance structures and processes, policies, sub-regional agreements, legal and accountability frameworks etc. required to sustaining project results and to lead those to impact on human behaviour and environmental resources?

(d) *Environmental sustainability.* Are there any environmental factors, positive or negative, that can influence the future flow of project benefits? Are there any project outputs or higher level results that are likely to affect the environment, which, in turn, might affect sustainability of project benefits?

145. Catalytic Role and Replication. The catalytic role of GEF-funded interventions is embodied in their approach of supporting the creation of an enabling environment and of investing in pilot activities which are innovative and showing how new approaches can work. UNEP and the GEF also aim to support activities that upscale new approaches to a national, regional or global level, with a view to achieve sustainable global environmental benefits. The evaluation will assess the catalytic role played by this project, namely to what extent the project has:

(a) *catalyzed behavioural changes* in terms of use and application by the relevant stakeholders of: i) technologies and approaches show-cased by the demonstration projects; ii) strategic programmes and plans developed; and iii) assessment, monitoring and management systems established at a national and sub-regional level;

[52] Those resources can be from multiple sources, such as the public and private sectors, income generating activities, other development projects etc.

(b) provided *incentives* (social, economic, market based, competencies etc.) to contribute to catalyzing changes in stakeholder behaviour;

(c) contributed to *institutional changes.* An important aspect of the catalytic role of the project is its contribution to institutional uptake or mainstreaming of project-piloted approaches in the regional and national demonstration projects;

(d) contributed to *policy changes* (on paper and in implementation of policy);

(e) contributed to sustained follow-on financing (*catalytic financing*) from Governments, the GEF or other donors;

(f) created opportunities for particular individuals or institutions ("*champions*") to catalyze change (without which the project would not have achieved all of its results).

146. *Replication*, in the context of GEF projects, is defined as lessons and experiences coming out of the project that are replicated (experiences are repeated and lessons applied in different geographic areas) or scaled up (experiences are repeated and lessons applied in the same geographic area but on a much larger scale and funded by other sources). The evaluation will assess the approach adopted by the project to promote replication effects and evaluate to what extent actual replication has already occurred or is likely to occur in the near future. What are the factors that may influence replication and scaling up of project experiences and lessons?

Processes affecting attainment of project results

147. **Preparation and Readiness**. Were the project's objectives and components clear, practicable and feasible within its timeframe? Were the capacities of executing agencies properly considered when the project was designed? Was the project document clear and realistic to enable effective and efficient implementation? Were the partnership arrangements properly identified and the roles and responsibilities negotiated prior to project implementation? Were counterpart resources (funding, staff, and facilities) and enabling legislation assured? Were adequate project management arrangements in place? Were lessons from other relevant projects properly incorporated in the project design? Were lessons learned and recommendations from Steering Committee meetings adequately integrated in the project approach? What factors influenced the quality-at-entry of the project design, choice of partners, allocation of financial resources etc.?

148. **Implementation Approach and Adaptive Management**. This includes an analysis of approaches used by the project, its management framework, the project's adaptation to changing conditions (adaptive management), the performance of the implementation arrangements and partnerships, relevance of changes in project design, and overall performance of project management. The evaluation will:

(a) Ascertain to what extent the project implementation mechanisms outlined in the project document have been followed and were effective in delivering project outputs and outcomes. Were pertinent adaptations made to the approaches originally proposed?

(b) Assess the role and performance of the units and committees established and the project execution arrangements at all levels;

(c) Evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of project management by the EA and how well the management was able to adapt to changes during the life of the project;

(d) Assess the extent to which project management responded to direction and guidance provided by the Steering Committee and IA supervision recommendations;

(e) Identify administrative, operational and/or technical problems and constraints that influenced the effective implementation of the project, and how the project partners tried to overcome these problems;

(f) Assess the extent to which MTE recommendations were followed in a timely manner.

149. **Stakeholder [53] Participation and Public Awareness**. The term stakeholder should be considered in the broadest sense, encompassing project partners, government institutions, private interest groups, local communities etc. The assessment will look at three related and often overlapping processes: (1) information dissemination between stakeholders, (2) consultation between stakeholders, and (3) active engagement of stakeholders in project decision making and activities. The evaluation will specifically assess:

(a) the approach(es) used to identify and engage stakeholders in project design and implementation. What were the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches with respect to the project's objectives and the stakeholders' motivations and capacities? What was the achieved degree and effectiveness of collaboration and interactions between the various project partners and stakeholders during the course of implementation of the project?

(b) the degree and effectiveness of any public awareness activities that were undertaken during the course of implementation of the project; or that are built into the assessment methods so that public awareness can be raised at the time the assessments will be conducted;

(c) how the results of the project (strategic programmes and plans, monitoring and management systems, sub-regional agreements etc.) engaged key stakeholders in sustainable development and sustainable land management.

150. The ROtI analysis should assist the consultants in identifying the key stakeholders and their respective roles, capabilities and motivations in each step of the causal pathway from activities to achievement of outputs and objectives to impact.

151. **Country Ownership and Driven-ness.** The evaluation will assess the performance of the Governments of the countries involved in the project, namely:

(a) in how the Governments have assumed responsibility for the project and provided adequate support to project execution, including the degree of cooperation received from the various contact institutions in the countries involved in the project and the timeliness of provision of counter-part funding to project activities;

(b) to what extent the political and institutional framework of the participating countries has been conducive to project performance. Look, in particular, at the extent of the political commitment to enforce (sub-) regional agreements promoted under the project;

(c) to what extent the Governments have promoted the participation of communities and their non-governmental organisations in the project; and

(d) how responsive the Governments were to UNEP/DRC/ROAP coordination and guidance and to UNEP/GEF supervision.

[53] Stakeholders are the individuals, groups, institutions, or other bodies that have an interest or stake in the outcome of the project. The term also applies to those potentially adversely affected by the project.

152. **Financial Planning and Management**. Evaluation of financial planning requires assessment of the quality and effectiveness of financial planning and control of financial resources throughout the project's lifetime. The assessment will look at actual project costs by activities compared to budget (variances), financial management (including disbursement issues), and co-financing. The evaluation will:

(a) Verify the application of proper standards (clarity, transparency, audit etc.) and timeliness of financial planning, management and reporting to ensure that sufficient and timely financial resources were available to the project and its partners;

(b) Assess other administrative processes such as recruitment of staff, procurement of goods and services (including consultants), preparation and negotiation of cooperation agreements etc. to the extent that these might have influenced project performance;

(c) Present to what extent co-financing has materialized as expected at project approval (see Table 1). Report country co-financing to the project overall, and to support project activities at the national level in particular. The evaluation will provide a breakdown of final actual costs and co-financing for the different project components (see tables in Annex 4).

(d) Describe the resources the project has leveraged since inception and indicate how these resources are contributing to the project's ultimate objective. Leveraged resources are additional resources—beyond those committed to the project itself at the time of approval—that are mobilized later as a direct result of the project. Leveraged resources can be financial or in-kind and they may be from other donors, NGO's, foundations, governments, communities or the private sector.

153. Analyse the effects on project performance of any irregularities in procurement, use of financial resources and human resource management, and the measures taken by the EA or IA to prevent such irregularities in the future. Assess whether the measures taken were adequate.

154. **UNEP Supervision and Backstopping.** The purpose of supervision is to verify the quality and timeliness of project execution in terms of finances, administration and achievement of outputs and outcomes, in order to identify and recommend ways to deal with problems which arise during project execution. Such problems may be related to project management but may also involve technical/institutional substantive issues in which UNEP has a major contribution to make. The evaluators should assess the effectiveness of supervision and administrative and financial support provided by UNEP including:

(a) The adequacy of project supervision plans, inputs and processes;

(b) The emphasis given to outcome monitoring (results-based project management);

(c) The realism and candour of project reporting and ratings (i.e. are PIR ratings an accurate reflection of the project realities and risks);

(d) The quality of documentation of project supervision activities; and

(e) Financial, administrative and other fiduciary aspects of project implementation supervision.

155. **Monitoring and Evaluation**. The evaluation will include an assessment of the quality, application and effectiveness of project monitoring and evaluation plans and tools, including an assessment of risk management based on the assumptions and risks identified in the project document. The evaluation will assess how information generated by the M&E system during project

implementation was used to adapt and improve project execution, achievement of outcomes and ensuring sustainability. M&E is assessed on three levels:

(a) *M&E Design*. Projects should have sound M&E plans to monitor results and track progress towards achieving project objectives. An M&E plan should include a baseline (including data, methodology, etc.), SMART indicators and data analysis systems, and evaluation studies at specific times to assess results. The time frame for various M&E activities and standards for outputs should have been specified. The evaluators should use the following questions to help assess the M&E design aspects:

- Quality of the project logframe as a planning and monitoring instrument; analyse/compare logframe in Project Document, revised logframe (if any) and logframe used in Project Implementation Review reports to report progress towards achieving project objectives;
- SMART-ness of indicators: Are there specific indicators in the logframe for each of the project objectives? Are the indicators measurable, attainable (realistic) and relevant to the objectives? Are the indicators time-bound?
- Adequacy of baseline information: To what extent has baseline information on performance indicators been collected and presented in a clear manner? Was the methodology for the baseline data collection explicit and reliable?
- Arrangements for monitoring: Have the responsibilities for M&E activities been clearly defined? Were the data sources and data collection instruments appropriate? Was the frequency of various monitoring activities specified and adequate? In how far were project users involved in monitoring?
- Arrangements for evaluation: Have specific targets been specified for project outputs? Has the desired level of achievement been specified for all indicators of objectives and outcomes? Were there adequate provisions in the legal instruments binding project partners to fully collaborate in evaluations?
- Budgeting and funding for M&E activities: Determine whether support for M&E was budgeted adequately and was funded in a timely fashion during implementation.

(b) *M&E Plan Implementation*. The evaluation will verify that:

- the M&E system was operational and facilitated timely tracking of results and progress towards projects objectives throughout the project implementation period;
- annual project reports and Progress Implementation Review (PIR) reports were complete, accurate and with well justified ratings;
- the information provided by the M&E system was used during the project to improve project performance and to adapt to changing needs;
- projects had an M&E system in place with proper training, instruments and resources for parties responsible for M&E.

Complementarities with UNEP strategies and programmes

156. UNEP aims to undertake GEF funded projects that are aligned with its own strategies. The evaluation should present a brief narrative on the following issues:

(a) *Linkage to UNEP's Expected Accomplishments and POW 2010-2011*. The UNEP MTS specifies desired results in six thematic focal areas. The desired results are termed Expected Accomplishments. Using the completed ROtI analysis, the evaluation should comment on whether the project makes a tangible contribution to any of the Expected Accomplishments specified in the UNEP MTS. The magnitude and extent of any

contributions and the causal linkages should be fully described. Whilst it is recognised that UNEP GEF projects designed prior to the production of the UNEP Medium Term Strategy (MTS)[54]/ Programme of Work (POW) 2010/11 would not necessarily be aligned with the Expected Accomplishments articulated in those documents, complementarities may still exist.

(b) *Alignment with the Bali Strategic Plan (BSP)*[55]. The outcomes and achievements of the project should be briefly discussed in relation to the objectives of the UNEP BSP.

(c) *Gender*. Ascertain to what extent project design, implementation and monitoring have taken into consideration: (i) possible gender inequalities in access to and the control over natural resources; (ii) specific vulnerabilities of women and children to environmental degradation or disasters; and (iii) the role of women in mitigating or adapting to environmental changes and engaging in environmental protection and rehabilitation. Assess whether the intervention is likely to have any lasting differential impacts on gender equality and the relationship between women and the environment. To what extent do unresolved gender inequalities affect sustainability of project benefits?

(d) *South-South Cooperation.* This is regarded as the exchange of resources, technology, and knowledge between developing countries. Briefly describe any aspects of the project that could be considered as examples of South-South Cooperation.

The Consultants' Team

157. For this evaluation, a team of two independent consultants will be hired, at least one of which is from the project sub-region. The evaluation team will combine the following decade-long expertise and experience in:

(a) Evaluation of environmental projects, in particular GEF-funded projects;

(b) Natural resource and environmental management, sustainable land management;

(c) CA countries and of their environmental and institutional issues;

(d) And Fluency in Russian and national languages.

The consultants' education background would be in environmental conservation/land management coupled with qualifications in working with CS and communities. The Supporting Consultant will also have experience in translating and interpreting from Russian.

158. The **Team Leader** will be responsible for coordinating the data collection and analysis phase of the evaluation, and preparing the main report. (S)He will ensure that all evaluation criteria are adequately covered by the team. **Annex 6** provides a matrix which presents the distribution of responsibilities between evaluation team members that will be finalized in consultation with the Team Leader in the inception report.

159. The **Supporting Consultant** will prepare a technical working paper that will be appended to the main report, the content of which will be agreed upon with the Team Leader. The Supporting Consultant is also expected to contribute to selected sections of the main report as agreed with the Team Leader, and provide constructive comments on the draft report prepared by the Team Leader.

[54] http://www.unep.org/PDF/FinalMTSGCSS-X-8.pdf
[55] http://www.unep.org/GC/GC23/documents/GC23-6-add-1.pdf

160. By undersigning the service contract with UNEP/UNON, the consultants certify that they have not been associated with the design and implementation of the project in any way which may jeopardize their independence and impartiality towards project achievements and project partner performance. In addition, they will not have any future interests (within six months after completion of their contract) with the project's executing or implementing units.

Evaluation Deliverables and Review Procedures

161. The Team Leader will prepare an **inception report** containing (i) a thorough review of the project design quality; (ii) a desk-based Theory of Change of the project (see Annex 8 - ROtI analysis); (iii) the evaluation framework.

162. The review of design quality will cover the following aspects:

- Project relevance (see paragraph 31 (b));
- Sustainability consideration (see paragraphs 32-33) and measures planned to promote replication and upscaling (see paragraph 35);
- Preparation and readiness (see paragraph 36);
- Financial planning (see paragraph 41);
- M&E design (see paragraph 44(a));
- Complementarities with UNEP strategies and programmes (see paragraph 45).
- Using the above, the review will assess of the overall quality of the project design using the template in Annex 9.

163. The evaluation framework will include following aspects:

- Summary of evaluation questions/areas to be explored/questions raised through document review;
- Description of evaluation methodologies to be used;
- Description of data collection and analysis methods and their means of verification/ list of data sources, indicators;
- Lists of individuals to be consulted;
- Detailed distribution of roles and responsibilities among evaluation consultants;
- Revised logistics (selection of sites to be visited)/dates of evaluation activities.

