

Terminal evaluation of
“Reducing greenhouse gas
emissions by promoting
community forestry, removing
barriers to sustainable
biomass energy, and laying
the groundwork for climate
change mitigation in
Afghanistan”

**Project Evaluation Series
04/2020**

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**Project code: GCP/AFG/081/GFF
GEF ID: 5610**

Required citation:

FAO. 2020. *Terminal evaluation of "Reducing greenhouse gas emissions by promoting community forestry, removing barriers to sustainable biomass energy, and laying the groundwork for climate change mitigation in Afghanistan"*. Project Evaluation Series, 04/2020. Rome.

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ISBN: 978-92-5-132381-6

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Acknowledgements

The FAO Office of Evaluation (OED) would like to thank all those who contributed to this evaluation, managed by Ms Seda Kojoyan from OED. The evaluation team was composed of one international independent subject matter expert, Mr Andrew Inglis as lead consultant, who covered in particular project management, stakeholder engagement/participation and Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM); Dr Mujtaba Bashari, who also covered CBNRM and led the local stakeholder consultations; and in order to be able to interview women beneficiaries, two female national consultants, Ms Shabana Niazi and Dr Yasmeen Ahmady, joined the team in the field.

The evaluation was carried out with the invaluable assistance of the FAO staff at FAOR-AG in Kabul. Their logistical support, insight, knowledge, advice and comments were invaluable, as were the briefing information provided by FAO officials in Rome and Bangkok.

The evaluation benefited from the inputs of many other stakeholders, including government officials, Forest Management Associations (FMAs) organizations and staff of NGO technical service providers, (Kabul University) and the private sector. Their contributions were critical to the team's work and are deeply appreciated.

Acronyms and abbreviations

CBNRM	Community-based Natural Resources Management
DAIL	Directorates of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FMA	Forest Management Association
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GCU	FAO GEF Coordination Unit
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
MADERA	Mission d'Aide au Developement des Economies Rurales en Afghanistan
MAIL	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock
MEW	Ministry of Energy and Water
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NEPA	National Environmental Protection Agency
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
PAIL	Provincial Directorate of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock
SBES	Sustainable Biomass Energy Systems
TSP	Technical Services Provider (contractor)
WHH	Welthungerhilfe

Executive summary

Introduction

1. This terminal evaluation was undertaken a month before project completion 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. As such, this evaluation had two primary purposes: i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements; and ii) to promote operational improvement, learning and knowledge sharing through results and lessons learned between the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Global Environment Facility (GEF) and international and Afghanistan-based implementers.
2. The main audience and intended users of the evaluation are:
 - i. FAO Country Office, Project Management Team, staff and consultants of other current and future FAO-GEF projects in Afghanistan, members of the Project Task Force at FAO headquarters and regional offices;
 - ii. project donors who will use the findings to inform strategic investment decisions in the future;
 - iii. National Government counterparts and partners who will use the evaluation findings and conclusions for future planning;
 - iv. technical service providers and contractors; and
 - v. other donors, organizations and institutions interested in supporting and/or implementing similar projects.
3. The terminal evaluation covered all but the last three weeks of the project implementation period (1 August 2016-31 July 2019). It covered all the geographical areas (Parwan and Nangarhar provinces) where the project had been implemented on the ground. As stipulated in the evaluation TOR (Annex 1), it focused on the relevance of project design, effectiveness of the implementation process and progress towards the planned outcomes. It also looked at long-term results, progress towards the development of and global environmental objectives, and sustainability of results. This terminal evaluation also considered the selected GEF project implementation model and other arrangements in place that contributed to - or hindered - the adequate implementation of the planned activities.
4. The evaluation team adopted a consultative and transparent methodological approach with internal and external stakeholders throughout the evaluation process. In answering questions related to the achievement of results, project efficiency and implementation, the evaluation used project documentation (e.g. technical and progress reports), and also qualitative data collection methods, using key informant interviews with stakeholders, as well as focus group discussions (FGDs) with local community-level beneficiaries in Parwan and Nangarhar.

Main findings

5. The evaluation acknowledges the challenging setting that the project has been operating in. For instance, serious security concerns and sociocultural norms must be continuously taken into account. This makes it hard for the project to control certain aspects, and such issues have been flagged in the evaluation report.

How relevant were the project outcomes and objectives to national and global efforts aimed at improving the sustainable management of forest resources? Was the project design adequate for delivering the expected outcomes?

6. The project was relevant and helpful regarding national and global efforts but due to the particular current circumstances and challenges of field operations in Afghanistan it had security-related design and implementation weaknesses (primarily pilot-site selection) which compromised its potential and success.

To what extent have the four project outcomes and the objective “to reduce GHG emissions by promoting community forestry, and removing barriers to sustainable biomass energy, while laying the groundwork for climate change mitigation in Afghanistan” been achieved, and how effective was the project in achieving them?

7. Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions have been reduced by project activities. The project has demonstrated that both CBNRM and removing barriers to sustainable biomass energy have the potential to reduce GHG emissions.
8. The most successful results were related to the Sustainable Biomass Energy Systems (SBES), less so to the community-based natural resources management (CBNRM). Both SBES and CBNRM resulted in reduced greenhouse gas emissions; results were more tangible in Nangarhar than Parwan. As for the achievement of policy and awareness raising results, it was reported and observed that more was achieved in the pilot areas than at national level.

Have the community-based natural resource management approach and sustainable biomass energy systems been mainstreamed into national policies and frameworks for renewable energy and forestry (Outcome 1)?

9. Too many outputs for Outcome 1 and Component 1 were out of the project’s control (especially as the project was considered too small to have the intended influences with regard to national policies).

Has the CBNRM approach been incorporated in the targeted areas at district level (Outcome 2)?

Have innovative and sustainable biomass energy technologies been tested and deployed in the two pilot areas, Dara-e-Noor in the Nangarhar province, and Salang in the Parwan province (Outcome 3)?

10. SBES were successfully tested and deployed, in particular in Nangarhar.

Has there been an increased national awareness (including capacity development) and promotion of SBES and CBNRM (Outcome 4)?

11. The project has increased awareness of SBES and CBNRM in the pilot implementation areas, in Kabul-based stakeholders but, according to all the national level partners interviewed, not with the wider/national public.

What were the contributing factors for the results achieved and what can be particularly attributed to FAO?

12. In general, the contributing factors for the results achieved were, with regard to SBES, the strong performance and capacity of the TSP, Welthungerhilfe (WHH). With regard to CBNRM, FAO did its best to make up for the suboptimal performance of the TSP, Mission d'Aide au Developement des Economies Rurales en Afghanistan (MADERA), especially after MADERA left the project and did not complete the time period from the Letter of Agreement with FAO (due to the Organization closing down all its operations and leaving Afghanistan).

How did the project activities, institutional arrangements, partnerships in place and resources available contribute to, or impede, the achievement of project results and objectives?

13. The pre-selected non-governmental organization (NGO) TSP implementation modality, especially regarding CBNRM, was problematic and if it were not for the security constraints, a direct FAO implementation model would have been more effective and efficient.

To what extent has the management been able to adapt to changing conditions to improve efficiency of project implementation?

14. Security challenges drove and constrained a lot of the project management decision-making, but more use could have been made of field coordinators and progress reports to make adaptations.

Did the project count on a structured monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system? Was the information from this system used to make timely decisions during project implementation?

15. Only a partial M&E system was in place. Though not required by GEF, a mid-term review would have been very helpful.

16. To what extent has the project created ownership among counterparts and stakeholders?

17. In general the project has created ownership among counterparts and stakeholders.

How sustainable are the results achieved at environmental, social and financial levels?

18. The conditions for SBES aspects of the project to be sustainable are present, but this is not likely for the CBNRM aspects/activities.

To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in project design and implementation?

19. In general, environmental and social concerns have been taken into consideration but there are some concerns about the Forest Management Associations (FMAs), the “orchards” and the solar cookers, as described in the evaluation report.

To what extent did the expected co-financing occur?

20. Co-financing occurred as expected.

To what extent is the project likely to contribute to evidence-based policymaking?

21. The project has not to date had any input to national level policymaking, but rather to policy cascade activities at provincial and district levels. However, it is hoped that in the future the project’s GHG emission reduction figures will be used by those estimating and producing national figures for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and other purpose.

Are there any barriers or other risks that may prevent future progress towards long-term results?

22. The barriers and risks identified include: future growth of SBES uptake; sustainability of the FMAs; governance issue caused by the lack of women elected to be FMA committee members; quality and quantity of planting material supplied by private tree nurseries.

Additional findings:

(i) Stakeholder engagement

23. Stakeholder engagement was a very positive feature of the SBES component, while in relation to the (CBNRM) component, it was adequate and as expected (Finding 13). All interviewed persons reported high levels of satisfaction regarding stakeholder engagement, especially in the field. Both men and women beneficiaries interviewed via FGDs ranked their engagement with, and their participation in the project as very high. In addition, it is clear that three partnerships in particular, with Welthungerhilfe, private sector artisans and Kabul University, provided complementarity and synergy. The only relationship that required more synergy was between NGO MADERA and the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL). This was because there was overlap regarding some of the field-based activities of this NGO and the mandate of MAIL’s local officials. The resulting focus on process activities such as trainings during the first two years of the project was a major gap in relation to results, as no actual tree planting was done until the third year.

(ii) Gender-responsive measures

In general gender issues were adequately managed by the project but the complete lack of women elected to be Forest Management Association office-bearers is an issue.

24. It is clear that gender issues were taken into account during project design but there were some shortcomings during implementation, especially in the CBNRM component. It is also acknowledged that national and local cultural norms and constraints were

involved. The most serious gender-related shortcoming was that in both Parwan/Salang and Nangarhar no women were elected as Forest Management Association committee members (5 x 11 positions in each district). The evaluation recognizes that community members elected their own representatives and this may have been beyond project control. Nevertheless, it feels the project could have done more to encourage women's participation in the FMAs. This not only resulted in weaknesses from the gender and governance perspectives of the new FMAs, but also meant that the project was not in a position to set a precedent for future FMA initiation processes in other parts of Afghanistan to ensure, or at least enhance the chances, that women can be elected as directors.

25. Another shortcoming was the failure to provide planned work and income-generating activities for women, in particular in community-level tree nurseries, which were not created in the end. Possible alternative activities, such as plantation maintenance and watering, were carried out by men in Salang (as observed by the evaluation team); it was reported that this was also the case in Nangarhar.
26. On the SBES project component, women in both Salang and Dar-e-Noor have high interest and satisfaction levels with the SBESs, especially the fuel-efficient cook-stoves and solar cookers. The only problem reported was that solar cookers were only distributed to elected male FMA officials (though the male members of the households passed them on to the female members for use).
27. From the project management perspective, the National Project Implementation Unit (NPIU) effectively recorded disaggregated gender participant and beneficiary data. While both the NGOs acting as Technical Services Providers (TSPs) hired an equal number of men and women as field staff/extension workers, no Afghani women were employed as middle or senior level NPIU project staff or consultants.

