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Seventh Operational Phase of the GEF Small Grants Programme in Kazakhstan

Annual Project Progress Report 2025

Global Environment Facility (GEF)

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Acronyms

(Note: it should be arranged in alphabetical order)

CSO	Civil Society Organizations
RBEC	Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States
SGP	Small Grants Programme
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services

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I. Executive Summary

Context and Key Developments

In 2025, the GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP) Operational Phase 7 (OP7) in Kazakhstan consolidated implementation results following an intensive scale-up phase initiated after project inception in July 2023. The programme seeks to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs) and local communities to implement integrated solutions for sustainable land management, biodiversity conservation, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

During the reporting period, implementation of activities under 25 regular grant projects was completed across seven target landscapes—Akmola; Eastern Kazakhstan–Abay; Karaganda–Ulytau; Kostanay; Almaty–Zhetysu; Turkestan; and Kyzylorda—complemented by one Strategic Grant focused on capacity development, knowledge management, and replication. While final technical reporting and validation were ongoing for a subset of grants, the programme generated substantial outcome-level results, assessed using verified midterm indicators.

Progress Against Outcomes and Outputs

Progress in 2025 demonstrates strong advancement toward all three project outcomes, with clear linkages between community-level outputs and landscape- and national-level results.

Outcome 1: CSOs and local communities implement innovative solutions for sustainable land management, biodiversity conservation, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Community-based interventions delivered measurable environmental and climate outcomes across all landscapes. By mid-2025, restoration activities covered 6,824 hectares, exceeding the midterm target and positioning the project to surpass its End-of-Project (EOP) target. In parallel, 26,399 hectares of land were brought under improved management practices—more than double the EOP target—through adoption of agroecological approaches, climate-resilient cropping systems, pasture rehabilitation, and soil restoration.

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Climate mitigation results were equally significant, with 34,633 tCO_2e in cumulative greenhouse gas emissions reductions (10-year lifetime projection), largely driven by renewable energy adoption, energy efficiency improvements, composting systems, and enhanced pasture management. These interventions strengthened ecosystem resilience, reduced emissions, and improved livelihood opportunities in rural communities.

Outcome 2: Multi-stakeholder platforms promote inclusive and gender-sensitive governance of natural resources.

In 2025, seven multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms—one per landscape—were fully operational and exceeded participation targets. A total of 85 organizations engaged in structured dialogue and co-management processes, including local authorities, CSOs, academia, and private sector actors. Gender-responsive design and targeted outreach resulted in strong representation of women-led and women-focused organizations (38% of participating organizations), reinforcing inclusive decision-making in landscape-level planning and sustainability processes. This outcome was fully achieved during the reporting period.

Outcome 3: Results are monitored, shared, and replicated to enable learning and upscaling.

Monitoring, evaluation, and knowledge management systems functioned effectively throughout the year. Baseline and midterm surveys were completed across all landscapes, and replication potential was systematically assessed by the strategic partner, PF "Decenta." In 2025, four case studies and five lessons-learned documents were developed, and 11 exchange visits facilitated peer learning among grantees.

Three technologies and approaches—drought-resilient cropping systems, remote-sensing-supported nutrient optimization, and energy-efficient heating solutions for rural social institutions—were replicated by other communities or organizations, demonstrating the scalability of SGP-supported solutions.

Key Challenges, Risks, and Mitigation Measures

The primary challenge affecting implementation remained the delayed project start—approximately one year after CEO endorsement—which compressed timelines for grant

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implementation, capacity building, and monitoring. This was mitigated through adaptive management measures, including flexible scheduling, intensive technical backstopping to grantees, accelerated grantmaking processes, and strengthened support from the strategic partner.

Despite these constraints, all planned grants were implemented, and no major fiduciary, environmental, or social safeguard risks were identified. A key lesson learned is the importance of early investment in CSO capacity development and structured peer-learning mechanisms to accelerate delivery under compressed timelines and enhance sustainability of results.

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II. Introduction / Background

The GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP) Operational Phase 7 (OP7) in Kazakhstan builds on earlier SGP phases to address persistent environmental challenges in steppe and desert ecosystems, including land degradation, biodiversity loss, and increasing climate vulnerability. Rising climate-related pressures on pastures, water resources, and rural livelihoods underscore the need for integrated, community-driven solutions implemented at the landscape level.

