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Fouta Djallon Highlands Integrated Natural Resources Management Project (FDH-INRM) – EP /INT/503/GEF

Mid-term Evaluation

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Office of Evaluation (OED)

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABN	<i>Autorité du Bassin du Niger</i> (Niger Basin Authority)
AMESD	Africa Monitoring of the Environment for Sustainable Development
CAADP	Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme
CIFOR	Center for International Forestry Research
CILSS	<i>Comité Intergouvernemental de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel</i> (Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel)
STC	Scientific and Technical Committee of the RPID-FDH
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FDH	Fouta Djallon Highlands
FDH-INRM	Fouta Djallon Highlands Integrated Natural Resources Management Project (FDH-INRM)
FOM	Forest Assessment, Management and Conservation Division (FAO)
GEF	Global Environment Facility
ICO-AU	International Bureau of Coordination (African Union)
ICRAF	International Center for Research in Agroforestry
IGAs	Income Generating Activities
IUCN	The World Conservation Union
LADA	Land Degradation Assessment in Drylands
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MTE	Mid-term evaluation
NFP	National Focal Point
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NRC	Climate, Energy and Tenure Division (FAO)
NRL	Land and Water Division (FAO)
NTU	National Technical Unit
OMVG	<i>Organisme pour la Mise en Valeur du fleuve Gambie</i> (Gambia River Basin Development Organization)
OMVS	<i>Organisme pour la Mise en Valeur du fleuve Sénégal</i> (Senegal River Basin Development Organization)
PSC	Project Steering Committee
RCC	Regional Consultative Committee of the RPID-FDH
RPCU	Regional Project Coordination Unit
RPID-FDH	Regional Program for the Integrated Development of the FDH
STC	Scientific and Technical Committee
TF	Task Force
TOR	Terms of Reference
UEMOA	<i>Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine</i> (West African Economic and Monetary Union)
ULAP	Local Support Unit for the Project
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ES1. The Fouta Djallon Highlands Integrated Natural Resources Management Project (FDH-INRM) is a regional project operating in eight countries in West Africa. It aims at reversing the phenomenon of natural resources degradation (water and land), which affects the living conditions of the populations in the Highlands and in the watersheds that originate from the Highlands and flow into ten countries in the water.

ES2. The project, which began in July 2009, has a ten-year duration, divided into two phases of four and six years each. From the estimated cost of US\$44 million, 25 percent is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the remaining 75 per cent by the national governments, the African Union and other partners, including FAO, which acts as an agency delegated for the implementation on behalf of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the executing agency of GEF.

ES3. The mid-term evaluation (MTE) was conducted three years after the start of the project and one year prior to the end of its first phase. At the end of initial consultations at FAO headquarters in Rome, the evaluation mission visited the two countries participating in the project, Guinea (the regional office of the project) and Senegal, in order to meet the national and regional partners and visit the sites where the project supports the rural populations in the adoption of sustainable natural resources management and income-generating initiatives. The visits to Guinea Bissau and Mali did not take place as planned due to security reasons related to the coups d'états that occurred in the two countries.

ES4. The mission analysed documents (see the list in Annex III) concerning the design and implementation of the project and the regional reference framework, and included the strategies and complementary initiatives led by the project partners. It collaborated with many stakeholders involved in the project at the international regional, national and local levels (see the list in Annex IV). On the basis of observations of the mission, the assessment is as follows:

ES5. The project is globally relevant in its strategic approach with respect to the initial framework and in the choice of partners associated with different levels of intervention. It was designed to contribute an added value and to fill gaps identified in the implementation of a long-term strategy reflected in the RPID-FDH, initiated by the African Union and its partners in the 1980s. The adopted approach to intervene at several levels (regional, national and local) by integrating the institutional, legal, economic, social and environmental aspects is justified by the analyses, although it seems ambitious in light of hypotheses and the resources mobilized at the time of this MTE.

ES6. The project supported the consultative and decision-making mechanisms of RPID-FDH for the regional and national levels, choosing coherent partnerships, notably, for the multi-disciplinary nature of the approach and for important synergies to be developed with the regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and CILSS, and watershed bodies.

ES7. At the local level, the involvement of the de-concentrated technical services and NGOs is fundamental, considering their closeness to the rural populations, knowledge of the territory, technical competence and participation in previous initiatives. Sustainable cooperation mechanisms between these two categories of actors should be strengthened in order to make them less dependent on external donors.

ES8. Although the institutional set-up was suitable, the effectiveness of the project was affected by political instability in several countries of the region, the slowness and insufficient mobilization of the human and financial resources by the African Union and by the countries, and by a centralized and insufficiently flexible management system. As a result, the start-up of activities for all the components underwent delays, forcing project staff to make additional efforts to launch field activities, which had repercussions on the GEF funds management costs. In addition, the co-financing for the additional costs associated with the participation of public employees was underestimated and showed an excessive dependence on external donors, making the GEF funding to co-financing 1/3 ratio unrealistic.

ES9. The **effectiveness** of the project was only partial for all the components. At the regional level, the Framework Agreement strengthened the legal framework and the regional partnership. Also, due to joint efforts of the African Union and FAO, progress was made in the creation of regional observatory of the FDH, although the insufficiency of the human resources (at the African Union level) or the unsuitable human resources (international consultants) as well as the inappropriate digital infrastructure limited the effectiveness and ownership of innovative approaches and high-tech products provided by FAO. At the local level, the project selected 29 pilot sites in five countries through a collaborative and coherent process. However, only in 16 sites were actions launched or will actions be launched during 2012.

ES10. The local competences of technical agents and NGOs mobilized in the project activities, as well as the capitalization of the community-based associations and dynamics were success factors, contributing to introducing processes aimed at reducing pressure on the natural resources, and improving land productivity and income opportunities for the local populations.

ES11. The environmental and socio-economic **impacts** of field activities are promising but mitigated by the limited spatial and temporal influence of the activities. However, factors of **sustainability** emerged, which must be consolidated in continuing the project. Some of these factors are the ownership of a participatory and inclusive partnership approach, the support and enhancement of community services, and the development of cooperation dynamics between community groups and the local authorities, thus offering opportunities of replication in the short, medium and long term. This can be achieved provided that synergies with other complementary actions beyond the scope of the project are strengthened, such as the improvement of the road and electric networks needed for ensuring access to markets and high value-added investments (e.g. conservation and processing of agricultural products).

ES12. Overall, the project supported the facilities and the resources allowing for integration between regional, national and local intervention levels, yet privileging, through the resources mobilized, the local level by responding to the demand expressed by the partners and beneficiaries. This concentration of efforts did not make it possible to fully implement all the project components; thus Component 3, devoted to training and the support measures of the Framework Agreement (legislative harmonization, regional partnerships, and transboundary resource management), was not used to its full potential.

ES13. Taking into consideration the issues included in the programme and in the project, in the evaluation mission's opinion, a second phase is indispensable for the consolidation of the investments made in the first phase, and must automatically follow the first one, without interruption, in order to avoid a loss of credibility in the eyes of the partners involved, and reduced motivation by the beneficiaries. The second phase, whose formulation must be initiated as soon as possible, in the second year of the first phase, would allow rectifying the inefficiencies encountered, and to define and agree on a more coherent and efficient institutional and partnership framework, as well as more efficient management modalities.

ES14. The following **recommendations**, in order of priority, result from the analysis of observations and lessons learned (chapter 7), concerning all of the project's partners and components, and refer the residual period of the first phase, as well as the preparation of the second one.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1. It will be necessary, at first, to launch and rapidly implement the demonstration activities that have been identified and programmed in all the pilot sites in the five countries in order to carry out an assessment at the end of the first phase, and define the support and capitalization measures needed in order to sustain the achievements and replicate them elsewhere (training, monitoring, impact evaluation, integration in the observatory, outreach and exchange).

R2. The regional cooperation formalized in the Framework Agreement must be consolidated through bilateral and multilateral agreements between the bodies of the programme and the partners (governments, ECOWAS, CILSS and river basin organizations), with the development of detailed action plans aimed at tangible and measurable results (convergence of strategic priorities, accessible data repositories, technical solutions disseminated, location of interventions determined, etc.), all of which could contribute to policy dialogue and the commitment of the countries.

R3. The viability of the action plan for the establishment of the observatory, presented in 2011, should be reviewed on the basis of a strengthened dialogue with the partners, in particular, with the developers and managers of other observatories and structures in the region, with FAO's contribution which will be crucial for the development of a realistic plan that defines the responsibilities of the actors and a process for assuming responsibility and strengthening long-term capacities. To this end, it would be necessary to refine the knowledge of the data and the available sources, verify the possibilities for exchange (compatibility of formats, access), prioritize the requests for information (for decision-makers and technicians) and activate the partnerships according to the mandates, competences, operational capacities and planned results.

R4. The project (ICO-AU/RPCU) should decentralize to a larger extent its approach at the national and local level towards the mandated technical structures (NTU, NFP and ULAP) by rendering them accountable (mobilization of co-financing, results-based planning, integration in the government programmes, enhancement of existing centres of expertise) and by strengthening their implementation and monitoring capacities (targeted training, data collection and sharing, etc.). The RPCU should maintain the financial management of the GEF funds, while ICO-AU with the support of UNEP should play a more active part in controlling that the co-financing commitments are being respected, an indispensable condition for effective and sustainable investment.

R5. The technical and financial planning of the project should be harmonized in order to become more results-oriented rather than activity-/output-oriented, and to allow for a greater flexibility in terms of decision-making and the mobilization of human, technical and financial resources. The creation of a multi-donor fund for the FDH, consisting of the contributions of partners (national governments, above all), could be taken into consideration, using as an example¹ other regional programmes and organizations. This would favour the convergence of common interests and the coordination and attraction of complementary financing.

R6. The technical partners, above all FAO and the national and regional partners, should actively adapt themselves to result-based planning by defining their specific contributions (time, outputs and modalities) as well as the necessary conditions (infrastructures, human resources, legal and regulatory framework) for the handing over of responsibilities to the beneficiaries and final users.

¹ Several regional African organizations (ECOWAS, CILSS, EAC) and basin bodies have multi-donor platforms that allow for coordinated contributions for the specific programmes/sectors.

GEF rating grid²

Item	Rating	Comments
Achievement of objectives	MS	The regional dialogue has been revitalized on shared objectives with a common legal framework (political endorsement). Solutions for reducing land degradation were tested and initiated locally together with income generation opportunities. Sustainable financing issues remain unsolved.
Attainment of outputs and activities	MS	Framework Convention approved and awaiting ratification and application by member countries. Valuable but uncoordinated actions on regional observatory. Local plans and actions partially achieved and not yet strengthened by appropriate training.
Progress towards meeting GEF-4 focal area priorities/objectives	MS	Adequate actions for reducing land degradation identified and partially implemented. More integration with International waters component and regional responsible organisms is urgently needed.
Cost-effectiveness	MU to U	Delayed schedule on many activities and heavy management costs due to excessively centralized management and scarce co-financing. Excessive burden on GEF funds.
Impact	MS	Promising environmental and socio-economic effects but still limited in time, space and target groups.
Risk and Risk management (1)	MU	Political and financial risks are high in the region and affect sustained commitment and empowerment by institutional partners with however encouraging progress on local governance and participation of communities and local authorities. The environmental risks of continued/increased degradation trends) remain high if identified actions are not implemented rapidly and efficiently or if the project is stopped. The Risk of de-motivation by beneficiaries and de-commitment by institutions is also strong as a consequence.
Sustainability (2)	HU	Limited impacts on land degradation and improved livelihood, but good basis for expanding impacts with appropriate means (ML) and coordinated efforts with other sectoral initiatives (MU). Regional coordination role to be reviewed in favour of ECOWAS given the weak political and financing functions of AU (MU)
Stakeholder participation	MS	Regional/national consultative and steering structures in place but dependant/relying on external funding. Promising support & capitalization on local and community governance practices and public/private partnerships: local authorities & NGO
Country ownership	HU	Despite local and national coordinating structures, participation in planning and resource mobilization is weak.

² This table was provided by the Evaluation Team Leader following a request by FAO's Office of Evaluation (OED).