(iii) Knowledge activities and products

28. From the interviews with NPIU and from documentation including project implementation reviews, project progress reports, communication strategy and workshop reports, and in particular from the NPIU's notable Knowledge Management Excel database, it is clear that communication between project partners and interested groups has been effective, although more could have been done using Facebook.
29. Apart from the delay and current lack of the peer-reviewed paper, project communications products and activities have been as planned and of good standard. In many government buildings and also in SBES artisans' stores, the project's posters were very visible.
30. The Project's Knowledge Management Excel database is a valuable resource detailing all events, publications, printed copies, etc., and was made available to the current GEF-6 Project. This will support the sustainability of project results.

Conclusions

Conclusion 1. Not all projects can have national level policy influence and this should be acknowledged at the beginning to avoid missed targets. Having more local level policy-cascade/pilot implementation of new policies, laws, etc. can be valid and valuable.

Conclusion 2. The SBES was more successful and is set to be more sustainable than the CBNRM component unless the way that FMAs are set up is fine-tuned to make sure that there is a balance of rights to go with new responsibilities, and that FMA's forest management plans are appropriate content and cost-wise to the community organizations.

Conclusion 3. A major governance shortcoming of FMAs is the lack of women elected to be officials.

Conclusion 4. A feature of the project's implementation was the lack of adaptive management. Since no mid-term review was conducted (which would have been very useful for this project), project implementation reports and project progress reports should be worded and used honestly and frankly to propose the fine-tuning of lower level parts of results framework, with justifications for amendments reviewed and approved by the Lead Technical Officer and Budget Holder, and the Project Steering Committee.

Conclusion 5. The project highlighted some issues with the TSP-NGO implementation model, with shortcomings being observed by government partners as well as FAO. The problems included inadequate engagement with the government to facilitate internalization of new skills and approaches, at times even duplicating or replacing government staff in the field. Some of the problems stemmed from the LOA, which were long in their duration, and with no front-loading of key activities in the first two years of a three-year project (e.g. at minimum some small-scale pilot/trial tree planting done first year and definitely second year of a three-year CBNRM/reforestation project).

Conclusion 6. Most of the weakness with regard to the CBNRM component of the project (including the fragility of FMAs) stemmed from the suboptimal selection of the Parwan/Salang pilot implementation area. A low level of forest resources and the potential availability of micro-hydro as a renewable domestic energy source meant that this was not the correct district to pilot this project. Security issues should be considered but should not unduly compromise the introduction of important new approaches which have the potential to have a major national impact if successfully implemented.

Conclusion 7. Some of the technical, coordination (with TSP) and adaptive management shortcomings (especially of the CBNRM component) would have been mitigated if there had been inputs from an international Chief Technical Adviser.

Conclusion 8. One of the successes of the SBES component was the level of engagement with private sector artisans. To build on this it would have been useful if national and local level private sector and trade associations were involved from the beginning as formal project partners.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. FAO-AF should work with FAO GEF Coordination Unit and MAIL to negotiate international (CTA) expertise for future GEF, Green Climate Fund (GCF), etc. projects, perhaps via part-time or shared high-quality CTA inputs.

Recommendation 2. FAO-AF should work with MAIL to review and fine-tune the way FMAs are set up as soon as possible to make sure that there is a balance of rights to go with new responsibilities, and that FMAs' forest management plans are appropriate content and cost-wise to community organizations.

Recommendation 3. FAO-AF and FAO-GEF Coordination Unit (GCU) should make sure middle and high-level staff of future GEF projects include women.

Recommendation 4. FAO-AF/ National Project Implementation Unit should set up innovative institutions, such as the FMAs, and, to the extent possible, should have processes in place to prevent situations where no women are being selected or elected.

Recommendation 5. FAO-AF should ensure that if NGO-TSP implementation modality is deemed to be appropriate (and it should only be if FAO implementation is impossible due to security-related concerns and costs) then the NGO-TSPs should not be pre-selected and the LOAs with them should only be for a year or 18 months maximum, with crucial activities (such as tree planting) front-loaded so that the NGO does not only perform soft-skill work (training etc.), with no tangible results on the ground.

Recommendation 6. GEF project formulators should be aware that not all projects should 'automatically' have national-level policy and related influence objectives/outcomes. Having more local-level policy-cascade/pilot implementation of new policies, laws, etc. should be recognized as being valid and valuable.

Recommendation 7. GEF project formulators in Afghanistan should focus more on whether security-related criteria being used to select pilot implementation sites will unduly compromise (undermine wider/national uptake of) the approaches and the methodologies being piloted (which has occurred in this project).

Table 1: GEF rating table

FAO - GEF Rating Scheme	Rating	Summary Comments
1) RELEVANCE		
Overall relevance of the project	MS	The project was relevant and helpful regarding national and global efforts but due to the particular current circumstances and challenges of field operations in Afghanistan there were design and implementation weaknesses that compromised its potential and success.
2) ACHIEVEMENT OF PROJECT RESULTS (EFFECTIVENESS)		
Overall assessment of project results	MS	The most successful results were related to SBES, less to CBNRM. Both SBES and CBNRM resulted in reduced GHG emissions but both were stronger in Nangarhar than Parwan. With regard to achievement of both policy and awareness raising-related results, more was achieved in the pilot areas than at the national level.
Outcome 1: The CBNRM approach and sustainable biomass energy systems have been mainstreamed into national policies and frameworks for renewable energy and forestry	U	Too many outputs for Outcome 1 were out of the project's direct control to deliver (especially as the project was perceived as being too small to have the intended influences with regard to national policies)
Outcome 2: The CBNRM approach has been incorporated in targeted areas at district scale	MU	MAIL staff 'internalization' of working with FMAs did not happen as planned/expected/required. The FMA Forest Management Plans produced by the TSP read more like consultancy reports than community entity 'plain language' practical action programmes, and are prohibitively expensive. Total re-forested area was smaller than planned, and no trees were planted until the final year of the project.
Outcome 3: Innovative and sustainable biomass energy technologies tested and deployed in two pilot areas	S	SBES were successfully tested and deployed, in particular in Nangarhar. There has been increased capacity among provincial planning and governmental agencies to plan, promote and implement sustainable biomass energy projects; communities and individuals were motivated to acquire and use the SBES, supported by a highly competent TSP, the WHH, and intensive testing was done by them and Kabul University.
Outcome 4: Increased national awareness and promotion of SBES and CBNRM	HS	The project has increased awareness of SBES and CBNRM in the pilot implementation areas, in Kabul-based stakeholders but not with the wider/national public.
3) EFFICIENCY, PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION & EXECUTION		
Overall quality of project implementation and adaptive management (implementing agency)	MU	Security challenges and associated costs disproportionately drove and constrained project implementation activities and adaptive management decision-making, but more use could have been made of field coordinators and progress reports to make adaptations.
Quality of execution (executing agencies)	MS	National executing agency partners were engaged and provided all planned support infrastructure; after initial misunderstandings

FAO - GEF Rating Scheme	Rating	Summary Comments
		(financial compensation) they collaborated in the field and at policy level.
Efficiency (including cost effectiveness and timeliness)	MU	The pre-selected NGO-TSP-via-Letter of Agreement (LOA) implementation modality, especially regarding CBNRM, was problematic (duplication and competition with regard to MAIL in the field, meeting targets with regard to 'soft' activities, training workshops, etc. but no tangible results - trees being planted on the ground) and if it were not for the security constraints, a direct-FAO implementation model would have been more effective and efficient.
4) MONITORING AND EVALUATION		
Overall quality of M&E	U	Only a partial M&E system was in place. A MTR would have helped M&E (and TSP problems); the more accurate use (i.e. to draw attention to issues and correction actions) of PIRS and PPRs would have resulted in increased and appropriate adaptation decisions. No evidence of strong PSC overall..
M&E design at project start-up	U	No standalone structured M&E plan/process was produced, relying too much on PPR, PIR and TSP progress reports.
M&E implementation plan	U	Despite the lack of a structured M&E plan (in addition to the standard PIRs and PPRs), some project activities, most notably the Knowledge Management Excel database, proved to be a valuable resource for monitoring.
5) SUSTAINABILITY		
Overall sustainability	SBES: S CBNRM: MU	The project has the SBES sustainable aspects (in particular strong private sector SME uptake of production and marketing activities), but this is not likely for the CBNRM aspects/activities, mainly due to imbalances between the new responsibilities (many) and new rights (few, if any) of FMAs.
6) STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT		
Overall quality of stakeholder engagement	S	Stakeholder engagement was a very positive feature of the SBES component and was adequate and as expected regarding the CBNRM component of this project.

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the evaluation

1. This terminal evaluation was intended to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by promoting community forestry through the formation of Forest Management Associations (FMAs), and removing barriers to sustainable biomass energy, thereby laying some of the groundwork for climate change mitigation in Afghanistan. Project implementation lasted three years, from August 2016 to July 2019.
2. The evaluation was been undertaken a month before project completion 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. As such, this evaluation has two primary purposes: i) to provide evidence of results to meet accountability requirements; and ii) to promote operational improvement, learning and knowledge-sharing through results and lessons learned among the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Global Environment Facility (GEF) and international and Afghanistan-based implementers. Therefore, the evaluation will identify lessons of operational relevance for future project formulation and implementation, especially for similar projects, in Afghanistan or elsewhere.
3. This terminal evaluation presents strategic recommendations in order to maximize the institutionalization and appropriation of project results by stakeholders and disseminate information to authorities that could benefit from it.
4. This report presents the context of the terminal evaluation, then details about the project followed by the evaluation team's methodology, commentary, findings and recommendations.

1.2 Intended users

5. The main audience and intended users of the evaluation are:
 - i. FAO Country Office, Project Management Team, staff and consultants of other current and future FAO-GEF projects in Afghanistan, members of the Project Task Force at FAO headquarters and regional offices who will use the findings and lessons identified in the evaluation; plan for sustainability of results achieved; and improve formulation and implementation of similar projects;
 - ii. project donors (i.e. the GEF) who will use the findings to inform strategic investment decisions in the future;
 - iii. national Government counterparts who will use the evaluation findings and conclusions for future planning (Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), the National Environmental Protection Agency; Ministry of Energy and Water (MEW); Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD); Kabul University);
 - iv. technical service providers and contractors, for instance Welthungerhilfe; and

- v. other donors, organizations and institutions interested in supporting and/or implementing similar projects.

