

Annual Project Progress Report

Project title: Conservation and Sustainable Management of Land Resources and High Nature Value Ecosystems in the Aral Sea Basin for Multiple Benefits

Award ID: 00128715

Project ID: 0012633

Implementing partner: Ministry of Environmental Protection of Turkmenista

Period covered in this report: January – December 2023

Date of last Annual Report:

Date of the last Project Board meeting: December 15, 2023

Date of last Quality Assurance and rating: 09.01.2023 (date of approval). Satisfactory

1. Project Performance

Please state the expected Output of the Project, set indicators and corresponding CP Outcome (as per project document/AWP):

Project Output 1: Promoting Land Degradation Neutrality

Output indicators:

Output 1.1 Development of integrated landscape plans in the context of LDN principles for 760,000 ha of production landscape.

b) Were the indicators and output achieved? Yes No Partially

c) If no or partially, please explain why?

The project provided expert support to the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development (ICSD) in developing the Concept of the National Program to Combat Desertification, which was submitted for consideration and comments to the Ministry of Environmental Protection in July 2023.

To join effort on integrated land use planning, the Local Steering Committees were established in two targeted regions and ToRs for two committees developed in terms of contributing to the achievement of Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets and to facilitate a series of national and local workshops and round table meetings. It is important to note that the LSC is composed of the national stakeholders with a mandate in land governance, representatives of daikhan associations and farmers associations and local NGOs.

It is important to note that there is no experience in the country with setting up LDN targets for Land cover and soil carbon, and a weak capacity for establishing a land productivity target.

During this reporting period, an assessment of institutional capacities of seven (7) public and one (1) private agrochemical laboratories in Ashgabat and project regions has been implemented.

One of the project targets is to create a digital database and change existing monitoring methodologies to combat land degradation. Based on the experience of the previous UNDP project, the main barrier to establishing such database is the absence of a National Coordinate System, which could enhance greatly potential for more efficient land management and establishment of LDN regional targets. There are no clear boundaries between daikhan associations on etrap level,

and especially between different land plots on dayhan association level. In this regard, to strengthen equipment base to cover LDN metrics, the project procures GNSS equipment (2 pcs) for Dashoguz and Lebap project regions. A FAO project provides hardware support to other velayats of the country . The Aral project plans to involve specialists (at least two from each region) of land services from Dashoguz and Lebap region for a two-week practical training on the use of equipment in September 2023 organized by FAO.

Initial discussions on LDN methodology and Road map were held with key partners in the framework of the LDN working group on the basis of scientific-public council for combating desertification NGO Tebigy Kuwwat (April 06, 2023); and with local and national authorities and other key project partners within the LDN workshop (July 26,2023)

This indicator is on track to be achieved during the set deadlines. The achievement of this indicator requires lengthy process of institutional and policy interventions due to the fact that there is no experience in the country with setting up LDN targets for Land cover and soil carbon, and a weak capacity for establishing a land productivity target.

Output 1.2 Investment in community-based restoration of degraded arable and forest lands in 2 provinces on the area of 10 000 ha

b) Were the indicators and output achieved? Yes No Partially

c) If no or partially, please explain why?

1,338 ha of LDN hotspots for restoration in the two target regions have been identified: in the pilot region Dashoguz the targeted area covers 420 ha and in Lebap - 918 ha. Selected demonstration plots include abandon lands, and it is envisaged that these lands will be used again for agricultural production after restoration.

In the two pilot regions, the amount of agrotechnical reclamation, including innovative phyto-melioration methods and irrigation works have been preliminarily determined. Required technical equipment and materials, required resources, etc. have been estimated.

The output targets are on track to be achieved and requires more time for full achievement. The planned works have also been hampered due to challenges and delays faced on engagement of Responsible Party for partial execution of the project, which includes recruitment and hire of local consultants and carry out of works at the local level.

Output 1.3 Efficient water management of irrigated land in 4 priority districts on 100,000 ha of irrigated areas

b) Were the indicators and output achieved? Yes No Partially

c) If no or partially, please explain why?

Approaches for updating water management information in support of an improved water and crops management have been preliminarily determined and the list and the required technical equipment and materials, the required resources, etc. have been estimated. In this way. Measures aimed at reducing salinity on an area of 1338 hectares (the area of the demonstration plots in the pilot region Dashoguz covers of 420 ha and in Lebap 918 ha in the target territories have been identified,required field agricultural, reclamation and engineering irrigation activities were determined, including initial work on cost estimates and required purchase of water supply equipment and materials.

To demonstrate approaches on integrated management of water resources in Danev etrap, Gengeshlik Isbaz, which was identified as the most relevant region, the WUG in the form of an informal association of water users was established and introduction workshop conducted.

The output targets are on track to be achieved and requires more time for full achievement. The planned works have

also been hampered due to challenges and delays faced on engagement of Responsible Party for partial execution of the project, which includes recruitment and hire of local consultants and carry out of works at the local level.

The delay in the implementation of output activities is also partly due to the transition to the new Quantum system, which makes the procurement process more difficult for suppliers; as well as late hiring of the project team (in May 2023). In addition, since September 2023 the project is in process of replacing a local coordinator for the project region, which also affects the achievement of results.

Output 1.4. Sustainable pasture management regimes in 4 priority districts introduced raising productivity of livestock management for local communities, including: sustainable pasture management plans focusing on rotational grazing and efficient and sustainable livestock watering infrastructure

b) Were the indicators and output achieved? Yes No Partially

c) If no or partially, please explain why?

31,200 ha of degraded pastures have been mapped during this reporting period for Lebap project region, of which 7,200 ha is a demonstration plot and 24,000 ha where activities related to the rational use of pastures will be implemented with project support.

The selected site in Lebap target region is located on the border between two etraps (Darganata and Danev) surrounded by KBAs/IBAs and the Gorelde protected area, in the vicinity of settlements and water wells with high levels of grazing and land degradation.

The project drafted a concept of a project grant mechanism to support farmers in restoration of degraded pastures, and it is planned to discuss the draft during the project's team meeting in July. The grant programme will be launched by the end of 2023, and the initial training for prospective applicants on how to write a funding proposal and how to calculate cost effectiveness of proposed approaches is scheduled for September-October 2023

The output targets are on track to be achieved and requires more time for full achievement. The planned works have also been hampered due to challenges and delays faced on engagement of Responsible Party for partial execution of the project, which includes recruitment and hire of local consultants and carry out of works at the local level.

The delay in completing the assigned tasks is also associated with the inclusion of the Kaplankyr Nature Reserve and several reserves, including new ones (which are in development) into the UNESCO World Heritage Site (September 20, 45th session, Saudi Arabia). As a result, there is a need to revise the strategy for carrying out work on sustainable pasture management in the buffer zone.

Project Output 2: Securing critical ecosystems for biodiversity and ecosystem services

Output indicators

Output 2.1 Management effectiveness supported for 8 existing Pas

Output 2.2 New conservation areas operationalized through new and innovative approaches covering 50,000 hectares of unprotected high priority ecosystems

Output 2.3 Implementation of biodiversity-friendly sustainable use regimes in PA buffer zones and corridors covering 600,000 ha aiming to provide alternative income to local communities

Output targets:

Output 2.1 Management effectiveness supported for existing PAs including improved management, and targeted investments; support to local tourism potential to facilitate additional income generation for local communities at

targeted PAs; control over illegal activities.

b) Were the indicators and output achieved? Yes No Partially

c) If no or partially, please explain why?