Implementation approach	U	Limited capitalization on lessons learnt and excessively centralized management.
Financial planning	HU	Unrealistic reliance on co-financing from governments and AU with no control by project management (FAO, UCRP. Burden on GEF limited resources.
Replicability	HU	Due to late start-up of field and training actions
Monitoring and evaluation	MS	Monitoring of project performance in place but weak progress on impact evaluation (observatory)

GEF six-point scale system: Highly Satisfactory (HS), Satisfactory (S), Marginally Satisfactory (MS), Marginally Unsatisfactory (MU), Unsatisfactory (U), and Highly Unsatisfactory (HU)

[1] Financial risks, socio-political risks, institutional framework and governance risks, and environmental risks.

[2] Sustainability will be assessed in terms of Likelihood: Likely (L): There are no risks affecting this dimension of sustainability. Moderately Likely (ML): There are moderate risks that affect this dimension of sustainability. Moderately Unlikely (MU): There are significant risks that affect this dimension of sustainability. Unlikely (U): There are severe risks that affect this dimension of sustainability.

1 introduction

1.1 Background and objectives of the evaluation

1. The Fouta Djallon Highlands Integrated Natural Resources Management Project (FDH-INRM), herein the “project” is part of a regional development process that began in 1959³ and was requested several times by the countries of the sub-region with the support of international partners.

2. A Regional Integrated Management Programme of the Fouta Djallon (RPID-FDH) was only formulated in 1980-1981 by the Organization of African Unity, later called the African Union, and by the Guinean Government with the support of United Nations agencies Environment Programme (UNEP), FAO and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). RPID-FDH, herein called the “Programme” is the long-term strategy on which several rural development projects have been implemented from the 1990s to date, located mainly in Guinea and financed by multiple multilateral and bilateral donors.

3. The formulation of the FDH-INRM project was launched in 2001 and was approved by the Secretariat of the Global Environment Fund (GEF) on July 2008. In its initial design, the project was implemented over a total period of ten years and divided into two phases. The first phase, which started in July 2009, should be completed by June 2013, four years after its start. It should be followed by a second phase of six years.

4. The Regional Coordination of the project is assured by the African Union with its International Coordination Office (ICO-AU) based in Conakry. UNEP is the GEF implementing agency, and FAO is the organization delegated for the execution of the project.

5. The overall cost of the project at the time of its approval was estimated at US\$44 million, with financing from GEF in the amount of US\$11 million and co-financing from other partners, including the African Union, beneficiary countries, FAO and other international and regional partners.

6. The mid-term evaluation (MTE) of the first phase was carried out almost three years after it began and one year before its completion. It started at the end of March 2012, with the first consultations of evaluators at FAO headquarters in Rome. A mission in the project region took place on 17 April to 5 May, and was followed by further meetings at FAO headquarters and consultations with other stakeholders.

7. From the terms of reference (ToRs) attached in the Annex I, the objective of this MTE is to determine the level of progress of the FDH-INRM project with respect to the expected outcomes. It is planned to evaluate the performance of the project, notably in terms of results and activities carried out with respect to those planned in the project document. Taking into account the state of progress (one year from the end of the first phase) and in view of a second phase, great importance is given to the relevance of the project, the validity of hypotheses and risks, as well as to the partnerships and the efficiency and effectiveness of their implementation. The ToRs raise specific questions on the critical aspects that emerge

³ It was during the International Conference on Soils held in 1959 in Dalaba, Guinea that a regional approach for the integrated management of the FDH was proposed.

during the implementation of this first phase, which concern the different evaluation criteria and to which this evaluation will try to answer.

1.2 Evaluation methodology

1.2.1 Phases of the evaluation

The evaluation was divided into three phases.

a. Preparatory phase (start-up)

8. This phase mainly took place at the FAO headquarters and served to clarify the Terms of Reference (ToR) of the evaluation, acquire available documents and information from headquarters, and discuss with the FAO technical services concerned their participation and contribution to the project, as well as their perception of the design and implementation of the project.

b. Mission in the project area (from 17 April to 6 May 2012)

9. From 18 to 20 April 2012, the evaluators held meetings in Conakry with the FAO Representative, the Regional Project Coordination Unit (RPCU), the Regional Coordinator of the African Union, and with some national and regional partners (see Annex IV).

10. From 21 to 30 April 2012, the evaluators moved to the field to meet the partners and beneficiaries of the project activities in the selected sites in Guinea and Senegal, while the visits and meetings that were planned in Mali and Guinea Bissau were cancelled due to security issues as a result of political events in these two countries. In the first two countries, the evaluators, accompanied by the National Focal Points (NFPs), met the Local Support Units of the Project (ULAPs), based in Mamou and Labé in Guinea and in Kédougou in Senegal. In four pilot sites, of which three are in Guinea and one in Senegal, the evaluators visited the project interventions underway and planned, and met the local communities, the village groups, the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the technical agents of the state services involved in the project activities, as well as the local authorities (the Governors of Labé and Kédougou).

11. From 1 to 5 May 2012, upon returning to Conakry, the evaluators organized interviews with other stakeholders and partners of the project in order to complete the collection of information. Telephone meetings were held with the NFP in Mali and the Project Officer in the FAO Office in Guinea Bissau.

12. Prior to their departure from Guinea for Europe, a briefing session was carried out with all of the actors who met in Conakry for a presentation of preliminary observations. This allowed to verify the reliability of the data, and to identify gaps and the points needing further details. This first briefing session also made it possible to discuss the conclusions and preliminary recommendations.

c. Summary and briefing phase

13. Upon return to Rome, the evaluators carried out a briefing with the project team and members of the Task Force, in the presence of a UNEP representative and some members of the RPCU who were in Rome for the Land & Water Days Conference. During this conference, technical sessions on the issues related to the project took place, notably, one session on the experiences in watershed management, which allowed for sharing experiences on similar projects (i.e. the Kagera project in Eastern Africa). In-depth meetings with the

FAO services and telephone meetings⁴ with other partners who had not been previously consulted (NFPs of the Gambia, Mali and Mauritania, the FAO Office in Mali and ECOWAS) were organized.

1.2.2 The approach and tools of evaluation

14. As a result of the collection and literature review, initiated at the beginning of the preparatory phase and pursued during the evaluation, there was access to several sources of information concerning the background, design and implementation of the project as well as the regional and international framework.

15. On the basis of the project document, a logical framework was re-created (see Annex V) in order to develop an evaluation matrix in which the observations arising from the evaluation were compared with the performance and impact indicators. This matrix assisted in the targeting of interviews and the questions addressed to the different stakeholders.

16. The stakeholders consulted (see Annex III list) were directly and/or indirectly involved in the design and implementation of the project at the regional, national and local levels.

17. Visits in the pilot areas selected for the implementation of the demonstration activities were carried out in two countries only (Guinea and Senegal) for the above-mentioned security issues. During visits, the evaluators, accompanied by the local partners (de-concentrated technical services and NGOs) were able to assess the progress of planned actions, the coherence of the technical procedures, the involvement and ownership of different actors, including the interest groups and the village communities, as well as the measures taken and/or planned by the project in order to ensure its sustainability.

2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

2.1 Description of the intervention area

18. The FDH consists of a group of high plateaus located at an altitude between 500 m and 1 500 m. They cover the north-west of the Republic of Guinea and extend to Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Senegal and Mali. With its physical extensions, they cover an area of around 120 000 km². In Guinea, it extends to a natural region of Middle Guinea all the way to Maritime Guinea or Lower Guinea, and High Guinea, an area of 60 000 km². The FDH are subdivided into four major ecosystems: (i) a Sudano-Guinean savannah in the northeast; (ii) a dry forest area in the north-west; (iii) a high plateau area in the centre; and (iv) wet lowlands in the south. This ecological diversity increases the important biodiversity (flora and fauna) that needs special protection.

19. The Highlands are characterized by their immense hydrographic network. It is estimated that there are roughly 8 000 water sources in the FDH, which are considered the water tower of West Africa. The main rivers and tributaries of West Africa originate in the Highlands and flow into the Atlantic Ocean, from Saint Louis in Senegal up to Port Harcourt in Nigeria. The main rivers originating in the FDH are: Niger (4 183 km), Senegal (1 609 km), Gambia (1 126 km), Koliba/Corubal and Konkouré.

⁴ Some partners, including at the African Union headquarters, the NFP in Sierra Leone and the FAO Offices in Sierra Leone and Niger, did not respond to the request for a phone interview.

20. Due to the morphological characteristics of the FDH, its hydrological network provides great possibilities for hydraulic works development of all sizes, with simple or multiple aims, able to cover the local, national and sub-regional needs for: (i) the supply of portable and industrial water; (i) energy production; (iii) irrigation of agricultural land and for livestock farming; and (iv) the regularization of watercourses for all uses in the countries located downstream.

21. The FDH only covers 20 percent of the Guinean territory, where over 40 percent of the country's inhabitants and 40 percent of its livestock are found. The Highlands also have large mining resources, which are being exploited by international companies representing an economic potential and an environmental and socio-political risk.

2.2 *The policy and institutional framework*

22. The river basins that originate in the FDH flow into ten countries of Western Africa. Eight of them belong to the RPID-FDH Programme and participate in the FDH-INRM project according to different modalities: Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Senegal and Sierra Leone fully contribute to project activities, while the Gambia, Mauritania and Niger plan to collaborate in this first phase only within the framework of regional initiatives.

23. The countries of the region, all members of the African Union, are also members of several integration and regional cooperation platforms. This membership is summarized in Table 1. Annex VI presents the detailed regional framework by underlining the strategies and programmes that share the same objectives.

Table 1: Participation of countries in regional organizations

Country	FDH-INRM	ECOWAS	UEMOA	CILSS	ABN	OMVS	OMVG
Gambia	X	X		X			X
Guinea	X	X		X	X	X	X
Guinea Bissau	X	X	X	X			X
Mali	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Mauritania	X			X		X	
Niger	X	X	X	X	X		
Senegal	X	X	X	X		X	X
Sierra Leone	X	X			X		
Benin		X	X		X		
Burkina Faso		X	X		X		
Cameroon		X			X		
Côte d'Ivoire		X	X		X		
Liberia		X					
Nigeria		X			X		

24. The African Union, through its Strategic Plan 2010-2012 and the role of its *Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture* (DREA) highlighted the need for continued efforts towards a better management of the environment and the natural resources, particularly, of water, as well as the development of responses to the consequences of climate change and desertification (*Africa Water Vision 2025*). In collaboration with the regional bodies, the African Union coordinates, with the national governments and the international partners, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), which emerged from the *New Partnership for Africa's Development* (NEPAD), as well as other programmes on a continental scale, such as the programme of the African Monitoring of the Environment for Sustainable Development (AMESD).

25. The regional integration organizations, which represent the West African region and the intervention zone of the project, i.e. ECOWAS and CILSS, have a mandate and fields of actions that are highly diversified with the management of the natural resources and the environment, and play an important role in the strategic priorities.

26. The convergence of these strategies towards a continental framework of the African Union, as well as the coordination and harmonization with the river basin organizations are highlighted in the objectives of these regional organizations in terms of thematic complementarity and an operational subsidiarity.

27. ECOWAS,⁵ together with the river basin organizations, also initiated the setting-up of an observatory for the region in order to establish a regional water resources coordination framework, in which the integration of information on the watersheds and on the socio-economic environment of the FDH is a priority.

28. The basin organizations were created for the basins of the Niger River (1964), the Senegal River (1972) and the Gambia River (1978), with mandates focused on the rational management of the water resources and their development for multiple uses that include drinking water supply, irrigation of agricultural lands, livestock farming, energy, industry and navigation, developing upstream-downstream regional integration processes among the riparian countries, as well as a strong mobilization of international partnerships in the form of a technical and financial support⁶ according to the modalities and priorities established during the multi-donor meetings (see Annex VI).

29. The Niger Basin Authority (ABN) and the Senegal River Basin Development Organization (OMVS) created observatories consisting of databases, maps and documentation centres, having the common and shared objective with FDH-INRM to strengthen capacity to monitor the state of the natural resources in the territories that concern them. Several previous projects contributed data on their intervention areas to observatories through the work of national technical teams delegated and equipped for on-field data collection.