1.3 Scope and objectives of the evaluation

6. This terminal evaluation covers all but the last three weeks of the entire project implementation period (1 August 2016-31 July 2019). It covers all the geographical areas (Parwan and Nangarhar provinces) where the project has been implemented on the ground. As stipulated in the Terms of Reference (TOR), it focuses on the relevance of project design, effectiveness of the implementation process, and progress towards planned outcomes. This evaluation also looks at long-term results, progress towards the development of and the global environmental objectives, and sustainability of results. Moreover, the evaluation considers the selected GEF project ‘implementation model’ and other arrangements in place that contributed to – or hindered - the adequate implementation of the planned activities.
7. This terminal evaluation also provides an assessment of project performance, gender-disaggregated achievements, and the implementation of planned project activities and planned outputs against actual results; as well as of lessons learned that may help in the design and implementation of future FAO, FAO-GEF or climate change mitigation, bioenergy, forestry management and ecosystem management related initiatives in Afghanistan and elsewhere.
8. The evaluation questions (as per the TORs) are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Evaluation questions by area of analysis

Relevance	<p>How relevant were the project outcomes and objectives to national and global efforts aimed at improving the sustainable management of forest resources?</p> <p>Was the project design adequate for delivering the expected outcomes?</p> <p>Has there been any change in project relevance since its design, such as new national policies, plans or programmes that affect the relevance of the project objectives and goals?</p>
Achievement of project results	<p>To what extent have the four project outcomes and the objective “to reduce GHG emissions by promoting community forestry, and removing barriers to sustainable biomass energy, while laying the groundwork for climate change mitigation in Afghanistan” been achieved, and how effective was the project in achieving them?</p> <p>Has the CBNRM approach been incorporated in the targeted areas at district level (Outcome 2)?</p> <p>Have innovative and sustainable biomass energy technologies been tested and deployed in the two pilot areas, Dara-e-Noor in the Nangarhar province, and Salang in the Parwan province (Outcome 3)?</p> <p>Has there been an increased national awareness (including capacity development) and promotion of SBES and CBNRM (Outcome 4)?</p> <p>Did the project produce any unintended results, either positive or negative?</p>

	What were the contributing factors for the results achieved and what can be particularly attributed to FAO?
Efficiency, project implementation and execution	How did the project activities, institutional arrangements, partnerships in place and resources available contribute to, or impede, the achievement of project results and objectives? To what extent has the management been able to adapt to changing conditions to improve efficiency of project implementation?
Monitoring and Evaluation	Did the project count on a structured M&E system? Was the information from this system used to make timely decisions during project implementation?
Sustainability	To what extent has the project created ownership among counterparts and stakeholders? How sustainable are the results achieved at environmental, social and financial levels?
Stakeholder engagement	To what extent has the project engaged stakeholders? To what extent have the partnerships established provided complementarity and synergy to project interventions? Have they contributed to the results achieved?
Environmental & social safeguards	To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in project design and implementation?
Gender	To what extent and how did the project include social issues, including gender, in its design? Did the project contribute to the empowerment of vulnerable groups throughout its implementation?
Co-financing	To what extent did the expected co-financing occur?
Progress to Impact	To what extent is the project likely to contribute to evidence-based policymaking? Is there any evidence of evidence-based decision-making on sustainable forest management that can be attributed to the project? ¹² Are there any barriers or other risks that may prevent future progress towards long-term results?
Knowledge Management	How effective has the communication of project aims, progress, results and key messages been, along with any structured lesson learning and experience sharing between project partners and interested groups? Are the communication products and activities likely to support the sustainability of project results?

1.4 Methodology

9. The core team for this terminal evaluation consisted of the International Team Leader and the National Consultant. In addition, two female consultants were engaged to conduct focus group discussions (FGDs) with women beneficiaries.
10. The evaluation adopted a consultative and transparent approach with internal and external stakeholders throughout the evaluation process. In answering questions related to the achievement of results, project efficiency and implementation, the evaluation utilized

project documentation (e.g. progress reports), but also qualitative methods for data collection, using 32 key informant interviews with stakeholders, as well as seven focus group discussions with local-community-level beneficiaries in Parwan and Nangarhar (the two provinces where the project has been implemented).

11. As noted in the evaluation inception report, and agreed with by respondents, this project was relatively 'institutional'; as such, amongst the 32 interviews conducted by the evaluation team, all partner institutions were interviewed at the national, provincial and district levels.

12. Evidence and information gathered and presented in this report has been triangulated from documented, interview and direct observation sources to underpin validation and analysis and to support conclusions and recommendations. Initial observations and draft findings were presented *in situ* on 4 July, before the Team Leader left Kabul, to the FAO Office of Evaluation (OED) and the GEF Coordination Unit (GCU) in a Skype call to Rome, and to eight FAOR-AF officials in a group meeting. Participants in these debriefing requested some clarifications, which the Team Leader provided, with no new issues raised.

13. The design of the methodology of this terminal evaluation adopted the following steps:

Step 1: Preparation

14. A desk review of project and other relevant documents including, but not limited to:

- i. project documents, key outputs, monitoring reports (such as progress and financial reports to the FAO, GEF annual Project Implementation Review (PIR) reports and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) data) and relevant correspondence;
- ii. external sources and other relevant documents with up-to-date information on the approaches introduced by the project;
- iii. minutes, decisions and notes from the Project Management meetings;
- iv. other project-related material produced by the project staff or partners;
- v. relevant material published and videos about the project; and,
- vi. additional information and opinions from representatives of donor or government agencies and other organizations, as required.

15. The content and quality of the project design documents were then commented on in the evaluation inception report, which identified the key evaluation partners, specific evaluation questions, indicators, methods and techniques for data collection (evaluation matrix).

Step 2 Field mission

16. The fieldwork, conducted in June-July 2019, focused on qualitative data collection methods, given the limitations on freedom of movement due to security constraints that hindered primary quantitative data collection (e.g. household survey). In this regard, the evaluation involved 12 key informant interviews with stakeholders at the national level and 15 at the province, district and community levels. Furthermore, and as detailed below, 7 semi-structured focus group discussions were facilitated with beneficiary communities. In Salang and Dari Noor groups of women accounted for over 20 and gave their opinions about the project via separate focus group discussions facilitated by female consultant members of the evaluation team. Discussions with beneficiary communities contributed in particular to assessing the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of activities, especially under Component 2 and 3 of the project.
17. Field mission activities included:
 - i. meetings with the project authorities (i.e. FAOR in Kabul) and key stakeholders to discuss project results, implementation modalities and agency support to project implementation;
 - ii. review and assessment of project implementation, results achieved, outcomes at counties/district, province (Nangarhar and Parwan) and national levels, challenges experienced and solutions adopted;
 - iii. visits to offices and selected field sites in Nangarhar and Parwan provinces were conducted to assess the results achieved, outcomes at the local level, and barriers to implementation. The data reported in project progress reports, monthly reports, back to office reports, training workshop, technical reports, etc. were 'ground-truth' and validated through observations when visiting the most accessible project tree plantation sites in Parwan. Local FMA members as well as the Directorates of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (DAIL) and project staff were informally interviewed during these visits with regard to, for instance, the practicalities of the planting, the current and expected tree survival rates.
18. Provincial and district level officials of the executing and partner agencies were interviewed, and direct beneficiaries were consulted both individually during site visits and in focus group discussions to assess behavioural and other changes related to the effectiveness and relevance of activities under Components 2 and 3 of the project. These field visits were subject to security clearance and security-related movement and time restrictions. Considering all the restrictions and challenges, the field visits were conducted effectively and productively, with a 100 percent success rate with regard to arranging and conducting 15 interviews with all stakeholders (both officials and non-officials).
19. Semi-structured interviews were guided by interview protocols developed by the evaluation team at the beginning of the evaluation, with a general list of questions, which was then fine-tuned into a bespoke list by the team before each interview. Notes were taken and recorded/tabulated as per the Evaluation Questions. As mentioned above, seven structured focus group discussions (four with women, three with men) were facilitated in the field, in neutral (non-official) venues, with the target communities and project stakeholders. The method used in the FGDs was the H-Form, which ensured engagement and inputs from all participants, as the participants themselves recorded their ratings, reasoning and suggestions for the project.

20. Two reforestation/tree-planting sites and four riverside fruit-tree plots ('orchards') were visited in Parwan, none in Nangarhar.¹ The two reforestation sites in Parwan were selected with regard to accessibility, with rough and very steep terrain representing the major limiting factors. In Nangarhar, security-related restrictions did not allow the evaluation team to conduct visits to the tree-planting/reforestation sites, but the national consultant was able to visit a 'check dam' built in Dari Noor district of Nangarhar province, and also met with beneficiaries who were using SMES provided via the project.

1.5 Limitations

21. A major limitation, as with all UN-FAO operations in Afghanistan, was the current security situation and related operational restrictions. As for this evaluation, the biggest impact were the restrictions regarding the field (i.e. out of Kabul) work that was possible, with a lot of time being wasted due to having a mandatory two-vehicle armed police escort. Movements in and around Kabul were also affected but, thanks to very effective logistical support from FAOR-AF, this only meant not being able to have out-of-office-hours meetings.
22. Another limitation was that only one member of the Kabul-based Project Management Unit staff, the Communications Officer, had 'institutional memory' with all other staff, including the National Project Manager (NPM) who had recently changed. The Team Leader asked for a meeting to be arranged with the former NPM, but this was not possible mainly due to the strict time constraints resulting from international staff security/safety restrictions, which meant there was no opportunity to meet in the evenings.
23. The current National Project Manager does have a lot of experience and expertise, and was only able to fully engage during the field visits (when the Communications Officer joined the evaluation team in Parwan and none in Nangarhar).
24. Field visits were also subject to security constraints. In Parwan both the International Team Leader and National Consultant were able to conduct field visits (requiring travel from and back to Kabul each day), but only the National Consultant was able to visit Nangarhar due to the United Nations Department for Safety and Security (UNDSS) restrictions active at the time (based on the number of security incidents in Nangarhar and not having any designated/'approved' secure overnight accommodation for international FAO staff/consultants). Another challenge was the cultural restriction with regard to the all-male evaluation team directly meeting women beneficiaries. To address this, female consultants/facilitators were successfully engaged and trained to conduct all the focus group discussions with women in both Parwan and Nangarhar.
25. Finally, one of the project's technical services providers left the country (apparently due to overall insufficient funding, despite them still having two active donors/sources of income - this project was one of them) and only one staff member, the Finance Officer, was still in Afghanistan. When interviewed by the evaluation team, he was not able to answer the technical and operational questions normally required of a Technical Service Provider (TSP) in a terminal evaluation. In a couple of cases, the optimal interlocutors (i.e. the best-

¹ "Orchards" in the context of the project is used to describe small fruit-tree-planted riverside plots.

informed personnel) at partner institutions were not available to be interviewed by the evaluation team.

2. Background and context of the project

Box 1: Basic project information

GEF Project ID Number: 5610

Recipient country: The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

Implementing Agency: FAO

Executing Agency: Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL)

GEF Focal Area: Climate change mitigation

GEF Strategy/Operational Programmes: CCM-1 Promote the demonstration, deployment & transfer of innovative low-carbon technologies; CCM-3 Promote investment in renewable energy technologies; CCM-5 Promote conservation & enhancement of carbon stocks through sustainable management of land use, land use change & forestry.

PIF approved: 13 October 2015

Date of CEO endorsement: 15 April 2016

Date of project start: 01 August 2016

Execution Agreement signed: 30 May 2016

Execution Agreement amended: Not applicable

Initial date of project completion (original NTE): 31 July 2019

Revised project implementation end date: 31 July 2019

Date of Mid-term Evaluation: Not applicable

26. Afghanistan is a mountainous country with an arid to semi-arid climate and a high diversity of ecosystems. These ecosystems provide valuable goods and services for local communities that depend on natural resources for their livelihoods. However, Afghanistan's natural resource base is being compromised by unsustainable land management as well as environmental degradation and climate changes which are threatening the livelihoods of local communities.
27. The problem that this project sought to address is that unsustainable land and resource management practices and expected climate changes are accelerating rates of degradation of Afghanistan's rangeland and forest ecosystems. This will have adverse effects on local communities that are dependent on ecosystem goods and services from rangelands and forests for their livelihoods. In addition, degradation of rangeland and forest ecosystems is resulting in alarming rates of extirpation of Afghanistan's biodiversity. This is also causing increased emissions of greenhouse gases through deforestation and forest degradation.
28. Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) is recognized as a potential tool to address deforestation and degradation of forests and rangelands. By decentralizing the management of forests and other natural resources to communities, there is increased incentive and capacity to sustainably use these resources. Furthermore, there is increasing interest in the potential role that international carbon market mechanisms – such as financing through REDD+, the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and voluntary carbon markets – could contribute to supporting GoIRA's dual goals of addressing climate change and improving the management of natural resources. However, the implementation of the aforementioned concepts – such as CBNRM and forest carbon

initiatives – was relatively limited and isolated because of multiple institutional and technical barriers.