164. The inception report will be submitted for review by the Evaluation Office before the evaluation team conducts any field visits. The inception report will also indicate the final division of responsibilities between the Team Leader and the Supporting Consultant and a work plan with final mission itinerary.

165. **The main evaluation report** should be brief (no longer than 35 pages – excluding the executive summary and annexes), to the point and written in plain English. The report will follow the annotated Table of Contents outlined in Annex 2. It must explain the purpose of the evaluation, exactly what was evaluated and the methods used (with their limitations). The report will present evidence-based and balanced findings, consequent conclusions, lessons and recommendations, which will be cross-referenced to each other. The report should be presented in a way that makes the information accessible and comprehensible. Any dissident views in response to evaluation findings will be appended in footnote or annex as appropriate.

166. **Technical working paper**. The format and contents of the working paper prepared by the Supporting Consultants should be agreed upon with the Team Leader and approved by the UNEP Evaluation Office before any data collection and analysis work is undertaken. It is recommended that the working papers follow the same structure as the main evaluation report, for easy reference by the Team Leader (Annex 2). The Team Leader will carry out a first review of the working papers and provide comments to the Supporting Consultants for improvement. Only a version acceptable to the Team Leader will be submitted to the EO as an appendix to the draft main report.

167. **Report summary**. The Team Leader will prepare a 15-slide presentation summarizing the key findings, lessons learned and recommendations of the evaluation.

168. **Review of the draft evaluation report**. The Team Leader will submit the zero draft report according to the tentative timeline in Annex 10 to the UNEP EO and revise the draft following the comments and suggestions made by the EO. The EO will then share the first draft report with the UNEP GEF Coordination Office (Nairobi) and the UNEP/DRC/ROAP. The UNEP Task Manager will forward the first draft report to the other project stakeholders, in particular to the REAP Secretariat, ISDC and AIT RRC.AP. for review and comments. Stakeholders may provide feedback on any errors of fact and may highlight the significance of such errors in any conclusions. Comments would be expected within two weeks after the draft report has been shared. Any comments or responses to the draft report will be sent to the UNEP EO for collation. The EO will provide the comments to the Team Leader for consideration in preparing the final draft report. The Team Leader will submit the final draft report no later than ten days after reception of stakeholder comments. The Team Leader will prepare a **response to comments** that contradict the findings of the evaluation team and could therefore not be accommodated in the final report. This response will be shared by the EO with the interested stakeholders to ensure full transparency.

169. Consultations will be held between the consultants, EO staff, UNEP/GEF, UNEP/DRC/ROAP and key members of the project execution team. These consultations will seek feedback on the proposed recommendations and lessons.

170. **Submission of the final Terminal Evaluation report**. The final report shall be submitted by Email to:

Segbedzi Norgbey, Head
UNEP Evaluation Office
P.O. Box 30552-00100
Nairobi, Kenya
Tel.: (+254-20) 762 3387
Email: segbedzi.norgbey@unep.org

171. The Head of Evaluation will share the report with the following persons:

Maryam Niamir-Fuller, Director
UNEP/GEF Coordination Office
P.O. Box 30552-00100
Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: (+254-20) 762 4686
Email: maryam.niamir-fuller@unep.org
Ibrahim Thiaw, Director
UNEP/Division of Environmental Policy Implementation (DEPI)
P.O. Box 30552-00100
Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: (+254-20) 762 24782
Email: ibrahim.thiaw@unep.org

Ms. Tomoko Nishimoto, Director
UNEP/Division of Regional Cooperation (DRC)
P.O. Box 30552, Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: (+254-20) 762 4153
Email: tomoko.nishimoto@unep.org

Mr. Young-Woo Park, Regional Director & Regional Representative
UNEP/Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP)

United Nations Building,
Rajdamnern Nok Avenue
Bangkok 10200, Thailand
Tel: (+66 2) 281-6101/+66 2 288 1870
Fax: (+66-2) 280 3829
Email: parky@un.org

Mr. Max Zieren
GEF Regional Focal Point Asia/Task Manager Biodiversity and Land Degradation
Division of Environmental Policy Implementation (DEPI)
UNEP Regional Office Asia Pacific
Tel: (+66 2) 288-2101
Fax: (+66 2) 288 1087
Email: max.zieren@unep.org

172. The final evaluation report will be published on the UNEP Evaluation Office web-site www.unep.org/eou and may be printed in hard copy. Subsequently, the report will be sent to the GEF Office of Evaluation for their review, appraisal and inclusion on the GEF website.

173. As per usual practice, the UNEP EO will prepare a **quality assessment** of the zero draft and final draft report, which is a tool for providing structured feedback to the evaluation consultants. The quality of the report will be assessed and rated against both GEF and UNEP criteria as presented in Annex 5.

174. The UNEP Evaluation Office will also prepare a **commentary** on the final evaluation report, which presents the EO ratings of the project based on a careful review of the evidence collated by the evaluation team and the internal consistency of the report. These ratings are the final ratings that the UNEP Evaluation Office will submit to the GEF Office of Evaluation.

Resources and Schedule of the Evaluation

175. This Terminal Evaluation will be undertaken by two independent evaluation consultants contracted by the UNEP Evaluation Office. The consultants will work under the overall responsibility of the UNEP Evaluation Office and they will consult with the EO on any procedural and methodological matters related to the evaluation. It is, however, the consultants' individual responsibility to arrange for their travel, obtain documentary evidence, meetings with stakeholders, field visits, and any other logistical matters related to their assignment. ROAP and RRC-AIT will provide coordination of in-kind support in the countries to be visited as well on institutions, staff and other persons for interviews (introductions, meetings), allowing the consultants to conduct the evaluation as efficiently and independently as possible.

176. The **Team Leader** will be hired for 8 weeks of work during March-July 2012. (S)He will travel to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to visit pilot sites and to Bangkok, Thailand where Task Manager, IAs and EAs are located. Furthermore, s(he) will travel to Kazakhstan to attend the ISDC meeting and meet with other project stakeholders.

177. The **Supporting Consultant** will be hired for 15 days of work. (S)he will travel to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan assist the Team Leader with interpreting and translation.

Schedule of Payment

Fee ONLY.

178. The consultant will be hired under an individual Special Service Agreement (SSA) and is NOT inclusive of all expenses such as airfares, in-country travel, accommodation, incidental and terminal expenses. Air tickets will be paid separately by UNEP and 75% of the DSA for each authorised travel mission will be paid up front. Local in-country travel and communication costs will be reimbursed on

the production of acceptable receipts. Terminal expenses and residual DSA entitlements (25%) will be paid after mission completion.

179. The Team Leader will receive 40% of the honorarium portion of his/her fee upon acceptance of a draft report deemed complete and of acceptable quality by the EO. The remainder will be paid upon satisfactory completion of the work.

180. The Supporting Consultant will be paid the honoraria in one single payment upon satisfactory completion of their work. The Team Leader will advise the EO whether the Supporting Consultant has provided satisfactory inputs in the evaluation.

181. In case the consultants are not able to provide the deliverables in accordance with these TORs, in line with the expected quality standards by the UNEP Evaluation Office, payment may be withheld at the discretion of the Head of the Evaluation Office until the consultants have improved the deliverables to meet UNEP's quality standards.

182. If the consultants fail to submit a satisfactory final product to UNEP in a timely manner, i.e. within one month after the end date of their contract, the Evaluation Office reserves the right to employ additional human resources to finalize the report, and to reduce the consultants' fees by an amount equal to the additional costs borne by the Evaluation Office to bring the report up to standard.

Annexes to the TE ToR are available upon request from the UNEP Evaluation Office.

Annex 2 Evaluation framework

Summary of evaluation process

183. The evaluation will follow (but not be restricted to) the methodology outlined below. Prior to the in-country mission the evaluator carried out a **desk-based study** and review of the Project's documentation to establish an understanding of the Project as represented by the standard UNEP-GEF documentation (*e.g.* Project Document, Project Implementation Report (PIR), Terminal Report, *etc.*). The purpose of this exercise is to carry out a "scoping" exercise becoming familiar with the Project's strategy, the various components and to identify the priority issues that needed to be examined and challenged in depth. Unfortunately not all documentation was available prior to the in-country mission and therefore the most significant documentation examined were the:

- Project Document,
- Annual Project Reviews/Project Implementation Reports (APRs/PIRs),
- Minutes of Steering Committee meetings,
- Output reports,
- Convention framework,
- Regional Environmental Action Plan,
- An assortment of ISDC recommendations.

184. The **in-country(s) mission** will consist of focused meetings and discussions (in person by electronic communications) with the UNEP Evaluation Office (Nairobi), UNEP/GEF Coordination Office (Nairobi), UNEP/DRC/ROAP, Project partners and stakeholders starting with a briefing of the purpose and the *process* of GEF monitoring and evaluation. The subject of these meetings will focus on (but not be limited to) the following sets of key questions, based on the project's intended outcomes, which may be expanded by the consultants as deemed appropriate:

i. How successful was the project in strengthening the political and institutional basis for regional cooperation in CA on SD and SLM and in setting up a regional cooperation mechanism?
ii. To what extent did the project strengthen capacities for information generation and information support to decision-making on SD and SLM in CA? Was a Decision Support System (DSS) established?
iii. To what degree was the project capable to involve civil society in the strengthening of regional cooperation in SD and SLM? Was an institutional mechanism for civil society involvement in policy dialogue developed?
iv. How successful was the project in building capacities for REAP implementation? What were the outcomes of the pilot projects implemented in the field?

185. In country missions will also include visits to a sample of two countries (Tajikistan, Kirgizstan) to meet with national REAP staff and stakeholders and visit the pilot sites. The international consultant will also travel to Bangkok, Thailand to meet with the UNEP ROAP Task Manager and the RRC-AIT.

186. Analysis of findings and drafting of the TE Report following the in-country(s) visit. There will be further analysis of the findings and drafting of the report for comment by the Project's partners before submission of the final draft.

Description of evaluation methodologies

187. The approach can be described thus:

Emphasis on constructive analytical dialogue: with the project partners providing the project participants with an opportunity to explain the strategies applied to date, the challenges that had been faced and the inevitable nuances that affect a project. In this way the TE is able to deepen the partner's conceptual understanding of the key issues underlying the project and the driving forces that have shaped, and continue, shaping events.
Defining the scope of the TE focus: through discussions with the UNEP Evaluation Office and Task Manager the areas and extent of inquiry to be defined.
Critical analysis of the project design: the original design, the Project Document, is challenged against best practices and in light of the project's experience to consider whether there were flaws in its logic and approach or whether there were assumptions, known or unknown, that have not proven correct.
Critical reflection on the measures of project success: measuring progress and performance against the indicators provided in the project's logical framework with the participation of the project partners and reflecting on their relevance and adequacy, and where these were in doubt, alternative or complimentary indicators can be identified and/or re-phrased.
Assessment of the project's performance and impact to date: analysing the performance and progress against the indicators and reasonably expected impacts of the project's implementation.
An examination of process: critically examining the project's actions and activities to ensure that there was sufficient effort in ensuring that elements of capacity building and participation, establishing processes and mechanisms, that would enable the targets to be achieved in the longer term rather than being *expedient*.
Synthesizing plausible future impacts: using the Theory of Change and other analytical methods to identify plausible future outcomes resulting from the impact of the project in the future.
Jointly defining the conclusions and recommendations with the UNEP Evaluation Office and ROAP Task Manager: ensuring that there is a common understanding of any weaknesses or shortcomings in the project's implementation and an understanding the reasons for, and the appropriate detail of, any remedial actions.

Description of data collection and analysis methods

188. Data collection will be carried out through examination of the project's documentation, the reports, agreements, minutes of meetings, web sites, convention framework and financial information, *etc.*, provided to the TE.

189. Interviews with individuals and representatives of institutions involved in the implementation of the project and where possible the current users of the resulting services and beneficiaries of the project's outcomes.

190. The TE will determine both the performance by the project, that is how well the project was prosecuted, and the effectiveness of the interventions, that is the outcomes and plausible impact of the overall project intervention.

191. The TE will, through a process of discussion with participants, examine the key questions from the ToR:

(a) How successful was the project in strengthening the political and institutional basis for regional cooperation in CA on SD and SLM and in setting up a regional cooperation mechanism?

(b) To what extent did the project strengthen capacities for information generation and information support to decision-making on SD and SLM in CA? Was a Decision Support System (DSS) established?

(c) To what degree was the project capable to involve civil society in the strengthening of regional cooperation in SD and SLM? Was an institutional mechanism for civil society involvement in policy dialogue developed?

(d) How successful was the project in building capacities for REAP implementation? What were the outcomes of the pilot projects implemented in the field?

192. These can be challenged against the findings of the Terminal Project Report, namely that:

(a) No specific or focussed mechanism towards SLM was established;

(b) Civil society participation was still weak;

(c) A regional framework convention on environmental protection for Sustainable Development (SD) was not yet fully signed by all countries;

(d) Little replication or follow up was recorded;

(e) Project focus on Sustainable Land Management (SLM) and implementation of SLM related activities in the field was limited.

193. The TE will measure the findings from these interviews against the Terminal Project Report's[56] understanding that the project, despite the shortcomings listed above was instrumental in providing a comprehensive support to the CA countries in a wide range of areas including bringing together top level environment decision-makers, scientific circles, civil society organizations as well as grassroots organizations involved in environment in Central Asia (CA). Whereas, the low level of financial and political commitment of country partners towards implementing and sustaining project outcomes and other issues has apparently affected project implementation. This could arguably reflect the level of commitment to resolving regional environmental issues and affect the long term impacts resulting from the REAP project.

194. Following this the TE team will analyse the findings and assess the project's overall performance and impact. The TE team will work closely together. The Lead Consultant will be responsible for the delivery of the Final Report, the Supporting Consultant will provide a brief summary report (based upon the ToR for the evaluation) which will cover the areas outlined in Annex 4.

Project indicators

195. The following indicators were given in the project's LFM for the objective, outcomes and outputs. They will be used to assess to what extent the project has achieved its objective, outcomes and outputs. However, given the number of indicators listed it may not be possible to quantify or qualify every indicator in detail:

5.2.1 Overall objective indicators:

- Regional coordination mechanism for SLM and environment for SD in place by end of project;
- Strengthened capacities for effective decision-making by end of project through increased access, availability and free use of environmental data/information;
- Enhanced participation of civil society in environmental policy formulation and implementation at regional, national and local level through policy dialogue, establishment of regional CS network, projects and cooperation programmes; Increased

[56] TERMINAL REPORT, THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME – Regional Office Asia Pacific, THE UNEP/GEF PROJECT ENTITLED: Support to the Implementation of the Regional Environment Action Plan in Central Asia Report to the Division of GEF Coordination – UNEP
DRC/ROAP, Bangkok, March 2011

investments in REAP and SLM through a number of REAP projects and replication of successful practices throughout the region.