The project's objective is to empower local communities and organizations to take integrated and adaptive actions that enhance socio-ecological resilience and sustainable livelihoods across seven target landscapes, while generating local and global environmental benefits. The programme supports community-based sustainable land and natural resource management, restoration of degraded lands, pastures, and forests, and the adoption of renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. By concentrating interventions within defined landscapes, the project promotes cost-effective delivery, cumulative impacts, and synergies among community-level initiatives.

Implementation spans seven landscapes—Akmola; Eastern Kazakhstan–Abay; Karaganda–Ulytau; Kostanay; Almaty–Zhetysu; Turkestan; and Kyzylorda—and seeks to consolidate and scale up successful approaches from previous SGP phases. SGP funding is structured to leverage additional financial and in-kind contributions from civil society, government programmes, and other partners, thereby enhancing sustainability and expanding the reach of results. The project aligns closely with national and regional development priorities related to sustainable land management and climate action and contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDGs 1, 5, 13, 15, and 17.

The project is implemented under the oversight of UNDP Kazakhstan, with coordination by the National SGP team. Local CSOs and community-based organizations implement grant projects, supported by a Strategic Grant partner responsible for capacity development, knowledge management, monitoring, and replication. Multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms established in each landscape provide structured coordination among CSOs, local authorities, academia, and private sector actors.

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Monitoring and evaluation are guided by the project results framework and GEF-7 Core Indicators. Data collection tools include baseline and midterm surveys, grantee reporting, field monitoring missions, and independent assessments. These mechanisms support results-based management, evidence generation, and adaptive implementation throughout the project cycle.

III. Progress Review: Key Activities and Results, 2025

Section 1: Analysis of Theory of Change

The assumptions underpinning the project's Theory of Change remain largely valid. The core premise—that empowered civil society organizations (CSOs) and local communities, supported by enabling governance mechanisms and access to appropriate technologies, can deliver integrated environmental and climate outcomes at landscape scale—continues to hold.

Evidence from implementation confirms that community-based organizations are capable of adopting and sustaining sustainable land management, climate mitigation, and adaptation practices when provided with targeted technical support, small-scale financing, and opportunities for peer learning. The establishment of multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms has validated the assumption that inclusive coordination mechanisms enhance ownership, alignment with local priorities, and sustainability of results.

No fundamental changes to the Theory of Change are required. However, implementation experience suggests two refinements:

1. early and continuous investment in CSO capacity significantly accelerates delivery under compressed timelines; and
2. replication and scaling are more effective when knowledge products are paired with practical exposure visits and facilitated peer-to-peer exchanges. These insights will inform remaining implementation and future SGP programming.

Section 2: Overall progress against outcomes

The project contributes to three interrelated outcomes, with substantial progress achieved across all of them during the reporting period.

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Outcome 1: CSOs and local communities implement innovative solutions for sustainable land management, biodiversity conservation, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Progress toward this outcome was strong and measurable across all seven target landscapes. By mid-2025, community-led restoration activities covered 6,824 hectares, exceeding the midterm target and demonstrating a marked improvement from the zero-baseline reported in 2024. Restoration interventions included pasture rehabilitation, erosion control, agroforestry, reforestation, and establishment of saxaul micro-nurseries, contributing to improved ecosystem functionality and land productivity.

In parallel, 26,399 hectares were brought under improved land management practices—representing more than double the End-of-Project target—through adoption of agroecological methods, climate-resilient cropping systems, organic soil restoration, and improved pasture management. These practices strengthened ecosystem resilience while supporting sustainable livelihoods.

Climate mitigation results significantly exceeded expectations. Cumulative greenhouse gas emissions reductions reached 34,633 tCO_2e (10-year lifetime projection), driven primarily by renewable energy installations, energy-efficient heating systems, composting, and improved pasture management. These interventions reduced reliance on fossil fuels and delivered co-benefits for community energy access and cost savings.

A total of 20,135 direct beneficiaries were reached through training, demonstrations, and technical support. Participation was balanced and inclusive, with women representing 35.5% of beneficiaries and youth 31.4%, reflecting effective gender- and youth-responsive implementation.

Outcome 2: Multi-stakeholder platforms promote inclusive and gender-sensitive governance of natural resources.

This outcome was fully achieved during the reporting period. Seven multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms—one per landscape—were operational and actively engaged in coordination, learning,

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and landscape-level planning. A total of 85 organizations participated, exceeding targets, including CSOs, local authorities, academic institutions, and private sector actors.

Gender inclusion was systematically embedded in platform design and outreach. Thirty-two participating organizations (38%) were women-led or women-focused, and women accounted for nearly half of all individual participants. These platforms strengthened participatory governance, facilitated alignment between community initiatives and local development priorities, and supported sustainability planning beyond individual grant cycles.