29. The project has an implementation period of three years. The overall project objective/intended impact is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by promoting community forestry, and removing barriers to sustainable biomass energy, while laying the groundwork for climate change mitigation in Afghanistan. The project was approved by GEF in April 2016 and the financing agreement was signed between FAO and Afghanistan on 30 May 2016.
30. The National Project Implementation Unit (NPIU) had a full-time National Project Manager and a Communications Officer based in the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock’s national office in Kabul, with two full-time field-based Provincial Field Coordinators based in the Ministry’s provincial office in Parwan and the FAO compound in Nangarhar. The project had a total budget of USD 6 546 274, of which USD 1 735 160 was GEF resources and USD 4 811 114 was co-financed by Government counterparts and services providers.

Institution/Stakeholder
<p>FAO was the GEF implementing agency for the project. It provided technical support for the project as a whole through its global expertise, and in-country infrastructure. This oversight role included the identification and recruitment of suitable expertise. In addition, FAO was tasked with facilitating the monitoring and evaluation of project outcomes, and participating in steering and management committees to provide project support.</p>
<p>Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) – as well as its provincial representation – led interventions under Component 2, and supported the implementation done by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development of interventions under Component 3. The Ministry also contributed to policy-related work under Component 1, where relevant, particularly with respect to policies and plans relating to natural resources and forestry.</p>
<p>National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) is Afghanistan’s national GEF focal point and was an executing partner for this project. It coordinated both the local and international stakeholders for project implementation as well as with other aligned initiatives. Consequently, NEPA chaired the Project Steering Committee. NEPA ensured that project activities were undertaken in alignment with national environmental law and good practices. Under Component 4, NEPA played a role in the public education and awareness-raising activities of the project, including through its ongoing activities to increase public awareness of issues related to environment and climate change.</p>
<p>Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) undertakes the majority of the Government’s off grid and local power generation activities, largely through the National Area-Based Development Programme and to a lesser extent through the National Solidarity Programme. Through these programmes, the Ministry’s activities have established and capacitated subnational community groups – notably Community Development Councils and District Development Authorities throughout Afghanistan – which are the structures through which this project interacted with communities. Furthermore, the project interacted with the Ministry to build capacity for</p>

community-based natural resource management, sustainable biomass energy systems and UN REDD+/Clean Development Mechanism activities to improve Afghanistan's ability to promote low-carbon sustainable development.

Ministry of Energy and Water: The Biomass Energy and Renewable Energy departments within the Ministry were key partners for the project to facilitate mainstreaming of efficient biomass energy systems. The Ministry contributed to development of policies and strategies to strengthen the institutional environment to promote sustainable biomass energy within Component 1.

Bremen Overseas Research and Development Association (BORDA), an international NGO, provided initial technical support and guidance for renewable energy interventions for the project. The design of *in situ* locally-constructed biogas digesters designed by BORDA was promoted at the project implementation sites, integrated with community awareness-raising and training activities. BORDA is no longer part of this project, and the German aid organization Welthungerhilfe implemented BORDA's Terms of Reference.

Welthungerhilfe ('World Without Hunger') – WHH - took over the SBES TSP role in 2017. WHH is one of the largest private aid organizations in Germany.

Mission d'Aide au Développement des Economies Rurales en Afghanistan (MADERA) is an international NGO that was active in rural development in Afghanistan until December 2018 (i.e. before the end of the project, despite being contracted via a Letter of Agreement (LOA) for the project's duration). MADERA – through the National Solidarity Program (NSP) – supported a large number of Community Development Councils. MADERA acted as a technical service provider to the project as a field-implementing partner, mainly providing technical support and guidance for CBNRM and forestry interventions through embedded technical staff in the pilot areas.

Kabul University, in particular the Kabul University Renewable Energy Laboratory (KURE Lab), leads the technical analyses and studies of SBES technologies to support monitoring and evaluation of emission reductions, as well as producing published academic studies. These measures are envisioned to support detailed carbon monitoring in the future and establish capacity and reference data for national GHG monitoring. Kabul University and KURE also joined the biogas consortium. Only a PSA/Consultancy contract with one of the faculty members, despite the Engineering Department having an arms-length organization capable of undertaking research and development contracts for external entities such as internationally-funded projects.

Participating local communities, particularly through representatives of **District Development Assemblies; Community Development Councils; and Forest Management Associations and district-level government** were engaged in the project during the project preparation phase to identify potential project implementation sites and obtain baseline data. The District Development Authorities were consulted during the initial phases of project implementation to identify suitable communities that are represented by Community Development Councils and Forest Management Committees for project interventions.

Community leadership and ongoing consultation was a consistent theme throughout project implementation. The planning, design and management of project activities under Components 2 and 3 includes direct participation of local communities.

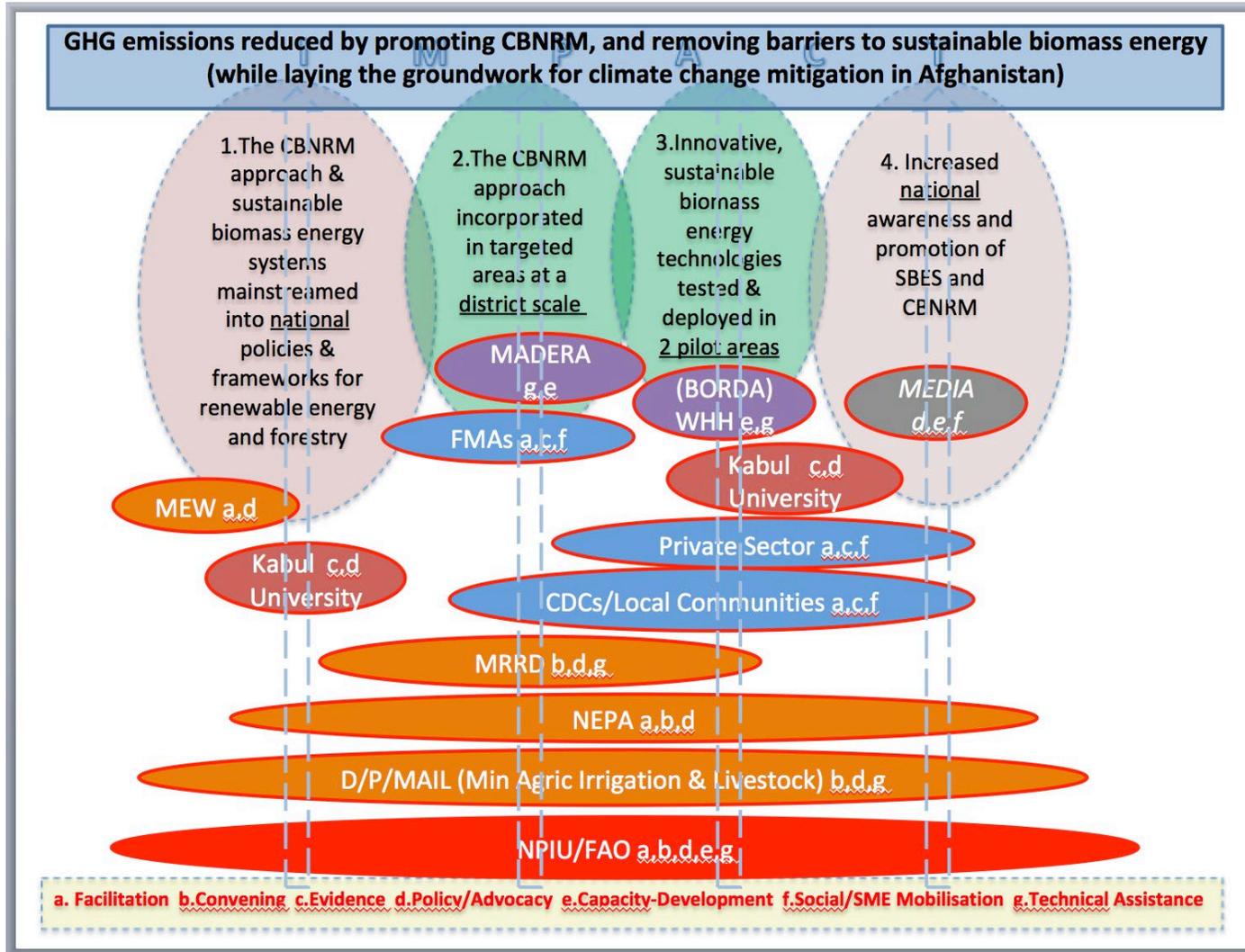
The GEF project included **private sector** enterprises by promoting and training identified local businesses and communities in the establishment of suitable SBES solutions. The cultivation and training of private sector enterprise owners and artisans facilitated the upscaling and rolling out of successful SBES activities to the broader community following project completion.

Also the tree nurseries used were all private sector entities.

2.1 Theory of change

31. The evaluation team noted that the project lacked a defined Theory of change (TOC). The TOC was built on a variation of another TOC found to be suitable for this project (see Figure 1). It was discussed with all stakeholders during the evaluation fieldwork in Afghanistan. With minor fine-tuning, stakeholders accepted the TOC.
32. This variation takes into account and illustrates that the project is heavily institutional, rather than dependent on many interlinked activities. It provides a visual presentation that illustrates the logic and describes the main elements of the project (who was involved, who did what and where) in order to understand which specific outcomes and how they all contributed to the impact. The specific roles of each of the institutional actors are clearly visible in Figure 1, and the use of different colours differentiates the type of entity (government, etc.).

Figure 1: Theory of change, reconstructed by the evaluation team



Source: Evaluation team - GCP/AFG/081/GFF

3. Evaluation questions: key findings

3.1 Relevance

How relevant were the project outcomes and objectives to national and global efforts aimed at improving the sustainable management of forest resources?

33. From the interviews with national partners, especially the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) and Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, it is clear that project objectives (and to a lesser extent its actual achieved outcomes) were and are very relevant to national efforts aimed at improving the sustainable management of forest resources via enhancing the roles and capacities of local communities with regard to sustainable forest management – and also global efforts, whereby the total forest area designated for local communities globally increased by 147 million ha, from 374 million ha in 2002 to 521 million ha in 2017.
34. In addition, it was mentioned that there are links to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG13 (Climate Action) and SDG15 (Life on Land).
35. NEPA officials were very clear that the project was relevant to national policy and environment laws and that they had seen evidence that deforestation and forest degradation, in the form of illegal harvesting of live trees and branches for fuelwood, had reduced in all the project's Forest Management Association areas, partly due to increased public awareness and 'self-regulation'.
36. Both NEPA and MAIL agreed that the logic of the project, i.e. mitigating climate change through increasing forest resources (via tree planting, etc.) and reducing demand for forest products via more efficient and non-wood using domestic energy technologies, was shown to be sound. As such, FAO and GEF's initial observations were that supporting institutions in the country to focus on piloting innovations regarding both renewable energy and community-based natural resource management on the ground were appropriate. However the aspirations for the project to be influential at policy and national level were unfulfilled, for example due to new sustainable energy policies being initiated as the project was starting, and other entities taking the lead regarding a Sustainable Biomass Energy Systems (SBES)-related Roadmap.