To improve the management efficiency of two state nature reserves - Amudarya and Gaplanyr, a Local Working Group (LWG) was created within the framework of the project, which included reserve employees and representatives of local communities. This Working Group serves as a local advisory committee.

A roadmap for the development of a 5-year management plan for the Amudarya Nature Reserve and its Kelifsky Nature Reserve has been prepared. The management plan for the Kaplankyr Nature Reserve, previously developed within the framework of the CADI project, is taken as a basis. Together with employees of the Amudarya Nature Reserve and national experts, a management plan for Kaplankyr reserve is planned to be prepared in 2024.

Based on the results of preliminary field work, the Amudarya Nature Reserve and its surroundings were chosen as the most suitable for the development of ecotourism.

To strengthen control over illegal activities on the territory of the two reserves, part of the equipment planned under the project was purchased this year, and the rest will be purchased in 2024.

The output targets are on track to be achieved and requires more time for full achievement. The planned works have also been hampered due to challenges and delays faced on engagement of Responsible Party for partial execution of the project, which includes recruitment and hire of local consultants and carry out of works at the local level.

Output 2.2 New operational areas operationalized through new and innovative approaches covering 60,000 ha of unprotected high priority ecosystems, supported by: gap analysis, feasibility studies and technical documentation for PAs establishment, analysis of ecological flow water requirements for maintenance and conservation of KBAs at new sites; mapping, management and financial plan preparation, with clear guidance for core and buffer zones, community-based conservation activities and monitoring.

b) Were the indicators and output achieved? Yes No Partially

c) If no or partially, please explain why?

The project initiated the process of creating a Working Group for the organization of new protected areas for the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Turkmenistan. Such a group was created in September 2023. Together with members of the Working Group, as well as with employees of the Amudarya and Gaplanyrsky reserves, field research was carried out, based on the results of which the locations and approximate coordinates of new reserves were determined: in Dashoguz velayat - Lake Zengibaba, covering the Tyarimgaya chinks and saxaul forests between them, in Lebap velayat – Pitnyak hill and adjacent areas of the Soltansanjar and Goshabulak reservoirs. In 2024, additional studies of these territories will be carried out to collect new data and clarify specific boundaries, including their buffer zones, and environmental and economic feasibility studies for the creation of these reserves will be prepared.

- A proposal has been prepared to justify for two protected areas and submitted to the MEP for consideration: Zengibaba in Dashoguz velayat and Pyatnyak in Lebap velayat, which will serve to increase the protected areas up to 60,000 hectares. Preliminary mapping showed that the total area of the proposed protected areas is 18,000 ha more.

Based on the available materials, a preliminary analysis of previously identified IBA in Turkmenistan was carried out. In recent years, for a number of reasons (climate change, intensification of the Aral crisis, etc.), there has been a need to inventory IBA in the country. Measures are planned to determine their current state in the project regions. Proposals are being prepared to define the Tyarimgaya determines as a separate IBA, and to exclude the Muskinata IBA from the list, since due to the lack of water it has lost its former significance.

Output 2.3 Implementation of biodiversity -friendly sustainable use regimes in PA buffer zones and corridors covering approximately 292,607 ha aiming at increasing security of biodiversity status, promoting environmentally friendly

agricultural practices and providing alternative income to local communities.

b) Were the indicators and output achieved? Yes No Partially

c) If no or partially, please explain why?

As a result of the work carried out jointly with employees of the Amudarya and Gaplanyr reserves, the buffer zones around these reserves and their sanctuaries were mapped, as well as the ecological corridor between the Gorelde, Gabakly and Nargyz sections of the Amudarya reserve were determined to ensure the free movement of tugai deer. Currently, together with the Department for the Protection of Flora and Fauna of the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Turkmenistan, work is underway to formalize these buffer zones in the manner established in accordance with the legislation of Turkmenistan. These works are planned to be completed in 2024.

The possibility of improving the legislation of Turkmenistan in the field of protected areas is being studied, in particular, on the mandatory creation of buffer zones around nature reserves and issues of regulating agricultural activities in the territories of buffer zones.

The output targets are on track to be achieved and requires more time for full achievement. The planned works have also been hampered due to challenges and delays faced on engagement of Responsible Party for partial execution of the project, which includes recruitment and hire of local consultants and carry out of works at the local level.

Project Output 3: International knowledge sharing and cooperation for Aral Sea Basin

Output indicators

Output 3.1 Higher capacity for government and scientific institutions for participating in IFAS.

Output 3.2 Outreach and awareness raising on the problems of the Aral Sea basin

Output targets:

Output 3.1 Higher capacity for government and scientific institutions for participating in IFAS. IFAS sanctioned activities for the implementation of global and regional initiatives put forward by Turkmenistan to save the Aral Sea

b) Were the indicators and output achieved? Yes No Partially

c) If no or partially, please explain why?

- Number of events strengthening national capacity to participate into regional cooperation programmes in the Aral Sea Basin - 2 Water Diplomacy Seminars (Ilebab and Dashoguz) and 1 IFAS meeting (Dushanbe) attended. Mid-term target is achieved.
- Number of national priorities embedded in IFAS led programmes and initiatives, supported by the project - 2 national priorities embedded in regional initiatives (REP4SD and ASBP-4) put forward by Turkmenistan are supported by the project (see Resolution of IFAS conference in Dushanbe and Dushanbe Statement by Heads of CA States – the founders of the IFAS). Mid-term target is achieved.

Output 3.2 Knowledge management. Lessons documented and disseminated within project partners and amongst stakeholders.

b) Were the indicators and output achieved? Yes No Partially

c) If no or partially, please explain why?

- Communication Plan finalized, communications needs of the key stakeholders identified and Communication Plan refined and under implementation
- 10 Awareness raising events

- Radio Talk Shows
- Available LDN/SLM/biodiversity training/information materials

The output targets are on track to be achieved and requires more time for full achievement. The planned works have also been hampered due to challenges and delays faced on engagement of Responsible Party for partial execution of the project, which includes recruitment and hire of local consultants and carry out of works at the local level.

2.Progress Reporting

Please summarize the main achievements during the project cycle:

Project Output 1:

In this reporting period a little progress for Indicator 2 was observed due to the fact that the project hired its key experts on land and water management only in December 2022, while a project assistant and Local Project Coordinators - in April 2023. In addition, an agreement with the Responsible Party has not yet been concluded due to some internal procedures related to engagement with the private sector entity as RP for the implementation of donor funded project.

To ensure the project achieves the targeted results and to perform corrective and adaptive measures as needed, the Project Board (PB) and Local Steering Committees (LSCs) have been established and respective ToRs developed. For the reporting period two PBM (12.04.23 and 15.12.23) and 2 LSC in each regions (in LB:27.02.23 and 17.10.23; in DZ: 15.02.23 and 15.09.23) have been conducted.

With support from GIZ ILUCA regional project “Integrated climate change-sensitive land management in Central Asia for joint efforts to achieve land degradation neutrality” the project has involved National Consultant to recommend and develop a concept (RoadMap) to monitor Land Degradation Neutrality indicators in Turkmenistan to promote sustainable management of production landscapes and integrated land use planning towards achieving Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) in the two provinces in the Amudarya River Basin, Dashoguz and Lebap.

To create a digital database on land management and change existing monitoring methodologies by developing a National Coordinate System to combat land degradation, GNSS equipment (2 pieces) was purchased for the Land Service of the Ministry of Agriculture of Turkmenistan within the framework of the project for the Dashoguz and Lebap project regions.