5.2.2 Outcome indicators

Outcome 1:

- Operational regional mechanism for collaboration in REAP implementation and replication of best practices established building on the existing institutional structure by end of the first year;
- Regional framework agreement as an official legal document for implementation of regional activities in the area of SLM and SD by end of the project;
- Increased capacities of the regional information network for decision-making support;
- Accessible harmonised data across the region and increased use of DSS as an information database on environment for SD;
- Enhanced capacities of the key national and regional organizations in effective decision-making on SLM and SD;
- Wider use of SLM approach at the national and regional level.

Outcome 2:

- Operational mechanism (Public Council) for CS involvement in coordination, decision-making and monitoring of regional cooperation initiatives by end of project;
- Enhanced awareness among CS of needs of regional cooperation and key environmental problems by training provision for five NGOs from each country;
- CS capacity building in project preparation on SLM and at least five projects involving CS on key regional priorities.
- REAP Monitoring Group established on the basis of SIC and NGO group under coordination of REAP Steering Committee by the first half of the first year;

196. Outcome 3:

- Five pilot demonstration projects on different aspects of SLM established in CARs;
- At least ten REAP project proposals developed for donor funding;
- Methodology, guidelines and knowledge accumulated during the REAP process disseminated in workshops and ISDC meetings among national experts and decision makers.

197. Outcome 4:

- REAP Monitoring Group established on the basis of SIC and NGO group under coordination of REAP Steering Committee by the first half of the first year;
- Five pilot demonstration projects on different aspects of SLM established in CARs;
- At least ten REAP project proposals developed for donor funding;
- Methodology, guidelines and knowledge accumulated during the REAP process disseminated in workshops and ISDC meetings among national experts and decision makers.

5.2.3 Output indicators:

198. Output 1:

- Endorsement of the proposed mechanism by the ISDC;
- Completed 5 national and 1 regional workshops.
- Implementation plan agreed by ISDC and donors;
- Operational mechanism for regional cooperation and replication of best practices established; Regular ISDC meetings;
- Donors funding a number of REAP project proposals;
- Countries and donors contribution secured;
- Clear process of funds utilization is developed;
- Clear procedures for reporting and accountability.

199. Output 2:

- Needs assessment report and conceptual framework for DSS presented and approved at the regional workshop;
- Agreements on free data exchange between the countries across the network;
- Effective decentralised data network established;
- Approved implementation plan;
- Increased capacity of the network through training and provision of hardware/software.
- Core datasets and indicators on SLM and SD identified;
- Network of data-holding organisations created by end of the first year of the project;
- Data accessible across the network and between data holding institutions at the national and regional levels;
- Workshops reports prepared;
- Increased use of DSS by different user groups as a repository on information on environment and SD by end of the project;
- Needs of decision-making organisations identified;
- Analytical tools (models, hot spot case studies, publications) identified and results effectively communicated for replication;
- GIS interface and SW developed;
- At least five training workshops on data application at the national level completed.

200. Output 3:

- Needs and opportunities for CS participation identified and a mechanism for CS participation proposed;
- Workshop reports prepared;
- Endorsement of CS participation mechanism during a regional workshop on NGOs/CS;
- Implementation plan for the CS mechanism prepared;
- Established operational Public Council under ISDC;
- Effective information dissemination system established;
- Best practice handbook and review on CS projects prepared;
- Workshop reports completed;
- Partnership with existing training and advisory centers established;
- At least 3 regional training courses for representatives of CS organised;
- Regional programmes for CS capacity-building prepared, including intersectoral bridging programmes and computer networks;
- A number of NGO projects on support to regional cooperation and key regional REAP priorities developed.

201. Output 4:

- Possible constrains for REAP implementation identified;
- Mechanism to address the possible constrains defined;
- Strengthened REAP Steering Committee through established operational Monitoring Group;
- Contract with the national expert signed;
- Specific priorities for REAP projects defined;
- Five REAP pilot demonstration activities established that address REAP priorities;
- Monitoring and evaluation reports;
- Methodologies, guidelines and knowledge accumulated during the REAP process summarized and disseminated;
- Results of REAP preparation and implementation regularly communicated;
- REAP experience recognised by the involved national, regional and international organisations in the region and outside;
- Best practices and lessons learnt from pilot activities collected and disseminated.

Table 3 List of data sources

Title	Date received	File title
List of the partners during UNEP/GEF REAP project implementation by country	20/03/2012	GEF-REAP FPs
PDF (Signatures)	22/03/2012	4448_Signed_LI_060502.pdf
PDF Final Report for Internal Projects	22/03/2012	4448_Final_rpt_300404.pdf
PDF Closing Revision	22/03/2012	4448_Closing Rev.No2_040604.pdf
Project Document (DRAFT) Project Document (DRAFT)	20/03/2012 22/03/2012	MSP CAREAP 03 March 2005 03-04-05 MSP Project document – for CEO appr
CEO Endorsement	Not available	
Inception Report	None done	
PIR 2008	20/03/2012	4865 REAP-PIR 2008-final
PIR 2006-2007	20/03/2012	PIR 2006-2007 REAPrev 21-09
PIR 2006-2007	20/03/2012	PIR 2006-2007 REAPrev 19Sept 2007
Half-yearly Report (Jan – Jun 2008) (1)	20/03/2012	Progress Report Jan-Jun 2008-Max edit
Half-yearly Report (Jan – Jun 2008) (2)	20/03/2012	Jan-Jun 2008-Max edit_BH
Half-yearly Report (Jul 2006 – Jun 2007)	20/03/2012	Progress Report July 2006-june 2007
Half-yearly Report (Jul Dec 2007)	20/03/2012	Progress Report July-Dec 2007
Half-yearly Report (Nov 2005 – Jun 2006)	20/03/2012	Progress Report Nov05-June06
Half-yearly Report (Nov 2005 – Sep 2006)	20/03/2012	Progress Report Nov05-Sep 06
Mid Term Review	None done	-
Support to the REAP in Central Asia	22/03/2012	4448_Output rpt
Assessment Reports on Emerging Ecological Issues in Central Asia	22/03/2012	4685_Output_rpt on emerging ecl issues in CA_2006
Appraisal Reports on Priority Ecological Problems in Central Asia	22/03/2012	4685_Output-rpt on priority_2006
TERMINAL REPORT THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME – Regional Office Asia Pacific THE UNEP/GEF PROJECT ENTITLED: Support to the Implementation of the Regional Environment Action Plan in Central Asia (IMIS ID GFL/2328-2770-4685/or 2175)	22/03/2012	4448_Terminal Report Mar 11.pdf
OPERATIONAL PROGRAM ON SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT (OP#15)	-	OP_15_English_Revised
Minutes of the Interstate Sustainable Development Commission meeting, May 26, 2009, Tashkent, Uzbekistan	22/03/2012	Minutes_SC_26 May 2009.Eng.pdf

AGENDA Interstate Sustainable Development Commission IFAS Meting 26 May, 2009, Tashkent, Republic of Uzbekistan	22/03/2012	SC Agenda_En.pdf
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS Interstate Sustainable Development Commission IFAS Meeting 26 May, 2009, Tashkent, Republic of Uzbekistan	22/03/2012	SC LoP Tashkent Uzbekistan_En.pdf
Report of the Meetings conducted within the frame of the Central Asia Interstate Sustainable Development Commission	22/03/2012	SC_Meeting_Report_En.pdf
DECISION 1 Interstate Sustainable Development Commission “ISDC Chair Rotation”	22/03/2012	SC_Decision_May_En.pdf

Annex 3 Evaluation programme

Time	Activity	Participants	Venue
Tuesday, 15 May 2012			
TDM	Travel to Bishkek, **Kyrgyzstan**	Francis, Firuz	
Thursday, 24 May 2012 REAP Kyrgyzstan			
09.30 – 10.30	Meeting with Ms. Djiparkul Bekkulova, State Agency on Environment Protection and Forestry under the Government	Francis, Firuz	Office of State Agency on Environment Protection and Forestry
10:30 - 11.30	Meeting with Mr. Arstanbek Davletkeldiyev, State Agency on Environment Protection and Forestry under the Government.	Francis, Firuz	Office of State Agency on Environment Protection and Forestry
12.00 – 13.30	Lunch		
13.30 – 17.00	Review and consolidation of information	Francis, Firuz	UNDP, CACILM MCB office
Friday, 25 May 2012, REAP Kyrgyzstan			
09.00 – 10.00	Meeting with Mr. Valery Lelevkin, Chief of SIC ISDC, Kyrgyzstan branch	Francis, Firuz	SIC ISDC, Kyrgyzstan branch office
10.15 – 12.00	Meeting with Mr. Kumar Kylychev E&E Unit of UNDP Kyrgyzstan.	Francis, Firuz	CAILM MCB
12.00 – 13.00	Lunch		
13.00 – 17.00	Deskwork and planning of REAP field trip.	Francis, Firuz	CACILM MCB
Friday – Saturday, 26 – 28 May 2012 REAP Kyrgyzstan			
09:00 – 17:00	REAP site visit	Francis, Firuz	Naryn, Suusamir valleys
Tuesday, 29 May 2012			
	Travel to Tajikistan	Francis, Firuz	
14:00 – 15:00	Meeting Mr. Djalil Buzrukov, Chief of SIC ISDC, Tajikistan branch.	Francis, Firuz	‘Vefa’ Center
15:00 -17:00	Deskwork	Francis, Firuz	‘Vefa’ Center
Wednesday, 30 May 2012 REAP Tajikistan			
09.30 – 11.30	Meeting with Mr. Kadyr Boturov, leading expert, Committee for Environmental Protection.	Francis, Firuz	‘Vefa’ Center
12.00 – 13.00	Lunch	Francis, Firuz	

13:00 – 14:00	Meeting with Mr. Karimov Abduvohid, chairman of National Botanic garden.	Francis, Firuz	Administrative office of National Botanic garden
14.00 – 16.00	Meeting Mr. Ivan Ustyan. State Enterprise for Protected Areas.	Francis, Firuz	Vefa Center
16:00 – 17:00	Deskwork	Francis, Firuz	Vefa Center
Friday,31 May 2012 REAP Tajikistan			
09.30-12.00	Meeting with Mr. Shodibek Kurbonov, Head of Dept. for Forestry and Protected Areas. Committee for Environmental Protection.	Francis, Firuz	Committee for Environmental Protection
12:00 – 13:00	Lunch	Francis, Firuz	
13:00	Field visits REAP	Francis, Firuz	Vahdat district
Friday, Sunday 01 - 03 June 2012 REAP Tajikistan			
	Field visits REAP	Francis, Firuz	Shahinav and Regar regions
Tuesday, 12 June			
	Return to Dushanbe and wrap up	Francis, Firuz,	
Wednesday, 13 June			
Travel to Bangkok		Francis	
Thursday-Friday 14-15 June			
Meeting REAP/PALM with Task manager and others			
Saturday 16 June			
Return home base		Francis	

Annex 4 Bibliography

Brinkerhoff, D.W. (2004), The Enabling Environment for Implementing the Millennium Development Goals: Government Actions to Support NGOs. Paper presented at: George Washington University Conference "The Role of NGOs in Implementing the Millennium Development Goals" Washington, DC, May 12-13, 2004

Gunderson, L.H. and Holling, C.S. *Eds.* (2002). Panarchy: Understanding transformations in human and natural systems. Washington, DC. Island Press.

Annex 5 Summary of co-financing and statement of project expenditures

Co-financing

Co financing (Type/Source)	IA own Financing (mill US$)		Government (mill US$)		Other* (mill US$)		Total (mill US$)		Total Disbursed (mill US$)
	Planned	**Actual**	**Planned**	**Actual**	**Planned**	**Actual**	**Planned**	**Actual**	
– Grants	0.2150	0.2100			1.300	0.120	1.515	0.33	0.33
– Loans									
– Credits									
– Equity investments									
– In-kind support		0.0360	0.1605	0.1605	0.0400	0.0400	0.2005	0.5605	0.2365
– Other (*) - -									
Totals		0.2150	0.2460	0.1605	0.1605	1.3400	0.1600	1.7155	0.5665

Project expenditures

Component	Estimated cost at design (US$)	Actual cost (US$)	Expenditure ratio (actual/planned)
Project personnel	43,200	30,840.75	0.713
Sub-contracts	638,265	463,260.21	0.725
Training	201,035	223,136.21	1.109
Equipment & premises	0	50,000	-[57]
Miscellaneous	92,500	100,984.99	1.091
Total	975,000	868,222.16	0.890

[57] No expenditure ratio possible

Annex 6 Review of the project design

1 Introduction

202. This Inception Report is the first deliverable of the Terminal Evaluation (TE) of the UNEP GEF project "Support to the Implementation of the Regional Environment Action Plan in Central Asia- REAP" GEF Project ID 217558 as required by the Terms of Reference provided to the Consultant.

203. The inception phase represents the TE's understanding of the project's design and theory of change following a desk review of mainly the design document, including logical framework, and other available documentation and surrounding literature prior to embarking on the field visits and carrying out interviews with stakeholders. The evaluation of the project is an iterative process, that is, the evaluation will continuously update its understanding of how the project has developed, progressed and what the long term impacts of the project might be and the Inception Report is the first step in this process.

204. The Inception Report is compiled mostly from an analysis of the following project documentation (where available):

- Project Preparation Grant (PPG) document
- Project Document
- GEF Chief Executive Approval (of the Project Document)
- Inception Report
- Project Implementation Reports (PIR)
- Steering Committee meeting documents, including agendas, meeting minutes, and any summary reports
- Mid Term Review (MTR)
- Correspondence related to project
- Supervision mission reports
- Project progress reports, including financial reports submitted
- Cash advance requests documenting disbursements
- Management memos related to project
- Other documentation of supervision feedback on project outputs and processes (*e.g.* comments on draft progress reports, etc.).
- Extension documentation. Has a project extension occurred?
- Project revision documentation.
- Budget revision documentation.
- Project Terminal Report (draft if final version not available)

2 Purpose of Evaluation

205. The Terminal Evaluation (TE) is initiated and commissioned by the Evaluation Office of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Nairobi. In line with the UNEP Evaluation Policy, the UNEP Evaluation Manual and the Guidelines for GEF Agencies in Conducting Terminal Evaluations, the terminal evaluation of the Project "*Support to the Implementation of the Regional Environment Action Plan in Central Asia*" is undertaken after the project has ended to assess project performance (in terms of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency), and determine outcomes and impacts (actual and potential) stemming from the project, including their sustainability.