Was the project design adequate for delivering the expected outcomes?

37. From the interviews with TSPs, MAIL, MRRD, MEW and FAO-AF, and from documentation including TSP reports, it is clear that:
38. Too many (Outcome 1) outputs (e.g. a national SBES "Roadmap") were out of project control because the project was too small in scale and too early with regard to impact to directly or in real-time influence high-level and national policies.
39. The selection of Salang in the Parwan province (due to its relative safety and accessibility from Kabul) was not optimal from both technical and resource perspectives to be a pilot area for this project, as it has a lot less forest (both quantity and quality-wise) than other areas, and micro-hydro would have most likely been a better renewable household energy

source than biomass or solar, leading to the delivery of less than the expected project outcomes, e.g. with regard to successfully piloting FMAs with forest utilization rights and biogas technology . The opinion that river-based micro-hydro was a better option (than biomass-based energy technologies) for Salang was stated by senior officials of four partners interviewed (national and local), and the evaluation team cannot argue that it is an invalid view (due to the fast-flowing river being primarily glacial melt with all-year flow).

40. The non-governmental organization (NGO)-as-TSP (rather than direct FAO or national/government agency) implementation modality was problematic and negatively affected the delivery of CBNRM outcomes (see Evaluation Finding 3) and it should be noted that some of the activities that were not implemented by the Mission d'Aide au Developement des Economies Rurales en Afghanistan (MADERA) were (commendably) completed by provincial coordinators (e.g. with regard to plantation and check dams).

Has there been any change in project relevance since its design, such as new national policies, plans or programmes that affect the relevance of the project objectives and goals?

Finding 1. The project was relevant and helpful regarding national and global efforts but due to the particular current circumstances and challenges of field operations in Afghanistan it had security-related design and implementation weaknesses (primarily pilot-site selection) which compromised its potential and success.

Rating: Moderately Satisfactory (MS)

41. From the interviews with MAIL, MEW et al, it is clear that national stakeholders see the project as having been influential at the technical and operational level, but not at policy level, in particular with regard to SBES/domestic energy. Welthungerhilfe (WHH) reported that their efficiency data and user-satisfaction results with regard to the new (to Afghanistan) domestic energy technologies should be supporting and enhancing the Government's energy policies (cooking more than heating) to reduce the demand on, and degradation of, local forest resources.

3.2 Achievement of project results

Overall combined finding

Finding 2. The most successful results were with regard to SBES, less so with regard to CBNRM. Both SBES and CBNRM resulted in reduced GHG emissions with both being stronger in Nangarhar than Parwan. With regard to achievement of both policy and awareness raising-related results, it was reported and observed more was achieved in the pilot areas than at the national level.

Ratings: SBES: Satisfactory (S)

CBNRM: Moderately Unlikely (MU)

Overall: Moderately Satisfactory (MS)

To what extent have the four project outcomes and the objective “to reduce GHG emissions by promoting community forestry, and removing barriers to sustainable biomass energy, while laying the groundwork for climate change mitigation in Afghanistan” been achieved, and how effective was the project in achieving them?

Finding 3. GHG emissions have been reduced by project activities.

42. From interviews with National Project Implementation Unit, MAIL and NEPA, and from documentation including PIRs and technical reports, it is clear that the project has demonstrated that both CBNRM and removing barriers to sustainable biomass energy have the potential to reduce GHG emissions. According to national experts working with the FAO Afghanistan office, the estimated GHG emissions reductions in the two pilot areas during the project’s three-year implementation period are:
- i. CBNRM: 19 858 tCO₂e. The evaluation team affirms this is likely an over-estimate as it is a calculation over a three-year period, while hardly any activities were done on the ground in project FMA areas until Year 3. The correct figure is almost certain to be less than the 17 358 tCO₂e in the Project Document;
 - ii. Household energy: 12 429 tCO₂e (from a technically-cleared report), around 2.5 times the 4 955 tCO₂e target in the Project Document.

Have the community-based natural resource management approach and sustainable biomass energy systems been mainstreamed into national policies and frameworks for renewable energy and forestry (Outcome 1)?

Finding 4. Too many Outcome/Component 1 Outputs were out of the project’s control (especially as the project was seen as being too small to have the intended influences with regard to national policies).

43. From the interviews with MRRD, MAIL, NEPA and Kabul University and from project progress report (PPR) and project implementation report (PIR) documentation it is clear that some mainstreaming was achieved. For example, it was noted by MRRD that Community Development Councils (CDCs) have been heavily involved, and in fact integrated, in the project’s field-level activities.
44. However the PPRs and PIRs were inaccurate with regard to reporting of the progress on mainstreaming of the CBNRM approach (at least in Parwan – there was more success in

Nangarhar which has more forests) and sustainable biomass energy systems into national policies and frameworks for renewable energy and forestry. Whilst MAIL and FAO did say that the project's FMA *modus operandi* was now going to be used elsewhere, this is an example of influencing technical implementation, the cascading of policy delivery, not high-level policymaking *per se*. On the face of it, the replication of the project's FMA *modus operandi* in other parts of Afghanistan is a success and an indicator of sustainability; however, as stated elsewhere in this report, the FMA *modus operandi*, at least in Parwan, was suboptimal from an international good-practice perspective.

45. With regard to SBES, the project did not produce a national roadmap to promote sustainable biomass energy systems in alignment with CBNRM principles, as the Asian Development Bank (ADB) was already undertaking/supporting a similar process with MEW. And a new cross-sectoral institutional government mechanism (working group) to promote sustainable biomass energy use was not established, with MEW deciding that its proposed activities were already being undertaken, and should continue to do so, by an ongoing, more general renewable energy working group. Another 'non-delivery' (in this case delayed), are the scientific/peer-reviewed paper(s) which have not yet been produced, mainly due to lack of relevant expertise in the National Project Implementation Unit and of a Chief Technical Adviser (CTA), for most of the duration of the project. One paper is currently being written, but it takes around a year for a short paper to be peer-reviewed and published.

Has the CBNRM approach been incorporated in the targeted areas at district level (Outcome 2)?

Finding 5. CBNRM was not fully incorporated at district level.

46. From the interviews with MAIL officials in Kabul and at the provincial and district levels it is clear that elements of CBNRM have been successfully implemented but only partially (in particular with regard to forest utilization rights and activities), and not robustly incorporated at a district scale. Despite the project's PPRs and PIRs consistently reporting high levels of progress, and the new formal legal entity status of FMAs being appreciated by MAIL, the NGO-TSP mode of delivery meant that there was suboptimal integration with MAIL staff's day-to-day office-based activities and field operations. The trainings, whilst generally technically sound and well-received, did not lead to the full integration of FMA support activities into MAIL field staff duties. Reasons for, and evidence of this, were found in project reports, together with responses given by MAIL staff (in interviews) and FMA members (in FGDs).
47. One reason for the lack of 'internalization' of MAIL working with FMAs is the amount of time it took to formally register FMAs. Even with a fully resourced TSP working full-time on it, it took over a year for the first FMA to be registered, i.e. well into the second year of the three-year project. According to the evaluation team, one of the reasons was the insufficient internalization and superficial way MAIL, the Provincial Directorate of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (PAIL) and DAIL officials spoke about FMAs, with little awareness of what new rights the FMAs should have had, and a lack of clear understanding of the officials' roles in supporting FMAs to activate these new rights.
48. Even though the target number of developed CBNRM plans, also called FMA Forest Management Plans (FMPs), was achieved, they look and read more like highly technical consultants' reports, not community entity 'plain language' practical action programmes

and explanations. Implementation of FMPs in pilot districts has hardly started, with no trees being planted until Year 3 and late grants from FAO to be delivered to bank accounts, leading to implementation delays and season-sensitive actions having to be postponed (for example no community-level tree nurseries were established – the fact that this change was apparently agreed to by FMAs does not mitigate that a rare opportunity for women employment was lost and from a project management point of view it should be noted that this change was apparently not reported in the PPRs and PIRs).

49. Another reason is the below-critical-mass of land and forest involved. In Parwan, the target area of 8 000 ha (all five FMAs' land) was not reached. The total is 5 663 ha, which is less than half of the original target (12 000 ha). Of the 5 633 ha, only 1 200 ha is categorized as being forest and only 93 ha was planted in Parwan due to the project (including small fruit-tree-planted riverside plots described as 'orchards' – which were not mentioned in the Project Document. One reason for not meeting targets is the selection of a location (and district) which was not quite suitable for this project. The selected (primarily for security reasons) site in Salang was not appropriate for piloting as it did not have enough forest and as a result did not achieve its targets. The Nangarhar province Dari Noor pilot site was much more suitable and, with 11 313 ha, almost met its 12 000 ha target.
50. The situation in Nangarhar is similar, although FMAs have offices and communities' elders are part of the FMAs as office bearers.

Have innovative and sustainable biomass energy technologies been tested and deployed in the two pilot areas, Dara-e-Noor in the Nangarhar province, and Salang in the Parwan province (Outcome 3)?

Finding 6. SBES were successfully tested and deployed, in particular in Nangarhar.

51. From interviews with WHH, National Project Implementation Unit, MRRD, Kabul University and NEPA, from FGDs with direct beneficiaries (in particular women), and from technical and project progress reports and direct observations in the field, it is clear that substantial progress was made with regard to testing and deploying of sustainable biomass energy technologies in Nangarhar and, to a lesser extent, Parwan. Reasons and evidence include:
 - i. increased capacity among provincial planning and governmental agencies to plan, promote and implement sustainable biomass energy projects;
 - ii. the number of private sector artisans manufacturing and marketing efficient SBES;
 - iii. motivated communities and individuals (for example personally paying 15-30 percent of the cost of stoves, etc.);
 - iv. good adaptive management, changing technologies and altering supply arrangements when not locally popular nor feasible (e.g. biogas in Parwan);
 - v. private sector artisans (potters, metal workers, etc.) successfully trained and engaged;
 - vi. highly competent technical and organizational performance from WHH;
 - vii. new high levels of academic/scientific interest, research and teaching activity with regard to SBES;
 - viii. very high satisfaction ratings by women in the evaluation FGDs;
 - ix. the project put considerable effort in dispelling a perception (and criticisms made by local politicians) that Nangarhar had benefitted more from the project (in particular

with regard to SBES), the main reasons being that Parwan was, from the beginning, a suboptimal pilot implementation selection area from a technical (climate and resource availability) point of view. However, it only partially succeeded.²

Has there been an increased national awareness (including capacity development) and promotion of SBES and CBNRM (Outcome 4)?

Finding 7. The project has increased awareness of SBES and CBNRM in the pilot implementation areas, in Kabul-based stakeholders but, according to all the national-level partners interviewed, not with the wider/national public.