The target areas were selected and mapped considering ongoing reorganization of daikhan associations, variety of landscape and land use types, proximity to PAs and KABs/IBAs, land and water resources degradation, willingness of daikhan associations to participate in project activities and consultations with local district authorities.

In addition, the project produced the Inception Report summarizing all changes/updates discussed with all stakeholders during the Inception workshop (10.11.22) and 1st PBM (12.04.23).

For planned demonstration activities on the ground, consisting of a range of feasible sustainable land management (SLM) practices, four (4) demonstration plots in irrigated agriculture in Lebap and Dashoguz regions (about 1338 ha) and one (1) demonstration plot on pasture management in Lebap region (about 7200 ha) were agreed coordinated with local authorities and preliminary mapped.

Project Output 2:

Since project start, the following activities have been implemented to assess biodiversity status in target PAs of 1,077,554 ha and local community endorsed ecological corridors covering 292,607 ha KBAs/IBAs in the Amudarya basin landscape:

- Meetings were held with the staff of the Kaplankyr and Amudarya State Nature Reserves to discuss issues of creating a data bank of the flora and fauna of these protected areas. Together with the nature reserves staff, materials were prepared on rare and endangered species of plants and animals and included in the 4th edition of the Red Book of Turkmenistan, which is the main indicator of biodiversity status;
- A roadmap for development of 5-year management plans for the Amudarya Reserve and Kelif State Nature Sanctuary was drafted and discussed;
- A PA strategy for needed infrastructure and equipment upgrade for PA improved management, monitoring and conservation activities was developed. The project procured construction materials to create an enclosure for ungulates in the Kaplankyr state nature reserve while the costs of civil works will be covered by the Nature reserve. This enclosure will be used for keeping and breeding of rare and endangered species of animals and birds to replenish their natural population (including sick and injured) and their further release into the wild.
- In the Amudarya Reserve, a pilot site was chosen to organize a nursery for growing seedlings of coniferous and deciduous trees to expand the area of forest plantations as indicated in the national Forest Programme for 2021-2025. The project procured required construction materials while the costs of civil works will be covered by the Nature reserve;
- To reduce incidents of poaching and illegal fishing in the Amudarya Reserve, the project procured two 4x4 vehicles (Mitsubishi L-200) and engines for to restore existing boats for the PA to strengthen its patrolling capacities;
- The project arranged for two trainings on of relevant legislation for the staff and inspectors of the Nature reserves.
- A complete inventory of all KBA and IBA in the project regions was carried out, including an analysis of existing memorandums/agreements on cooperation in the field of Biodiversity between Turkmenistan and neighboring countries; recommendations were made to the MEP on the significance and feasibility of all priority for cooperation areas.

Project Output 3:

The project participated in joint meetings with the UNDP/GEF Project in Uzbekistan (on-line meeting on May 04, 2023); IFAS agencies; NGOs; ICSD, GIZ, FAO, etc. The project strengthens cooperation with interstate, public and international organizations to unite efforts on achieving the set goals. To date, a joint action plan has been signed with IFAS, ICSD, 3 local NGOs, FAO, UNDP and GIZ.

In this reporting period, the project held a total of 45 events. The total number of beneficiaries is about 1,243, from which the public sector beneficiaries was 572 employees; the number of women participating in the above project events was close to 30%.

The project held two (2) water Diplomacy regional seminars in partnership with IFAS, the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in cooperation with the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) and experts from the State Committee on Water Resources, NGOs in Dashoguz and Lebap provinces.

In addition, the project supported the attendance of the Turkmenistan delegation (3 persons) to IFAS high level meeting "Central Asia: towards sustainable future through strong regional institution" held in Dushanbe in June 5-7, 2023.

The project initiated the process of incorporating the two initiatives of Turkmenistan on REP4SD and ASBP-4 in the resolution of respective conferences.

In particular, at the 79th session of Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP, May 15-19, 2023 Bangkok), the Resolution "Consideration of conditions for the establishment of a United Nations Special

Program for the Aral Sea Basin" was adopted (Resolution ESCAP/79/L9).

In addition, both initiatives have been included in the text of the final resolution of the International Conference in Dushanbe on 5-7 June,2023 that calls for joint efforts of all prospective and interested donors in implementation of these Regional Programs (Resolution of the IFAS conference).

3. Project Risks and Issues

The project Risk Log is maintained throughout the project implementation to capture potential risks to the project and associated measures to mitigate risk. The Project Manager shall maintain and update the Risk Log and ensure that risks are identified, communicated and managed effectively.

A number of potential risks are listed below.

Description of risk	Type and category	Risk management actions in 2023	Current situation
Risk 1: The modification of land use planning in the two targeted regions may lead to land use decisions that are failing to integrate the interests and concerns of the vulnerable people. This may lead to a short-term limitation of access to natural resources. This could disproportionately disadvantage	Environmental Financial Operational Organizational Political Regulatory Strategic Moderate	Inclusive stakeholder consultations in accordance with the Stakeholder Engagement Plan are in place to ensure that the stakeholders are informed and consulted and their considerations integrated into the modification of resource-use regimes. During the first year of its implementation, the project established four Local Steering Committees in the project pilot regions to institutionally support engagement of the local-level stakeholders, including those responsible for the land-use planning on the local level. This mechanism strengthens the	A key element of the project is the improvement of land governance in the country by implementing Land Degradation Neutrality, through LDN-centred land use planning. To this end, the project will identify and implement Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets and actions to attain and monitor progress towards land degradation neutrality (under Output 1.1.) and will promote LDN-compatible sustainable land management (SLM) measures in the production zones (Output 2.1; 2.3) Land use planning in Turkmenistan is highly centralised and despite its efforts, the project could fail to consider all rural poor's concerns and land use decisions

<p>women and rural poor.</p>		<p>Stakeholder Engagement Plan for the project, the Process Framework, and the Grievance Redress Mechanism at the local level.</p> <p>The project is not yet at the stage of modification of land use planning. An appropriately scaled SESA approach will be developed once the project advances with the implementation of its workplans. The SESA will determine if an ESMF is required for compliance with the SES and national law.</p>	<p>may lead to failure to fully consider the effects of the temporary restrictions in the use of land resources (e.g. temporary grazing limitations on degraded pastures).</p>
<p>Risk 2: The modification of resource management regimes through the implementation of sustainable land management (SLM) measures (e.g. forests, pastures, agricultural lands) implemented in support of long-term sustainability could affect short-term access and use of resources by local communities, including the rural poor and women</p>	<p>Environmental Financial Operational Organizational Political Regulatory Strategic</p> <p>Moderate</p>	<p>The project is not yet at the stage of detailed planning for modification of resource management regimes. In the second year of its implementation, the project will make sure that the SoWs and ToRs for relevant activities include the SES considerations as key requirements. The project will also ensure that the stakeholder consultations and outreach mechanisms which are to be implemented by subcontractors consider this risk as a priority.</p>	<p>The project will be supporting improved management of agricultural lands, pasture resources, and sensitive ecosystems encompassing Key Biodiversity Areas, through the promotion of Sustainable Land Management (SLM) measures that in the medium and long term will lead to an increased land productivity and improved livelihoods. When modifying existing resource use and management regimes, there is always a possibility of some modification to the enjoyment of human rights or potential economic displacement of individuals living near or otherwise using territory included in the targeted area.</p> <p>The Risk is preventatively rated Moderate. However, UNDP has extensive experience working in Turkmenistan on similar types of interventions. In addition, the targeted protected areas are primarily in remote rural areas, and the inhabitants in such regions typically have a higher percentage of people living in poverty, and/or marginalized groups. Therefore, there is a risk that the project activities could have an adverse effect on the enjoyment of human rights, and/or possibly restrict availability, quality or</p>