206. The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the TE has identified three implementation issues:

i. No mid-term Evaluation or Review was conducted during project life[59].

[58] Hereinafter referred to as "the REAP project"

[59] Although it is not clear at this point whether it was a requirement of MSPs at the time of project formulation. Clarification will be sought on this issue.

ii. The latest project implementation report from 2008[60] highlighted following issues:
- No specific or focussed mechanism towards SLM was established;
- Civil society participation was still weak;
- A regional framework convention on environmental protection for Sustainable Development (SD) was not yet fully signed by all countries;
- Little replication or follow up was recorded;
- There was limited project focus on Sustainable Land Management (SLM) and implementation of SLM related activities in the field.

iii. The terminal report (draft March 2011) pointed out that the project was instrumental in providing a comprehensive support to the CA countries in a wide range of areas including bringing together top level environment decision-makers, scientific circles, civil society organizations as well as grassroots organizations involved in environment in CA. The low level of financial and political commitment of country partners towards implementing and sustaining project outcomes and other issues affected project implementation. The TE will examine this statement closely to assess its validity as to whether, despite the apparent poor implementation and commitment, the project has had a lasting effect on regional environmental management.

207. Based on this and other information the TE will seek to determine the following:

(a) How successful was the project in strengthening the political and institutional basis for regional cooperation in CA on SD and SLM and in setting up a regional cooperation mechanism?

(b) To what extent did the project strengthen capacities for information generation and information support to decision-making on SD and SLM in CA? Was a Decision Support System (DSS) established?

(c) To what degree was the project capable to involve civil society in the strengthening of regional cooperation in SD and SLM? Was an institutional mechanism for civil society involvement in policy dialogue developed?

(d) How successful was the project in building capacities for REAP implementation? What were the outcomes of the pilot projects implemented in the field?

208. The evaluation has two primary purposes:
1. To provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements, and;
2. To promote learning, feedback, and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned among UNEP, the GEF and their partners. Therefore, the evaluation will identify lessons of operational relevance for future project formulation and implementation.

209. The inception phase and subsequent report can be considered a point in the process of evaluation to consolidate the evaluation team and define the current and near-future status of the evaluation. The ToR require the TE to carry out a Theory of Change (ToC) exercise (see Section 4), review the quality of the project design based upon the study of the project documentation available and in particular the project document and prepare an evaluation process plan.

2.1 Background to the Project

210. The UNEP GEF "Support to the Implementation of the Regional Environment Action Plan in Central Asia" project (REAP project) was designed to improve environmental quality through enhanced integrated ecosystems management (IEM), strengthen regional capacity and cooperation in environment for sustainable development and to implement the Regional Environmental Action Plan developed between the five participating Central Asian countries (Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan,

[60] 4865 REAP – PIR 2008 - final

Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). The REAP concept and methodology was proposed by UNEP to the Interstate Sustainable Development Commission (ISDC) in 2000 and it was later presented at the Ministerial Conference in Almaty, Kazakhstan and approved by the ISDC with the request for further development and update. In September 2001 a request was subsequently made to initiate activities to strengthen regional cooperation and public participation in the area of environment and sustainable development resulting in the Project Development Fund (PDF A) for the development of a small to medium-sized project (SMP) grant to develop the REAP project.

211. During a regional meeting of experts, five priority issues were identified as key topics for REAP by the countries:

1. Mountain eco-systems degradation;
2. Air pollution;
3. Land degradation;
4. Water pollution, and;
5. Waste management.

212. The countries agreed on the following selection criteria: that the priorities should be national priorities for two and more countries or have a trans-boundary character which cannot be solved by efforts of only one country.

213. For each of the priority areas, one country took a leading role in preparation of a thematic Environmental Action Plan (EAP). On the basis of five EAPs, the REAP was compiled with concepts for regional projects.

2.2 Description of the Project

214. The project falls under the GEF Operational Programme (OP15) on Sustainable Land Management and OP 12, Integrated Ecosystem Management,61 and it is also related to several other GEF Focal Areas, such as Biodiversity, International Waters, Climate Change, and Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). The project was intended to contribute to the generation of multiple global benefits in the GEF focal areas by providing efficient cross-sectoral regional coordination and integration of environmental concerns in national and regional policy planning and development and is broadly in line with GEF 4 Replenishment (although developed under the GEF 3 Replenishment). The project was intended to strengthen national and regional management capacity in information generation and application for decision-making through the development of a regional decision support system and operational data exchange network. The project was also to facilitate cooperation between the Governments and civil society organizations (CSO) at the regional level in the area of sustainable environmental management. A key element of the project was to enable the Governments to translate the regional and international commitments to sustainable land management (SLM) and sustainable and rational natural resources management into practice through five pilot projects.

Project Details[62]

GEF Project ID	2175
Funding Source	GEF Trust Fund (GEF 4)
Project Name	Support to the Implementation of the Regional Environmental Action Plan in Central Asia
Country	Regional (Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan)
Region	Central Asia
Focal Area	Land Degradation
Operational Programme	15; 12
PDF-A Approval Date	March 01, 2002
Approval Date	April 19, 2005

[61] The second OP (12) was not included in the Project Document but appears on the GEF Project details on the GEF Website http://www.gefonline.org/projectDetailsSQL.cfm?projID=2175

[62] Source: http://www.gefonline.org/projectDetailsSQL.cfm?projID=2175

GEF Agency Approval Date	April 19, 2005
Project Completion Date	December 01, 2010
Project Status (April 2012)	Completed
GEF Agency	UNEP
Executing Agency	UNEP's Regional Resource Center for Asia and Pacific (ROAP) and Interstate Sustainable Development Commission (ISDC) for Central Asia
PDF A Amount	US$ 25,000
GEF Project Grant	US$ 975,000
GEF Grant	US$ 1,000,000
Co-financing Total	US$ 1,715,501 (cash & in-kind)
Project Cost	US$ 2,715,500
GEF Agency Fee	US$ 146,000

2.2.1 Overall goal and project outcomes

215. The Project Document describes the goal of the REAP project as improving "the quality of the environment through sustainable land management in CA by strengthening of regional cooperation in environment for SD and REAP implementation. The main purpose is to implement some key aspects of the REAP and to build regional capacity for replication and up-scaling of successful practices and approaches in SLM."

216. The objective of the project is stated in the LFM as: "To implement key aspects of the Regional Environmental Action Plan for Central Asia and to create enabling conditions for its further implementation through capacity building and pilot demonstrations in Sustainable Land Management".

217. The expected outcomes from the project were listed as:

0. **Outcome 1:** Strengthened political and institutional basis for regional cooperation in SD and SLM.
1. **Outcome 2:** Strengthened information support to decision-making on SD and SLM.
2. **Outcome 3:** Involvement of civil society (CS) in strengthening of regional cooperation in SD and SLM.
3. **Outcome 4:** Enhanced capacities to address regional SLM priorities and to implement the REAP.

218. For each of the priority areas, one country took a leading role in the preparation of a thematic Environmental Action Plan (EAP):

- Uzbekistan - Air pollution;
- Kazakhstan - Water pollution;
- Turkmenistan - Land Degradation;
- Kyrgyz Republic - Waste management, and;
- Tajikistan - Mountain ecosystems degradation.

3 Review of Project Design

219. Summary of project design ratings:

Criteria	Rating
Overall rating for Relevance	**Moderately Satisfactory:** because it did not marry the priority needs with the objectives of GEF OP#15 sufficiently enough
Overall rating for Intended Results and Causality	**Satisfactory:** the project's strategy was sufficiently robust to achieve the objective
Overall rating for Efficiency	**Satisfactory:** the design had tried to tie the project in closely with existing structures, institutions and on-going programmes
Overall rating for Sustainability / Replication and Catalytic Effects	**Satisfactory:** for the time it was designed and the disparate nature of regional collaboration the project presented a reasonable strategy and in all likelihood the most efficient way of driving the process of regional collaboration
Overall rating for Risk Identification and Social	**Moderately Satisfactory:** the project design would

Safeguards	have benefited from a clearer risk log (described above)
Overall rating for Governance and Supervision Arrangements	**Satisfactory:** the governance model described by the Project Document was sufficient, even progressive for the region at the time. The TE will analyse why it appeared to fail
Overall rating for Management, Execution and Partnership Arrangements	**Moderately Satisfactory:** the management, execution and partnership arrangements described by the Project Document, while probably innovative for the region at the time, were poorly described. The TE will analyse why they appeared to fail
Overall rating for Financial Planning / budgeting	**Moderately Satisfactory:** there was reasonable provision for budgeting and financial management except for the SSFA and the 35 MoU
Overall rating for Monitoring	**Moderately Satisfactory:** a monitoring programme was described and it is similar to many produced around the time of this project's conception but it is deficient in many ways described above. Because there was no inception phase or MTR these issues could not be addressed and the project re-aligned
Overall rating for Evaluation	**Moderately Unsatisfactory:** a project of this complexity should have had a midterm evaluation and it was unrealistic to expect it to run its course without an external critical analysis. Many of the shortcomings in the project could have been avoided if there had been a MTR

Annex 3 provides a summary description of the assessment of the quality of project design.

3.1 Project relevance

3.1.1 Sub-regional environmental relevance

220. The Project Document provides a convincing argument for the need to support the REAP in Central Asia listing a range of pressing environmental issues and challenges that require inter-governmental collaboration and agreements including land degradation, air pollution, water pollution, waste management and mountain ecosystem degradation (Project Document p. 3).

221. However, as is documented in the project's Terminal Report (Section 3.3 p. 26) in 2006 a number of "emerging" issues were added to the project's list of environmental challenges that the REAP project was intended to address. These included: *Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF), Atmospheric Brown Cloud (ABC), renewable energy and climate change*.

222. Quite whether these issues were "emerging" or where just not considered to be important or even whether the REAP project was simply a place to put the "problems" is not clear from the project documentation. Having said that, the addition to the project of these "emerging" issues is a measure of the project's relevance.

3.1.2 Sub-regional policy relevance

223. The preparation of REAP for Central Asia was initiated after the official request of Ministers of Environment of five participating Central Asian countries in February 2000. REAP was based on priorities identified in National Environmental Action Plans (NEAPs)[63], National Action Programmes to Combat Desertification (NAPCD) [64], National communications to FCCC [65] and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans[66] as well as on-going national and regional projects and programmes. It was a collaborative effort of National Focal Points and Collaborative Centres from

[63] Prepared in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan.

[64] Prepared in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan.

[65] Prepared in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan

[66] Prepared in Kazakhstan

each participating country, and a number of national NGOs. Therefore the UNEP-GEF REAP project designed to implement REAP was clearly embedded in the regional environmental policy framework.

3.1.3 UNEP mandate and policy relevance

224. The objectives of the REAP project were clearly relevant to the UNEP mandate and policies of the time as outlined in the UNEP Sub-programme 3 (Policy Implementation, Section 2) which has an objective:

> "*The overall objective of the sub-programme is to enhance the human, technical and institutional capacity of Governments and other stakeholders to implement environmental policy and to improve environmental management*"

225. The expected outcomes being:

> "*Strengthened capacity of Governments and other relevant stakeholders in the implementation of environmental policies and programmes for environmental management in the context of sustainable development*"
>
> *"Enhanced capacity at the international, regional and national levels to better prevent, prepare for, respond to and mitigate the impacts of environmental emergencies and/or disasters with impacts on the environment"*
>
> *"Enhanced cooperation and capacity at the international and national levels for the implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, as endorsed at the first Global Programme of Action (GPA) Intergovernmental Review Meeting, held in Montreal, Canada in November 2001 (UNEP/GCSS VII.6), and the World Summit on Sustainable Development"*
>
> *"Greater availability and use of biodiversity information and policy analysis products for developing countries and multilateral environmental agreements bodies"*

3.1.4 GEF focal areas, strategic priorities and operational programmes relevance

226. The TE agrees, to an extent, with the statement in the Project Document (Section C, p. 9) that:

> *"The project is consistent with the GEF Operational Programme (OP15) on Sustainable Land Management (SLM) and it is also related to several other GEF Focal Areas, such as Biodiversity, International Waters, Climate Change, and Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). The project will contribute to the generation of multiple global benefits in the GEF focal areas by providing efficient cross-sectoral regional coordination and integration of environmental concerns in national and regional policy planning and development. It will strengthen national and regional management capacity in information generation and application for decision-making through development of a regional decision support system and operational data exchange network. The project will also facilitate cooperation between the Governments and civil society organizations (CSO) at the regional level in the area of sustainable land management. The project hence contributes to GEF's Strategic Priority SLM-1 on Targeted Capacity building. Pilot demonstrations of good practices in sustainable land management will enable the Governments to translate the regional and international commitments to SLM and rational natural resources management into practical realm and to replicate successful practices in line with GEF Strategic Priority SLM-2 on implementation of innovative and indigenous SLM practices."*

227. The GEF OP#15, Sustainable Land Management, which to a large extent will be the median against which the Project's performance will be judged, is defined (at the time) by the document Operational Program on Sustainable Land Management (OP#15) revised in 2003.

228. Within GEF OP#15 Land degradation is broadly defined as "… any form of deterioration of the natural potential of land that affects ecosystem integrity either in terms of reducing its sustainable ecological productivity or in terms of its native biological richness and maintenance of resilience."[67]
229. The expected **outcomes** of GEF-supported activities on sustainable land management include the following:

- Institutional and human resource capacity is strengthened to improve sustainable land management planning and implementation to achieve global environment benefits within the context of sustainable development.
- The policy, regulatory and economic incentive framework is strengthened to facilitate wider adoption of sustainable land management practices across sectors as a country addresses multiple demands on land resources for economic activities, preservation of the structure and functional integrity of ecosystems, and other activities.
- Improvement in the economic productivity of land under sustainable management and the preservation or restoration of the structure and functional integrity of ecosystems.