52. From interviews with MAIL, National Project Implementation Unit, MRRD, MEW, NEPA and Kabul University, FGDs and direct observations with local beneficiaries and from reviewing documentation including PIRs, PPRs and promotional materials, it is clear that there has been an increased awareness and promotion in the project areas (though not nationally) of SBES and, to a slightly lesser extent, CBNRM. Reasons and evidence for this include:
- i. awareness sessions at community level in pilot areas were conducted where 26 169 participants (16 822 women and 9 374 men) were trained on fuel efficient thermal devices, sustainable biomass energy systems and importance of the forests;
 - ii. technical CBNRM-related trainings conducted by MADERA also contributed to raising awareness;
 - iii. local radio programmes, videos, posters, flyers, training manuals, sign-boards, brochures and reports produced by the project;
 - iv. "Best Practice" publications made available and distributed in English and local languages;
 - v. government officials in NEPA, MAIL and MRRD stated that awareness in and around the project areas has been adequately increased, but with regard to the wider, national, public, it has not been enough;
 - vi. Kabul University reported a large increased interest and research project uptake in SBES by students: it is now in the curriculum, and practical components have been added to the previously theory-only courses.
53. In response to the finding that national partners do not think that awareness has been raised at national/wider level, however the National Project Implementation Unit have stated this is not the case because project video clip reports were broadcast on government and private TV channels.

Did the project produce any unintended results, either positive or negative?

Positive results

54. MRRD stated that there were more SBES livelihood benefits than expected, in particular via SMEs.
55. Less respiratory diseases in SBES households and time spent by children collecting fuelwood (according to project reports and verified by local communities' feedback).

² As further clarified by FAO staff, "as it was a pilot project all the items were equally allocated for both provinces but later on due to feasibility study it was clear that biogas system was not possible in Parwan due to cold weather, high ground water table, shortage of livestock and agriculture land. Therefore, all 40 biogas system were constructed successfully in Dari Noor district."

56. SBES stoves produced by local artisans over 10 percent more efficient and 70 percent cheaper to produce than the imported 'prototype' models (in addition, it was stated that overall project stoves are 50 percent more efficient than current cooking and heating methods).
57. As reported by provincial MAIL officials and the district Governor, the ad hoc harvesting of fuelwood utilizing live trees was reduced (apparently via the cross-fertilization and proliferation of messages from politicians and officials) in non-FMA areas (which was unintended) as well as FMA areas (which was intended) in the pilot implementation districts.

Negatives

58. MADERA and FMAs were frustrated and negatively affected due to non- or late payment of grants from the project.
59. The CBNRM/FMA Forest Management Plans cost USD 5 000-8 000 each to produce by MADERA, which will be a high cost for newly-formed community-based entities in the future.
60. Small (0.3-0.5 ha) plots of riverside land in Parwan/Salang were planted with fruit trees by the project. These "orchards" were not mentioned in the Project Document, have dubious value in relation to climate change mitigation/GHG emissions reduction and raise social and equity concerns as the land appears to be owned or controlled by local male elites.
61. SBES-related problems in Parwan arose because:
 - i. of the use of traditional wood-burning stoves to continually heat water for hours in the background, as some intended beneficiaries did not want new smaller stoves which required constant attention such as the pushing-in of small bits of wood;³
 - ii. biogas did not work for several reasons: there was not enough dung produced or available in the local farming systems, nor enough agricultural land for using/putting the slurry 'by-product' on, and in winter temperatures are too cold for the digestion processes to happen.

What were the contributing factors for the results achieved and what can be particularly attributed to FAO?

Finding 8. In general, contributing factors for the results achieved were, with regard to SBES, the strong performance and capacity of the TSP, WHH. With regard to CBNRM, FAO (i.e. the National Project Implementation Unit and Provincial Coordinators) did their best to make up for the suboptimal performance (mostly problems that were more associated with the NGO-TSP implementation modality, not MADERA's technical nor personnel deficiencies) of the TSP, MADERA, especially after MADERA left the project and did not complete their LOA time period (due to the organization closing down all its operations and leaving Afghanistan).

³ As per as the FGD interviews in Parwan and in Nangarhar, users did not like this mainly because the only entry points where fuel (wood) can enter the stove are very small, and therefore it requires users' constant attention to regularly add fuel.

3.3 Efficiency, project implementation and execution

How did the project activities, institutional arrangements, partnerships in place and resources available contribute to, or impede, the achievement of project results and objectives?

Finding 9. The pre-selected NGO-TSP-via-LOA implementation modality, especially regarding CBNRM, was problematic and if it were not for the security constraints, a direct-FAO implementation model (with a Chief Technical Adviser and specifically recruited full cadre of specialist staff with province (or even district) *in situ* pilot-site level teams) would have been more effective and efficient

62. From the interviews with FAO, National Project Implementation Unit, TSPs, MAIL and NEPA, and from documentation including TSP reports, PIRs and PPRs, it is clear that in general there were good working relationships and partnerships with government agencies, but the lack of an international Chief Technical Adviser and the TSP-NGO partnerships were problematic, impeding project implementation and results. Reasons, evidence and observations made include:
- i. MRRD and MAIL reported that there was space for learning, in particular the government and UN entities learning to work together;
 - ii. The NGO implementation modality, perhaps in particular the pre-selection of the NGO TSPs during the design phase (thereby limiting a merit-based selection process) - whilst likely to have been justifiable for operational reasons at the time when the project was being planned and initiated - was deemed to be an "unsatisfactory delivery/implementation modality" by many of those interviewed.
 - iii. Both of the originally pre-selected TSPs ended up producing increased risks with regard to operations and outcomes (despite them being selected to reduce risks): BORDA left very early in the project, to be replaced by WHH; and MADERA unexpectedly left (the country as well as the project) eight months before the end of the project and its FAO LOA period.
 - iv. Some of the CBNRM technical assistance inputs from MADERA were unconvincing – such as the very expensive and highly technical CBNRM Forest Management Plans, and the fact that zero trees were planted before MADERA withdrew.
 - v. There were 'visibility' and 'branding' issues with regard to FAO and GEF (and MAIL) on reports produced by MADERA – and instances reported of too much credit being claimed and taken by MADERA for work done in the field with FMAs, with the result that government project partners felt undermined, and not supported as intended.
 - vi. The lack of a full-time, or even part-time Chief Technical Adviser for most of the duration of the project resulted in a 'missing' level/filter between the National Project Implementation Unit and the Lead Technical Officer. A consequence resulted in low levels of real-time technical quality control of and guidance given to the TSPs (especially on CBNRM), exacerbated by there being no full-time NRM expertise in the National Project Implementation Unit (the National Project Manager was qualified in engineering), and a high 'approvals workload' for the remotely located Lead Technical Officer.

- vii. Highly competent staff, skill and cost-sharing took and is taking place with the FAO-AF GEF-6 forest-related project, in particular the combined/shared national Project Manager and a Communications Expert.

To what extent has the management been able to adapt to changing conditions to improve efficiency of project implementation?

Finding 10. Security challenges drove and constrained a lot of the project management decision-making, but more use could have been made of field coordinators and progress reports to make adaptations.

Rating: Moderately Unlikely (MU)

63. The ability of the project management to make changes was limited by security constraints and the high costs associated with them. However the use of relatively long (two-three years) duration and high value (USD 300-400 k) LOAs with both TSPs left management with limited room for manoeuvre.
64. There was also inadequate use of PIRs and PPRs, which in some cases included incomplete or not entirely accurate information. If project challenges and changing conditions were discussed with the Lead Technical Officer, GCU, etc., this could have potentially led to beneficial and timely adaptations.
65. In an NGO-TSP implementation model situation like this, the evaluation team observed and believes that the experienced and competent Provincial Field Coordinators were not used to their full capacity. This does not imply that they did not work hard and diligently, just that they were underemployed as the TSPs were taking up some professional space, in particular with regard to CBNRM capacity building of MAIL staff that could probably have achieved more sustainable results had the Provincial Field Coordinators been more directly involved.

3.4 Monitoring and evaluation

Did the project count on a structured M&E system? Was the information from this system used to make timely decisions during project implementation?

Finding 11. Only a partial M&E system was in place. A mid-term review would have helped M&E (and TSP problems), and more accurate and intended use (i.e. to draw attention to issues and correction actions) of PIRs and PPRs would have resulted in increased and appropriate adaptation decisions.

Rating: Moderately Unlikely (MU)

66. The National Project Implementation Unit (and Lead Technical Officer) did use the reporting system deployed by all FAO-GEF projects, i.e. PIRs and PPRs, but did not use them as designed/intended, e.g. to raise issues, recommend correction actions and changes to lower level sections of Results Framework or regarding resource re-allocations.
67. In retrospect the lack of a mid-term review, especially when combined with the three-year LOAs with TSPs and the lack of a Chief Technical Adviser, represented a very high risk.

68. On the positive side, both MAIL and NEPA, the main national partner, reportedly had their own monitoring and evaluation procedures in place with regard to project activities.

3.5 Sustainability

Finding 12. The conditions for SBES aspects of the project to be sustainable are present, but this is not likely for the CBNRM aspects/activities.

Rating: Moderately Satisfactory (MS)

To what extent has the project created ownership among counterparts and stakeholders?

69. From the interviews with FAO, National Project Implementation Unit, TSPs, MAIL, MRRD, and NEPA, local beneficiary FGDs and from documentation including TSP reports, PIRs and PPRs, it is clear that in general the project has created ownership among counterparts and stakeholders. Reasons and evidence given for this and observations made include:
- i. positive engagement and informed responses during interviews by officials in all government institutions apart from MEW;
 - ii. SBESs training of private sector artisans was well done by WHH and well received by the communities. Additionally, tinsmiths trained by the project are independently producing and selling cook stoves, and bukharis have also been informally training other tinsmiths;
 - iii. all government officials said they had received good reports from field staff, with the single notable complaint being on the number of committee meetings (mainly energy-related) relative to the national significance of the project.

How sustainable are the results achieved at environmental, social and financial levels?

70. From the interviews with FAO, National Project Implementation Unit, TSPs, MAIL MRRD, and NEPA, local beneficiary FGDs and SBES artisans, and from documentation including TSP reports, PIRs and PPRs, it is clear that the SBES aspects of the project will be more sustainable than CBNRM aspects. Reasons and evidence given for this and observations made include:
- i. high levels of engagement amongst private sector artisans regarding SBES manufacture and marketing;
 - ii. regarding CBNRM, FMAs have new responsibilities but not the new nor additional rights required for sustainability. A recent FAO Forestry Paper warns that forest communities are put at risk when they are asked to take on increased "responsibilities and costs of managing forests without obtaining a commensurate increase in security of their rights." Some persons interviewed by the evaluation team agreed that harvesting and use rights should be stated in the Forest Management Plans – if/when they are there, they have to be acknowledged and recognized by MAIL/PAIL/DAIL et al, and the translation of "management" into local languages shouldn't be "protection", "conservation", etc.;

- iii. If FMAs can't get any direct benefits or income from using forest resources, there will be a high dependency on external funding, and if 'grants-required-for-FMAs' mentality continues or grows, then there's the risk there will mini 'REDD+' schemes with little funding (grants delayed, future source(s) unclear) and no clear or structured payments for results systems. It should be noted that MAIL officials in both locations (Parwan and Nangarhar) have proposed/requested funds from MAIL in Kabul to continue with the work with FMAs, and MAIL has added FMAs to their structure for the future.