			<p>access to resources. There is the risk that the populations affected would include the poor or other marginalized groups, and that these groups would be disproportionately affected by the project activities (due to their inherent proximity to the targeted area). This includes the risk that women could be among those affected.</p>
<p>Risk 3: Expansion of PAs system could lead to potential limitations or restrictions of the use of natural resources.</p> <p>Strengthening management of existing PAs, such as improved PAs zoning, strengthening the sanctuaries' protection regimes, and/or creation of ecological corridors could further restrict access to and use of biodiversity resources by local communities, affecting livelihoods.</p>	<p>Environmental</p> <p>Moderate</p>	<p>In the first year of implementation, the project established four Local Steering Committees in the project pilot regions, also acting as Public Advisory Councils, ensuring participation of the local communities in decision-making related to the PA establishment and functioning.</p> <p>The project is not yet at a stage of new PA planning, however, some preparatory consultations and feasibility assessments have already begun. Further activities and consultations related to the designation of new PAs will be guided by the ESMF and Process Framework developed as part of the Project Document. ToRs for PA feasibility assessments will include the following elements of the Process Framework:</p> <p>(i) Assessments of the socio-economic conditions of the local communities, highlighting the type and extent of the community use (and use by men and women) of natural resources in the targeted areas, and the existing rules and institutions for these and management of natural resources, including customary use rights; (ii) Assessment of threats and impacts on the relevant areas and local communities from various activities (e.g., poachers, traders, development activities) ; (iii) Assessment of the potential livelihoods impacts on men and women from new restrictions on the use of natural resource</p>	<p>Local communities in the project area could face economic displacement due to the expansion of the PAs system (new PA designation in Darganata and Ruhubelent districts). Certain land use activities would likely be prohibited or restricted as part of these processes.</p> <p>Together with the significant environmental benefits that come with the designation of new PAs and delineation of community endorsed ecological corridors, there are potential risks for example restrictions/limitations of the use of natural resources that may be at odd with the current agricultural practices of the local communities in project areas. There is a risk that not all key user groups of natural resources at project sites are consulted in project implementation and they will be affected by the restrictions on the use of natural resources.</p>

		<p>management in the proposed areas.</p> <p>In parallel to that, and in accordance with the Stakeholder Engagement Plan, the project will ensure participation of vulnerable local communities that may be affected by PAs expansion in the grant program and provision of support to strengthen their livelihoods.</p>	
<p>Risk 4: Enforcement of PAs regime and of wildlife corridors, following applicable environmental norms and legislation could pose risks to conflicts between rangers and local communities engaged in traditional livelihoods and practices.</p>	<p>Environmental Social Moderate</p>	<p>In the first year of implementation, the project arranged for two trainings on relevant legislation for the inspectors of the Nature reserves and local communities. The trainings discussed community outreach related topics, and addressed illegal activities, in accordance with national laws and regulations, as well as the opportunities for engaging the local population in biodiversity conservation, joint patrolling of territories, and protection of key sites.</p> <p>The project established four Local Steering Committees in the project pilot regions, also acting as Public Advisory Councils, ensuring participation of the local communities in decision-making related to the PA functioning. Also, the PAs' staff are actively involved in the work of Local Steering Committees to ensure close communication between rangers and the local community. The role of the Local Steering Committees, or the Public Advisory Councils, will be further expanded in order to coordinate the implementation of measures to prevent illegal activities, and keep a closer communication with local communities, involving them in the development of alternative sources of income as much as possible. As per the Project Document, the Public Advisory Councils are expected to facilitate</p>	<p>Enforcement issues of the environmental regulations in the new PA may lead to conflicts between the rangers and the local community or among different local community members.</p> <p>When working in developing countries there exists a risk that the entity responsible for PA management (be it governmental authority or community organization) does not have the full capacity necessary to fulfill their duties in terms of governance, administration, and management of natural resources. The enforcement personnel need to be appropriately trained to implement legal enforcement and manage relationship with local residents.</p>

		<p>the creation of joint teams in Dashoguz and Lebap Provinces, of gamekeepers together with representatives of the United Society of Hunters and Fishermen, the Nature Conservation Society, representatives of Forestry Enterprises and employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and environmental protection departments of the province authorities to ensure compliance with anti-poaching measures and to involve the local population in species monitoring.</p> <p>The project will support the work of the Public Advisory Councils and make sure that the SES requirements are mainstreamed in their ToRs and activities.</p> <p>In addition, in collaboration with related environmental initiatives, the project is undertaking various assessments of the potential livelihoods impacts on men and women from new restrictions on the use of natural resource management in the proposed protected areas.</p>	
<p>Risk 5: Government resource management authorities may not have the capacity to fulfill all aspects of their mandate, and rural resource users may not have the capacity to claim their rights, which could potentially lead to the violation of human rights.</p>	<p>Social Environmental Operational Moderate</p>	<p>In the first year of implementation, the project arranged for two training seminars on relevant legislation for the border guards, Nature reserve's staff and local communities. Also, all mentioned stakeholders actively participated in the targeted trainings for the local and national decision makers as well as natural resource users on specific themes.</p> <p>The training seminars included evaluation forms and training formats and were adapted to participants' needs.</p> <p>The stakeholder consultations, led by the project and its partners, ensured that all parties were aware of and understood the</p>	<p>There is a risk that institutional government duty-bearers related to the management of high value Aral basin ecosystems and land resources do not have the capacity to meet their obligations.</p> <p>In addition, by the same principle and rationale of the fact that the project will be working on natural resource management issues in rural and remote areas, there is a risk that resource users and other rights holders do not have the capacity to claim their rights. Such resource users living in rural and remote areas may not been fully educated and informed about what their rights are (in this case, in relation to usufruct or other natural resource-related rights), or the procedures to claim those rights. There is</p>

		<p>relevant obligations and rights.</p>	<p>a risk that rights holders may not have the legal, self-organizing, or financial means to claim their rights. The risk is assessed based on situation and context that the project will be working in. The fact that there is limited capacity on both the part of the government and rights holders is an inherent element to working on sustainable livelihoods in developing countries. As with the previous risks, the project will be working closely with all stakeholders to support government natural resource management authorities and institutions to meet their obligations, and with resource user rights holders to claim their rights. The risk is assessed based on situation and context that the project will be working in. The fact that there is limited capacity on both the part of the government and rights holders is an inherent element to working on sustainable livelihoods in developing countries. As with the previous risks, the project will be working closely with all stakeholders to support government natural resource management authorities and institutions to meet their obligations, and with resource user rights holders to claim their rights. This will be accomplished through multiple stakeholder consultation sessions during all relevant aspects of the project to ensure that all parties are aware of and understand the relevant obligations and rights.</p>
<p>Risk 6: Project activities intended to reduce threats to critical habitats and environmentally sensitive areas could potentially end up harming them</p>	<p>Environmental Moderate</p>	<p>The project selected several areas in order to demonstrate sustainable agricultural practices around Protected Areas (in buffer zones) and Key Biodiversity Areas (outside of PAs). The tentative content of the demos was agreed to by the local authorities, respective land managers (lessees) and the project experts, while environmental safeguards were discussed by the Project Board and the Local Steering Committees.</p>	<p>The project specifically targets the conservation and sustainable management of critical habitats, environmentally sensitive areas, and legally protected areas in the high value ecosystems of Turkmenistan’s Lower Amu Darya basin. The conservation, protection, and sustainable use of these areas is the objective of the project. Therefore, the probability of these risks is “expected”. However, given that the objective of the project is to enhance the environmental and social qualities of</p>