230. However, it should be noted that the REAP project had a much wider remit than that of OP#15 (*e.g.* waste disposal) although it should be noted that this OP was not well defined around the time of the PDF-A phase and some of the issues such as *mountain ecosystem degradation* have been further segregated into specific OPs (OP# 4) since then (GEF 3 Replenishment) under the GEF 4 Replenishment.
231. A counter argument might run that OP#15 was used for what is essentially a cross-cutting issue of resource governance at a regional scale.

3.2 Problems the project seeks to address

232. The Project Document (Section A, p. 2) lists an alarming array of issues that the REAP project is intended to address which are worth reiterating here:
"Land Degradation - Root causes of land degradation are linked to socio-economic and policy factors and land-use regimes inherited from the Soviet era. Immediate causes are related to inappropriate agricultural practices that cause soil contamination and soil erosion, poor management of irrigation systems that leads to salinization and water logging of soils, as well as radio-chemical pollution and solid waste from the industrial sector.

Air Pollution - Urban and industrial trans-boundary air pollution poses serious environmental problems in the CA and contributes to global warming. In CA, more than 7 million tonnes of pollutants were discharged into the atmosphere by industries and transport in 1999, including more than 150 harmful substances discharged by industrial plants and power-generating facilities, mainly sulphur, nitrogen and carbon oxides, hydrocarbons, ammonia, hydrogen sulphide, hydrogen fluoride, heavy metals and benzopyrene.

Water Pollution - Recycled water (drainage water and waste water) are the main sources of water pollution. The prevailing pollutants are sulphates, chlorides, and sodium ions, pesticides, compounds of nitrogen, phosphates as well as heavy metals from mining and metal industries, etc. (toxins); organic substances from specific industries (toxins and non-toxins); non-toxic and toxic organic substances from different types of industrial plants. In addition, persistent organic pollutants (POPs) pose a serious threat to public health and environment. In CA, POPs are an issue of significant concern. The main sources of POPs contamination include agriculture, out-dated technologies used in industry as well as a lack of awareness amongst the general public. Since little attention has been accorded to the problem so far, pesticides such as aldrin, dieldrin, heptachlor and dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) are still in use. The area of land under agriculture has decreased significantly during the post Soviet period. This has resulted in the stockpiling of unused pesticides, often in dilapidated buildings with no special facilities, and therefore increased the risk of ground water contamination. The estimations are that there are thousand tonnes of pesticides, which include POPs pesticides – HCH, Toxaphene, DDT - awaiting safe disposal.

[67] GEF1999. Report of the STAP Expert Group Workshop on Land Degradation (GEF/C.14/Inf. 15)

Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethanes (PCBs) have been used in industrial production. There are stockpiles of aldrin, dieldrin and DDT. Identified exposure pathways for humans to these three POPs include consumer, residential and accident/poisoning

Waste Management - In 1999, the volume of industrial waste in the region exceeded 168 million tonnes. The majority of this waste is non-ferrous, including radioactive and heavy metals. Another critical problem is the mining dumps and tailings that occupy vast areas. These dumps contain such dangerous contaminants as mercury, antimony, fluorite, lead, prussic acid, cyanides, and heavy metal salts. A danger of trans-boundary contamination by waste mostly exists with regard to non-ferrous metallurgic waste and radioactive waste storage sites located in the basins of the trans-boundary Syr Daria, Zeravshan, and Chu Rivers.

The current waste management policies do not address the inherited problems from the times of the Soviet Union. The major problems with waste management identified are as follows: absent and worn waste treatment plants and recycling facilities; low sanitary standards; a lack of waste-less and low waste technologies; absence of centralized sites for toxic waste disposal and radioactive and metallurgical waste storages, and a lack of landfill re-cultivation practices.

Mountain Ecosystems Degradation - The mountain ecosystems of Central Asia are threatened by:

> *Natural disasters - earthquakes, landslides, avalanches, frequent forest fires, snow, mud- and stone flows;*
>
> *Anthropogenic impact - deforestation (industrial production, use of wood for fuel and forest logging); poaching; irrational use of arable lands (at the expense of desert and steppe foothills and wetland plain ecosystems); extension of mining enterprises; uncontrolled cattle grazing; urbanization, extension of communication infrastructure, etc. An additional negative factor is sand storms from the dried Aral Sea bed, which carry particles to Pamir glaciers and to the larger Asian region.*

At present, the status of flora and fauna of mountain systems is quickly deteriorating. These processes are supplemented by radical changes in the hydrological balance of mountain catchments, depletion of renewable water resources and increased risk of dangerous natural disasters. The mountain ecosystems are under the pressure of complex social and economic factors ranging from extensive and unplanned natural resources use; growing anthropogenic pressure; lack of environmental impact assessment during construction of major power and industrial enterprises; lack of modern agricultural and industrial production technologies; irrational use and insufficient management of agricultural lands by local communities, and lack of a regional monitoring and early warning system, research and forecasting."

233. The additional "emerging" issues which were added to this project's list of environmental challenges included: *Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF), Atmospheric Brown Cloud (ABC), renewable energy* and *climate change*.

234. By way of comment the TE can't help wondering that some of the issues had a tenuous link to SLM and LD and further; if issues were not being added on an *ad hoc* basis and there was a lack of any serious analysis taking place in terms of *cause and effect* and that a simple clustering exercise might have been useful to identify cause and effect and develop appropriate responses as well as removing issues that were not sufficiently relevant to the OP (*e.g.* waste management). However, the TE makes this comment cautiously nearly a decade later and without reference of the political context of encouraging the emergent CIS countries to engage in a process and address environmental problems when there was no previous experience of doing so.

3.2.1 Barriers to addressing the challenges

235. Considering the dysfunctional or *ad hoc* way in which the environmental challenges that were to be addressed is presented in the Project Document it provides a surprisingly forthright and reasonable assessment of the barriers to effective environmental management in the region:

> ***"Barrier 1: Lack of sufficient and adequate regional institutional, political, regulatory and financial mechanism for sustainable environmental management***
>
> *In general, the economic transition seriously affected the existing regional environmental institutional structures in CA, with economic growth being a high priority on the national and regional political agenda.*
>
> *Environmental regulation at the regional level presents a difficult challenge, as the collective interest in a clean environment is diffuse. There is a lack of coordination at regional level, which makes difficult monitoring and compliance with the regional agreements and multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), and to securing sufficient financial resources. No one organization has the sufficient political authority, vitality and profile to serve as a centre of gravity for the environmental problems and exert sustained political influence and authority in other regional fora for decision-making and enforcement.*
>
> *Regional environmental governance is shared among too many institutions (International Fund for Aral Sea (IFAS), Interstate Sustainable Development Commission (ISDC), Interstate Committee on Water Coordination (ICWC)) with diffuse, overlapping, or conflicting mandates at the national and regional level. Adding to this fragmentation are the national Ministries of Environment, contending for limited governmental time, limited authority, attention and financial resources without adequate technical provisions for data management and analysis.*
>
> ***Barrier 2: Lack of harmonized and unified data, as well as an efficient mechanism for data management and exchange***
>
> *The fragmentation related to the environmental governance reflects and is strongly felt on the level of information and data management throughout the region. There is a lack of regional inter-sectoral protocol/agreement for data and information exchange, as well as for harmonization of qualitative and quantitative monitoring data and systems related to various environmental parameters. Additionally, there is a lack of national agreements on the coordination role of the Ministries of Environment related to data processing and analysis in the field of the environment, on their function as the main repositories of environmental information. During the preparation of the REAP the need for such an agreement regarding the five environmental priority areas and SD was strongly felt.*
>
> ***Barrier 3: Insufficient public participation at all political levels in environmental management***
>
> *CSOs in CA play a number of important functions, such as: provision of legal advice, raising public awareness on the current environmental problems, information dissemination, grass-root level activities, environmental education, advisory functions and training for public and mass media. In some cases, the academic NGOs have supplemented or even replaced the impoverished departments of national research and academic institutions. Environmental NGOs are largely made up of highly educated former academicians with scientific background. With time the membership of these organizations is expanding to include a broader social profile.*
>
> ***Barrier 4: Insufficient capacity for project development, implementation and resource mobilization***
>
> *The REAP was developed under the auspices of the ISDC, which comprises of the Ministers of Environment, deputy Ministers of Economy and Finance and academia. However, the measures to be implemented under the five REAP environmental priority areas and issues of sustainable use of natural resources need to be addressed in an integrated manner with the broader participation from the Ministries of Economy, Planning, Finance and other line Ministries as well as CS involved in policy formulation.*
>
> *The ISDC recognized that there is a need to further elaborate the plan and develop strategy and mechanism for REAP implementation. A mechanism with clear institutional responsibilities and inter-sectoral interaction is required for project development,*

implementation and monitoring, as well as for needs assessment and resource mobilization. The capacity for project development and implementation throughout the region is uneven and there is a need to strengthen the experts from the CA counties. Additionally, the need for capacity development in environmental governance among CS was also identified.

236. The ToR for the TE of the REAP project state that "as this is a terminal evaluation, particular attention should be given to learning from the experience. Therefore, the "why?" question should be at front of the consultant's mind all through the evaluation exercise. This means that the consultant needs to go beyond the assessment of "what" the project performance was, and make a serious effort to provide a deeper understanding of "why" the performance was as it was, i.e. of processes affecting attainment of project results (criteria under category 3). This should provide the basis for the lessons that can be drawn from the project. In fact, the usefulness of the evaluation will be determined to a large extent by the capacity of the consultant to explain "why things happened" as they happened and are likely to evolve in this or that direction, which goes well beyond the mere assessment of "where things stand" today."[68]

237. Therefore the TE considers that there may have been some trade-offs between what was essentially OP# 15 "core business" and a range of somewhat disparate, in terms of OP# 15, environmental challenges that were presenting themselves at the time (*e.g.* waste management), taking place in order to address weaknesses within the overall system and presenting an acceptable way forwards. Quite understandably, there would have to be a large element of "*political expedience*" involved in developing a project such as this and having it accepted by decision-makers and maintaining a degree of scientific and environmental management credibility and rigor.

3.3 Sustainability

238. The Project Document (Part C, Section 3, p. 21) describes the project's likelihood of sustainability:

"The project proposal rests upon a number of factors that provide a solid foundation for its long-term sustainability. The first of these is the long-term political support and strong will from the high-level national authorities from all countries of Central Asia. The urgent need for a regional initiative of this type and benefits drawn by many regional, national and international stakeholders will ensure the sustainability of this project. WSSD [World Summit on Sustainable Development] outcomes and preparations to the Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, Kyiv, 21-23 May 2003 gave additional inputs and facilitate cooperation activities in the sub-region.

Sustainability is likely to be further enhanced through increased capacity of the national and regional experts in decision-making, collaborative approach and involvement of CS [civil society] representatives, different level and different types of stakeholders. Moreover, the establishment of financial mechanism for regional initiatives under REAP implementation will ensure financial sustainability."

3.3.1 Socio-political sustainability

239. The TE would expect to have seen a more detailed analysis of the prospect of, and issues facing, the sustainability of the project's outcomes. The statement that there was a "solid foundation for its long-term sustainability" is not borne out by the subsequent delivery by national governments and international stakeholders with regards co-financing commitments. For instance the delivery on co-financing has been derisory and a cursory examination of the ISDC minutes from the "Chair Rotation Meeting" show that there are a number of requests for financial assistance for items that might reasonably be met from national budgets such as the Anniversary meeting in the Republic of Uzbekistan in November-December 2009 or the continued operation of the SIC ISDC "eco-portal" (ISDC Decision, 26th May 2006).

[68] TE REAP Project Section D, p. 8

240. The addition of the "emerging issues" (Section 3.2, para. 28) to the REAP project may have been an effort to include these in the overall framework of the project or arguably it might also have simply been a means to be seen to be addressing the issues without actually allocating national budgetary funds. The TE will try and determine whether there was genuine commitment from the participating countries. Indeed the TE will try to determine the level of financial commitment by participating countries since the closure of the UNEP-GEF REAP project.
241. However, the argument that greater civil society involvement in the project is likely to enhance the prospects of sustainability is very reasonable and can be supported by reasonable and logical arguments.

3.3.2 Financial resources sustainability

242. The development of a "*financial mechanism for regional initiatives under REAP implementation"* first appears under outcome 1 (Project document, p. 10). However the *financial mechanism* is not elaborated anywhere else within the Project Document and importantly it does not appear to make it into the project's log frame matrix.

3.4.3 Environmental sustainability

243. The TE feels that environmental sustainability is at the very heart of the REAP project in as much as the measures outlined in the Project Document are intended to put in place a framework for environmental sustainability but questions whether this is possible without the political and financial commitment that have been raised in sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2.

3.4.4 Measures planned to promote replication and up-scaling

244. The Project Document's strategy to promote up-scaling and replication is given as a two-fold approach. In reality there are three aspects to the strategy:

"*The replication potential of the project is two-fold:*

1. Replication of the project approach to promote regional collaboration and priority setting to address common and trans-boundary environmental issues. This approach has already been successfully applied by UNEP within the context of the New Partnership for Africa's Development and its GEF supported Environment Initiative. UNEP is also working with other regions, such as Latin America and the Caribbean as well as Southeast Asia, promoting a similar approach. Lessons from the Central Asian experience will therefore be mainstreamed into UNEP's programmes for other regions.

2. The project is designed to promote replication of pilot demonstration activities and best practices in environmental management through the creation of regional networks and exchange of information in Central Asia on environmental management issues. Moreover, the project will establish a financial mechanism under its component 1 to ensure funding for future projects linked to the REAP, which will also ensure replication and scaling up of successful pilot demonstrations."[69]

245. The TE makes the following comments on these statements:

1. While it is very useful to have a flow of experience between regions and programmes one has to wonder whether, given the specific circumstances of Central Asia *viz a viz* a range of issues that are specific to countries emerging from highly authoritarian and strongly centralised command economies, there are experiences and lessons that are transferable to other situations.
2. The idea of promoting networks within the region is a very reasonable one but questions why the issue of developing a "financial mechanism" was not listed separately. The evaluation can't help but wonder why this very important issue of a financial mechanism (assuming that this is not the Small Grants Programme) is mentioned on a number of occasions throughout the Project document but never "makes it" to the log frame matrix

[69] Project Document Section C, subsection 4, p. 22

or is clearly elaborated on. The next phase of the evaluation on data collection and analysis will help to clarify this point.