3.6 Stakeholder engagement

Finding 13. Stakeholder engagement was a very positive feature of the SBES component and was adequate and as expected regarding the CBNRM component of this project.

Rating: Satisfactory (S)

To what extent has the project engaged stakeholders?

71. From the interviews with FAO, National Project Implementation Unit, TSPs, MAIL MRRD, and NEPA, local beneficiary FGDs and SBES artisans, and from documentation including TSP reports, PIRs and PPRs, it is clear that efforts to facilitate stakeholder engagement have been determined and, overall, they were successful. Reasons, evidence and observations include:
 - i. high levels of satisfaction regarding engagement reported by all interviewees, especially in the field (in Kabul there were some communication protocol issues with regard to meeting notifications);
 - ii. both men and women FGDs ranked their engagement with, and their participation in, the project as being very high (using H-forms in small groups - scores of 9 out of 10 were the norm).

To what extent have the partnerships established provided complementarity and synergy to project interventions? Have they contributed to the results achieved?

72. From the interviews with FAO, National Project Implementation Unit, TSPs, MAIL MRRD, and NEPA, local beneficiary FGDs and SBES artisans, and from documentation including TSP reports, PIRs and PPRs, it is clear that three partnerships in particular, with WHH, private sector artisans and Kabul University, provided complementarity and synergy. The only relationship that required more synergy was that between MADERA and MAIL, as there was overlap regarding some of the field-based activities carried out by the NGO, the mandate of MAIL's local officials, and the resultant focus and emphasis on 'soft'/'process' activities (training etc.) during the first two years of the project, with no tree planting being done at all until the third year. This was a major lapse in results. Evaluation is of the opinion that this should have been mitigated by the National Project Implementation Unit and MAIL and explicitly addressed in the LOA with MADERA.

3.7 Environmental and social safeguards

Finding 14. In general, environmental and social concerns have been taken into consideration but there are some concerns about the FMAs, "orchards" and solar cookers.

Rating: Moderately Satisfactory (MS)

To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in project design and implementation?

73. From interviews with FAO, National Project Implementation Unit, TSPs, MAIL MRRD, and NEPA, local beneficiary FGDs and from documentation including TSP reports, PIRs and PPRs, it is clear that environmental and social safeguards were taken into consideration in project design; however, there were some shortcomings during implementation. Reasons, evidence and observations include:
- i. it was intended that the limited number of solar cookers the project had would be given to the heaviest wood users in each of the beneficiary communities. It was reported that the recipients of solar cookers were all newly-elected FMA office bearers/'directors', which raised questions about whether they had been correctly assigned as planned;
 - ii. project FMAs were not set up with a balance of rights and responsibilities – but rather only or mainly the latter. Governments only have 'one shot' at starting/doing FMAs, if suboptimal and/or unsuccessful governments, NGOs or international entities can only try again to establish FMAs after a number of years. The lack of a likelihood of reliable grants (e.g. to offset lost benefits) is a red-flag. Agreed forest use, product harvesting and sharing rights should be clearly stated in the Forest Management Plans and recognized by MAIL and NEPA officials. If there is a lack or small quantity of forest resources and products from which to generate revenue, and grants are therefore required for most or all FMA activities, will the benefits derived from these financial allocations be equitably shared?
 - iii. as mentioned previously, the small "orchards" created and supported have ownership, male and elite 'capture' red-flags, and it is unclear and undocumented how benefits derived from the trees planted in the privately owned "orchards" will be managed and/or shared by/via FMAs.

3.8 Gender

To what extent and how did the project include social issues, including gender, in its design? Did the project contribute to the empowerment of vulnerable groups throughout its implementation?

Finding 15. In general, gender issues were adequately managed by the project but the complete lack of women elected to be FMA office-bearers is an issue.

Rating: Unlikely (U)

74. From interviews with FAO, National Project Implementation Unit, TSPs, MAIL and NEPA, local beneficiary men and women FGDs and from documentation including TSP reports, PIRs and PPRs, it is clear that gender issues were taken into consideration in the project

design but there were some shortcomings during implementation, especially in the CBNRM component. Reasons, evidence and observations include:

- i. the most serious gender-related shortcoming was that in both Parwan/Salang and Nangarhar, no women were elected to be FMA committee members (5 x 11 positions in each district). This not only resulted in weaknesses from the gender and governance perspectives of the new FMAs, but also means that the project did not provide a template for future FMA initiation processes in other parts of Afghanistan to ensure (or at least enhance the chances) that women will be elected as directors. Whilst it is acknowledged that national and local cultural norms and constraints were involved, the fact that international funding was being used to pilot best international practices should have led to more of an effort being made, perhaps requesting national women rights experts/advisory groups for advice regarding running elections and for the latest/innovative thinking regarding community-based organization governance processes and structures in Afghanistan which can involve women. A *laissez-faire* approach should have been challenged by FAO et al – perhaps one reason it wasn't challenged is that it doesn't seem to have been raised as an issue in the PPRs nor PIR;
 - ii. another shortcoming was the failure to provide planned work and income-generating activities for women, in particular community-level tree nurseries. None were created and no activities were implemented to make up for this. Possible alternatives, such as plantation maintenance, watering, etc. was seen by the evaluation team as being done by men in Salang and it was reported that this is also the case in Nangarhar.
75. On the energy side of the project, women in both Salang and Dar-e-Noor have a high interest and satisfaction levels with the SBESs, especially the fuel efficient cook-stoves and solar cookers, the only fault being that it was reported that solar cookers were only distributed to elected male FMA officials (as noted above, it would have been correct only if these FMA office-bearers also happened to be in the households using the biggest amounts of fuelwood in each community).
 76. From the project management perspective, gender-disaggregated participant and beneficiary data was effectively recorded by the National Project Implementation Unit. Both NGO TSPs hired equal numbers of men and women as their field staff/extension workers, however no Afghani women were employed as National Project Implementation Unit senior/middle level project staff nor consultants.
 77. Apart from women FGDs, all terminal evaluation interviewees were male.
 78. The planting/improving of small privately-owned riverside/prime-land orchards – which apparently are owned or controlled by men – are indications of de facto 'elite (and male) capture' of FMAs (the FMA all-male office-bearer election results are also an indicator).

3.9 Co-financing

To what extent did the expected co-financing occur?

Finding 16. Co-financing occurred as expected.

79. In general, without doing any auditing, the terminal evaluation team are satisfied that all project co-financing (with the minor complication caused by MADERA opting out) was provided as planned. In particular the office spaces provided by MAIL were of good quality.
80. In addition to complications caused by their withdrawal, MADERA was unsatisfied with the co-financing arrangement from the beginning (despite the LOA clearly stated the funding that would be provided to them). They claimed they had to finance their own senior staff time, IT, HR, vehicles and drivers, and also security measures (e.g. paying for armed police escorts for international staff field visits) which is another issue with NGO-TSP implementation modality. However this was not the reason MADERA withdrew from the project; it was a strategic country-wide (and multi-project) withdrawal by MADERA from Afghanistan.
81. Kabul University was named as a project partner, but not as a co-financer. However, they would have been better suited to be a co-financier on certain aspects than MADERA. Teaching and researching staff time, lab/testing facilities etc. all could have contributed as payments in-kind.

3.10 Progress to impact

To what extent is the project likely to contribute to evidence-based policymaking?

82. As noted above the project has not to date had any input to national level policymaking, but to policy cascade activities at provincial and district levels. However it is hoped that in the future the project's GHG emission reduction figures will be used by those estimating and producing national figures for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and other purposes (especially as the Government has put a high priority, via an Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC), on GHG emissions reporting).

Is there any evidence of evidence-based decision-making on sustainable forest management that can be attributed to the project?

83. No.

Are there any barriers or other risks that may prevent future progress towards long-term results?

84. The barriers and risks identified include:
- i. future growth of SBES uptake constrained by cultural issues (such as traditionally using the heat emanating from the cooking devices to also heat living spaces during cold periods; and having cooking and boiling of water go on in the background without constant need for fuel manipulation), low levels of understanding and fixed mind-sets regarding cooking and heating technologies;
 - ii. sustainability of FMAs, especially in districts with a lack of or very small areas of (low-quality) forest resource, where at best they are able to fulfil only protection/conservation-related roles;

- iii. serious governance issue caused by the lack of women elected to be FMA committee members (which could have been mitigated by seeking, taking and acting on advice from Afghani women's rights experts and groups as noted above);
- iv. quality and quantity of planting material supplied by private tree nurseries. The saplings supplied were of variable quality, with a low overall survival rate predicted by the evaluation team due to them being planted, apparently without 'hardening', in much more rugged and higher altitude sites than where they were raised.⁴

3.11 Knowledge management

How effective has the communication of project aims, progress, results and key messages been, along with any structured lesson learning and experience sharing between project partners and interested groups?

85. From the interviews with National Project Implementation Unit and from documentation including PIRs, PPRs, communication strategy and workshop reports, and the National Project Implementation Unit's Excel database, it is clear that communication between project partners and interested groups has been effective, although more could have been made of using Facebook. Other social media was used, but the National Project Implementation Unit were discouraged by FAO (erroneously, according to the evaluation team) from using Facebook, which is the most popular and effective social media platform in Afghanistan.

Are the communication products and activities likely to support the sustainability of project results?

86. Apart from the delay/lack of the peer-reviewed paper, the project's communications products and activities have been as planned and of good standard. In many government buildings and in SBES artisans' stores, the project's posters were very visible.
87. The project's Excel database is a valuable resource detailing all events, publications, printed copies, etc., and is already available to the GEF6 Project. This will support the sustainability of project results.

⁴ The younger and smaller ones (about 50 percent) will likely have an acceptable survival rate, the larger and more mature saplings are more vulnerable and it is the opinion of the evaluation team that most of them won't survive/grow to maturity.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1. Not all projects can have national level policy influence and this should be acknowledged at the beginning to avoid missed targets. Having more local level policy-cascade/pilot implementation of new policies, laws, etc. can be valid and valuable.

Conclusion 2. The SBES was more successful and is set to be more sustainable than the CBNRM component unless the way that FMAs are set up is fine-tuned to make sure that there is a balance of rights to go with new responsibilities, and that FMA's forest management plans are appropriate content and cost-wise to the community organizations.

Conclusion 3. A major governance shortcoming of FMAs is the lack of women elected to be officials.

Conclusion 4. A feature of the project's implementation was the lack of adaptive management. Since no mid-term review was conducted (which would have been very useful for this project), project implementation reports and project progress reports should be worded and used honestly and frankly to propose the fine-tuning of lower level parts of results framework, with justifications for amendments reviewed and approved by the Lead Technical Officer and Budget Holder, and the Project Steering Committee.

Conclusion 5. The project highlighted some issues with the TSP-NGO implementation model, with shortcomings being observed by government partners as well as FAO. The problems included inadequate engagement with the government to facilitate internalization of new skills and approaches, at times even duplicating or replacing government staff in the field. Some of the problems stemmed from the LOA, which were long in their duration, and with no front-loading of key activities in the first two years of a three-year project (e.g. at minimum some small-scale pilot/trial tree planting done first year and definitely second year of a three-year CBNRM/reforestation project).

Conclusion 6. Most of the weakness with regard to the CBNRM component of the project (including the fragility of FMAs) stemmed from the suboptimal selection of the Parwan/Salang pilot implementation area. A low level of forest resources and the potential availability of micro-hydro as a renewable domestic energy source meant that this was not the correct district to pilot this project. Security issues should be considered but should not unduly compromise the introduction of important new approaches which have the potential to have a major national impact if successfully implemented.