Outcome 3: Results are monitored, shared, and replicated to enable learning and upscaling.

Knowledge management and replication advanced steadily in 2025. The strategic partner, PF "Decenta," conducted a structured replication assessment, resulting in four case studies and five lessons-learned documents highlighting successful models in sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, and climate resilience. Eleven exchange visits enabled peer learning across landscapes.

During the reporting period, three technologies and approaches were replicated by other communities or organizations:

1. drought-resistant and cover crop systems for soil conservation;
2. integrated methodologies for optimizing mineral nutrition using remote sensing; and
3. energy-efficient heating technologies for rural social institutions.

These early replications confirm scalability of SGP-supported solutions. Additional dissemination and exposure activities are planned to achieve the remaining replication targets.

Section 3: Monitoring and Evaluation[1] of activities.

Monitoring and evaluation during the reporting period focused on results verification, learning, and adaptive management. Key M&E activities included:

[1] The later if applicable.

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- Baseline and midterm surveys conducted across all seven landscapes, covering beneficiaries, land management practices, and adoption of technologies;
- Regular grantee progress reporting, including financial and technical updates;
- Field monitoring visits by the National SGP team and strategic partner, covering multiple regions and project sites;
- Independent assessments and replication studies conducted by PF "Decenta," engaging CSOs, community members, and local stakeholders;
- Stakeholder consultations through multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms.

These activities provided robust evidence for reported results, informed adaptive management decisions, and supported documentation of lessons learned and replication potential. Final validation of endline indicators will be completed upon receipt and review of all final technical reports.

Section 4: Progress against each output

Project Output 1: Resilient rural and peri-urban landscapes of steppe and desert ecosystems for sustainable development and global environmental benefits		
Output indicators	**Targets**	**Progress against targets**
1.1 Number of households (disaggregated by gender) adopting sustainable agroecological practices and sustainable land management schemes	Baseline: 0 AWP target: At least 50 households (disaggregated female-led or male-led)	Reporting period: 2,715 households - 1,085 female-led (40%) - 1,631 male-led (60%) Cumulative total: 2,715 households
1.2 Number of organizations in target landscapes that benefited from RE and energy efficient	Baseline: 0 AWP target: At least 7 organizations	Reporting period: 61 organizations Cumulative total: 61 organizations

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technologies and solutions for productive use		
1.3 Number of the community projects led by women	Baseline: 0 AWP target: At least 30%	Reporting period: 60% (15 out of 25) Cumulative total: 60% (15 out of 25
1.4 Number of women-led households adopting sustainable agroecological practices and sustainable land management schemes	Baseline: 0 AWP target: At least 30% of 50 households	Reporting period: 40% (1085 out of 1631) Cumulative total: 40% (1085 out of 1631)
Project Output 2: Enhancing landscape sustainability through participatory governance and upscaling of best practices		
2.1 Number of local CBOs and stakeholders in each landscape participating in multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms (with disaggregation by women-led community organizations)	Baseline: 0 AWP target: At least 5 in each multistakeholder dialogue group (at least 2 are women-led or women-focused organizations) (at least 2 are women-led or women-focused organizations)	Reporting period: 85 CBOs and stakeholders in each landscape participating in multi-stakeholder dialogue with 32 organizations women-led. Cumulative total: 85 CBOs and stakeholders in each landscape participating in multi-stakeholder dialogue with 32 organizations women-led.
2.2 The percentage of women participants in capacity-building events	Baseline: 68% AWP target: At least 40%	Reporting period: 68% (157 participants, of whom 107 were women) Cumulative total: 68% (157 participants, of whom 107 were women)

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2.3 Percentage of women in gender mainstreaming workshops	Baseline: 66% (101 out of 153) AWP target: At least 50%	Reporting period: 66% (101 out of 153) Cumulative total: 66% (101 out of 153)
2.4 Number of landscape strategies updated and landscape action plans developed through participatory consultation and implemented by multi-stakeholder groups in each target landscape	Baseline: 7 landscape strategies updated and 7 action plans developed AWP target: 7 landscape strategies updated and 7 action plans developed	Reporting period: 7 landscape strategies updated and 7 action plans developed Cumulative total: 7 landscape strategies updated and 7 action plans developed
2.5 The percentage of women participants discussing landscape strategies and action plans.	Baseline: 49% (48 out of 98) AWP target: At least 40%	Reporting period: 49% (48 out of 98) Cumulative total: 49% (48 out of 98)
2.6 Number of SGP technologies, practices or approaches successfully replicated and up-scaled in and beyond the target landscapes	Baseline: 0 AWP target: At least 2	Reporting period: 3 Cumulative total: 3
2.7 Number of KM products produced and distributed in the target landscapes and outside	Baseline: 0 AWP target: At least 5 lessons learned	Reporting period: 5 lessons learned documents and 4 case studies were developed. Cumulative total: 5 lessons learned documents and 4 case studies were developed.