3 PROJECT DESIGN AND RELEVANCE

3.1 Design

3.1.1 Needs analysis

30. Following several analyses conducted since the 1980s up to the project formulation, the ecological balance of the FDH was severely affected by the combined actions of climate, ecology, and human and livestock populations, which share the following issues:

⁵ Source: Interview with Mahamane Touré, ECOWAS.

⁶ The banks (World Bank, African Development Bank, International Development Bank) privilege the large works, whereas the bilateral donors privilege technical assistance, the development of agricultural sectors and the socio-economic services.

- Traditional practices of slash-and-burn agriculture with increasingly shorter fallow time do not spare the steeply sloped watersheds;
- There is illegal forest harvesting to satisfy the increasingly growing needs in firewood and timber;
- There are uncontrolled bush fires;
- Overgrazing strongly reduces the plant cover, exposing the soils to erosion and loss of fertility;
- The depletion of headwaters and the reduction of water flows affect access to the water by the communities of the Highlands as well as the hydrology of the basins downstream.

31. These problematic issues were confirmed during the project formulation in 2000-2001, while taking into account numerous initiatives implemented in the previous decades. These projects, characterized by a technical and economic approach to resolving problems of degradation, did not treat the underlying institutional and political causes, leaving them for future generations:

- actions often dispersed without a true inter-sectoral integration;
- a reduced effectiveness of investments, which was unsuccessful in mitigating the degradation trends;
- a weak accountability and ownership by the final beneficiaries (the rural populations) due to the lack of active participation in the planning and implementation phases;
- a low capitalization of achievements in terms of experience-sharing and capacity building of the technical services to address the phenomena of degradation and their evolution in time and space;
- an inadequate regional approach for sharing achievements and harmonizing the national institutional, policy and regulatory frameworks.

3.1.2 The strategic approach (theory of change)

32. On the basis of the above analyses, the project was formulated to face, in an integrated manner, the deep causes of land degradation and poverty of the rural population, by capitalizing on previous experiences in terms of both successes and weaknesses. It therefore envisages filling the gaps through a multi-level approach in order to promote the creation of an environment that is conducive to the coordination management of the FDH resources at the local, national, regional and international levels. In order to revitalize a participatory, effective and sustainable process, the project planned on: strengthening knowledge and monitoring the causes and effects of the phenomena of land degradation, as well as the capacities of different actors involved; supporting the adoption and dissemination of rational practices of natural resource management; and creating a sustainable institutional, political, legal and financial framework conducive to participation and cooperation between the partners of the region.

3.1.3 Analysis of the project objectives and the logical framework

33. According to the project document, a logical framework was re-created (shown in Annex V), with the performance and impact indicators based on the observations of the evaluation. The general and environmental objectives of the project are the same as those that were originally in the RPID-FDH programme. They establish a cause and effect between the

reduction of the natural resources degradation and the improvement of living conditions of the populations concerned by the FDH. By acting on the causes and effects, the project plans on strengthening cooperation and regional harmonization (Component 1), improving the natural resource management practices in 29 pilot sites, and the living conditions of the local communities (Component 2), and building the capacities of stakeholders at all levels (Component 3). The third and fourth component, devoted to the project management, were structured and budgeted separately, while supporting the first two components in a crosscutting manner. This has impacts on the technical and financial management of the project (see paragraph 4.4).

3.1.4 *Division into phases*

34. Project implementation in two phases was justified at the time of formulation by the need to adopt a flexible and gradual approach, with a first four-year phase aiming to test the political-institutional mechanisms that would have to be applied and strengthened, in principle, in the second six-year phase. At the same time, the first phase planned on building both the capacity of actors and the local dimension of the natural resources management of the pilot sites of five out of the eight participating countries, and then to replicate these activities in all the countries. The need to identify and mobilize sustainable financing also justified the division into two phases in order to verify the relevance and feasibility of some hypotheses on the co-financing of governments and regional and international partners.

3.1.5 *Financial scheme*

35. The estimated cost of the project is US\$44 million for the two phases, over a total of ten years. Twenty-five percent of the financing must be guaranteed by GEF and the remaining 75 per cent through the co-financing of other partners (see table 2).

Table 2: Project budget

Component	GEF	Co-financing	Total (US\$)	%
1 Regional cooperation	1 058 900	3 773 899	5 783 511	13
2 INRM and IGAs	5 942 600	23 108 601	28 512 119	65
3 Capacity building	182 500	370 500	1 178 251	27
4 Management	3 816 000	5 747 000	8 526 119	19
Total	11 000 000	33 000 000	44 000 000	
	25%	75%		
Phase 1	5 000 000	19 746 000		
Phase 2	6 000 000	13 254 000		

(source: Prodoc)

36. For the co-financing, several sources had been identified and requested through co-financing commitment letters that had to guarantee the contribution of the following partners (see table 3):

Table 3: Co-financing

Partner	In kind	In cash	Total (US\$)
Governments	10 200 000	4 800 000	15 000 000

African Union		3 150 000	3 150 000
Donors			0
FAO	1 142 000		1 142 000
Beneficiaries	3 000 000		3 000 000
UNEP			
Total	14 342 000	7 950 000	22 292 000

(source: Prodoc)

37. At the time of project approval, therefore, there was a gap between the planned co-financing (US\$33 million) and the co-financing provided or promised (US\$22.3 million), despite the co-financing commitment letters signed by the governments and the numerous partners.

38. According to the initial estimates, 70 percent of co-financing (on average) would have to be earmarked for Component 2, thus for the field activities. This priority of national governments was confirmed during the evaluators' mission.

39. In light of the analysis of the efficiency in the project implementation (see chapter 4.4), it can be affirmed that the financial scheme (GEF: Co-financing ratio, differential at the start-up) was extremely ambitious and unrealistic.

3.1.6 *Institutional anchorage and partnerships envisaged*

40. The FDH-INRM project, as well as the RPID-FDH Programme, which represents its long-term reference framework, are under the responsibility of the African Union and its ICO based in Conakry. The African Union has been the traditional promoter of the Programme since it began, and in line with its mandate, it had to guarantee the project's coordination in collaboration with the NFPs of the participating countries. Accordingly, the ICO-AU nominated a Regional Coordinator to ensure the mobilization of human and financial resources in close collaboration with its partners and according to the management and guiding mechanisms and structures responding to needs.

At the regional level, several structures were to ensure the decision-making, guidance and management tasks, namely:

41. The Project Steering Committee (PSC), responsible for the development of project policies and strategies, is composed of representatives designated by: member states; the African Union Commission; the GEF implementing agency (UNEP); the executing body (FAO); other regional organizations (ECOWAS, CILSS) and river basin bodies (ABN, OMVS, OMVG). The PSC, under the coordination of the ICO-AU and with the support of the RPCU, should annually meet on the side-lines of other regional events organized under the project or the programme. The most recent meeting of the PSC was held in Freetown, Sierra Leone in 2001, during the Ministerial Conference of the countries participating in the programme. The next was planned for July 2012 in Guinea, but was postponed because the African Union was unable to cover costs.

42. The Scientific and Technical Committee (STC), with a guiding mandate, should advise and validate the technical choices of the project independently and facilitate the coherence and synergies with other approaches and initiatives.

43. The RPCU, under the authorities of the Regional Coordinator of the ICO-AU, is responsible for the implementation of the project and work plans at the regional and country level, in close collaboration with the regional and national partners.

At the national level, the project envisages the following structures:

44. National Technical Units (NTUs) set up to facilitate the implementation of project activities, through inter-institutional coordination and collaboration with public partners and civil society. The NTUs, coordinated by the NFPs, should benefit from the support of the Regional Coordinator of the ICO-AU and the RPCU.

45. The Local Support Units for the Project (ULAPs) should be established at the local level to facilitate the activities in the selected pilot sites. These Units should provide technique assistance to the local communities in close collaboration with the local administrative and technical services and NGOs.

46. At the international level, the partnership between UNEP, FAO and GEF, which dates from the development of the RPID-FDH Programme, was consolidated in the preparatory phases of the FDH-INRM project. The same partners supported and continue to support a diversified portfolio of national, regional and global initiatives operating in the sub-region in relevant fields such as agriculture, food security, biodiversity climate change and the reduction of organic pollution in the river basins. An indicative list of these projects can be found in Annex VIII. The project is part of the strategic priorities of these partners.

47. GEF (at the time of the GEF-3 formulation) mainly covers Land Degradation activities and several operational programmes (OPs) related to biodiversity. It can nevertheless be highlighted that the project contributes to other GEF fields of action such as “international waters” and “climate change”, and could therefore be defined as a multi-focal initiative, according to the GEF’s strategic evolution.

48. The project is in line with several of FAO’s strategic objectives, including:

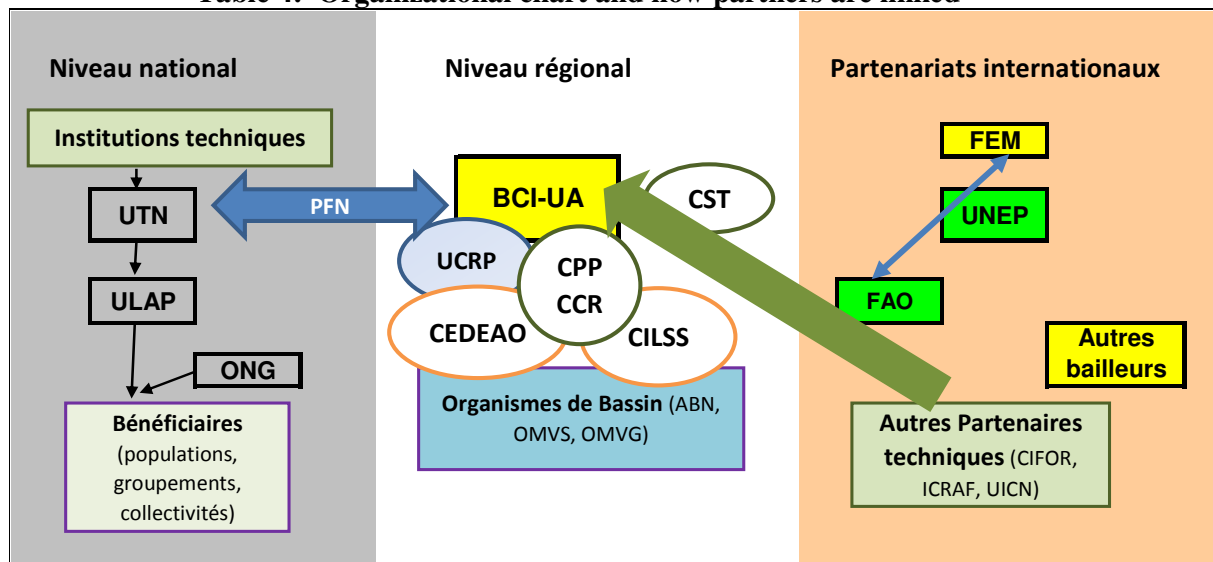
- sustainable intensification of plant production (development of lowland areas);
- sustainable forest management (reforestation and reduction of brushfires and pressure on forest ecosystems);
- sustainable land and water management (water sources and watersheds protection, the combatting of soil erosion, wells for agricultural and drinking water);
- integrated crop and livestock farming, and management of land use conflicts (plot fences, animal traction);
- food security and rural poverty reduction: market gardening and income-generating activities (apiculture, shea butter oil);
- environmental governance (analyses and participatory management plans, support to village groups);

The following FAO’s core fonctions are addressed:

- monitoring and evaluation of medium-/long-term trends (Observatory);
- strengthening of capacities and exchange/transfer of know-how (Component 3);
- development of international instruments and regulations (Framework Agreement, harmonization of legislations, transboundary protected area).

49. As mentioned in chapters 1.1 and 3.1.1, several projects were conducted in the FDH from the 1980s to date, with the financial and technical support of several bilateral and multilateral donors. Taking into consideration these previous projects, the mobilization of additional funding was envisaged, as well as the technical contribution of other partners who expressed their interest and availability on principle, Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), International Centre for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF), and World Conservation Union (IUCN), with respect to their initiatives in the region.