3.5 Preparation and readiness

3.5.1 Implementation arrangements

246. The TE ToR provides a more detailed account of the projects implementation arrangements than that provided in the Project Document which can be described as vague on many aspects:

> *"The UNEP Division of GEF Coordination (DGEF) acted as the project's GEF implementation agency.*
>
> *UNEP/Division of Regional Cooperation (DRC)/ Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) was the leading executing agency for this project and therefore took responsibility for overall project management organizing donor conferences and workshops, and providing continuous briefing on the project status and implementation achievements to the interested donor agencies. Specific technical tasks were to be undertaken by regional organizations through sub-contracts, such as ISDC, SIC, REAP country focal points, Regional Resource Center of the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT-RRC.AP.).*
>
> *The REAP Secretariat, hosted at the Regional Resource Center of the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT-RRC.AP) took care of day-to-day project coordination and management on behalf of UNEP/DRC/ROAP. Later during the project the key project coordinator, as former staff of RRC-AIT, managed the project as UNEP staff based at ROAP.*
>
> *Implementation was envisioned as a cooperative effort. Since the project was based on a partnership initiative of ADB, UNDP and UNEP, a Project Steering Committee was established with the representation of three donor agencies and ISDC. At a later stage, governing functions rested only with UNEP and ISDC.*
>
> *As REAP and regional cooperation initiative is a long-term programme, of which this project is just an initial part, the long-term oversight and coordination was envisioned to be carried out through ISDC or regional mechanism created in its place"*

247. Due to the dispersed nature of the REAP project the execution arrangements were complex and the TE will seek to determine where the strengths and weaknesses of this approach lie. An important aspect of this is that it appears that the execution through this means is possible because project implementation appears to have improved in the latter stages of the projects execution.

248. There appears to have been a lack of support in the implementation on the part of other international organisations particularly in respect to the Steering Committee. Whether this was due to a lack of confidence in the REAP project's abilities, perhaps even they felt that REAP was not relevant given the range of issues it was addressing, or the poor performance of the partners themselves is not clear and will need to be investigated further.

3.5.1 Financial planning

249. The Project Document sets out the financial reporting as:

> *"The project financial reports will be submitted to UNEP/GEF in the form of quarterly project expenditure reports and final expenditure report, showing amount budgeted for the year, amount expended since the beginning of the year and unliquidated obligations. The financial reports on separate activities will be prepared within 30 days of the end of the reported activity. The project managers will prepare the quarterly and final financial reports in the following formats: (i) books of account and records; (ii) vouchers and adequate documentation to support all project expenditures, and (iii) justification that the expenditures are incurred in accordance with the objectives and budget items outlined in the project document.*

The final financial report will be submitted together with the final substantial report to UNEP/GEF no later than 90 days of the project completion. Any portion of cash advances remaining unspent or uncommitted by UNEP RRC.AP on the project completion will be reimbursed to UNEP/GEF within 30 days of the presentation of the final financial report."

250. These are reasonable and fairly standard preparations for financial reporting however, because this was a project internally executed (UN to UN) all financial records are processed and kept in the UNEP IMIS system, accessible at any one time, but not providing the sort of detail that quarterly or annual summaries would do and were being requested by the new TM after 2007.

251. Given that there were 35 Memoranda of Understanding for the small grants programme through Small Scale Funding Agreements (SSFA) there appears to have been little in the way of establishing a system to monitor these.

3.6.2 Monitoring of co-financing

252. Given that, according to GEF logic, co-financing should be considered as part of the 'GEF project' and be essential for the achievement of its objective, it should be subject to continuous monitoring in order to determine whether and how it continues to complement the GEF funds invested in the project.

253. However, co-financing has not been closely monitored throughout the project and even in the Terminal Report it is simply recorded with little comment on the reasons behind the failure of promised co-financing to be delivered. Indeed the financial reporting is poor and one can only assume that the project was poorly prepared for the financial management, accounting and reporting necessary for a complex project such as this.

254. There are two critical phases of the project cycle, the inception phase (which should have taken place in early 2006) and the mid-term review (which should have taken place by mid 2007), where these issues could have been isolated and actions put in place to strengthen the system. Neither of these two events ever took place.

255. An important aspect of this that of the $1,715,000 promised in co-financing in the Project Document only 33% ($566,000) was delivered at the close of the project in December 2008. The TE will reserve any comments on the causes behind this until after the field work only to add that if only 33% of the estimated cost of the project's implementation was ever provided then it is likely that the it has significantly under-performed.

256. A further confusion stems from the UNDP contribution of US$ 500,000 which is reported as cash in the project document (and most other documents) but in the Budget Revision this amount (from UNDP) is reported as in kind[70].

3.7 Monitoring and evaluation design

257. The Project Document describes a relatively standard approach to project monitoring and evaluation. The TE notes that the idea of monitoring and evaluation within the context of countries still operating under a highly centralised and authoritarian system, particularly around the time that the UNEP-GEF REAP project was being developed, was still poorly understood. Indeed in some instances the direct translation of "*monitoring*" in Russian is "*control*" and the TE notes that this perception still persists in some instances today.

258. The monitoring and evaluation programme in the Project Document is not well-developed. It provides little in the way of pathways and the sort of feedback loop that is so important for adaptive management, particularly when applied at this scale.

[70] 4685 Rev_no_1 291206.pdf

259. Issues of audit (financial monitoring) and project progress are largely covered by the standard UNEP-GEF monitoring system but it is confusing when it comes to monitoring the *impact* of the project.

260. The project's log frame matrix (LFM) is weak; indeed this report has listed the *indicators* stated in the LFM as *results*. The indicators in the LFM are essentially targets, or a means of verification or merely restating an output.

261. "Component 2 of the project will establish a monitoring and evaluation and decision-support system (Project Document, Section C, Subsection 6, p. 23), which includes the identification of environmental indicators that will be used when assessing impacts of pilot demonstrations in this and future projects". The TE has found no evidence that this has taken place but feels that this would have been an extremely useful process.

262. The monitoring and evaluation, by the UNEP ROAP and the project partners, appears to have been extremely weak if not completely deficient until the end of 2007 with the period prior to this characterised by poor (on financial issues, project outputs and outcomes and progress) reporting and an element of "drift" in the project. Indeed the reporting was so poor that the project was placed on the UNEP Directorate GEF (DGEF) register of Projects at Risk in 2010[71]. However, by the time the new TM was placed in charge of the project's monitoring (which is what the TE assumes was the cause of the improved monitoring), there was a considerable backlog and it would appear that obtaining the information from the project implementation partners (including the *AIT-RRC.AP*) was a bit like pulling teeth; hard work and painful.

263. Following the appointment of a new Task Manager (TM) in October 2007[72] reporting is remarkably improved but by this stage most of the budget had been spent and critical stages of the project cycle such as the inception phase and report or the mid-term evaluation (MTE,) had never been carried out.

264. Remarkably there was no midterm review (MTR) planned for the project. It is not clear to the evaluators whether this was UNEP policy at the time but it seems extraordinary that, for a project of such obvious complexity, there was no scheduled MTR.

4 Theory of Change and Review of Outcome to Impacts

265. Part of the UNEP-GEF project evaluation methodology requires the TE to carry out a Theory of Change (ToC) exercise in order to create a baseline which can be used to assess the actual project outcomes and impacts (expected and unexpected) during field visits and interviews.

266. Because final evaluations are carried out very soon after a project ends it is not always possible to identify the longer term impacts, the Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs) that might result from the project's interventions. A ToC exercise uses a methodology to try to identify what are termed "intermediate states", in other words is the project following a trajectory likely to result in an impact that equates to the global objectives (GEBs) of GEF funding. The ToC recognizes that the project and social, ecological and economic processes are operating at different timeframes and invariably there will be an intermediate state between completion of a project and the appearance of the impact(s) of the intervention.

[71] Memo from Director DGEF UNEP to Regional director ROAP, 22nd September 2010

[72] The UNEP GEF PIR FY 07 (1st July 2006 to 30th June 2007) reports that of the GEF budget of $975,000, $919,959 had been disbursed (approximately 94%) and $711,638 had been accounted for (actual expenditures entered in IMIS as of June 2007).

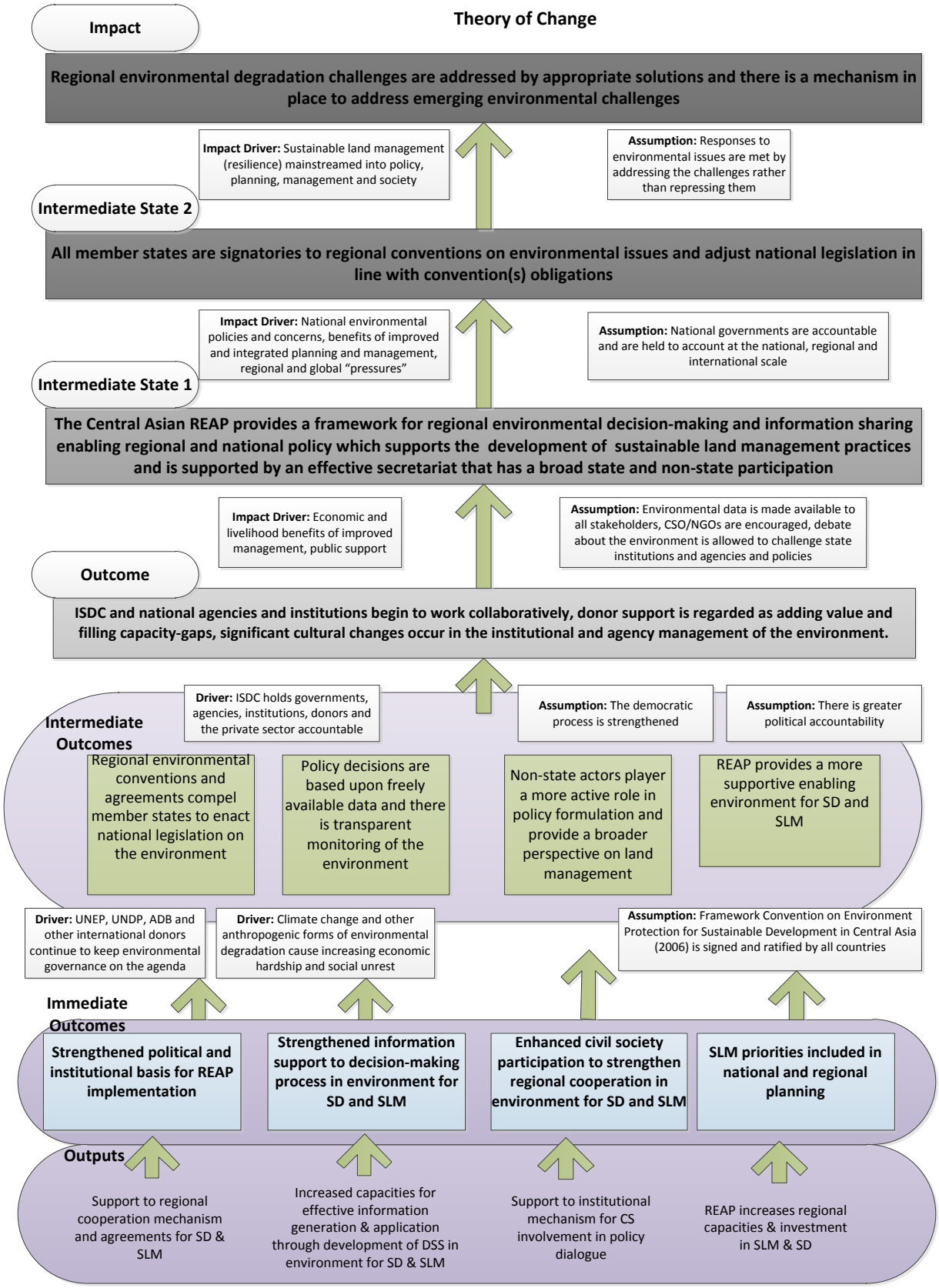
267. It is not necessary to reiterate the ToC methodology[73] other than to note that it attempts to recreate the logical hierarchy of the project's LFM, that is, how activities led to outputs, outputs contributed to outcomes and these outcomes will eventually result in an impact bringing about desirable change as measured by the GEF Global Environmental Benefits, which themselves can be determined from the relevant Operational Programme (in this instance OP#15 Sustainable Land Management, see Section 3.1.4 of this report).

268. From this it is then theoretically possible to determine the Drivers at impact (the significant factors that if present are expected to contribute to the realization of the intended impacts and can be influenced by the project) and other levels and the Assumptions (the significant factors that if present are expected to contribute to the realization of the intended impacts but are largely beyond the control of the project). Based upon this analysis it should be possible to recognize if a project has produced sufficient changes and to identify the intermediate states, that is, whether what the project has put in place will bring about the long term changes and have a lasting impact.

269. The preliminary Theory of Change for the REAP project is presented in Table 2 below. A cursory examination of this would suggest that the outlook is not positive and riddled with assumptions. The ToC presented here is essentially the "best case scenario". Given the realities of the region there are a very likely a full 360◦ of other directions in which this process could go, all of them less desirable than the modest impacts expected from this exercise.

[73] A detailed guidance on the ToC is attached to the TE Terms of Reference

Table 2 Project theory of change



270. The Theory of Change (which in the eyes of the TE has a number of limitations) is presented here as a "best case scenario" for a purpose:

271. "*Environmental degradation and poor governance of natural resources increase vulnerability to disasters as well as conflicts. Current research suggests that over the last sixty years, at least 40 per cent of all intrastate conflicts have had a link to natural resources and the environment, and at least eighteen violent conflicts since 1990 have been driven by the exploitation of natural resources. Similarly, the degradation of ecosystems services has been directly linked to an increase in catastrophic losses from natural hazards. Climate change is expected to further increase the frequency and intensity of weather-related disasters and cause greater scarcity of natural resources, potentially leading to more conflicts.*[74]"

272. By these measures land degradation is a very real and present danger in terms of social and political security and there was a certain amount of responsibility on the project management, participating institutions, executing agency, and so on in making the project, and by extension the REAP, work. However, there is little evidence of this responsibility within the project being exercised, at least until it was too late.

273. This somewhat alarmist and profound comment and quote are necessary because it is important to learn the lessons in the design and implementation of future projects. UNEPs own programmes illustrate the serious nature of environmental governance but it is striking that until the end of 2007, by which time most of the budget had been expended, there are no signs that anyone was taking this project seriously.