		The detailed design of the demos and the SoWs will include the assessment of possible impacts and measures to minimize risk to the critical or sensitive habitats.	these areas, the risk of negative social and environmental impacts is considered limited in scale and manageable through applicable standard practices. As with all of the risks, this risk will be consistently monitored throughout project implementation via the standard project management oversight and risk monitoring systems.
Risk 7: The project activities re-planting native tree species could have unforeseen ecological consequences.	Environmental Low	No measures needed as the risk is low.	The planned project activities include small amounts of reforestation. Output 1.2 includes reforestation of high value arid saxaul forest ecosystems. The assisted regeneration of a small portion of tugai forest ecosystem will be further supported by the project. The project team will work with the partner local forestry services and qualified project experts to ensure ecologically appropriate locations for planting trees, and will use native species (this is the purpose of the activity). The relatively small area of tree planting means that any ecological impact will be with a limited impact in case of a potential adverse effect. The overall environmental impact – considering the benefits of the planted trees – is expected to be positive. The purpose of the activity is to restore areas of forest that have been degraded.
Risk 8: The expected project impacts of the conservation of endangered and threatened species, restoration of degraded land, and sustainable management of forest and pasture resources could be sensitive to changing climatic conditions in the	Environmental Moderate	The project is planning to implement the climate risk assessments and activities that will demonstrate and put into place sustainable land management measures grounded by scientific principles and participatory mechanisms that will enable stakeholders to adapt the management of natural resources to any given context or threats.	Adverse impacts of extreme climatic events (drought; sand and windstorms; seasonal floods) can affect project’s interventions in the field and the livelihoods of local communities living in the target areas.

future.			
Risk 9: Project activities involving local/field interventions and close engagement with local communities may inadvertently contribute to the spread of COVID-19.	Environmental Social Moderate	As of January 2022, the risk is deemed irrelevant as the COVID-19 spread ceased	Activities at local level are based on participatory approaches, and most of the times will include meetings and local consultations. There are a number of training workshops and awareness events, round table meetings etc which will be organized mindful of government regulations and healthy standards and other appropriate safeguards.
Risk 10: The project may inadvertently contribute to potential perpetuation of discriminations against women. There are lingering disparities between men and women, particularly in rural areas and in the patriarchal cultures of some of the ethnic minority communities, which could be inadvertently replicated.	Social Moderate	<p>Gender risk management is ensured through the implementation of the Gender Action Plan (GAP) and monitoring by the PM and UNDP CO team.</p> <p>The project ensures the participation of women in all project events: meetings, seminars, grant programs, competitions, etc. The project reports the following specific activities in the first year of implementation:</p> <p>The project implemented a number of gender related activities including a meeting on March 7, 2023 "The important role of women and girls in the fight against climate change". The event provided a great opportunity to share innovative ideas and best practices in combating climate change and achieving green growth, and raising awareness among young people about how gender equality and climate change intersect. Participants discussed gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of climate change.</p> <p>In addition, the project specialists and volunteers held lectures at the American Corner in Dashoguz, at the Training center "Merdem Yashlar" and at the premises of NGO Ecodurmus to raise awareness of youth about land</p>	The Project could potentially perpetuate discriminations against women based on gender, especially regarding participation in design and implementation or access to opportunities. In the pilot farmers' associations and livestock farming sector, women account for around 51-52% of the population. They are mainly engaged in housekeeping, teaching, and administrative support services. Many more women form part of the unpaid family labor in home farming and lease of agricultural lands.

		<p>degradation and the importance of ecosystem conservation in the context of climate change.</p> <p>In terms of involving more attention of society to environmental problems of desertification, depletion of soil fertility and land degradation, and to demonstrate how land degradation and water scarcity affect women, the project announced an open competition devoted to the International day to combat desertification with development of brochures, infographics and leaflets. The contest focuses on discriminatory practices towards women that impede their right to inherit and access services and resources, and on conservation of terrestrial ecosystems, including forest ecosystems.</p>	
<p>Risk 11: The project may fail to ensure that labor rights, especially of vulnerable groups, are respected by local subcontractors. There could be risk of forced child labor at project sites.</p>	<p>Social Moderate</p>	<p>As stated in the Project Document, the project applies labour rights-related SES principles in an appropriately-scaled manner based on the nature and scale of the project, its specific activities, the project's associated social and environmental risks and impacts, and the type of contractual relationships with project workers.</p> <p>Once the project Responsible Party is in place, it will make sure that national working standards (Labor Code) are respected for all of the project activities.</p> <p>The project has developed a grievance mechanism, which is included in the PB ToR and is implemented at local level by LSCs. All involved parties can file a complaint if their rights are infringed or violated.</p> <p>The project team is committed to</p>	<p>Turkmenistan ratified all ILO main conventions. The information on the ILO website with regard to application of labor standards in Turkmenistan reveal no major observations and issues. There are however independent media streams revealing that forced labor is still practiced¹.</p>

¹ <https://www.solidaritycenter.org/children-forced-labor-turkmenistan-cotton-fields/>

		<p>mainstreaming of the key SES principles and requirements of the terms and conditions of employment in accordance with the national Labour Code. Project specialists took part in the development of the National Action Plan for Human Rights for 2021–2025 and will use this experience at their workplace(s).</p>	
<p>Risk 12: There is a risk that the choice of irrigation technology may lead to an increase in the use of surface water.</p>	<p>Environmental Moderate</p>	<p>Demonstration projects using new water-saving technologies (Act. 1.3.3.) are being developed based on thorough hydrological studies in selected locations. At the same time, the hydrographic parameters of the landscape, available water sources, their quantity and quality are being taken into account. Experienced local experts, drawing on international expertise as necessary, will carry out these engineering and hydrological studies. Irrigation technologies will also be monitored to assess water consumption trends.</p> <p>This work is carried out in close consultation with specialists from the Institute of Water Management of the State Committee for Water Resources.</p> <p>The development of the Sustainable Water Use Plans (Act. 1.3.1) will entail guidelines and specifications for the most efficient irrigation technology and cost effectiveness. Deliberations are included in the cost benefit analysis. In addition, the Sustainable Water Use Plans will include a Monitoring mechanism to be implemented by local authorities and daikhan farms in order to monitor water use trends.</p>	<p>The project’s work under Output 1.3. will result in approximately 100,000 ha of irrigated land under sustainable water management. Under this output the project will demonstrate small scale local farm level repairs and improvement of irrigation systems (e.g. pumps; canals). The plans are expected to be funded and implemented by the government; therefore, the impact is considered Moderate. Although the water management planning will indicate the technology to be used in order to reduce water wastage and improved resource efficiency, there is the risk that the choice of water irrigation technology would lead to increase water consumption.</p>