Table 4: Organizational chart and how partners are linked



3.1.7 *Hypotheses at the project start*

50. The project design is based on hypotheses and on the consideration of risks at several levels – policy, institutional, financial, socio-economic and environmental, including:

- The commitment of the national governments to participate in the RPID-FDH Programme should guarantee the political and financial support of countries in the project;
- The adoption of an international framework for the FDH should strengthen the harmonization of policies and legislations at the regional level;
- The participation of partners of the region in the management and monitoring structures should facilitate collaboration, cooperation and information-sharing;
- The adoption of a participatory management approach that is de-concentrated at the local and regional level should reduce risks to institutional feasibility and to the ownership by different stakeholders;
- The project's efforts towards building the capacities of actors at all levels should increase knowledge and the control over the causes and effects of ecosystems degradation, prevent the environmental risks, and favour the adaptation of natural resources management systems.

3.2 *Relevance of the project*

51. In consideration of the previous projects and the context of intervention, as described in the previous chapters, the FDH-INRM project was designed to bring an added value and fill identified gaps in the implementation of a long-term strategy represented by the RPID-FDH.

52. The initial assessment, essentially based on the previous analysis and on the evaluations of other projects, confirmed the nature of the phenomena of natural resources degradation, mainly of land, water and biodiversity. This was carried out by highlighting the weaknesses of past actions without delving into the achievements and the scope of intervention, therefore leaving out a baseline on which to capitalize on and assess the impacts.

53. The adopted approach is to intervene at several levels (regional, national and local) by addressing multiple actors (the public administration, the technical services, the private sector and associations) through a multi-sectoral approach that integrates the institutional, legal, economic, social and environmental aspects. Although this approach is justified by the analyses, it seems ambitious in light of the current institutional framework, hypotheses and means mobilized at the time of this MTE.

54. The institutional set-up of the project is complex and largely structured on the consultative and decision-making mechanisms of RPID-FDH for the regional and national levels, with a choice of coherent partnerships, notably, for the multi-disciplinary nature of the approach and for important synergies to develop with the regional organizations (ECOWAS and CILSS) and the basin bodies.

55. Although the role of the African Union as promoter and leader of the programme is recognized by all the partners of the region, the capacity of its international office in Conakry and in particular, support provided by the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa, show strong limitations in the operational capacity of the African Union in the sub-region with respect to other partners such as ECOWAS. It will be fundamental that this limitation be considered in order to achieve a more effective institutional set-up in the second phase, notably for some components such as the observatory (see chapter 5.1.1).

56. For the local level, the involvement of the de-concentrated technical services and NGOs is fundamental, taking into consideration their closeness to the rural populations, their knowledge of the territory, their technical skills and their participation in previous initiatives.

57. For a project that aims at making stakeholders responsible, these achievements also represent a constraint, because the national and local institutions developed a dependence with respect to the projects financed by external donors, which the project had initially underestimated. The hypothesis that the additional costs related to their participation in project activities would be completely assumed by the public administration hindered the mobilization and effectiveness of these essential actors.

58. The project is relevant globally with respect to the initial framework; however, the extent of issues linked to the natural resources management in the FDH requires that a second phase of the project be formulated and implemented without interruption, but with, nevertheless, a questioning of the partnership and funding mechanisms in order to reduce the inefficiencies encountered in the implementation of the first phase (see Chapter 4).

4 PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

4.1 *Planning*

59. Since the start of the project on 1 July 2009, technical activities were planned by the RPCU on an annual basis in collaboration with the Regional Coordinator of ICO-AU and the NFPs, who sent their proposals to the RPCU. Financial planning is associated with the work plans. The annual technical and financial plans were then validated by FAO in Rome before being sent to partners (UNEP, GEF) and to the members of the Steering Committee for approval.

4.2 *Implementation and monitoring of activities*

60. Three annual work plans were implemented, which made it possible to carry out the following activities:

First year (July 2009–June 2010):

- recruitment of technical, administrative and support staff of the RPCU;
- dialogue and support to the establishment of the natural structures (NTUs, NFPs);
- selection of pilot sites in the five countries (also in the second year).

Second year (July 2010–June 2011):

- development and launching of the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system of the project by an international expert and a Guinean expert recruited at the RPCU;
- training abroad of two NFPs (Guinea and Mali);
- preparation (from October 2010) and launching of participatory analyses in the selected pilot sites (to May 2011);
- development (from October 2010) of an environmental information system of the FDH;
- creation of six ULAPs, of which two are in Guinea (May 2011) and one each in Guinea Bissau, Mali, Senegal and the Gambia;
- provision of vehicles and equipment for the ULAPs (June 2011);
- training of ULAPs in M&E by the M&E expert of the RPCU.

Third year (July 2011–June 2012):

- presentation of the Framework Agreement to partners (August 2011) and approval at the Ministerial Conference in Freetown in November;
- development of activity plans in the pilot sites;
- selection of NGOs in collaboration with the ULAPs;
- contracting of NGOs and start-up of demonstration activities.

This summary presentation refers to information derived from regular reports and the M&E system. The results of these activities are analysed in Chapter 5.1.

4.3 *Project management*

61. As described in Chapter 3, the project planned on setting up and supporting steering, management and monitoring structures based partly on those already existing within the RPID-FDH. Their performance was heterogeneous during the first three years.

62. The NFPs, although formally nominated at the beginning of the project, underwent several changes. The eight NFPs met in May 2009 in Kindia to define, with the regional

coordination (ICO and RPCU) the work plan, the choice of sites and the procedures for the implementation. Despite good intentions, several obstacles affected their performance, namely: (i) the replacement of NFPs in Sierra Leone (November 2010), in Guinea Bissau (March 2011) and in Senegal (August 2011), while in Niger, the post has been vacant since December 2011; and (ii) the slow mobilization of governments' co-financing (in cash and in kind) for covering investment and operating expenses.

63. The Project Steering Committee (PSC) came along on top of the Regional Consultative Committee (RCC) of the Fouta Djallon Programme (RPID-FDH)⁷ which has been in place since the 1990s and has already been involved in the project design, thus plays a significant role in the long-term vision and became embedded in the coordination process of various initiatives. In the texts of the Framework Agreement approved in 2011, reference is made to the RCC. Efforts to harmonize these committees – PSC, RCC and STC – and their duties would be desirable, considering there is overlapping of mandates and of members.

64. The RCC regularly met every year since the start of the project,⁸ allowing partners to plan actions in the countries, update priorities and attempt to resolve the constraints related to the mobilization of technical, human and financial resources. The most recent meeting in Freetown, in November 2001, was held during the Ministerial Conference of RPID. The next was planned for July 2012 in Guinea, but was postponed due to financial problems within the African Union.

65. To date, the STC has yet to be established. Two selection attempts failed and a third call for candidature is in progress.⁹ The reasons for this failure seem to be of an operational (the attribution of roles and potential duplication with the PSC/RCC) and economic nature (motivation/expected allowances).

66. The National Technical Units (NTUs) assure multi-disciplinary collaboration among technical institutions and a representation of the fields relevant to the project (the environment, agriculture, veterinary services, water and forests, hydraulics, energy, meteorology, biodiversity, local development) according to the institutional organization of the countries, and in Mali, with the participation of civil society (professional associations, NGOs).

67. Five ULAPs were established, two in Guinea (in Mamou and Labé, in May 2011) and one each in Guinea Bissau (in Bafata, in October 2011), in Mali (in 2011) and in Senegal (in Kédougou, in December 2011). The ULAPs consist of de-concentrated state service agents, and with the respective authorities, reflect their supervisory authorities, which are represented within the NTU. In Senegal, the creation of the ULAP was formalized by a Decree from the Governor of Kédougou, who himself chairs the ULAP. In Mamou, the Governor supports the rehabilitation of a building for the RPID-FDH, which could, according to the intentions of the local partners, hold a programme office with an antenna of the observatory and a services centre. This demonstrates some interest and support of the local authorities in the programme/project, but also strong expectations that risk being disappointed

⁷ Source: 12th meeting of the RCC in Guinea Bissau, February 2008 – Bulletin no. 00/2008.

⁸ Meetings in Bissau (2008), Bamako (2008), Kindia (2009) and Freetown (2011).

⁹ <http://www.fouta-djallon-programme.org/en/component/content/article/237>

if the resources for the issues are not mobilized and the objectives of the observatory reviewed in a more realistic manner.

4.4 *Financial management and the statement of expenditures*

68. The structure of the budget and, consequently, the financial plans and reports follow the UNEP model, adopted to be compatible with FAO's Oracle system. This system is based on the typology of expenditures and differs from the budget presented in the project document, which is organized by project component, making it more difficult to harmonize the technical and financial planning, as well as the results-oriented monitoring.

69. The administrative and financial management system set up provides for a multi-step decision-making and operational circuit, involving several partners, without extensive autonomy for the RPCU, which does not have a bank account for the project and which receives funds through the FAO Office in Conakry. This slows down procedures when activities and disbursements are intensified.

70. As indicated in chapter 3.1.5, within the overall budget of the project, 65 percent was allocated to component 2, of which 81 percent should have been financed by the different stakeholders. This consequently presumed the priority given to the community development activities. Numerous studies and services are, however, associated with this component, reducing the amount available for investment and field work. For this reason, it was decided to request from the governments an indicative amount of US\$60 000 per country per year (for a total of US\$480 000 for all eight countries), which would be mobilized to support demonstration activities of Component 2 in order to integrate the disbursement of the GEF funds.

Table 5: GEF budget expenditure for the first phase

GEF allocation, first phase			Expenditure to 31 December 2011	
Project staff	2 456 352	49%	1 855 245	75.5%
Sub-contracting	262 649	5%	5 618	2.1%
Training	613 884	12%	52 385	8.5%
Equipment and rental	1 333 566	27%	673 085	50.5%
Miscellaneous	333 549	7%	2 422	0.7%
Total	5 000 000		2 588 755	51.8%

71. Over half the GEF budget of the first phase (Table 5) is earmarked for project staff and the recruitment of service providers, mainly NGOs and experts of the region. According to financial reports, the human resources allocated to the project recorded a high utilization rate (78 per cent), if considering the residual duration (one year) of the first phase, followed by the purchase of equipment and vehicles, and the set-up of offices (50 percent). With respect to the vehicles (cars and motorcycles) for the ULAPs,¹⁰ their anticipated handover to the administration aims at accelerating the start-up of activities. However, the vehicles were only available once the ULAP was formalized, i.e. in 2011, at the end of the preparation of

¹⁰ FAO points out that the norm is the handover of vehicles to the administration at the end of the project.

field activities (see chapter 5). This delayed even more the participation of the ULAPs in the design and implementation of demonstration activities.

72. For the “subcontracting” and “equipment” categories, a strong acceleration of the rate of disbursement is expected for the residual period of the first phase, notably, for: (a) the consultants in charge of carrying out the legal studies in the countries and studies on the income-generating sectors (e.g. shea butter); (ii) the contracting of the NGOs (underway) working in the pilot sites; and (iii) the purchase of equipment and supplies earmarked for demonstration activities in the pilot sites. The “training” category was underused to date (see chapter 5) while waiting for the drafting a detailed training programme for building capacity of stakeholders directly involved in the various project activities included in Components 1 and 2.

4.5 *Support of governments*

73. Political instability in some countries (Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali) and changes of the NFP in Niger, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau and Senegal limited the commitment and co-financing of countries and delayed the actions. Even though the Framework Agreement favoured dialogue on transboundary resource management through the existing regional cooperation platforms and partnerships with basin organizations, this dialogue still remains theoretical and needs more concrete actions and a mobilization of resources that live up to the commitments.

74. For the financial contribution to the implementation of the first phase, the co-financing reports (Table 6) show an intermittent and variable contribution by regional partners (African Union and governments). They indicate higher amounts in the countries that fully participate (with the pilot sites), although the reliability of these amounts is yet to be verified. It should also be noted that there are gaps in some countries during the periods of political instability (Guinea in 2009) and when there is a change in the NFP (Senegal, Guinea Bissau and Sierra Leone, in 2011).

Table 6: Co-financing declared by partners (US\$)

Partner	2009	2010	2011	2012	Total
African Union	539 738	416 444	621 008		2 843 880
Guinea		75 251	75 251	75 251	225 753
Mali	151 346	69 805	70 196		825 091
Senegal		42 844			42 844
Gambia	24 116	22 537			46 653
Guinea Bissau		108 000			108 000
Sierra Leone		7 015			7 015
Total	715 200	741 897	766 455	75 251	4 099 236

75. These amounts provided by the sources do not indicate their specific destination, in terms of activities/outcomes, or in type of expenditures. This does not make it possible to see if they align with the project objectives and their contribution towards the outcomes. This is even more true since FAO as GEF fund manager does not have enough influence or control on the mobilization of partners' contributions.