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for experience-sharing, replication and up-scaling	documents developed	

Key Activities:

Project Output 1: Resilient rural and peri-urban landscapes of steppe and desert ecosystems for sustainable development and global environmental benefits

During the reporting year, project activities under this output focused on completing and consolidating community-level interventions aimed at improving land productivity, ecosystem resilience, and climate mitigation across the seven target landscapes. Activities were implemented by 25 regular grant projects and supported through ongoing technical backstopping, field monitoring, and portfolio-level coordination.



Key activities included the application of sustainable agroecological practices, restoration of degraded land and pastures, establishment of demonstration plots, and introduction of climate-adaptive farming and grazing systems. In parallel, grantees implemented renewable energy and energy-efficiency solutions for productive use, including small-scale solar installations and energy-efficient technologies supporting agricultural processing and community services. These activities were accompanied by beneficiary training, peer learning, and practical demonstrations, enabling uptake at household and organizational levels.

Analysis of PIR mid-term indicators, verified through independent monitoring and survey-based assessments, demonstrates that the cumulative scale and geographic coverage of these activities directly contributed to output-level achievements during the year. As a result of coordinated implementation across landscapes, 26,399.56 hectares were brought under improved land management practices, significantly exceeding the End-of-Project target, while 6,824.16 hectares of degraded land were restored, surpassing the mid-term target. In addition, mitigation-focused

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activities under this output generated an estimated 34,633.4 tCO_2e in cumulative greenhouse gas emissions reductions (10-year projection), substantially exceeding planned targets.

Although not all projects had finalized technical reports by year-end, the aggregation of activity-level data through monitoring visits, grantee reporting, and PIR validation provides robust evidence that the volume, diversity, and consistency of activities implemented during the reporting period materially advanced the achievement of this output.

Project Output 2: Enhancing landscape sustainability through participatory governance and upscaling of best practices

Activities under this output during the reporting year concentrated on strengthening inclusive governance mechanisms, facilitating cross-sector collaboration, and promoting replication of effective community-based solutions. Central to this effort was the operationalization of multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms in each of the seven target landscapes.



Key activities included convening regular dialogue sessions, facilitating joint planning between CSOs, local authorities, academic institutions, and private sector actors, and supporting women-led and women-focused organizations to participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. Targeted outreach and capacity support ensured balanced representation and integration of gender-responsive approaches within governance structures.

In parallel, knowledge management and upscaling activities were implemented through collaboration with the strategic partner PF "Decenta." These activities included portfolio-level assessments, documentation of successful practices, development of case studies and lessons learned, organization of exchange visits, and dissemination of materials through national CSO networks and dialogue platforms. Monitoring and evaluation activities, including mid-term surveys and replication assessments, generated evidence on adoption pathways and scalability of solutions.

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Analysis of PIR-verified data indicates that these activities collectively enabled the establishment and functioning of seven multi-stakeholder platforms involving 85 organizations, exceeding planned participation targets, with 38% women-led or women-focused organizations. Furthermore, three technologies and approaches were replicated by external communities or institutions during the reporting year, demonstrating early evidence of upscaling attributable to structured knowledge-sharing and governance mechanisms supported under this output.

Overall, the concentration and sequencing of governance, learning, and replication activities during the year strengthened institutional capacities, reinforced participatory landscape-level planning, and created enabling conditions for sustainability and scale-up beyond individual grant interventions.

Key Results:

Project Output 1: Resilient rural and peri-urban landscapes of steppe and desert ecosystems for sustainable development and global environmental benefits

In 2025, 25 community-level grant projects implemented activities across seven target landscapes to enhance agroecosystem services, improve land and water management, and introduce climate-adaptive solutions. Key activities included the restoration of degraded pastures and steppe lands through reforestation, soil stabilization, and pasture rehabilitation; establishment of demonstration plots for sustainable agroecological practices; training of households on organic soil management, crop rotation, and cover crops; and installation of small-scale renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies for productive use.