<p>Risk 13: The project's small scale, on-the-ground works may pose safety risks to community members</p>	<p>Environmental Social Moderate</p>	<p>Risk 13 (Small-scale agromeliorative land works of the project may pose a safety hazard to community members) was recognized by the members of the Project Board as insignificant and weak due to the fact that the activities planned under the project are carried out along second-order canals and on a small scale. For these tasks, technical engineers who are familiar with the safety regulations carried out the relevant work and their conclusions led members of the Project Board (Minutes, April 12,2023) to conclude that these safety risks are insignificant and weak due to the fact that no historical objects were found in the selected pilot sites. The entire cultural heritage of the Dashoguz and Lebap velayats is a place of pilgrimage for the population and is well known to everyone. Target communities will be alerted and appropriate action will be taken if artifacts or objects of cultural heritage are found.</p> <p>Based on the PB advice, the risk has been re-classified as Low, effective from July 1, 2023. No further management action is required.</p>	<p>Project activities that entail possible public health concerns are not envisaged, quite the contrary, the project will contribute to enhancing public health, as it seeks to improve the social and economic environment as well as the physical environment. All the works envisaged at project sites are at the lowest level of the irrigation system (i.e. at the level of farm canals/pumps/wells) but some risks of ground work infrastructure malfunction that could pose some safety risks may exist (e.g. repairs of wells) or minor disturbance of top soil where slipping or other small safety hazards are not excluded.</p>
<p>Risk 14: The project supported demonstration activities may inadvertently be implemented at/in proximity of significant cultural and historical significance sites.</p>	<p>Environmental Social Moderate</p>	<p>Risk 14 (Demonstration activities carried out by the project may be unintentionally implemented in/near important sites of cultural and historical significance) was recognized by the members of the Project Board as insignificant and weak due to the fact that the activities planned under the project are carried out along second-order canals and on a small scale. For these works, technical engineers who are familiar with the safety regulations when carrying out the relevant work will be involved was</p>	<p>The project sites have been carefully selected during the PPG based on several criteria chiefly among which is the land condition and water irrigation system and proximity to PAs. The demonstration areas are located on daikhan farm estate and have been already used for decades for agriculture and animal husbandry. The selected sites are located around PAs. There is very low risk that these sites or other demonstration sites that could be further selected, be overlapping with cultural and/or historically significant sites.</p>

		<p>considered by the members of the Project Board (Minutes, April 12,2023) as insignificant and weak due to the fact that no historical objects were found in the selected pilot sites. The entire cultural heritage of the Dashoguz and Lebap velayats is a place of pilgrimage for the population and is well known to everyone. Target communities will be alerted and appropriate action will be taken if artifacts or objects of cultural heritage are found.</p> <p>Based on the PB advice, the risk has been re-classified as Low, effective from July 1, 2023. No further management action is required.</p>	<p>Turkmenistan has three sites under the List of World Heritage Sites. In the project targeted regions, there is only one site included in the World Heritage List namely the Soltan Tekesh Mausoleum, situated in Dashoguz province in Konye-Urgench city, located on the south side of Amudarya River. All the project’s demonstration sites are located in the PAs surrounding geographies and although Dashoguz is one of the targeted project’s region, none of the demonstration activities come near this site. However, there may be other culturally significant sites that the project could inadvertently impact. This risk will be monitored attentively, especially because the government has proposed other sites to be included in the List of the World Heritage, and there are two PAs under the project’s scope, featuring among them, namely Repetek Biosphere Reserve and Amudarya Nature Reserve.</p>
<p>Risk 15: There is a risk that the marginalized and vulnerable groups/ farmers cannot access agricultural extension services strengthened by the project’s activities and/or are exclude from benefiting from access to technical knowledge</p>	<p>Social Moderate</p>	<p>The project has agreed with the main partner to establish a training center in the Amudarya State Nature Reserve to provide consulting and expert support to the local community. At the same time, the project organized farm schools and practical training in remote areas, developing alternative sources of income on household plots. The project includes partnerships with other initiatives, the private sector and NGOs to implement a range of awareness-raising activities.</p> <p>Regarding the Dashoguz project region, an agreement was reached with a local NGO „Eco-durmush“ that works in the field of environment and agriculture, as well as gender, to join efforts in providing advice to the local community and contribute to the development of these communities (providing internet</p>	<p>The project beneficiaries are small and medium size private farmers and farming enterprises. One of the project’s activity is aimed at making agricultural extension services and resilience advice more accessible to farmers (Act 3.2.1). There is a risk that marginalized and vulnerable groups cannot access extension services or are excluded from the direct project support through Outputs 3.2 and 3.3. This risk is preventatively assessed moderate as access to knowledge within the framework of this project that promotes new innovative practices is deemed essential to achieving the intended outcomes and there is a risk that the vulnerable communities’ representatives, may not even hear about or be informed about the existence of these services and/or not be able to access due to remoteness of their location.</p>

		services, information resources, holding round tables among small and large entrepreneurs, etc.)	
<p><i>Risk 16 (updated, December 2023):</i> Conflicting government priorities relating to agricultural production and sustainable land use could lead to limited progress in achieving the project's intended outcomes and limited results in the conservation and restoration of degraded lands, and the protection of critical habitats for the long-term maintenance of ecosystem services necessary to support sustainable livelihoods.</p> <p>Another risk factor is timing: by-laws to the Land Code and the Law on Pastures, etc., scheduled for development within the framework of the project, may not be adopted or changed / revised during the project lifespan</p>	<p>Political</p> <p>Strategic</p> <p>Moderate</p>	<p>The planned activities of the project are based on National Programs, such as: the Aral National Program for 2021-2025, the National Forest Program for 2021-2025, the Social and Economic Development Program for 2022-2028. To this end, the project has made analyses of synergies with these programs, which are regularly referenced during the official meetings with the government.</p> <p>For Quality Assurance purposes, the Project Board and UNDP CO will closely monitor the progress towards the formal approval of strategic project outputs (such as ILUPs/Integrated Land Use Plans; Sustainable Water Management Plans; Regional LDN targets and Action Plans; Legal amendments to Pasture Law; Water Code and Land Code; and new PAs dossier) and address the risk of not securing the official/formal approval of these strategic outputs.</p> <p>As stated in the Project Document, the risk is mitigated through different activities. The project will be working closely with a range of government stakeholders, partners, and resource users and managers and will organize education and awareness events (under Component 3) on the need to manage land and water resources in an integrated and sustainable way that will not deplete soil productivity and will not impact negatively on biodiversity. Through the support to the National LDN target setting and support to an enabling policy framework (under Component 1/Output 1.1.) the project will facilitate inter-sectorial</p>	<p>Due to historic conflicting priorities among environment and other economy sectors such as agriculture; due to existing policy/regulatory loopholes; and due the lack of awareness and sufficient information of the decision makers on the negative impact of climate change on natural resources and consequences of unsustainable use of water resources, there is a moderate risk that the project strategic outputs will not be formally approved and therefore not implemented.</p> <p>This may happen due to a lack of consensus and reconciliation between environment and agriculture priorities, and due to a lack of acknowledgement of biodiversity values and the need to change the way agriculture practices are implemented and land use is planned. For example, adoption of an integrated participative land use approach is an important step forward from the current centralized way of the water and land governance.</p> <p>The update of the National Action Plan to Combat Desertification (NAPCD), envisaged by the project, is intended to consolidate the approach of LDN in the strategic documents of the country. It is possible that the NAPCD will incorporate state programs on Forests and Aral Sea in future. By-laws to the Land Code and the Law on Pastures should legally fix the definition of LDN and SLM.</p>