4.6 *FAO's technical support to the project*

4.6.1 *Technical support from headquarters*

76. The project is managed at FAO headquarters by the Forest Assessment, Management and Conservation Division (FOM) and, more precisely, by the Watershed Management and Mountains Team. Members of this team¹¹ ensure the technical and administrative management of the project in collaboration with other FAO technical and financial services. It plays the role of liaison between the project staff located in Conakry and the services at headquarters, and between FAO and the other partners (ICO-AU, UNEP and GEF).

77. With the aim of integrating multi-disciplinary aspects and enhancing the skills of the different FAO services, a Task Force was established. Its role is to contribute to the planning and monitoring of the project, share information, propose actions and guarantee the support of headquarters services, through specific contributions to the fields of competences of the members. This is achieved by enhancing the normative work in the different areas and by adapting it to the context and the needs of the project. In the Task Force meetings,¹² which have been held since the beginning of the project, representatives of the following departments and divisions participated: FOM, Climate, Energy and Tenure Division (NRC), Land and Water Division (NRL), Agricultural Management, Marketing and Finance Service (AGS), Equity and Rural Employment Division (ESW), Legal Office (LEGA), Investment Centre (TCI) and the Office of Evaluation (OED). The senior officials from FAO's decentralized offices in the region were also invited to participate in the Task Force meetings by teleconference. Task Force services can be delivered from headquarters or through missions in the project region, according to the needs and the technical and administrative modalities that are deemed the most appropriate.

78. During the first three years, the headquarters services provided the following contributions:

Table 7: Contributions from HQ technical divisions

Division	Contributions	Project component/activity
Legal Office (LEG)	Development and revision of the text of the Framework Agreement	1.1 Framework Agreement
Climate, Energy and Tenure Division (NRC)	Development of the GeoPortal and the FDH Atlas	1.2 Regional Observatory of the FDH
Land and Water Division (NRL)	Adaptation and transfer of WOCAT and LADA methodology	2.1 Participatory analyses in the pilot sites
Forestry Assessment, Management and Conservation Division (FOM)	Study on vulnerability to climate change (CRISTAL)	2.1 Participatory analyses in the pilot sites
Office of Evaluation (OED)	Development of the Terms of Reference for the mid-term evaluation	4 Management, monitoring and evaluation

¹¹ Thomas Hofer, Petra Wolter and Antonella Sorrentino.

¹² Source: Task Force meetings were held on 25 September 2009, 13 November 2009, 18 June 2010, 30 May 2011 and 1 December 2011.

	of the first phase	
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79. The management of the project, in collaboration with the Task Force and the partners, is also responsible for the selection and recruitment of international consultants working in the project through GEF funding. The following consultants were mobilized to date:

- Giuliano Soncini, for the development of the M&E system of the project;
- Jean-Louis Couture, for supporting and conducting the participatory analyses in the pilot sites;
- Ivo Morawski and Sylvie Tourrette for the mid-term evaluation mission.

80. The first mission launched the M&E system, which is currently operational. The second mission failed in terms of the final report and the adaptation of a WOCAT approach, thus requiring additional efforts¹³ from the RPCU, which had an impact on the duration of the analysis and the management costs.

4.6.2 *Support from FAO decentralized offices*

81. The FAO offices in the sub-region of the project assumed a different role. The national offices and the Regional Office for Africa in Ghana are kept informed on the project activities through the dissemination of half-year activity reports and the Fouta Djallon Bulletin. Their direct participation as well as their contribution to the planning, management and monitoring of activities are, however, reduced in terms of the technical and institutional aspects. The FAO Representation in Guinea has an important role in the administrative and financial management related to regional and national activities (for Guinea), acting as a channel for GEF funds between FAO headquarters and the UCRP. Following approval of the annual action plans, the transfer of funds is made on a quarterly basis, and according to technical and financial progress reports. The national offices of the other countries, which fully participate in the project, also operate in the transfer of funds approved for the national activities only. They envisage intensifying the monitoring of field actions when they will become operational. A staff from the Regional Office in Africa trained the project team (UCRP) on the application of administrative and financial management procedures.

4.7 *Support from other project partners*

82. ICO-AU, which hosts the RPCU in Conakry, in principle, plays an important role in networking with the NFPs and other regional partners (ECOWAS, CILSS and basin organizations) by ensuring the regional identity and promotion of the project. ICO-AU and its staff are, however, faced with several constraints. These are, namely, the mobilization of planned, necessary human resources and limitations in the co-financing of some activities, particularly those of Component 2 and the holding of regional meetings such as those of the PSC. Mamadou Ouattara, the Regional Coordinator, assigned at the beginning of the project, left the position in March 2010. Afio Zannou, agricultural economist and head of the observatory within the same ICO office, assumed the responsibilities in the interim without an

¹³ “Plumber” verification missions in the pilot sites were needed to carry out the analyses/plans.

official replacement.¹⁴ Furthermore, the staff that was planned for managing the FDH observatory had not been hired to date.

83. Even though a space was built for the observatory at the ICO, equipment was purchased (not used to date) and preparatory work was carried by the Guinean consultants (see chapter 5.1), the lack of long-term staff delayed the launch of this important component. Therefore, this limited the feasibility of a centralized regional observatory within the ICO-AU, as well as the implementation of an action plan established for the observatory, notably on technical dialogue with the partners, training, data collection and the adaptation and harmonization of the environmental information system initiated by FAO with the other existing systems in the region.

84. UNEP, a main partner in the design and preparation of the project and a member of the PSC, had a less visible role in the execution of this first phase of the project, and thus delegated to FAO the technical and financial management of the project and, in particular, of the GEF funds; which limited its action to a channel for transmitting reports between FAO and GEF.

4.8 Overall efficiency of the project

85. According to the chronology of events (chapter 4.2), it took a long time for the different components to become fully operational, although some actions for the three components jointly began since the first year, but apparently, not in a well-coordinated manner.

86. The national guiding structures (NTUs) and coordination structures (NFPs) with a few exceptions, ensured their role as multidisciplinary platforms and dialogue with the partners of the region, through the PSC and the RCC, and the facilitator role of the ICO-AU in exchanges with the regional organizations (ECOWAS and CILSS) and the basin organization, although the operational capacities of the ICO-AU remain limited by the lack of effective support by the African Union headquarters.

87. The local partners (ULAPs) were mobilized late, which consequently slowed down the implementation of Component 2. By participating earlier in launching the demonstration activities, the ULAPs could have increased the feasibility of the analyses, as well as their commitment. Since their first task was the selection of service providers (NGOs) for activities that they could do themselves, there was some reluctance and friction. This reduced the good collaboration between the technical agents and the NGOs, which merit priority attention for resolving economic aspects linked to additional costs of their work for the project.

88. Due to the M&E system developed within the RPCU, it was possible to define the performance indicators of the project and contribute to the reports and communications. Similarly, the ICO-AU took the initiative, despite the constraints in human resources, in developing and implementing an action plan for the FDH observatory, by identifying the existing pressure and impact indicators in the region. Thus, this initiative promoted dialogue with the data creators and managers, and therefore constituted a useful baseline if it will be monitored and consolidated by a growing cooperation with the national, regional and international partners.

¹⁴ The African Union has an annual ceiling for the recruitment of staff for all of its continental structures.

89. FAO provided diversified support by mobilizing the expertise of its technical services on different components of the project, and by trying to promote the adaptation of its normative programmes (WOCAT/LADA, EIS) and the introduction of innovative approaches (CRISTAL). Extension and training efforts are needed to render FAO products and services more adaptable to the demand and capacities of stakeholders while working more in direct partnership with the regional counterparts.

90. The RCPU-ICO should develop a functional training plan for project activities in order to establish the themes and content, the beneficiaries, trainers and modalities of implementation, and to be able to test them right from the first phase. This would also allow to begin the second phase with an operational plan on a component that is largely underused, and also provide useful information by enhancing local know-how, experience sharing and development opportunities. Access to this information would strengthen the visibility and effectiveness of the observatory, which would respond to the request of stakeholders.

91. The programme website¹⁵ and the bulletin are important information tools and can be strengthened by synergies with other existing platforms¹⁶ to increase project visibility and its perception by different stakeholders, and thus their participation and contribution.

5 OUTCOMES AND CONTRIBUTION TO OBJECTIVES

5.1 Analysis of results and outcomes

92. The results generated by the activities included in the different components of the project (components and sub-components) are shown in the evaluation matrix in Annex V. This matrix is based on the logframe of the project, reformulated by the evaluation needs in order to link the performance and/or impact indicators corresponding to each level of the logframe. The sections below refer to this matrix to analyse to what extent the generated results contribute to achieving the expected outcomes.

5.1.1 Component 1 –The strengthening of regional collaboration

93. The project contributes to strengthening the regional collaboration framework initiated by the RPID-FDH programme mainly by working on the development of the Framework Agreement (subcomponent 1.1) and on the creation of the regional FDH observatory (subcomponent 1.3).

94. The text of the Framework Agreement was approved by the representatives of eight countries participating in the programme during the Ministerial Conference held in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in November 2011. This text, which awaits the ratification by the Heads of State of at least five countries for its entry into force, was perceived by partners of the region as an important advancement towards political commitment and a mobilization of resources adequate for the issues. In recognizing the stages of the collaboration process and the efforts undertaken, as well as the achievements and skills of partners of the region, it confirms the objectives of development of the programme and strengthens the institutional framework of the RPID-FDH. This is achieved by establishing the tasks and operational modalities of the

¹⁵ <http://www.fouta-djallon-programme.org/index.php>

¹⁶ A project funded by UNDP supported the creation of the social and economic information centres in the FDH.

decision-making, consultative, guiding, monitoring-evaluation and implementing bodies at the regional and national levels. The Framework Agreement also sets up an administrative and financial framework of common bodies financed by the Member States. The registration of the Framework Agreement ratified at the United Nations, the African Union and ECOWAS should strengthen its legal value and its integration with other agreements and regional and international cooperation platforms.

95. The work of adaptation and harmonizing the national legal and regulatory frameworks (subcomponent 1.2) is yet to be carried out. The recruitment of national experts was planned in this first phase. ToRs for these studies were developed by ICO-AU and shared with the partners to accelerate the mobilization. The call for candidature was published on the programme site and disseminated through its bodies (see para. 3.1.6) and in various media of the region.

96. The regional observatory of the FDH is one of the common implementing bodies of the programme with the Coordination Union of the programme placed under the supervision of the ICO-AU. The implementation of the observatory has made partial progress as a result of the joint work, but was weakly coordinated by ICO-AU and FAO. An Action Plan for the implementation of the observatory was developed and presented by ICO-AU in October 2011 and discussed at the PSC/RCC meeting in Freetown in November 2011. Nevertheless, it was received rather coldly by the countries and partners because it was considered too theoretical and weakly coordinated. It contains a first repository of indicators of the conditions, pressure and impact on the FDH natural resources, by indicating the data sources and potential users. These documents should be a basis for collaboration agreements between the programme and the regional and international partners that are the creators and common users of these data, among which there are also the regional and basin organizations. The draft of these agreements was developed and negotiations should begin immediately in order to define a comprehensive and integrated programme including the human, technical and financial resources needed for implementation in the second phase of the project.

97. FAO developed a FDH Atlas as a first product of the environmental information system. This work allowed to list and to acquire satellite photos and bibliographical information, statistics and maps on several environmental, social-economic and administration parameters of the FDH. The Atlas, in the form of a CD-ROM, was disseminated to partners of the region with a users' manual, which is still, however, underused and weakly integrated into the work carried out by ICO-AU for several reasons: (i) the lack of competent human resources allocated to the observatory on which the technical competences are transferred; (ii) the weak collaboration in the implementation of parallel actions; and (iii) weak capitalization of already existing systems in the region (observatories of the basin organizations, AGRHYMET¹⁷, etc.). In addition, the digital infrastructure (electric network, access to the Internet) in the region, notably in Guinea, is inadequate and insufficient to transfer this system, which continues to be developed, maintained and managed in Europe.