As a result of these activities, a total of 2,715 households adopted sustainable agroecological practices and land management solutions, with 39.96% of these households led by women. The project restored 6,824.16 hectares of degraded land and brought 26,399.56 hectares under improved land management practices, exceeding mid-term and some End-of-Project targets. Climate mitigation measures implemented by grantees contributed to an estimated 34,633.4 tCO_2e of greenhouse gas emissions reductions (10-year projection). These results demonstrate

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that the combination of field-level restoration, capacity-building, and technology adoption effectively delivered the intended environmental and socio-economic outcomes.

Project Output 2: Enhancing landscape sustainability through participatory governance and upscaling of best practices

During the reporting period, the project strengthened participatory governance and knowledge-sharing mechanisms to support sustainable landscape management. Activities included the establishment and operationalization of seven multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms, engaging civil society organizations, local authorities, academic institutions, and private sector actors. Efforts focused on ensuring gender-responsive participation, including targeted outreach to women-led and women-focused organizations.

Knowledge management and replication activities were implemented in collaboration with the strategic partner PF "Decenta." These included documenting best practices, producing lessons learned and case studies, organizing exchange visits, and disseminating technical guidance to communities and partner organizations. During 2025, three technologies and practices were successfully replicated by other communities, demonstrating early scaling of effective solutions supported by the project.

These activities resulted in the active participation of 85 organizations across all landscapes, exceeding End-of-Project targets, with 32 organizations led by or focused on women. The project's emphasis on governance, knowledge exchange, and replication created enabling conditions for sustainable outcomes, fostering collaboration, social cohesion, and the potential for further scaling of successful community-based solutions.

Section 5: Cross-Cutting Integration

Briefly describe how the project is contributing to any of the Cross-Cutting Integration Areas or what are the plans to integrate these areas into their operations. If any of the areas below are not applicable, please do not include them. Ideally, the project will contribute to at least one of these areas. Human and Social Context

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Leave No One Behind & Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment:

The project promoted inclusive participation across all landscapes by targeting women-led and women-focused organizations in grant activities and multi-stakeholder platforms. Women represented 39.96% of the 2,715 households adopting sustainable agroecological practices, and 38% of organizations participating in platforms were led by or focused on women. These measures strengthened women's leadership in sustainable land management and renewable energy initiatives.

Support of Women – Key Example:



The project "Reducing the Carbon Footprint of Karaganda Region through Improving Energy Efficiency of Correctional Facilities", implemented by the Karaganda Regional Ecological Museum Public Association, enhanced energy efficiency in the women's correctional facility Institution No. 32 in Severnoe, Koksun Rural District. Energy-efficient technologies—including solar panels, wall and roof insulation, and energy-efficient lighting—were installed, reducing energy consumption and coal emissions. The project improved living and educational conditions for up to 600 women inmates and provided knowledge on climate change and energy efficiency, reaching over 5,000 young people and 2,000 schoolchildren.

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People with Disabilities – Key Example:



In the Karaganda region, the project "Implementation of an Energy-Efficient Hot Water Supply System: Local Water Heating Point Using Renewable Energy Sources (Heat Pumps)" by the Public Association PRO ECO installed a hot water supply system at the Center for Special Social Services No. 1 in Abay district, benefiting 75 individuals with disabilities. This intervention improved living conditions and contributed to energy efficiency and reduced CO_2 emissions.

Youth Engagement – Key Example:



The "Launch of the Climate School and Establishment of 10 School Climate Clubs" by the Private Institution Korgalzhyn Ecological Observatory engaged local youth and women in renewable energy and energy-saving technologies, promoting sustainable resource management and contributing to CO_2 emission reductions.

Human Rights and Cultural Heritage:

The project respected community rights over land and resources through participatory decision-making and community-led planning. In several landscapes, traditional knowledge informed pasture management and restoration practices, reinforcing cultural heritage while enhancing sustainability.

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Interactions between Social and Environmental Factors

Sustainability and Resilience:

Community-led restoration, climate-adaptive agroecological practices, and renewable energy interventions strengthened the resilience of rural and peri-urban landscapes. By improving land productivity, restoring ecosystems, and supporting sustainable livelihoods, the project enhanced the capacity of communities to respond to environmental and socio-economic stresses.

Natural Environment

Biodiversity Conservation & Sustainable Natural Resource Management:

Restoration of 6,824.16 hectares of degraded land and improved management of 26,399.56 hectares enhanced ecosystem services, improved soil and pasture quality, and supported biodiversity conservation. Community interventions were designed to maintain ecological balance while promoting productive land use.