		<p>stakeholders' consultations, expected to raise awareness and knowledge on LDN and integrated land use plans and biodiversity values. The project will also address some of the policy loopholes or inconsistencies or missing bylaws in land and water management, and will advocate for their formal approval, as these legal amendments will contribute to an enabled LDN framework. In addition, the regional LDN and ILUPs and Sustainable Water Management Plans will create a framework for Sustainable Land Management (SLM) measures and progress towards LDN and a more sustainable water use. Furthermore, the project will work to identify any critical conflicts in government policies and strategies relating to agricultural production that would potentially diminish the potential to achieve the project objective.</p> <p>The project work is accompanied by active media coverage and a PR campaign, which will promote greater attention to the regulatory reforms initiated by the project. The project cooperates with the National Institute of Deserts, Flora and Fauna and the National Coordinator of the UNCCD in Turkmenistan, who is responsible for developing a National program to combat desertification. By-laws to the Land Code and the Law on Pastures are reflected in this program as priority actions.</p>	
<p>Risk 17: National and local government institutions responsible for the management of protected areas, pastures and forests</p>	<p>Social Environmental Operational Moderate</p>	<p>The project conducts round tables with relevant National and local government institutions responsible for the management of protected areas, pastures and forests with the involvement of lawyers and qualified experts. Also, issues are discussed at the</p>	<p>Improving zoning around the targeted reserves will be complemented by the delineation of the corridors for wildlife feeding and migration (Act. 2.3.1), aiming to improve the integration of PAs within the wider production landscape. The project will map critical habitats, buffer zones and corridors, and identify spatial</p>

<p>do not have adequate capacity to support project activities and build and maintain and enforce working agreements with communities, living in and near KBAs</p>		<p>PBM, LSCs, in which all stakeholders participate. This facilitates the exchange of experience and knowledge, which contributes to capacity building. During the reporting period, more than 500 representatives of National and local government institutions participated in various project activities.</p> <p>As stated in the Project Document, the project will continue strengthening and expanding the current capabilities of the PAs administrations, environmental inspectors and border police, local authorities (i.e., key institutions responsible for the planning and management of PAs, enforcement of environmental norms, and pastures and forests management across the high value arid ecosystems of Turkmenistan’s Aral Sea Basin).</p> <p>The project management unit will advocate for institutionalization of the training modules and inclusion of these training seminars into institutional capacity building framework of the personnel. The project will also support PA ‘business planning’ on revenue-generating opportunities (e.g. assessments will be conducted in order to establish alternative financial revenues, e.g., from tourism, pasture tax, forest use and leasing fees, income from fines, etc.) to further augment the current budgets of the responsible institution that could be directed towards capacity building.</p>	<p>and temporal habitat use patterns (e.g. bird nesting times, calving zones etc.) and identify buffer zones and corridors for wildlife and develop cooperative land use planning and management agreements for these areas. The project will work with PAs staff, local authorities and forestry enterprises, community representatives and local councils (People Councils). While the initiative could be successful, there is a risk of the relevant authorities not having the necessary capacities to maintain these agreements with the local communities.</p>
<p>Risk 18: Project implementation delays related to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>	<p>Operational</p> <p>Moderate</p>	<p>COVID-19 related restrictions have either been eased or lifted at the time of project start, and thus had minimal impact on the project implementation timeline.</p> <p>As of January 2022, the risk became irrelevant.</p>	<p>The project implementation may be affected by delays, as was the case with other projects, affected by the restrictive measures implemented since the Covid-19 outbreak</p>
<p>*** Risk 19: Due to the ongoing</p>	<p>Environmental</p>	<p>All land tenure changes relevant for the project activities are</p>	<p>The main activity of the project is related to sustainable land management. This is</p>

<p>reorganization of daikhan associations, land plots for project activities may be changed during the implementation of project activities and differ from those planned.</p>	<p>Financial Operational Organizational Political Regulatory Strategic</p> <p>Moderate</p>	<p>considered during the PBM and LSCs meetings. The alternative areas and pilot sites are being selected to meet, as much as possible, the criteria set during the project development.</p> <p>The project engages new stakeholders (private sector, NGOs, agencies), helping to increase their motivation by providing information on new agricultural practices, creating and participating in experience exchange platforms through local training centers, participating in small grant programs to support sustainable land management assistance in obtaining bank loans.</p>	<p>especially true for Components 1 and 2, according to which it is planned to restore degraded pasture and irrigated areas, plant forests and increase the area of protected areas in accordance with the principles of the Land Degradation Neutral Balance (LDB) approach. A change in location can affect the positive impact that improved land use has on biodiversity conservation.</p>
<p>*** Risk 20: Valuable forest ecosystems in the focus of the project are at risk as the intensive reclamation of forest fund lands (tugai forests in Lebap velayat) for agriculture, becomes a growing priority for local hakimliks in order to fulfill plans for the state order for the cultivation of cotton and wheat. To date, it has been found out that already about 590 hectares of forests have been cut down and developed for agricultural land.</p>	<p>Environmental Strategic</p> <p>High</p>	<p>To avoid the risk, high level meeting of UNDP RR with velayat Hyakim (Provincial Governor) has been organised. Local government suggested to have such restoration actions in another region, since the irrigated lands of the “Lebap” daykhan association in Darganata etrap recommended in Prodoc are not currently a priority.</p> <p>In this regard, the project is actively negotiating with Forestry local department and Amudarys state nature reserve in order to determine new areas for restoration.</p>	<p>Natural restoration of tugai forests is an important component of the project and contributes to the achievement of a number of indicators: CO2 reduction, restoration of ecological corridors in order to biodiversity conservation, demonstration of LDN principles, etc. According to the general concept of the project, it is proposed to restore and provide a water structure of 300 hectares of land and transfer them to the “Lebap” d/a. As a result, the local community should stop deforestation and develop the restored land for agriculture with the support of the project. This concept was previously discussed and supported by the local community and former authorities of Darganata and d a “Lebap”.</p>
<p>*** Risk 21 (updated, December 2023): The cost estimations for a number of project</p>	<p>Financial</p>	<p>UNDP CO, the IP and the project management team have prioritized the need to ensure that the project is implemented in a highly effective and efficient</p>	<p>The cost estimations for a number of project activities made during project development become invalid with the changing financial climate and raising inflation rates.</p>