98. Despite these constraints, efforts in disseminating the techno-scientific data contained in the Atlas can considerably increase the effectiveness of these products for an awareness-raising among stakeholders and a support to decision-makers.

¹⁷ <http://www.agryhmet.ne>

5.1.2 *Component 2 – Improvement of national resources management and living conditions*

99. Component 2 has a central and strategic role for the entire execution of the Project, because it aims to facilitate the adoption, sustainability and replication of sustainable natural resources management systems for the rural populations of the FDH and to increase the impact of the Project after it is completed.

100. The quantitative and qualitative performances were promising but partial in this component. Twenty-nine plot sites were selected as planned (100 percent). On these sites, 29 participatory analyses were developed (100 percent), but only 16 action plans (55 percent) were finalized, of which four are already in the implementation phase and 12 will begin their start-up by the end of 2012. Table 6 summarizes the distribution of these sites by country, while other characteristics of the pilot sites are provided in Annex VII.

Table 8: Situation of activities in the pilot sites

Country	Selected pilot sites	Participatory analysis	Action plans
Guinea	18 = 13 old sites + 5 new sites	18	4 are being implemented and 5 are starting-up
Guinea Bissau	2 new sites	2	1 is starting up
Mali	5 new sites	5	5 are starting up
Senegal	2 new sites	2	1 is starting up
Sierra Leone	2 new sites	2	No information
Total	29 = 13 old sites + 16 new sites	29	16 of which 4 are being implemented

101. The approach to selecting pilot sites was rigorous and collaborative. The criteria chosen, based on the proposals of the RCC took into account several ecological, socio-economic and historical factors.

- Representativeness of the agro-ecological areas of the FDH
- Presence of important watersheds and watercourses
- Accessibility of sites
- Location with respect to old Representative Pilot Basins (RPBs) and related projects
- Socio-economic characteristics
- Presence of wetlands of ecological interest
- Richness of the biodiversity of the site
- Commitment of the population and local authorities to participate in the project
- General importance of the resources to be conserved
- Surface area of the land to be managed by one or several villages
- Experience of villages in natural resources management
- Impact of previous projects

102. For each of the five countries concerned, the preparation and implementation process of the community management plans for the natural resources consisted of four stages:

1. **Selection of the 29 pilot sites through:**

- pre-selection of the potential pilot sites by the states (NFPs and NTUs) in close collaboration with the basin organizations, the local communities concerned¹⁸ (village chiefs, traditional chiefs) and the technical services by adapting, if necessary, the criteria cited above (position with respect to the hydro-electric dams, anthropic pressure, level of poverty, etc.). Indeed, it is in Mali that this process was carried out in a highly participatory manner. In Guinea, the 12 old sites were selected as pilot sites.
- ***delimitation and validation of the sites by the RPCU***, with the technical services involved in the project activities (NTU), through site visits, by locating topographical and hydrographical/hydrological limitations, while respecting watershed divide, the proximity of the populations and the impact of human activities. The average surface area of the 29 pilot sites selected vary between 5 000 and 10 000 ha. They include six watersheds in the regions upstream of the main transboundary rivers.

2. **Participatory analyses on the 29 selected sites.**

Seven multidisciplinary teams of national consultants and one international consultant were recruited for these tasks: (i) the inventory of human and natural resources on the 29 selected sites (land, water, forest, fauna); (ii) the assessment of the agro-economic and socio-cultural situations; (iii) capitalization of past projects and experiences; (iv) the identification of projects and programmes underway and their partnerships; and (v) the planning of the environmental and social management of sites with the population of the sites under study. Each team, composed of three specialists, assisted by a Project expert, stayed for two weeks per site in order to: (i) collect basic agro-socio-economic data from the communities at the district level and at different villages of the targeted sites; (ii) field observations based on transects in order to be aware of the manifestations of land degradation, analyse their causes and effects on the watershed, and propose, in collaboration with the communities, solutions to reverse the trend. The needs of the populations were identified and the priority intervention axes defined, both in terms of improving natural resources management and the living conditions in the FDH. A summary of the assessments per site was established for each country and, for Guinea, one summary per region (East, West and South)¹⁹ was carried out. By contrast, the general summary on the five countries has not yet been performed by the international consultant in charge of the coordinating the national teams.

3. **Planning of actions in 16 priorities intervention sites through:**

- ***Prioritization of flagship sites***. With the aim to start up actions as soon as possible on the field and to mitigate the problems of co-financing of field activities, the regional coordination of the Project (RPCU and ICO-AU), in close collaboration with the NFPs of the countries concerned and, on the opinion of the Project Steering Committee,

¹⁸ This includes the Regional President of the women's promotion groups of Kédougou in Senegal.

¹⁹ Each was covered by the same team of consultants.

carried out a prioritization of sites, according to eligibility criteria, as follows: balance of the quota of old/new projects, accessibility of sites, representativeness of agro-ecological diversity of the FDH, and organizational dynamic of the village communities. Seventeen flagship sites were selected, of which nine were in Guinea, five in Mali, one in Guinea Bissau, one in Senegal, and one in Sierra Leone. At least one flagship site was selected per basin.

- ***Planning actions and validation by beneficiaries and ULAPs.*** On the basis of proposals on actions that emerged from the participatory analyses of the 17 targets flagship sites, surveys and complementary studies in the communities concerned were conducted in order to finalize a community action plan per site. In Guinea, it is the RPCU, the ICO-AU and the NFP Guinea who, with the assistance of the ULAP and communities concerned, completed the basic data on the beneficiaries and planned productive activities,²⁰ and established the financial analysis and the results indicators of the projected activities. In Guinea Bissau, Senegal and Mali, the planning exercises were conducted by the NFP and the senior officers of the technical services (some members of the current ULAPs). The definition and adoption of priorities and action plans in these four countries were validated by the beneficiaries and the ULAPs. By contrast, in Sierra Leone, no planning was carried out to date.
- ***Pre-selection, evaluation and contracting of partner NGOs of the Project.*** Since the NGO providers are responsible for covering all the support/guidance activities of the beneficiary communities, the RPCU and the ICO-AU, with the support of the ULAPs and the NFPs in Guinea, Senegal and Mali, carried out the pre-selection of ten potential NGOs²¹ (five in Guinea, one in Guinea Bissau, two in Mali, one in Senegal and one in Sierra Leone). This was performed according to geography and on the basis of their operational competences and of their evaluation according to extremely rigorous eligibility criteria.²² Eight out of the ten NGOs were selected (three in Guinea, one in Guinea Bissau, two in Mali, one in Senegal and one in Sierra Leone). One is currently contracted (in Guinea) and seven should be contracted by the end of 2012.

4. ***Implementation of activities in the flagship sites.***²³

For each activity, a performance contract specifies: (i) a detailed description of the activities; (ii) all of the stakeholders jointly involved in this action and their respective

²⁰ For example, the areas to be reforested, the surface of cropland areas to be treated in terms of animal traction, market gardening, the set-up of nurseries, etc.

²¹ These ten potential NGOs were selected out of 74 interviewed (37 in Guinea, six in Guinea Bissau, 16 in Mali, seven in Senegal and eight in Sierra Leone).

²² Governance, the means of the structure, experiences in the intervention area, competences, and fields of intervention.

²³ The evaluators were able to visit two sites out of the four operational ones, Dissa-Souguétea and Tolo-Bafing in Guinea, but were able to assess the preparation in Kédougou, Senegal.

tasks; (iii) the scheduling of implementation; (iv) the costs of activities and the financing mode; and (v) the monitoring mechanism and the reports to be provided.

103. For the creation of new sources of income (sub-component 2.2), the participatory analyses identified promising sectors (shea butter, apiculture, market gardening, fruit tree crops, timber, tree species, fish farming²⁴ with potential high value-added products such as dried tomatoes and mangoes, shea butter and honey) for which the Project envisages a FDH biological agriculture label. Special studies on these sectors are being launched, except for the shea butter sector,²⁵ for which a national consultant was recently recruited²⁶ to carry out a study on: (i) the evaluation of capacities and needs of actors concerned and the development of strategies for strengthening the shea butter sector;²⁷ (ii) the definition, in each target site, of the commercial outlets for forest, agricultural and craft products as well as the marketing mechanisms in force; and (iii) the identification of niche market products and priority actions (technical support, training, promotion and marketing).

104. For the development and management activity of a new protected transboundary area (chapter 2.3), a meeting took place between the NFPs of Guinea and Sierra Leone on a homogenous area (protected forest) shared by the two countries. Legal and administrative expertise is being prepared, as well as meetings between the stakeholders of the areas concerned (interest groups, local authorities, technicians). This activity should also lead to the harmonization of national regulations on the transboundary resources (sub-component 1.2) on a specific theme that interests the other countries, notably, on land use conflict management and illegal forest harvesting, and could therefore be adapted elsewhere.

5.1.3 *Component 3 – Capacity building of stakeholders*

105. The progress of Component 3 is closely linked to how quickly the activities of the other components are being implemented, above all, of the second component. The UCRP and its partners did not receive specific training to build their capacities in integrated natural resources management and biodiversity conservation. Nevertheless, the first meeting of the NFPs²⁸ served to draft a first revision of the common approach of the Project intervention with the national partners. The Project has not yet organized visits and experience sharing for the various parties concerned in the five countries, nor developed technical training materials on natural resources management. By contrast, meetings were organized every six months between the two ULAPs in Guinea and once a year among the NFPs.

106. Four types of training were provided by the Project: (i) in administrative management for the UCRP personnel; (ii) in participatory planning, for the national consultants recruited for the analyses and for the NFPs, through a three-day training workshop; (iii) in project management for two NFPs (Guinea and Mali); and (iv) in monitoring and evaluation by the M&E expert of UCRP, for two ULAPs (Mamou and Labé

²⁴ Mali and Senegal.

²⁵ This activity is being implemented for the four groups representing four villages in the watershed, i.e. for a total 115 persons, of whom 96 are women. Thirty women among the four groups are currently beneficiaries of cascade training, and will in turn extend the training to other members of the group.

²⁶ April 2012.

²⁷ The ULAP in Labé put the consultant in contact with regional experts who worked on the shea butter sector in Burkina Faso.

²⁸ Meeting of NFPs in Kindia, Guinea, in 2009.

in Guinea), A training plan was established for the ULAPs of five countries over two training sessions, which for the time being, have been suspended in order to focus on the field activities.

107. The methodological instruments developed for the project by the technical departments of FAO/Rome (WOCAT/LADA, Atlas, the CRISTAL approach) have not yet been supported by a capacity building of the beneficiaries/users.

5.2 Environmental issues

108. In line with its environmental objectives, the project addressed the causes and effects of land degradation. The analyses confirmed the known negative trends and showed new trends (invasive insects and plants), and updated the data and dynamics in the 29 pilot sites.

109. The depletion of springs, soil erosion, bushfires, and the extension of arid lands (walle) are all closely linked to each other, as well as slash-and-burn cultivation and extensive livestock farming. The technical procedures promoted and selected in the pilot sites are largely based on those developed previously in the FDH, but with the aim of integrating them to a larger degree.

110. The zoning of the targeted basins allowed to delimit the areas according to their use (lowlands for the market gardening, slopes for the reforestation and arboriculture, and plateaus for the livestock farming), and accordingly react to pressure (overgrazing, deforestation, fires) with preventative, corrective and income-generating practices.

111. The development of lowlands favours a sustainable intensification of food and forage production, integrating, with animal traction, tillage, draining and fertilization (compost), and resorting less to chemical fertilizers, which are costly and pollutant. A strong demand for improved seeds was expressed by the farmers to improve yields.

112. The fencing of market garden perimeters and shifting towards a mixed livestock farming (pastureland and forage) reduces the impacts of animals and land use conflicts within and between the neighbouring communities. The material of the fences was discussed, and the mixed choice (barbed wire²⁹ backed by hedges) was a quick solution, economic and sustainable, which was highly appreciated by the beneficiaries.

113. The protection of slopes by productive reforestation (timber), hedges and vetiver, and the adaptation of river banks reduce the erosion of the soils, the loss of fertility and the silting of dams downstream.