[74] Source UNEP Sub-Programme on Disasters and Conflicts

Annex 7: Technical working paper – Review of demonstration projects and small grant programme

Terminal Evaluation of the UNEP GEF project "Support to the Implementation of the Regional Environment Action Plan in Central Asia"

GEF Project ID 2175

Technical Report

Firuz Ibragimov

BRIEF SUMMARY OF TERMINAL EVALUATION MISSION:

1. In line with the UNEP Evaluation Policy[75], the UNEP Evaluation Manual[76] and the Guidelines for GEF Agencies in Conducting Terminal Evaluations[77], the terminal evaluation of the Project "Support to the Implementation of the Regional Environment Action Plan in Central Asia" (REAP)" is commissioned by the Evaluation Office of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Nairobi, to determine outcomes and impacts (actual and potential) stemming from the project, including their sustainability.
2. The technical report purposefully concentrates on the quality of the demonstration projects and the small grants or micro-projects implemented through the Small Scale Funding Agreements (SSFA), by the REAP project. In particular it gives an assessment of: i) their cost-effectiveness in achieving the projects stated outcomes and objectives, ii) the efficiency of their implementation and the likelihood of their sustainability financially, economically, socially and environmentally, iii) the extent to which they might be considered as "catalytic"[78] and as far as practicable iv) the quality of the process of developing the demonstration/micro-projects followed by the project.

GOAL OF THE TERMINAL EVALUATION

3. The aim of the assignment is to formally assess if the implemented demonstration projects and the micro projects respond to the emerging environmental problems, supported within implementation of regional environmental action plans, of Central Asian Countries.
4. In so doing, this technical report examines the existing and potential capacities of the execution entities of the demonstration projects and micro projects as well as of the leading institutions to determine their contribution to achieving the project's outcomes and objective and whether their impact is sustainable.

SCOPE OF TERMINAL EVALUATION

5. The technical report focused on exploring the full range of the process from their conceptualization through to implementation, sustainability, and catalytic role in promoting replication and up-scaling further. In order to address the these issues the following approaches have been applied:
    i. Interviews conducted with REAP Focal Points in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan.
    ii. Interviews conducted with responsible NGOs and focal points for micro projects in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.
    iii. Visits to Lidar station in Kyrgyzstan[79]
    iv. Visit to demonstration projects in Tajikistan (micro hydro power plant, MHPP).
    v. Visits to two regions covering the Dushanbe area to see projects implemented under the SSFAs.
    vi. Contacting a number of individuals involved in the demonstration projects and the SSFAs because the information provided in the project evaluation reports was considered to be insufficient for the TE to make an assessment of these activities and their outcomes. Therefore the TE team has been in close contact by email, telephone and where possible through meetings with the REAP focal points of each country.

[75] http://www.unep.org/eou/StandardsPolicyandPractices/UNEPEvaluationPolicy/tabid/3050/language/en-US/Default.aspx

76 http://www.unep.org/eou/StandardsPolicyandPractices/UNEPEvaluationManual/tabid/2314/language/en-US/Default.aspx

77 http://www.thegef.org/gef/sites/thegef.org/files/documents/TE_guidelines7-31.pdf

78 A catalytic role assesses efforts and achievements in terms of replication and up-scaling of project lessons and good practices.

[79] The Lidar Station is part of the Russian-Kyrgyz University Asian Brown Cloud (ABC) monitoring programme. It was not included in the demonstration projects, however, the TE was shown the station as an example of a demonstration project

ORGANIZATION OF TERMINAL EVALUATION

6. The remainder of this report is organised into four sections. Section 1 explains the limitations of the TE in assessing this particular component of the REAP project. Sections 2 and 3 outline the goal and scope of the assessment, Section4 and 5 on organization and limitation encountered. Sections6-7 provide the major findings on the demonstration projects and SSFA projects. Section 8 gives the main conclusions.

LIMITATION AND PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

7. In total, the TE survey covered three SSFA projects and one micro project (demonstration project) in Tajikistan and one demonstration project in each of the countries, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The TE survey also covered other indirect beneficiaries of demonstration projects and SSFAs, in addition to requirements set in the TORs, that helped ensure greater coverage. The available information on SSFAs was very limited and the TE Team found it hard to understand the topics of the SSFAs from the information provided by RRC-AP/AIT.
8. The TE observed that it was hard to obtain information about demonstration projects and the SSFAs by focal points and detected an unwillingness to discuss these with the TE which impeded the evaluation process and has resulted in delays and incomplete information.
9. The survey replies from representatives from Uzbekistan is challenging and demanding because:
   - State institutions and agencies are not used to external evaluations and as a result there is little culture of open governance that makes it hard for individuals to divulge information without higher authority consent.
   - Official permission/request was always required to meet and talk to focal points of the project which was time consuming and resulted in delays. This was surprising given that this was an official project evaluation.
   - The TE observed that on more than one occasion interviews were cancelled and interviewees proved difficult to contact and evasive in keeping to appointments

10. Overall, for the quality survey and information collected, additional time should have been allocated to conduct interviews which were partly a function of the under-budgeting for M&E activities in the original project's designs and costing. These issues are well known within the region and time and additional travel costs should have been a factor of the original project budget for M&E activities.

11. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were not visited by the TE team. However, they were contacted by telephone interview and the TE talked with representatives from these countries. However ,without physical site visits and face-to-face interviews it is not possible for the TE to judge with any confidence that these were the successes that have been claimed in the project's Terminal Report and indeed there is a body of evidence to suggest that they were not successful. Furthermore, none of the demonstration projects or SSFA projects were well suited to the goal and objective of the project and most of them had been abandoned, as was the case in Tajikistan, by the time of the TE raising obvious questions about their sustainability
12. Establishing the status of the demonstration projects and SSFAs has taken a disproportionate amount of the TE's time and effort. Despite the TE making adequate provision of time for what should have been a relatively simple exercise, the consultants had a number of difficulties with finding and interviewing the key informants and there was little collaboration from involved parties in locating these projects. The TE considers that this evasiveness and obfuscation may well have been intentional and reflects a poor attitude towards the TE which is an integral component of any GEF-UNEP project. .

MAJOR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS ON MICRO PROJECTS

TAJIKISTAN

Establishment of Micro hydro power station in Bulbuchashma of Gissar District.

Demonstration project Background

13. The pilot project on Renewable Energy Sources (RES) use is implemented with GEF/UNEP support in accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the State Committee of Environmental Protection, the Forestry RT and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Asia - Regional Office Asia Pacific. The micro hydro power station is justified to promote an alternative source of energy to reduce forest and shrubs cutting and positively influence mountain environmental conservation, creating jobs and improving living conditions of the population in the mountain area.
14. The justification for this demonstration project was given as the social context of people living in mountain areas which is characterized by the lack of jobs, inadequate energy provision and infrastructure and weak economy integration in general state system. From this it follows a lack of the most appropriate attitude to mountain people's needs and concerns. They construct their houses on land slide-prone territory or plough land without any engineer-technical requirements, destroying flora and fauna systematically. Forest and shrubs areas are significantly reduced, natural renewal of coniferous species almost stopped, progressive pastures degradation was observed. From all of this follows a progressive species diversity degradation, forage resources depletion, and finally desertification of the territory and ecosystem sustainability endangered.
15. Limited fuel availability, difficulties in delivering fuel to mountain areas of Tajikistan, constant price increases for electricity, absence of electricity in many remote places often result in the people using wood as a fuel. This leads to environmental degradation, including destruction of forests, whose area has been already reduced 5-10 fold, and in some places the forest has been completely destroyed.

16. ***Project objective*** is the environmental conservation of mountain ecosystem by using renewable energy sources in mountain regions.
17. ***Target area.*** Bulbuchashma village of Gissar District.

18. ***Present situation and functionality-*** the current situation of MHPP is not good. The water catchment was heavily silted and has not been working since last year reportedly because of absence of water and a frozen channel due to the previous harsh winter conditions.

19. ***MHPP beneficiaries:*** the main target beneficiaries are the secondary school 26 and the local College.

20. ***Shortcomings and drawbacks:*** hydrogeological surveys were not conducted although it has been reported the national water projection institute was involved. The leading engineer lives in Dushanbe and is not frequently coming to Gissar district while the local community are dependent upon on the engineer for proper maintenance. At the same time communities were found not to be interested because they do not get electricity and hence do not share the technical and financial responsibility to maintain the MHPP.

21. ***Incompatibility with MOU.*** According to the MOU,, the MHPP should have been located in the mountainous area, however, the Gissar district MHPP is in a valley and the mountains are located very far from the region. Given that the MHPP cannot by any measure contribute to the reduction of deforestation on mountain sides (both due to its proximity from mountain slopes and that it cannot possibly produce sufficient energy to meet heating requirements in the vicinity and thus reduce deforestation), the TE considers that there has been an element of

political capture in the location of the MHPP plant and contrary to the objectives of the MOU.

22. ***Sustainability and the quality.*** Presently the TE team did not see any sustainability of the MHPP, because it does not provide electricity to the community, just providing electricity to the college and secondary school. The MHPP works only during the winter period and the hydrogeological data and calculation were not available. The present situation of the MHPP's water catchment is worse and the local community is not supporting it because they do not get any electricity from this MHPP (apparently it supplies electricity to a school and a gymnasium). The turbines are made in China and one belt for the turbine costs 1,700 USD, which might be very hard for the administration of secondary school or college to replace, particularly as there is no charge and cost recovery for the electricity. It has been reported that during water shortages, the MHPP provides electricity to the pump station which pumps the water from the river and puts the water into the channel which drives the MHPP.
23. ***Recommendation:*** The community should get electricity from the MHPP and bear the responsibility over further maintenance of MHPP, hydrogeological inspections should be conducted and the real capability of MHPP should be rechecked. The MHPP should have been well regulated in order to not to conflict with any community water demands for irrigation. Monitoring of the hydrological system should be carried out and a system of community pricing should be established to investigate whether such MHPPs are actually a feasible option given the local communities ability to pay and thus to maintain the infrastructure. The technology is not in doubt having been demonstrated already in numerous situations. What is in doubt is the economic viability and whether the introduction of the MHPP can generate sufficient increase in social benefits and local economic activity to be a viable alternative. However, it must be clearly understood that such plants will not replace heating fuel as they simply do not generate sufficient energy and thus contribute nothing towards reducing deforestation in mountainous areas.

KYRGYZSTAN

The Pilot Project: "Development of eco-tourism in the Issyk Kul area in Kyrgyzstan"

Demonstration project background

24. Following factors supported the creation of this pilot project: job creation (installation yurt camps and creating new guest buildings requires the use of staff from the local population); Ability to maintain a traditional lifestyle (i.e. obtaining funds for existence in their home regions and farming in the traditional way, transmitted from generation to generation), raising funds for infrastructure improvements (necessary to have the most part of the proceeds from ecotourism remaining in local budgets, and develop infrastructure in the region); sales of local products (produced by local farms, such as dairy, meat products, handicraft items in need of marketing); Attracting tourists to sell products (directly in the place of production without the cost of their transportation and storage); Maintain and improve environmental conditions; Promotion of local culture abroad, and increase in the numbers of those wishing to visit the region.

25. ***Project objective-*** introduction of eco-tourism as an alternative income generation activity to the community living in or around a protected area.

26. Target area. *Issyk Kul area*

27. ***Present situation and functionality-*** although the TE team was not taken to see the developed infrastructure, but based on the phone discussion, the nomad people were supported and as it was said the yurts are now functioning but not in the original area where the project has initially provided support.
28. ***Ecotourism development beneficiaries:*** Nomad community.
29. ***Shortcomings and drawbacks:*** It is hard to clearly understand this demonstration project and its contribution to the overall objectives of the REAP project when the TE team was not able to meet with those responsible for its implementation or the beneficiaries. However, it has been reported that the nomad people are not staying at the same place each year. The TE does

make the observation that "nomad community" is a somewhat vague description. Furthermore, there is no evidence of the type of social *due diligence* that might be expected of a project interacting at the community level and with common property issues. The TE would at least expect to see this level of sophistication in a GEF project and the budget, though small, still merits that these issues are taken into account. Further, there is no analysis of risk, cost-benefit analysis or ongoing economic modelling of the intervention with a view to evaluating it for up scaling.

30. ***Incompatibility with MOU.*** What the TE can ascertain is that the project was implemented although with 5 month delay resulting in project cost increases. The technique on preparation of international food has never been taught. However, these are relatively minor points.
31. ***Sustainability and the quality.*** The nomad community which has been supported has left the project site however the knowledge and experience gained from the project has apparently well equipped the community to replicate the knowledge. But, there is no attempt to measure or verify this through targeted surveys.
32. ***Recommendation:*** Some form of evaluation of the project's benefits, opportunities for up scaling, risks and impacts might give the TE some confidence that this demonstration project had made a lasting impact, was socially, economically and ecologically viable and had contributed to the project's SLM objectives.

<u>Turkmenistan</u>

Pilot Project "Experience of Halophyte for increasing the productivity of degraded pastures on salinized soils"

Demonstration project background

33. There was an MoU between National Institute of Deserts, Flora and Fauna of the Ministry of Nature Protection of Turkmenistan and ROAP/UNEP on above- mentioned project .

34. ***Project objective –*** use of halophytes in ecological restoration of saline lands
35. ***Target area.*** Dashoguz, Akhal and Mary Velayats and on seaside saline soils of Turkmenistan
36. ***Present situation and functionality.*** As it has been reported the halophytes are well sustained the soil environment of the target area, but upon the completion of the project the target area was abandoned and, due to uncontrolled pasture management system, the area was heavily overgrazed and needs to be reseeded with the seeds of halophytes plants and there is a need for implementing sustainable pasture management and controlled system for rehabilitation.
37. ***Rangeland beneficiaries:*** local community and herd owners
38. ***Shortcomings and drawbacks:*** the project has conducted research for one year (*i.e.* from 2006 to 2007) and started the implementation only on 2008. The halophytes by their nature are species that do not grow quickly and need from 5 to 8 years to mature. However, the project did not have time to really assess the impact of the demonstration project. At the same time as it has been reported the halophytes plantation area was degraded shortly upon finishing the project.
39. ***Incompatibility with MOU.*** The MOU states that there would be considerable impact. However, the this has not been evaluated during project implementation or since.
40. ***Sustainability and the quality.*** The sustainability of the project is the research which proves that cultivation of halophytes in such saline lands is a useful technology. However, the project has failed to reach the local community. The likely causes of this may be, *inter alia,* a lack of understanding of the driving forces behind the communities apparent over use of pastures, lack of community "ownership" of the outcomes, the technology used was inappropriate or not transferable, an adaptive or systems approach was necessary rather than a technological "fix". Regardless, the TE feels that this demonstration project was probably to technocratic and top-down in its approach to addressing the issue of pasture recovery and management.
41. ***Recommendation:*** The researchers apparently exchanged such unique experience with other ISDC members, but the TE questions whether there were any real lessons regarding SLM and

pasture management and it did not address such issues from the local community perspective. To obtain the seeds of halophytes is practically not easy for the moment and information shared through research results should be more practical and affordable to the community. The target key informants also stressed the fact that the problems related to desertification through deserts and moving deserts are having a much greater negative impact upon their livelihood than the salination of pastures.