<p>activities made during project development become invalid with the changing financial climate and rising inflation rates.</p>		<p>manner.</p> <p>Several examples of successful adaptive management measures already implemented include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agreements with parallel projects and other donors to share costs while increasing complementarity and achieving higher synergies; - Agreements with governmental partners to ensure the best value for the GEF increment while covering “regular” activities such as aerial census for flagship species solely from governmental sources. <p>The project management team will continue focused stakeholder consultations with a view to ensure maximum efficiency, incremental nature and additionality of the GEF investments. The workplan activities will be prioritized accordingly, in due consultations with project partners and beneficiaries.</p> <p>The UNDP CO and the project management team will continue working with other development partners and encourage joint efforts with the parallel and complementary projects and activities in order to ensure maximum project efficiency.</p> <p>Possible amendments to the original budget will be considered case-by-case by the Project Steering Committee, while the project management team stays responsible for justifying the necessity for budget revisions and proposing adaptive management measures aimed at delivering the declared impact within the original</p>	
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		budget limits approved by the GEF.	
<p>***Risk 22 (updated, December 2023): The project is likely to face significant operational delays in delivering the originally planned outputs as the new implementation modality (assisted NIM with the engagement of the Responsible Party) is applied for the first time in the country</p>	<p>Operational Organizational High</p>	<p>Updated risk treatment/management response:</p> <p>The UNDP CO and MAEP will look further for potential RP candidates and implement appropriate procedures, including capacity assessments, due diligence and micro-HACT assessment of RP candidates.</p> <p>The UNDP CO will expedite the conclusion of the RP agreement once the RP selection is confirmed.</p> <p>The project will look for relevant experience in implementing NIM projects with the RP's engagement, in other countries of the region. Lessons learned will be summarized, with possible risks and concerns identified and communicated to UNDP and IP.</p> <p>The project management team will request training and advice on related POPP rules and procedures as required.</p>	<p>The project is implemented in accordance with UNDP NIM modality where Ministry of Agriculture and Environment Protection (MAEP) is the National Implementing Partner (IP). The private enterprise "Ynamly Kepil" has been selected as Responsible Party (RP) as a result of the HACT Micro Assessment conducted at the project PPG stage. The PCAT Assessment as associated due diligence has also demonstrated that private enterprise "Ynamly Kepil" is well capacitated to provide partial execution support for the project. The decision on selection has been discussed and consulted with the IP (MAEP). Actual contracting of RP(s) was supposed to place after project approval during the inception phase.</p> <p>However, during the inception and start of the implementation, further discussions with "Ynamly Kepil" indicated the RP's concerns about operational and payment modalities, unexpected fiscal implications for the RP, and risks associated with the RP's negotiation capacity in working with government authorities at project pilot regions.</p> <p>As a result, UNDP CO had to re-initiate the selection process for the potential RP. There is no guarantee, however, that the project won't have any further operational delays right after the RP is selected and contracted, as there is no experience in running the project in accordance with the modality that is new to the country's institutional setting.</p>
<p>*** Risk 21 (updated, December 2023): The cost estimations for a number of project activities made during project development</p>	<p>Financial</p>	<p>UNDP CO, the IP and the project management team have prioritized the need to ensure that the project is implemented in a highly effective and efficient manner.</p> <p>Several examples of successful</p>	<p>The cost estimations for a number of project activities made during project development become invalid with the changing financial climate and raising inflation rates.</p>

<p>become invalid with the changing financial climate and rising inflation rates.</p>		<p>adaptive management measures already implemented include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agreements with parallel projects and other donors to share costs while increasing complementarity and achieving higher synergies; - Agreements with governmental partners to ensure the best value for the GEF increment while covering “regular” activities such as aerial census for flagship species solely from governmental sources. <p>The project management team will continue focused stakeholder consultations with a view to ensure maximum efficiency, incremental nature and additionality of the GEF investments. The workplan activities will be prioritized accordingly, in due consultations with project partners and beneficiaries.</p> <p>The UNDP CO and the project management team will continue working with other development partners and encourage joint efforts with the parallel and complementary projects and activities in order to ensure maximum project efficiency.</p> <p>Possible amendments to the original budget will be considered case-by-case by the Project Steering Committee, while the project management team stays responsible for justifying the necessity for budget revisions and proposing adaptive management measures aimed at delivering the declared impact within the original budget limits approved by the GEF.</p>	
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4. Lessons learned and follow-up steps (if applicable)

a) Please provide the lessons learned and further steps after the project’s closure.

The lesson related to the engagement of the Responsible Party for partial execution of the project, which creates critical impediments to the progress of the project. One of these impediments is the issue related to the involving/hiring of National experts under an Individual Contract (IC) in accordance with UNDP rules. According to the approved Project Document and relevant management arrangement, this must be done by the Responsible Party, but the issue has not yet been resolved and the uncertain situation with RP is affecting the implementation of the project. The main concern in this situation that International consultants have to implement their duties in synergy with National Experts.

The project collaborates with GIZ, NAP, NGOs and other international initiatives to overcome the National Consultant situation. Considering that there is not sufficient Expert Capacity at the local market to carry out the scope of work proposed in the project, meanwhile, the project pays special attention to activities (trainings, workshops, round tabs, practical days etc) to build the capacity of governments and local professionals.

The joining the Kaplankyr State Nature Reserve into the World Heritage Site (45th session, 20.09.23) led to the territorial expansion of the Nature reserve and its sanctuaries to 100 thousand hectares. Considering that most of the project activities are carried out in the agro-industrial landscapes of the buffer zones of the Nature reserves, this circumstance led to a change in the concept of the project in terms of pasture management in the Dashoguz pilot region.

The project has put forward an initiative to strengthen mutual cooperation between all projects of the Ministry of Nature Protection and the UNDP Environment and the energy portfolio in order to exchange information on ongoing activities and projects for greater efficiency of project activities. During the reporting period, several round tables were held with all beneficiaries (MEP, NIDFF FAO, GIZ, IFAS, ICSD, Science Academy) involved in the LDN issues.

3. Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment

Gender equality is a fundamental human right, a condition and indicator of the level of socio-economic and personal development. Therefore, this principle was considered in almost all components of the project. The project called for active participation of women in all project activities: women participated in seminars, trainings and in the PB meetings.

The project implemented a number of gender related activities including a meeting on March 7, 2023:” The important role of women and girls in the fight against climate change”. The event provided a great opportunity to share innovative ideas and best practices in combating climate change and achieving green growth, raising awareness among young people about how gender equality and climate change intersect. Participants discussed gender equality and women’s empowerment in the context of climate change.

The project together with the Nature Protection Society, Tebigy Kuwat, Eco-durmush and Ynanch Vepa NGOs, on the occasion of Desertification and Drought Day, June 17, 2023 launched a competition „HerLand, HerRights“ to draw the attention of society, including women and girls to the environmental problems of desertification, depletion of soil fertility and land degradation leading to desertification and demonstrate how affected are women when land becomes degraded and water is scarce.

On December 2, 2023, an Environmental Brain Ring among youth with focus on women was held in Dashoguz with the aim to recognize the critical importance of addressing waste disposal, recycling, air and water pollution, as well as other climate change issues, the organizers held an intellectual game to enhance awareness and knowledge among local youth. The focus was made on environmental issues related to the Aral crisis, climate change, protection and restoration of natural resources, biodiversity, and fostering active participation of youth in climate action.

The project also provided a technical input in UNDP Gender Strategy by providing an analysis of the developed/available documents (guidelines, concepts etc) on gender issues in the environmental portfolio, as well as expert support to local NGOs in terms of identification of socio-economic benefits and services for women and created a platform for empowering NGOs and youth to expand gender equality initiatives.

5. Transfer of Assets or other related matter

a) Please state on any past or future transfer of assets made within the project cycle (Attach list of equipment, cooperation frameworks with beneficiaries, etc.)

a) Transfer of 4x4 vehicles (2 pcs) to the Amudarya and Kaplankyr State Nature Reserves;

b) Transfer of two “Yamaha” boat engines to the Amudarya State Nature Reserve;

c) At the final stage, a tender is being held for the purchase of construction materials for creation of seeds nursery and enclosure for wild animals and birds; as well as a tender on creation of training room in Amudarya state nature reserve and in Ashgabat on the base of National Institute of Desert Flora and Fauna of the ministry of environmental protection of Turkmenistan.

6. Financial management (based on Quantum)

Budget item	Total approved in 2023 (in USD)	Expenses + commitments	Budget utilization in % to planned
Component 1	354,394.35	287,493.94	81,12%
Component 2	210,949.58	179,025.39	84.87%
Component 3	112,836.00	90,340.02	80.06%
Project management	40,450.00	24,002.91	59.34%
Total delivery in 2023	718,629.93	580,862.26	80.83%
In % to total project budget	15.68%	12.67%	

Prepared by: Project



Manager

Date: Approved by:  Programme Specialist

Date: 20.12.23