114. The protection of water sources and the building of wells for drinking and agricultural water by guaranteeing a supply even in the dry season, allow income opportunities and thus an provided an added incentive for the communities.

²⁹ The grid fences were largely used by other projects, but their importation from Italy is more expensive than the large barbed wire imported from China.

5.3 *The issues of gender and social integration*

115. The gender dimension is taken into account in the Project design but is not specified in terms of strategy, objectives and indicators.³⁰ It is in the Project³¹ execution that the social integration and gender aspects are more explicit³² and are proof of the interest given to the socio-economic institutional and cultural dimensions. At the local level, the community activities respond well to the priority needs³³ of the community (men/women/youth) and allow access by two target groups (women and youth) to the project support. Women represent over 75 per cent of the beneficiaries of the activities,^{34,35} considering the role they play in the agricultural activities³⁶ and resource management in addition to their family tasks.

116. The Project relies on an existing local dynamic; the grassroots community groups³⁷ can serve as a learning framework for technical matters, the assumption of responsibilities, and for defending individual and collective interests. It already has an indispensable structure to promote the gender approach and allow women and young girls to take part in decision-making and to be more active in the management and control of development activities. Although a participatory monitoring and evaluation³⁸ mechanism is yet to be implemented, the RPCU has taken the initiative to assign a senior officer for the monitoring and evaluation of the information/communications activities of the Project. This aims to building the capacities of the village committee bodies and groups and to ensure that quotas are established for certain activities.³⁹

117. The local actors are developing a real aptitude for taking into consideration gender equality in their daily work, and are becoming important partners in terms of sharing

³⁰ The Project approach is not systemized in a baseline on gender to ensure equitable access of men and women to Project's resources, activities and benefits, and gender issues are not institutionalized in each Project component.

³¹ The efforts were promoted by the RPCU through the technical officer.

³² The Project has effectively provided strong guidance on the gender dimension through: (i) the presence of a sociologist within the multi-disciplinary team of consultants according to their expertise on the analyses; (ii) the content of the terms of specific mandates of the sociologist and agronomist consultants; (iii) the contents of two methodological guides produced by the Project in order to guide the consultants in their planning exercise; and (iv) methodological support on gender provided by the RPCU for the consultants benefit. However, the participatory analyses hardly benefitted from the specific competence of the sociologist in the quality of outputs on gender; the consultants did not, for example, sufficiently raise the issues of gender parity and difference in land access and control.

³³ With the specific support tools, such as the focus groups and the interviews with the target groups, notably women and youth.

³⁴ This observation was made on the two sites visited by the evaluators.

³⁵ This observation was made on the two sites visited by the evaluators.

³⁶ Out of the 24 interest groups identified as partners of the Project, 19 groups are female, four groups are male and one group is mixed. This shows the involvement of women in all project activities. Youth (men) dominate the animal traction activity.

³⁷ Women are effectively present in all the stages of agricultural work, supporting their spouse, and using their industriousness for various crop tasks (labour, planting, weeding, harvesting, and selling agricultural produce), collecting wood for household energy needs, collecting water for the home, and gathering medicinal plants.

³⁸ This is based on field visits and interviews with the President of the Federation of Women's Groups of Samécouta (Senegal).

³⁹ To ensure a good targeting of beneficiaries, verify their capacity to take ownership so as to review the achievements and benefits, identify possible obstacles, and propose solutions.

³⁹ This includes training, visits and experience sharing.

experiences, building capacities and creating support activities. Some NGOs⁴⁰ develop gender application tools. In addition, the ULAPs have work experience in the participatory approach, are informed on issues of parity in natural resources management,⁴¹ and wish to develop their knowledge on local development and gender.⁴² Women are, however, the only target group for which the Project needs to more focus on.

5.4 Development of capacities

118. Capacity development is the third component of the Project (see chapter 5.1.30), thus an essential and cross-cutting component. It addresses all the stakeholders involved in the project and aims to ensure the ownership of actions and outcomes.

119. A structured and functional training plan has not yet been developed for the entire project, nor for different categories of beneficiaries, which explains the low rate of disbursement in this budgetary category.

120. Nevertheless, needs have emerged from the different partners, and training approaches were foreseen and planned to support the actions in the project, notably for Component 2 where they have just begun.

121. For local partners, the project approach is based on a participatory and partnership approach, where the community actors (ULAP/technical services, NGOs) play an important role in the capacity building of beneficiaries. The support measures for the interest groups are diverse (training-actions, experience sharing on the achievements and good practices, promotion of local associations, development of micro-projects/IGAs, transfer of technologies, etc.). They are also based on traditional know-how and innovative techniques on natural resources conservation and use for their ownership and replication. Adaptive management, community organization and information sharing will gradually lead to behavioural changes with respect to improved practices of natural resources management, by taking into consideration local know-how and the capacities to accept innovations.

122. The aim is to gradually have well trained rural liaison farmers⁴³ organized at the village level, who could themselves be trainers in the implementation and dissemination of technical procedures (animal traction,⁴⁴ nurseries, market gardens, reforestation, improved stoves, etc.) for other communities in the neighbouring villages of the watershed. The Project planned to promote experience sharing among the most dynamic groups that are likely to use the technical innovations and benefit from the achievements and experiences of local individual resources, having already received training in the past⁴⁵ and currently.⁴⁶ To achieve this, the Project must establish modalities of: (i) dissemination of good practices, lessons learned and acquired knowledge (local charters⁴⁷, management committees, rural liaison

⁴⁰ GADEC and SOS Environnement in Senegal

⁴¹ The ULAP of Mamou supports the promotion of women.

⁴² Reference to para 48

⁴³ Leaders of groups or village committees

⁴⁴ It should be noted that at the beneficiary level, the NGO already set up five networks of master cattle herders and five blacksmith networks in Lower and Upper Guinea.

⁴⁵ Reference to the study on the evaluation of the socio-economic impacts of forest projects

⁴⁶ For example, the OMVS also trains rural liaison farmers and provides support to the nursery managers

⁴⁷ On the basis of the perception of problems and local, traditional biophysical knowledge, the local community rules will be set up for the bush fires, transhumance and poaching.

farmers); and (ii) awareness raising for populations living near the watershed, and then gradually for other watersheds of the FDH, as well as neighbouring areas of the Highlands. These modalities can prove extremely effective in promoting an approach combining private and community initiatives for water resources management. Moreover, the approach is increasingly owned by the rural communities and should promote an innovative shift towards a sustainable management of the natural resources, even more so since the Project may continue for another six years. The conditions are certainly opportune, but are not yet present in terms of perennial community structures (ULAPs, local authorities, representative of the traditional authorities) to be able to consolidate a network of partners who are liable to complete and pursue the support and local capacity-building activities aimed to be replicated in other sites.

5.5 *Overall effectiveness of the project*

123. The outcomes achieved by the project are promising in most of the environmental and socio-economic aspects, but are still limited in space and time, taking into considering the constraints recorded in the implementation (see chapter 4). Nevertheless, from these outcomes, some **success factors** have emerged to be capitalized on for the continuation of the project, such as:

- an ***inclusive participatory and partnership approach*** at the regional, national and local levels that responds to the needs of partners and that should favour their commitment, in principle, and the adoption of good governance and cooperation mechanisms;
- ***support and enhancement of community services***, represented by the de-concentrated technical agents (ULAPs) and by the NGOs, that ensure, through a good integration in the rural communities, the transfer of technical procedures to the final beneficiaries and a good combination of environmental and socio-economic benefits;
- ***development and strengthening of the local cooperation dynamic***, in particular, through the participation and accountability of community interest groups (youth, women) in the preparation and implementation of actions on the field. This favours social cohesion and land use conflict management of natural resources, as well as their visibility among the local authorities⁴⁸ and neighbouring communities, thus offering opportunities of replication in the short, medium and long term.

124. Some of the weaknesses and **constraints** that influenced the effectiveness of the project were:

- the ***approach and duration of participatory analyses***, which should have, to a greater extent, capitalized on the RPID-FDH experience and previous projects by involving technical agents (ULAPs) earlier in the process. This would have allowed to focus more on their updating and thus reduce RPCU personnel's efforts in the field missions and to focus it instead on the complementary activities (outreach, partnership agreements, data collection, etc.);

⁴⁸ Some intercommunity agreements concerning land rights on developed lands have been formally validated by the local authorities (Governor of Mamou in Guinea).

- the weak (or unknown) **baseline data** on the target sites needed for assessing the changing state of the natural resources and the impact of the actions, and to further promote the achievement of results rather than outputs;
- the **planning-action process** should have greater consistency with the participatory and partnership approach, with more flexible validation and disbursement procedures, and a greater delegation by the RPCU to the national and local partners;
- **limited access to markets and infrastructures** (roads and electricity) are a hindrance⁴⁹ for the rural communities in the development of income-generating sectors, and thus a more rigorous integration of the project in the local development plans and other sectoral programmes of the states and of donors is required.

5.6 *Impacts of the project*

125. Just as for the above outcomes, the impacts are promising but still mixed because they are not highly visible. There is, however, a growing involvement of partners and beneficiaries in the project.

126. At the regional level, the countries' expectations are pushing for a strengthened dialogue and an optimization of project resources and actions. The expression of interest of Nigeria and Benin in participating in the RPID-FDH programme strengthens the regional dimension and the integration opportunities in several platforms, such as ECOWAS.

127. At the national and local levels, there is increased awareness raising and thus a change in attitude towards the potential benefits of the project and the need to mobilize all necessary and promised resources. This change is still, however, weakly supported by a mobilization of natural resources. This confirms the strong dependence of the country on external donors.

128. Although the impacts on land and water degradation are not yet visible, the approach used by the Project promoted a dynamic of collaboration between the actors involved, creating and/or strengthening spaces of dialogue and mutual learning of partners in the techniques of analysing situations, seeking appropriate solutions to problems, and enhancing the know-how of the beneficiaries involved (learning by doing) through the ownership of the action plans and activities.

129. Participation in the zoning of the sites contributed towards securing land tenure through a formalization of intercommunity agreements, as well as a planning of the space according to its use, reduction of manmade pressures, and the communal organization of work (access to water, the lightening of women's workload, participation in common works, etc.).

130. Food security, guaranteed as a result of increased market garden production and revenue assurance, are, however, conditioned by the harnessing of water resources⁵⁰ (wells for drinking and agricultural water). The economy on human resources is also aimed at together with animal traction, which will allow women to develop the market gardens and/or AGR activities, and will provide opportunities for the men to work in other activities and/or

⁴⁹ Value-added processing initiatives (fruit and tomatoes) failed due to the high cost of electricity.

⁵⁰ The evaluators found that water is considered one of the essential priorities for the communities.

offer their animal traction services, which would further mitigate pressure on the land and reduce the rural exodus.

131. The Project approach also made it possible to mobilize the spirit of enterprise of the beneficiaries towards participating directly in on-site activities and encouraging them to take part in the income-generating activities. This is based on the promotion of local know-how (shea butter, honey) and on the diversification of income sources for the members of the communities, particularly, women.

132. The impact of the Project on the emergence of multi-actor management committees composed of the community, and livestock and crop farmers, is not yet visible. However, the Project is focused on the implementation the demonstration activities in the pilot sites to create a participatory culture where men and women are not only producers, but also developers. The awareness raising on the importance of the environment is already considerable, with the set-up of anti-bush fire committees and community reforestation committees in the pilot sites, and involving the targeted communities in a natural resources conservation and management strategy.

5.7 *Sustainability*

133. The Project is based on a sustainable development and a participatory and decentralized approach. Its sustainability depends on the strengthening of the promising outcomes and impacts mentioned above.

134. The sustainability of its intervention will certainly depend on several **risk factors**:
- The commitments by the governments must be respected and other funding sources mobilized for the complementary activities, including those included or planned within other indispensable sectoral programmes. Similarly, a convergence of regional and international partners towards a more effective coordination and harmonization of technical and financial approaches and instruments have proven to be absolutely necessary.
 - The local ownership of practices in sustainable natural resources management will depend on the capacity to generate tangible benefits for the living conditions of populations of the FDH and of the regions concerned.
 - The strengthening and sustainability of community services, in addition to the structures created ad hoc by the projects, are achieved through training, information and awareness- raising efforts aimed at feasible entrepreneurial development of initiatives, and increased know-how and access to financing.