Climate Change:

Renewable energy adoption, energy-efficient technologies, and improved land management practices contributed to an estimated reduction of 34,633.4 tCO_2e in greenhouse gas emissions (10-year projection), supporting local and national climate objectives.

Disaster Risks:

By rehabilitating degraded lands and improving management practices, the project reduced vulnerability to soil erosion, desertification, and other climate-related hazards, contributing to disaster risk reduction at the community and landscape level.

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IV. Partnerships and Sustainability

Partnerships

During the 2025 reporting period, the project strengthened collaborations with a range of stakeholders, including civil society organizations (CSOs), local authorities, academic institutions, private sector actors, and strategic partners such as PF "Decenta." A total of 85 organizations actively participated in multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms across the seven target landscapes, of which 32 were women-led or women-focused, ensuring inclusive governance.

These partnerships enabled effective planning, implementation, and monitoring of project activities. CSOs and local communities were actively engaged in grant selection, field interventions, restoration works, and capacity-building activities, while PF "Decenta" facilitated knowledge management and replication of successful practices through exchange visits, case studies, and lessons learned documents. The project's visibility was enhanced through 121 media outputs, including news articles, interviews, and videos shared via social media platforms, as well as feature stories highlighting women's leadership, further supporting replication and awareness of sustainable practices.

Sustainability

The project embedded sustainability through capacity-building, community engagement, and knowledge dissemination. Strategic partnerships and multi-stakeholder platforms strengthened local ownership and governance mechanisms. Lessons learned and case studies developed during the reporting period are being used to guide replication by other communities and organizations.

Key sustainability measures include:

- Documentation and dissemination of technical briefs, lessons learned, and best practices via dialogue platforms and CSO networks.
- Engagement of local authorities and community leaders to ensure continuation of restoration and climate-adaptive practices.

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- Strengthening of women-led initiatives and youth clubs to sustain agroecological, renewable energy, and energy efficiency interventions.
- Early planning for the transition of project-supported technologies and practices to be adopted by other communities, schools, and social institutions, fostering long-term impact and replication beyond the project period.

These measures collectively ensure that project outcomes, including landscape restoration, sustainable land management, and climate resilience, are maintained and scaled up after the project concludes.

V. Update on risks and mitigation measures

During the 2025 reporting period, the project risk landscape remained largely consistent with the risks identified in the original risk analysis matrix. The primary challenge continued to be the late start of the project, which compressed the implementation timeline and required rapid mobilization of grantmaking, partnerships, capacity building, and monitoring activities. No major fiduciary, safeguard, or environmental risks were identified during the reporting period.

Emerging issues included logistical constraints in remote landscapes and delays in the submission of final reports by some grantees, which temporarily limited access to complete indicator data. These challenges were actively mitigated through adaptive management measures, including:

- Flexible scheduling of field visits and capacity-building sessions;
- Intensive technical support and guidance to grantees for reporting and implementation;
- Continued engagement of strategic partners, particularly PF "Decenta," for monitoring, knowledge management, and replication support;
- Early planning for terminal reporting to ensure completeness and accuracy of results;
- Strengthening of multi-stakeholder platforms to maintain oversight and local accountability.

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These mitigation measures ensured continuity of project implementation, maintained the quality of interventions, and reinforced the resilience of project delivery against operational challenges. An updated risk log is attached as an annex for reference, documenting risk status, mitigation actions, and residual risk levels.

VI. Key Challenges, Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Challenges:

1. Late Start of Project Implementation

The project commenced approximately one year after CEO approval, compressing the implementation timeline. This delay required rapid mobilization of grantmaking, partnerships, capacity-building activities, and monitoring efforts. To address this challenge, the project team adopted adaptive management measures, including flexible scheduling of field visits, intensive technical support to grantees, and coordination with strategic partners such as PF "Decenta." While the delay temporarily limited the collection of comprehensive indicator data, these mitigation measures ensured continuity of interventions and allowed most activities to progress on schedule.

Recommendation: Future projects should plan for accelerated onboarding procedures and consider contingency timelines for delayed starts. Monitoring frameworks should include flexible data collection schedules to accommodate staggered implementation.

2. Partial Submission of Final Reports by Grantees

Not all grantees submitted their final reports during the reporting period, limiting access to complete and verified outcome-level data. To mitigate this, the project relied on midterm surveys, field monitoring, and independent verification to estimate results. Regular follow-ups and technical guidance were provided to ensure eventual reporting compliance.

Recommendation: Strengthen grantee reporting support from the outset, including training on reporting requirements and interim reporting checkpoints. Introducing incentives for timely submission could enhance compliance and data completeness.