Conclusion 7. Some of the technical, coordination (with TSP) and adaptive management shortcomings (especially of the CBNRM component) would have been mitigated if there had been inputs from an international Chief Technical Adviser.

Conclusion 8. One of the successes of the SBES component was the level of engagement with private sector artisans. To build on this it would have been useful if national and local level private sector and trade associations were involved from the beginning as formal project partners.

4.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1. FAO-AF should work with FAO GEF Coordination Unit and MAIL to negotiate international (Chief Technical Adviser) expertise for future GEF, Green Climate Fund (GCF), etc. projects, perhaps via part-time or shared high quality Chief Technical Adviser inputs.

Recommendation 2. FAO-AF should work with MAIL to review and fine-tune the way FMAs are set up as soon as possible to make sure that there is a balance of rights to go with new responsibilities, and that FMAs' forest management plans are appropriate content and cost-wise to community organizations.

Recommendation 3. FAO-AF and GCU should make sure middle and high-level staff of future GEF projects include women.

Recommendation 4. FAO-AF/National Project Implementation Unit should set up innovative institutions, such as the FMAs, and, to the extent possible, should have processes in place to prevent situations where no women are being selected or elected.

Recommendation 5. FAO-AF should ensure that if NGO-TSP implementation modality is deemed to be appropriate (and it should only be if FAO implementation is impossible due to security-related concerns and costs) then the NGO-TSPs should not be pre-selected and the LOAs with them should only be for a year or 18 months maximum, with crucial activities (such as tree planting) front-loaded so that the NGO does not only perform soft-skill work (training etc.), with no tangible results on the ground.

Recommendation 6. GEF project formulators should be aware that not all projects should 'automatically' have national-level policy and related influence objectives/outcomes. Having more local-level policy-cascade/pilot implementation of new policies, laws, etc. should be recognized as being valid and valuable.

Recommendation 7. GEF project formulators in Afghanistan should focus more on whether security-related criteria being used to select pilot implementation sites will unduly compromise (undermine wider/national uptake of) the approaches and the methodologies being piloted (which has occurred in this project).

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Appendix 1. GEF evaluation criteria rating table

FAO - GEF Rating Scheme	Rating	Summary Comments
1) RELEVANCE		
Overall relevance of the project	MS	The project was relevant and helpful regarding national and global efforts but due to the particular current circumstances and challenges of field operations in Afghanistan it had design and implementation weaknesses which compromised its potential and success.
2) ACHIEVEMENT OF PROJECT RESULTS (EFFECTIVENESS)		
Overall assessment of project results	MS	The most successful results were with regard to SBES, less so with regard to CBNRM. Both SBES and CBNRM resulted in reduced GHG emissions but both were stronger in Nangarhar than Parwan. With regard to achievement of both policy and awareness-raising related results, there was more achieved in the pilot areas than at the national level.
Outcome 1: The CBNRM approach and sustainable biomass energy systems have been mainstreamed into national policies and frameworks for renewable energy and forestry.	U	Too many Outcome 1 outputs were out of the Project's direct control to deliver (especially as the project was perceived as being too small to have the intended influences with regard to national policies)
Outcome 2: The CBNRM approach has been incorporated in targeted areas at a district scale.	MU	MAIL staff 'internalization' of working with FMAs did not happen as well as planned/expected/required. The FMA Forest Management Plans produced by the TSP read more like consultancy reports than community entity 'plain language' practical action programmes, and are prohibitively expensive. Total re-forested area was smaller than planned, and no trees were planted until the final year of the project.
Outcome 3: Innovative and sustainable biomass energy technologies tested and deployed in two pilot areas	S	SBES were successfully tested and deployed, in particular in Nangarhar. There has been increased capacity among provincial planning and governmental agencies to plan, promote and implement sustainable biomass energy projects; communities and individuals were motivated to acquire and use the SBES, supported by a highly competent TSP, the WHH, and intensive testing was done by them and Kabul University.
Outcome 4: Increased national awareness and promotion of SBES and CBNRM	HS	The project has increased awareness of SBES and CBNRM in the pilot implementation areas, in Kabul-based stakeholders but not with the wider/national public.
3) EFFICIENCY, PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION & EXECUTION		
Overall quality of project implementation & adaptive management (implementing agency)	MU	Security challenges and associated costs disproportionately drove and constrained the project's implementation activities and adaptive management decision-making, but more use could have been made of field coordinators and progress reports to make adaptations.

Quality of execution (executing agencies)	MS	National executing agency partners were engaged and provided all planned support re infrastructure and after initial (financial compensation) misunderstandings collaborated in the field and at policy level at adequate levels.
Efficiency (incl. cost effectiveness and timeliness)	MU	The pre-selected NGO-TSP-via-LOA implementation modality, especially regarding CBNRM, was problematic (duplication and competition with regard to MAIL in the field, meeting targets with regard to 'soft' activities, training workshops, etc. but no tangible results (trees being planted on the ground) and if it were not for the security constraints, a direct-FAO implementation model would have been more effective and efficient.
4) MONITORING AND EVALUATION		
Overall quality of M&E	U	Only a partial M&E system was in place. An MTR would have helped M&E (and TSP problems), and more accurate and the use as intended (i.e. to draw attention to issues and correction actions) of PIRS and PPRs would have resulted in increased and appropriate adaptation decisions. No evidence of strong PSC overall oversight.
M&E design at project start up	U	No stand-alone structured M&E plan/process was produced, leaving too much reliance on PPR, PIR and TSP progress reports.
M&E plan implementation	U	Despite the lack of a structured M&E plan (in addition to the standard PIRs and PPRs), some project activities, most notably the Knowledge Management Excel database, proved to be a valuable resource for monitoring.
5) SUSTAINABILITY		
Overall sustainability	SBES: S CBNRM: MU	The conditions for SBES aspects of the project to be sustainable are present (in particular strong private sector SME uptake of production and marketing activities), but this is not likely for the CBNRM aspects/activities, mainly due to imbalances between the new responsibilities (many) and new rights (few, if any) of FMAs.
6) STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT		
Overall quality of stakeholder engagement	S	Stakeholder engagement was a very positive feature of the SBES component and was adequate and as expected regarding the CBNRM component of this project.

Appendix 2. Rating scheme

PROJECT RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

Project outcomes are rated based on the extent to which project objectives were achieved. A six-point rating scale is used to assess overall outcomes:

Rating	Description
Highly Satisfactory (HS)	<i>"Level of outcomes achieved clearly exceeds expectations and/or there were no shortcomings."</i>
Satisfactory (S)	<i>"Level of outcomes achieved was as expected and/or there were no or minor short comings."</i>
Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	<i>"Level of outcomes achieved more or less as expected and/or there were moderate shortcomings."</i>
Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU)	<i>"Level of outcomes achieved somewhat lower than expected and/or there were significant shortcomings."</i>
Unsatisfactory (U)	<i>"Level of outcomes achieved substantially lower than expected and/or there were major shortcomings."</i>
Highly Unsatisfactory (HU)	<i>"Only a negligible level of outcomes achieved and/or there were severe shortcomings."</i>
Unable to Assess (UA)	<i>The available information does not allow an assessment of the level of outcome achievements.</i>

During project implementation, the results framework of some projects may have been modified. In cases where modifications in the project impact, outcomes and outputs have not scaled down their overall scope, the evaluator should assess outcome achievements based on the revised results framework. In instances where the scope of the project objectives and outcomes has been scaled down, the magnitude of and necessity for downscaling is taken into account and despite achievement of results as per the revised results framework, where appropriate, a lower outcome effectiveness rating may be given.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND EXECUTION

Quality of implementation and of execution will be rated separately. Quality of implementation pertains to the role and responsibilities discharged by the GEF Agencies that have direct access to GEF resources. Quality of Execution pertains to the roles and responsibilities discharged by the country or regional counterparts that received GEF funds from the GEF Agencies and executed the funded activities on ground. The performance will be rated on a six-point scale:

Rating	Description
Highly Satisfactory (HS)	<i>There were no shortcomings and quality of implementation or execution exceeded expectations.</i>
Satisfactory (S)	<i>There were no or minor shortcomings and quality of implementation or execution meets expectations.</i>
Moderately Satisfactory (MS)	<i>There were some shortcomings and quality of implementation or execution more or less meets expectations.</i>
Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU)	<i>There were significant shortcomings and quality of implementation or execution somewhat lower than expected.</i>
Unsatisfactory (U)	<i>There were major shortcomings and quality of implementation substantially lower than expected.</i>
Highly Unsatisfactory (HU)	<i>There were severe shortcomings in quality of implementation or execution.</i>
Unable to Assess (UA)	<i>The available information does not allow an assessment of the quality of implementation or execution.</i>

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Quality of project M&E will be assessed in terms of:

- i. Design
- ii. Implementation

SUSTAINABILITY

The sustainability will be assessed taking into account the risks related to financial, socio-political, institutional, and environmental sustainability of project outcomes. The evaluator may also take other risks into account that may affect sustainability. The overall sustainability will be assessed using a four-point scale:

Rating	Description
Likely (L)	<i>There is little or no risk to sustainability.</i>
Moderately Likely (ML)	<i>There are moderate risks to sustainability.</i>
Moderately Unlikely (MU)	<i>There are significant risks to sustainability.</i>
Unlikely (U)	<i>There are severe risks to sustainability.</i>
Unable to Assess (UA)	<i>Unable to assess the expected incidence and magnitude of risks to sustainability.</i>

Appendix 3. GEF co-financing table

Name of the Co-financer	Co-financer type	Type of co-financing	Co-financing at project start (Amount confirmed at GEF CEO endorsement/approval by the project design team) (in USD)			Materialized Co-financing at project end (in USD)		
			In-kind	Cash	Total	In-kind	Cash	Total
BORDA/ WWH	TSP	In-kind	450 000	-	450 000	450 000	-	450 000
MADERA	TSP	In-kind	161 114	-	161 114	161 114	-	161 114
MRRD	GOVT	In-kind	1 200 000	-	1 200 000	1 200 000	-	1 200 000
MAIL	GOVT	In-kind	1 000 000	-	1 000 000	1 000 000	-	1 000 000
NEPA	GOVT	In-kind	500 000	-	500 000	500 000	-	500 000
MEW	GOVT	In-kind	500 000	-	500 000	500 000	-	500 000
FAO	IA	In-kind	1 000 000	-	1 000 000	1 000 000	-	1 000 000
Grand Total (in USD)			4 811 114		4 811 114	4 811 114		4 811 114

Annexes

Annex 1. Terms of Reference

<http://www.fao.org/3/ca7811en/ca7811en.pdf>

Office of Communications – November 2020

Terminal evaluation of “Reducing greenhouse gas emissions by promoting community forestry, removing barriers to sustainable biomass energy, and laying the groundwork for climate change mitigation in Afghanistan”

Corrigendum

Updated on 17/09/2021

The following corrections were made to the PDF after it went to print.

Page	Location	Text in printed PDF	Text in corrected PDF
40-41	Appendix 4	Entire appendix	Entire appendix removed.
42	Annexes	Entire section	Entire section moved to page 40.

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