6 **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

135. The previous chapters contain summaries and partial conclusions regarding the different assessment criteria: (i) the relevance of the project design with respect to the context (chapter 3.2); (ii) the efficiency of modalities of the project implementation (chapter 4.9); (iii) the effectiveness of outcomes (chapter 5.5); (iv) the impacts (chapter 5.6); and (v) sustainability (chapter 5.7). These criteria-based assessments were used in the conclusions below, but structured in a different manner according to the organizational and crosscutting aspects of the project. This aimed to draft a partial assessment less than one year before the

end of the first phase, and to stimulate dialogue on the continuation of the project (end of the first phase and the second phase) through recommendations that are both strategic and operational.

6.1 Conclusions

6.1.1 *Institutional set-up*

C1. The project relied on decision-making, consultative and management structures already established within the RPID-FDH by formalizing them through the Framework Agreement. This aimed to promote dialogue on the regional and transboundary aspects by initiating a cooperative process between the partners of the region according to the respective mandates and competences acquired in the past. The choice to strengthen cooperation with the regional organizations (ECOWAS and CILSS) and with the river basin organizations (ABN, OMVS, OMVG) is coherent, but it was made too late with respect to the regional observatory, even more so since these partners participate in common structure of the RPID and launched similar initiatives.

6.1.2 *Integration of the levels of intervention*

C2. Working at the regional, national and local levels, the project attempted to strengthen the structures and resources that would allow for the integration of these levels, by privileging, however, the local level through a strong mobilization of human and financial resources. This is in line with the request expressed by the countries and the budget allocated to Component 2 (65 percent). The integration between these levels was, in part, hindered by the deficiencies of some national networks (NFPs) and by the late mobilization of local networks (ULAPs) and government co-financing. Moreover, the African Union, with its limited human and financial means, played an important role in the regional identity and promotion of the project and the programme through circuits of information (website and bulletin) and dialogue platforms, with, nevertheless a limited influence on the country's commitment and co-financing.

6.1.3 *Targeting and suitability of the project approach and resources*

C3. The project adopted a coherent approach in the choice to operate on several levels and in an integrated manner to fill identified gaps in the previous interventions; however, a better capitalization on the achievements could have provided an even greater impetus to more the field actions. This could have been achieved by reducing efforts in the analyses and promoting a planning-action approach and a more effective ownership by the local actors (technical agents, NGOs, groups), who are more efficient when they had been supported by capacity building.

6.1.4 *Financial scheme and administrative management*

C4. The ratio between GEF financing (25 %) and co-financing (75%) proved to be too ambitious and not very realistic considering the problems recorded in this first phase and the cost of management and human resources allocated to the project, which mostly weighed on the GEF component of the budget. This shows that the division of the project into two phases was highly justified and that alternative scenarios must be taken into consideration for what follows, in particular, in order to respect the co-financing commitments and a more results-oriented and more decentralized management and monitoring. The lack of co-financing is an enormous risk for the project's sustainability, which needs to be taken into immediate consideration in order to test the alternative solutions already in the residual period of the first phase.

6.1.5 Contribution and ownership of partners

C5. FAO's contribution covered the legal, administrative and technical aspects by aiming to enhance the normative programmes in several fields relevant to the project and introducing innovative approaches for building knowledge and monitoring the causes and effects of natural resources degradation in line with the project objectives.

C6. The contribution of ICO-AU to the setting up of the observatory allowed the potential of different national and regional partners to emerge. It also showed the need for information on decision-making processes at several levels, laying down the foundations for the partners' joint harmonization and ownership efforts. However, the recruitment of ICO-AU personnel as well as a better coordination with the RPCU and FAO should make it possible to define the optimal scope of the observatory and the feasibility of its location at the ICO-AU, as well as the role of the different partners.

C7. UNEP plays an important role in the regional and international political and partnership relations, and could use its connections to guarantee the co-financing commitment. Its contribution to the technical and financial management was limited to the transmission of reports between FAO and the GEF.

C8. The other partners of the region, the members of the consultative and guiding structures, were informed on the need for a more operational cooperation for issues of common interest (e.g. the observatory), for which agreements are under negotiation.

6.2 Recommendations

136. Although the partial review of the first phase has promising achievements, but also raises doubts and has structural weaknesses, the issues related to natural resources management of the FDH are such that a second phase is indispensable to strengthen efforts and consolidate the achievements and the dynamics observed at all the levels. The second phase should follow, as much as possible without interruption, the first phase, which consists of dialogue; the revision and formulation should start during the residual year of the first phase.

137. The below recommendations are closely tied to the previous conclusions (chapter 6.1) and aimed at different partners for the decisions and actions to take in the short, medium and long term, i.e. for the residual period in the first phase as well as for the preparation of the second phase:

R1. It will be necessary, at first, to launch and rapidly implement the demonstration activities that have been identified and programmed in all the pilot sites of the five countries in order to carry out an assessment at the end of the first phase, and define the support and capitalization measures needed to sustain the achievements and replicate them elsewhere (training, monitoring, impact evaluation, integration into the observatory, outreach and exchange).

R2. The regional cooperation formalized in the Framework Agreement must be consolidated through bilateral and multilateral agreements between the programme bodies and the partners (governments, ECOWAS, CILSS and river basin organizations), with the identification of common priority interests, the development of detailed action plans aimed at tangible and measurable results (convergence of strategic priorities, accessible data repositories, technical

solutions disseminated, location of interventions determined, etc.), all of which could contribute to policy dialogue and the commitment of countries.

R3. The viability of the action plan for the establishment of the observatory, presented in 2011, should be reviewed on the basis of a strengthened dialogue with the partners, in particular with the developers and managers of other observatories and structures in the region, and with FAO contribution which will be crucial for the development of a realistic plan that defines the responsibilities of the actors and a process for assuming responsibility and strengthening long-term capacities. To this end, it would be necessary to refine the knowledge of the data and the available sources, verify the possibilities for exchange (compatibility of formats, access), prioritize the requests for information (for decision-makers and technicians) and activate the partnerships according to the mandates, competences, operational capacities and planned results.

R4. The project (ICO-AU/RPCU) should decentralize to a larger extent its approach at the national and local level towards the mandated technical structures (NTU, NFP and ULAP) by rendering them accountable (mobilization of co-financing, results-based planning, integration in the government programmes, enhancement of existing centres of expertise) and by strengthening their implementation and monitoring capacities (targeted training, data collection and sharing, etc.). The RPCU should maintain the financial management of the GEF funds, while ICO-AU with the support of UNEP should play a more active part in controlling that the co-financing commitments are being respected, an indispensable condition for effective and sustainable investment.

R5. The technical and financial planning of the project should be harmonized in order to become more results-oriented rather than activity-/output-oriented, and to allow for a greater flexibility in terms of decision-making and the mobilization of human, technical and financial resources. FAO should be considered for the role of executing agency for GEF for the second phase. The creation of a multi-donor fund for the FDH, consisting of the contributions of partners (national governments, above all), could be taken into consideration, using as an example⁵¹ other regional programmes and organizations. This would favour the convergence of common interests, and the coordination and attraction of complementary financing.

R6. The technical partners, above all FAO and the national and regional partners should actively adapt themselves to results-based planning of the project by defining their specific contributions (time, outputs and modalities), as well as the necessary conditions (infrastructure, human resources, legal and regulatory framework) for the handing over of responsibilities to the beneficiaries and final users.

Table 9: Summary of recommendations

Recommendation	Conclusion	Actors concerned	Deadlines
R1	C2, C3	RPCU, ICO-AU, NFP/NTU/ULAP	Implementation in the first tranche (T1) and capitalization in the second tranche (T2)
R2	C2, C3,	RCC/PSC, ICO-AU, NFP/NTU	Negotiations and agreements in T1

⁵¹ Several regional African organizations (ECOWAS CILSS, EAC) and the basin organizations have multi-donor platforms that allow coordinated contributions for specific programmes/sectors.

	C4		and implementation in T2
R3	C1, C4	RPCU/ICO-AU, FAO, NTU/NFP, ECOWAS, CILSS and basin organizations	Collaboration and preparation in T1, Testing and application in T2
R4	C3, C4	RPCU/ICO-AU, FAO, UNEP	Dialogue and Planning in T1 and implementation in T2.
R5	C2, C3, C4	RPCU/ICO-AU, FAO, UNEP, NTU/NFP	T2
R6	C1, C25, C6, C7 and C8	RCC/PSC, ICO-AU, regional partners and other donors	Negotiation in T1, execution and consolidation in T2

7 LESSONS LEARNED

138. Over three years of implementing the project, strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats have emerged for which it is indispensable to draw lessons learned in order to continue the project and the programme. The lessons learned, described below, integrate the recommendations in a cross-cutting manner and concern all of the stakeholders.

7.1 *Capitalization on the achievements of the prior initiatives*

139. Despite the fact that the RPID programme and previous projects was taken into account in the project design, its experience was underestimated and weakly recognized by focusing more on weaknesses than on the achievements. These projects, although dispersed, poorly integrated and ineffective (according to the initial analysis) nevertheless intervened in the representative pilot sites that were partially used again by the project. The often involved the same partners (de-concentrated technical agents) with whom the technical procedures were developed, which allowed the beneficiary populations to begin the promising local development dynamics (interest groups). The environmental and socio-economic data generated by these projects as well as their data circuits used by the national institutions and basin organizations were underestimated (despite their participation in the guiding structures). This prevented having a reliable baseline right from the beginning of the analyses; which were repetitive, particularly according to target groups. This gap must be overcome through a reversal of the trend and effective and efficient partnerships with these partners.

7.2 *Motivation/mobilization of local competences*

140. As mentioned above, the project should have better capitalized on the local competences of de-concentrated technical agents and involved them earlier in the process of preparing the action plans on the pilot sites (chapter 5.1.2) for better quality of the analyses, and improved motivation and commitment of the technical services. Since the ULAPs were mobilized, the issue regarding additional operating costs (travel to the field, per diems) needs to be resolved rapidly. The GEF approach to assuming these costs by the member administrations is in line with the principle of sustainability. The project provided the vehicles and office and field equipment. It is therefore completely realistic to expect that governments cover the operating costs according to the procedures in effect in the countries, despite the different practices applied by other donors. A compromise is nevertheless possible in light of new GEF procedures,⁵² but a sustainable solution must come from the decision-making bodies of the programme and their capacity for policy dialogue with members, as well as with external donors.

⁵² The regional GEF/FAO project in the Kagera basin in West Africa contributes to the public administration costs by providing allowances for national personnel.

7.3 *Realism of co-financing hypotheses*

141. The co-financing hypotheses by the national governments were certainly ambitious, but justified by the concern for sustainability. The political and economic instability of the States could partially explain the insufficient contributions, but this is not surprising. The project, through the ICO-AU and UNEP, should solicit the countries to respect the commitments, but at the same time, be involved in seeking alternative suitable funding. They could start by re-establishing dialogue and cooperation with the partners (CIFOR, ICRAF, IUCN) that had already expressed their interest in establishing synergies with their programmes in the region. These contributions in services would guarantee an extension of partnerships on the thematic, complementary programmes (forest production and conservation, biodiversity, adaptation to and mitigation of climate change). The payment for environmental services could also be considered a long-term option as part of an increased cooperation with the basin organizations for a downstream/upstream integration and an economic development of the water resources, by capitalizing on the experiences of other initiatives⁵³ in the FDH.

7.4 *Adapting normative programmes to the reality on the ground*

142. The mixed acceptance and assessment of FAO contributions to the project, notably, for innovative (WOCAT, LADA, Cristal) and high-tech products (Atlas/ Environmental Information System) by the regional partners of the project are certainly attributable to an insufficient ownership capacity. These contributions should, nevertheless, lead to discussions on the opportunity for more collaborative planning and a more effective implementation in direct partnerships with the regional counterparts, capitalizing on the existing centres of expertise and the other initiatives underway (Agrhymet, AMESDA, observatories), including synergies with other FAO/GEF/UNEP projects implemented at the national and/or regional level (see Annex VIII).

⁵³ Pro-poor Rewards for Environmental Services in Africa (<http://presa.worldagroforestry.org/>)