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Lessons Learned

1. Multi-Stakeholder Platforms Strengthen Sustainability and Governance

The establishment of dialogue platforms in all seven landscapes facilitated knowledge sharing, participatory decision-making, and inclusion of women-led organizations (38% of total). This contributed to stronger governance structures and increased local ownership of interventions.

Recommendation: Continue investing in multi-stakeholder platforms as a core mechanism for sustainability, particularly for gender-inclusive decision-making and scaling up community-led innovations.

2. Strategic Partnerships Enhance Knowledge Management and Replication

Collaboration with PF "Decenta" proved instrumental in capacity building, replication of best practices, and dissemination of technical knowledge through case studies, lessons learned documents, and exchange visits.

Recommendation: Maintain and expand strategic partnerships to replicate successful models across landscapes. Encourage documentation of technical and social innovations for broader uptake.

3. Gender-Responsive Approaches Yield Positive Community Outcomes

Women-led initiatives and gender-inclusive engagement significantly improved adoption of sustainable land management and renewable energy practices. Projects targeting women and youth achieved high visibility and strengthened local capacities.

Recommendation: Continue integrating gender-responsive planning and support for women-led projects. Ensure that gender-disaggregated data is systematically collected and used to inform adaptive management.

4. Importance of Adaptive Management in Compressed Timelines

The compressed implementation period highlighted the value of flexible project management, including adaptive scheduling, intensive grantee support, and targeted monitoring. These measures allowed project objectives to remain on track despite delays and logistical constraints.

Recommendation: Incorporate adaptive management strategies in project design and planning, particularly for multi-landscape, multi-grantee initiatives, to mitigate risks from delays or unforeseen operational challenges.

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VII. Financial Summary[2]

Table 1: Overview of available resources for the project duration

(Total funds received from different donors for the year of the AWP; please follow this format)

Donor	*Opening Balance $*	*Contribution Received $*	*Available Resources $*
GEF	*522,715.54*	*-*	*522,715.54*
Total	*522,715.54*	*-*	*522,715.54*

Table 2: Overview of allocation and utilization[3] per output

For multi-donor projects, show the cumulative total

Output	*GEF*	
	Budget $	*Utilization $*
1.1. Resilient rural and peri-urban landscapes of steppe and desert ecosystems for sustainable development and global environmental benefits	*309,537.66*	*257,048.78*
1.2. Enhancing landscape sustainability through participatory governance and upscaling of best practices	*147,881.94*	*158,519.30*
1.3. M&E	*6,695.95*	*8,169.19*
1.4. PMC	*58,599.99*	*64,148.68*

2 Disclaimer 1: Data contained in this financial report section is an extract of UNDP financial records. All financial provided above is provisional. Certified financial statements will be provided on <indicate date (30 June of the following year)>.

3 Disclaimer 2: Of the USD xxxxx presented above, USD xxxx corresponds to eligible expenses (as per IPSAS terminology), and USD xxxx corresponds to legal commitments in force between UNDP and third parties for the reporting period.

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Total	*522,715.54*	*487,885.95*

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VIII. Annexes

Annex I: Progress Review: detailed matrix of activities and results

Output 1	Indicators	Baseline	Annual target	Progress / Milestone
Resilient rural and peri-urban landscapes of steppe and desert ecosystems for sustainable development and global environmental benefits **Budget:** 1,184,056 **Expenditure to date:** 1,094347.19	• # of households adopting sustainable agroecological practices and sustainable land management schemes (disaggregated by gender)	0	2,500 households (midterm)	2,715 households (39.96% women-led)
	• Area of land restored (ha)	0	5,000 ha (midterm)	6,824.16 ha restored
	• Area under improved land management practices (ha)	0	10,000 ha (midterm)	26,399.56 ha (254% of EOP target)
	• GHG emissions mitigated (tCO_2e, 10-year projection)	0	5,000 tCO_2e (midterm)	34,633.4 tCO_2e

Activities	Results
Activity 1: Implementation of 25 community-level small grant projects across seven landscapes.	Implementation of activities completed under all 25 regular grants. Environmental and climate results verified through PIR midterm indicators.

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1.1. Restoration of degraded pastures and lands (reforestation, erosion control, saxaul nurseries, agroforestry).	6,824.16 hectares restored; improved ecosystem resilience and productivity.
1.2. Introduction of sustainable agroecological practices (crop rotation, cover crops, soil restoration, pasture management).	2,715 households adopted sustainable practices; 26,399.56 hectares under improved management.
1.3. Installation of renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies for productive use (solar panels, heat pumps, insulation systems).	34,633.4 tCO_2e in cumulative GHG reductions (10-year projection); improved energy access and reduced fossil fuel dependence.
1.4. Beneficiary training, demonstrations, and technical backstopping.	Strengthened community capacities and ensured sustainability of land management and energy interventions.