Uzbekistan

Pilot Project "Restoration of forest lands in the southern part of the Aral Sea"

Demonstration project background

42. There is a large body of information about the Aral Sea basin distributed across numerous databases and in various institutions, agencies and other organisations. This information could be used to tackle many of the ecological challenges faced by the region. There is increasingly more information on the socio-economic aspects of the causes of environmental degradation in the area that might also contribute to finding lasting solutions.

43. ***Project objective-*** To expand the database for the application of the national economy, the promotion of environmental information, access a wide range of consumer- information and promote solutions to the challenges of biodiversity conservation of the Aral Sea, improve the human environment and strengthen environmental services. Practical recommendations developed by the project will be applied for practical use in the preservation of biodiversity of the Aral Sea.

44. Target area. Karakalpakstan

45. ***Present situation and functionality.*** Although there is a research report on this posted on the ecoportal website, the TE team has never been able to reach anyone from Uzbekistan despite considerable efforts. The report posted on the site consists of a scanned hard copy (complete with the ring bindings) and the TE has to raise the question of whether an electronic copy was ever provided. It has been reported by the representatives on national secretariat of Uzbekistan on UNCCCD convention that, the research by itself has been carried out for the 4 years while the project lasted for 3 years (which might suggest some greater commitment). However, it has also been reported that only a small trial was established for research purposes.

46. ***Restoration of forest lands in the southern part of the Aral Sea beneficiaries:*** *The community living at the southern part of Aral Sea.*

47. ***Shortcomings and drawbacks:*** The research works were conducted during the project implementation period and the first year the project apparently failed because of selection of the wrong seeds and by the second year of project the group of researchers used another species of seeds for further studies. It ia Hed to understand any benefit of the project since the whole research was left at the laboratory level. Furthermore the TE challenges the approach that such a short term research intervention can actually generate the sort of benefits, lessons and experience that might have been expected from a demonstration project. Certainly the quality of the reporting and the materials that have been posted on the ecoportal (at least in the quality of their presentation) suggest that this was poor value for money.

48. ***Incompatibility with MOU.*** The MOU talks about the sustainability of biodiversity of Aral Sea and biodiversity, but the type of research and the time spent for research does not comply with the actual wording of the MOU. In the event the demonstration project appears to have been some sort of reafforestation trial.

49. ***Sustainability and the quality.*** There is no indication that any project benefits have been taken up since the project ended.

50. ***Recommendation:*** Demonstration projects with a limited timeframe should not focus on such research works and introduce technologies or methodologies that might not be fit with the local biogeocenosus of the southern part of Aral Sea. To attempt something that, by its very nature might take eight years to demonstrate through a three to four year demonstration project appears to be risky indeed.

MAJOR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS ON SMALL SCALE FUNDING AGREEMENTS

The SSFAs

51. In accordance with the decisions of the ISDC in the Republics of Central Asia for the period of 2007 -2008, was initiated and implemented a number of Small Scale Funding Agreements (SSFA), with the slogan on "Sustainable Development of Central Asian societies."

52. The competition was held with the support of UNEP's Regional Centre in Bangkok, a major role in its support and development played by an ISDC and NGO Working Group on implementation of REAP.

53. The administration of grants in all Central Asian countries was supervised by the members of the Public Council under the ISDC and through Small Scale Funding Agreements (SSFA) signed with the AIT-RRC.AP.

The purpose and objectives of the SSFA.

54. The main objective of the SSFA was to reduce and prevent the excessive use of natural resources in Central Asia by supporting projects to develop alternative livelihoods, more sustainable in terms of natural resources.
55. The program presented it as a component of the Regional Action Plan for Environmental Protection (REAP). According to the Regulations of the SSFA, it was assumed that the projects submitted for the contest would:
    -Improve the environmental situation in Central Asian countries through more sustainable use of natural resources
    -Raise awareness of the local population about the need to protect and preserve natural resources;
    -Provide communities the opportunity to implement measures to ensure the protection of natural resources in Central Asia. Applications for participation in the contest were taken from:
    -Bodies of local self-government;
    -Associations of people and / or employers;

56. The amount of funding for each grant for each country was in the amount of 9000 USD, the amount for each project ranged from 2500 to 4000 USD.
57. All projects under this program have been implemented in the period from 6 to 12 months. The organization works Call for grants in all Central Asian countries have been published in local media in the Russian and national languages, were distributed via e-mail and posted on Internet sites.
58. In addition, information about the program and participation procedures, forms, applications, was received by the national coordinators of the program. They have played an important role in the SSFA in the country: starting programs, providing technical support and advice, and the formation of national expert committees, the procedure for selection of applications, development of reporting, monitoring and evaluation of projects, etc.
59. Workshops and press conferences announcing the competition were carried out in all five participating countries. The following criteria were provided for applicants:

-The creation of alternative sources of legal income in the community, do not cause damage to the environment;
-Investing in a small commercial project to create a sustainable alternative source of livelihood in the community (for example, the cultivation of aquatic organisms, or the arrangement of the eco-tourism facility, and other activities);
-Pilot projects to protect and restore the environment in communities where pollution, desertification and biodiversity loss hinders economic and social development;
-Learn additional skills that contribute to sustainable development (e.g. in management and marketing of ecotourism, the creation of small businesses);
-Create a revolving fund to support sustainable community development Information about the projects that have passed the competition for Grants to Central Asian countries[80].

60. The Call for proposal received 64 project proposals, of which 14 projects[81] or 22% of the total were supported. In the context of the situation with the filing of applications and selection is listed below.
61. **Kazakhstan:** Administering small grants program was implemented in Kazakhstan member Eco-Forum of the Republic of Kazakhstan, member of the Public Council under the ISDC Kazakhstan.
62. The country presented six project applications. The winners were the following organizations:
-Public Association "Center for Children and Adolescents Source", project "Eko theater" The Golden Key.
-NGO "Keepers of the Altai" project "Development of local initiatives aulaChingistau as an example of sustainable development in mountain communities Altai.

63. **Findings of TE mission:** The Eco theatre which has been established is no longer functioning because of absence of financial support. The NGO Keepers of Altai were not able to reach thus; therefore the TE cannot comment on the sustainability of this SSFA
64. **Kyrgyzstan**: Administering SSFA in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan was carried out by the "Independent Ecological Expertise". In total 18 applications were received, of which two-stage in the process of selection has been chosen three project proposals:
-Public Ecological Foundation "Unison" - "Promotion of sustainable tourism tools in the village of Hue", Kyrgyzstan
-Public Association "Zhamaattar a bunch of" - "Nature feeds us" (in digging the submerged pump for irrigation of 6 hectares of orchard garden)
-City Council, Cholpon-Ata - "Better management of biological waste in municipal territory Cholpon-Ata and the surrounding communities"

65. **Findings of TE mission:** No SSFA reports were found from Kyrgyzstan.

66. **Tajikistan:** Administration and counseling SSFAs was implemented in Tajikistan NGO "Foundation for the Support of Civil Initiatives". In total 16 applications were received. The final decision of the National Expert Commission on Grants winners were three project proposals:
-Public Ecological Organization for Women, "Bon," Khujand - "Environmentally friendly products - Yes (Development bio farming products)"
-NGO "For the Earth" in partnership with the production cooperative "Hakimi" (Tursunzade district Dzh.Karatag) - "Solar Greenhouse" and "solar dryer" in a mountain village, "Hakimi"
-"Center Support Jamoat Navzamin" partners - HH "Umed" HH "Kosim" Khatlon region., Jilikul District RT - "And the environment, and products", which created pond fishery tank on-site wastewater treatment.

[80] The TE notes that the creation of financing mechanisms and credit facilities within a project can be regarded as a critical risk and should not be undertaken unless there is sufficient expertise and due diligence by the project.
[81] The project Terminal Report states that 35 MoUs and SSFA were signed. If 4 MoUs were signed for the demonstration projects this leaves 31 SSFA of which the TE has information on 14

Findings of TE mission:

67. **The SSFA number 1:** The Biofarming project of SSFA has failed after three month of the start. It has been found out that the head of the winning NGO had established a small *trila* at the balcony of his apartment and when he sold the apartment all the products of SGP were lost and the project was closed. No sustainability.
68. **The SSFA number 2**: The project reports well but in reality no building was ever built, as it been reported, the representative of NGO "For the Earth", rented tractor to prepare land and some other construction materials and nothing more is reported, the SSFA apparently failing. No sustainability.
69. **The SSFA number 3:** The NGO of Center Support Jamoat Navzamin was one of the winners of SGP but the head of the NGO has migrated to Russia and the NGO was officially closed in 2009.

70. **Turkmenistan:** As a result of the competition there were selected two project proposals:
    -Society of Nature Protection of Turkmenistan - "Raising awareness and building community in the implementation of regional, national and local action plans for environmental protection."
    -Association of Entrepreneurs of Turkmenistan - "The creation and development of the complex laundry for the residents of the city of Turkmenbashi."

Findings of TE mission: It was not possible to find the responsible persons or NGOs. Therefore the TE cannot comment

71. **Uzbekistan:** In total 21 applications were received out of which four of them were selected.
    -NGO "Zarafshan" (Samarkand), "Getting additional income by the rural residents with a rational use of medicinal plants - a contribution to sustainable development in the region."
    -NGO "SPRING" (Tashkent region), "Developing the youth of ecotourism at the Tashkent Regional Center of Child tourism and local history."
    -Union for the Protection of the Aral Sea and Amudarya (Nukus), "The Wind in the help."
    -NCC "Ecoservice" (Tashkent), "Cultivation of microalgae in order to improve the environmental situation in the Aral Sea.
72. **Findings of TE mission:** It was not possible to find the responsible persons or NGOs.

    Therefore the TE cannot comment.

The TE has made a comparison with the GEF Small Grants Programme which, admittedly much larger than the SSFA programme undertaken by the REAP project, provides a comparative example on the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) procedures for similarly sized individual grant dispersals. Arguably, in the event the SSFA were smaller than the maximum SGP allocation per project but the TE feels that it provides a reasonable comparison in the event.

Comparative advantages of the Smallscale Grant Programme (GEF) implementation, M&E and procedures practiced by UNDP and the REAP project's SSFA procedures for M&E

UNEP (SSFA)	GEF-UNDP (SGP)
No template of SSFAss were available or at least it was not made available to the TE Team	SMART outcomes and outputs, indicators and budget description and break down per project
Criteria developed by ISDC members	Standard GEF SGP rules and regulations extracted from GEF OP15 apply
Very weak terminal reports on SFFA	Very comprehensive monthly, quarterly, semi-annual and annual reporting system. With triggers should reports not be filed.
No evaluations missions	Independent evaluators missions
National NGOs are responsible for selection of winners	A special GEF UNDP administrative office through inter-ministerial working commission

	on selection and scoring the proposals
SSFAs not agreed and coordinated with national UNCCD and UNCCB focal points.	SGPs agreed and coordinated with national UNCCD and UNCCB focal points.
SSFA projects time frame 7-12 month	SGP project time frame 1-2 years

Annex 8 Brief CVs of the evaluation team

Francis Hurst has a BSc. in Zoology and a MSc. in Conservation. He has worked in biodiversity conservation, protected areas management and natural resource management for over 20 years with practical experience of managing protected areas, policy, and planning, sustainable use and natural resource governance. His main interest is in CBNRM and sustainable use. For the past 20 years he has worked as an independent consultant in more than 27 countries including UNDP-GEF, UNEP-GEF and EU midterm and final/terminal evaluations in Uzbekistan, Georgia, Turkey, Egypt, Russia, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, China, Montenegro and Botswana.

Firuz Ibragimov has a BSc. in Agricultural Sciences and two MScs. in Land Management and Conservation. He has worked on adaptation to climate change, biodiversity and natural resource management for over 12 years. He has managed a number of projects within international NGOs and UN agencies on protected area management with experience on planning, sustainable use and community based management and the biosphere reserves. His main interest is sustainable community based natural resource management and implementation of participatory planning systems at the protected areas and for resource management. He has worked in the following countries: Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, India, Bangladesh, Iran and the USA to address issues of sustainable development in biodiversity conservation, protected areas management and natural resource management. He speaks Tajik (native), English, Russian, Persian, Dari, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Kazakh and Turkish.

Annex 9 Terms of Reference for Technical Report

Terms of Reference, Supporting Consultant (REAP & PALM) Terminal Evaluations, Technical Reports

The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Terminal Evaluation of the two UNEP-implemented GEF-funded projects (REAP and PALM projects) required the Supporting Consultant to provide the following:

"*The **Supporting Consultant** will prepare a technical working paper that will be appended to the main report, the content of which will be agreed upon with the Team Leader. The Supporting Consultant is also expected to contribute to selected sections of the main report as agreed with the Team Leader, and provide constructive comments on the draft report prepared by the Team Leader*."

Due to the particular strengths of the TE Team and the nature of the two projects the TE team is proposing a change of the ToR provided in the Inception Report (Annex 1, REAP; Annex 2, PALM) in order to address two critical issues that have emerged from the initial review of both projects (the Inception Reports) and the country visits and field work.

These issues can be broadly characterised as:

1. The manner in which a project has engaged with the appropriate policy and legal framework regionally and nationally, in particular whether the project has collaborated with other initiatives that are broadly affecting the enabling environment[82] and the level to which the project has participated in this process.
2. The quality of any demonstration projects or micro-projects implemented by the project, in particular an assessment of their cost-effectiveness in achieving the projects stated outcomes and objectives, the efficiency of their implementation and the likelihood of their sustainability finically, economically and environmentally, the extent to which they might be considered as

[82] In this instance the "enabling environment" is taken to be focused very closely on the legal, bureaucratic, fiscal, informational, political and cultural factors that might impact on the stakeholders to engage in the process (from Brinkerhoff 2004)

"catalytic" [83] and as far as practicable the quality of the process of developing the demonstration/micro-projects.

The report should be brief and not more than five to ten pages (not including any annexes) in length for each project.

[83] A catalytic role assesses efforts and achievements in terms of replication and up-scaling of project lessons and good practices.