Output 2	**Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Annual target**	**Progress / target**
Enhancing landscape sustainability through participatory governance and upscaling of best practices **Budget:** 394,193.01 **Expenditure to date:** 356736.66	• # of organizations participating in multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms	0	75 organizations	85 organizations (106% of EOP target)
	• # of women-led or women-focused organizations participating	0	25 organizations	32 organizations (38% of total)
	• # of technologies / practices replicated by other communities	0	2 replications	3 replications achieve

Activities	**Results**
Activity 2: Establishment and operationalization of seven multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms.	Seven platforms operational; 85 organizations engaged across landscapes; strengthened participatory governance.

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2.1. Facilitation of structured dialogue sessions involving CSOs, local authorities, academia, and private sector actors.	Institutionalized landscape-level coordination and gender-responsive decision-making.
2.2. Targeted inclusion of women-led and women-focused organizations.	32 organizations (38%) led by or focused on women participated in governance processes.
2.3. Knowledge management and replication support through PF "Decenta" (case studies, lessons learned, exchange visits).	4 case studies and 5 lessons learned documents developed; 11 exchange visits conducted; 3 technologies replicated by external communities.
2.4. Monitoring and evaluation (baseline and midterm surveys, field monitoring visits).	Strengthened evidence base for results reporting; replication potential assessed; adaptive management applied.

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Annex II: Updated Risk Log

#	Description	Date Identified	Type	Impact & Probability	Counter-measures / Mngt response	Owner	Last Update	Status
1	Delay in completion of Terminal Evaluation (TE)	December 2025	Operational	P = 3 I = 3	Early contracting; advance document compilation; agreed detailed TE workplan; close coordination with evaluator.	National Coordinator	January 2026	Reducing
2	Low participation of key stakeholders in Final Conference	December 2025	Reputational	P = 3 I = 3	Early save-the-date; confirmation of speakers; coordination with	National Coordinator	January 2026	No change

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					government focal points; hybrid participation option if needed.			
3	Minor budget variance during final phase (conference / TE costs)	December 2025	Financial	P = 2 I = 2	Close budget monitoring; pre-commitment verification; coordination with Finance; contingency planning within remaining balance.	National Coordinator	January 2026	No change
4	Unfavourable findings in Terminal Evaluation	December 2025	Reputational	P = 3 I = 3	Full transparency with evaluator; evidence-based reporting; preparation of management	National Coordinator	January 2026	No change

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					response and lessons learned dissemination. Treatment			

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Annex III: Annual Work Plan for (next year)

Annex IV: Assets List. Not applicable. Assets procured for programme implementation are recorded and managed by UNOPS.

Annex V: Knowledge Generation

The project generated knowledge through systematic monitoring, documentation of implementation experience, peer learning among grantees, and assessment of replication potential across the seven target landscapes. Knowledge management was embedded in project implementation and drew on grantee progress reports, field monitoring visits, baseline and midterm surveys, and analytical work conducted by the Strategic Grant partner, PF "Decenta."

During the reporting period, the project produced 15 lessons learned documents and 5 case studies capturing practical experience from community-based interventions in sustainable land management, agroecology, renewable energy, climate resilience, and inclusive community engagement. These products documented successful approaches and provided evidence for identifying practices with strong replication potential.

The project also facilitated 11 exchange visits among grantee organizations, enabling peer learning and direct knowledge transfer between communities implementing similar interventions. In addition, between June and August 2025, the project team organized and conducted seven landscape-level multi-stakeholder meetings, bringing together representatives of grant projects to exchange experience on the most successful and effective approaches implemented across the landscapes.

Importantly, the project actively incorporated knowledge generated during implementation into project management and technical support. Findings from monitoring activities, surveys, case studies, and lessons learned were used to strengthen technical backstopping to grantees, refine dissemination strategies, and guide replication and scaling-up efforts. Knowledge sharing was further supported through dialogue platforms, exchange visits, WhatsApp groups, newsletters, and public dissemination events.

To enhance visibility and dissemination of project results, six articles were published on the UNDP Kazakhstan website, of which two were also featured on the global GEF SGP and UNDP platforms. These publications, along with other media coverage and communication materials, contributed

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to broader awareness of project results and facilitated wider dissemination of lessons and best practices.