THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL FACILITY (GEF)

Implementing Agency: WWG GEF Agency

Executing Agency: Government of Nepal and the WWF, Nepal

Sustainable Land Management in Churia Range, Nepal

(SLMCRN)

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Evaluators: Mohan Wagely and Sarba Raj Khadka
June-July; 2017

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POSITION DETAILS		
Location	Kathmandu and project sites in Chure of Nepal	
Reporting to Starting Date Duration Report due	Nepal, Santosh &Rai, Kamal Raj May 15, 2017 Approximately 25 days June, 2017	
PROJECT DATA		
project/Program Title GEF PMIS project ID	Sustainable Land Management in Chure Range, Nepal 5596	
WWF GEF Agency project ID Implementing Agency(s) Executing Agency Executing Partners	G0002 WWF GEF Agency WWF Nepal Ministry of Agriculture Development, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, Ministry of Land Reform and Management, Ministry of Population and Environment	
Countries	Nepal	
Focal Area	Land Degradation LD-1, LD-3	
GEF Operational Program Total GEF Approved Budget Total Co-financing Approved	GEF-5 $917,431 $4,398,864	
RELEVANT DATES		
CEO Endorsement/Approval Agency Approval Date project Start	December 19, 2013 December 19, 2013 January 1, 2014	
Independent project Review Completion Date Project Completion Date (proposed)	March, 2016 December 31, 2016	
Project Completion Date (actual)	May 31, 2017	
Terminal Evaluation Completion Date	July 30, 2017	
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Source: WWF-GEF project document, GEF project database

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Insemination
AMR	Annual Monitoring Reviews
AMR	Annual Monitoring Reviews
AMU	Agency Management Unit
AWP	Annual Work Plans
BToR	Back to Office Report
BZCFUG	Buffer Zone Community Forestry User Group
BZMC	Buffer Zone Management Committee
BZUG	Buffer Zone User Group
CBNRM	Community Based Natural Resources Management
C&D	Conservation And Development
CBDP	Community Based Disaster Preparedness
CBNRM	Community Based Natural Resources Management
CBO	Community Based Organizations
CBRP	Corridors and Bottlenecks Restoration project
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFUG	Community Forest User Group
CHAL	Chitwan Annapurna Landscape
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
DADO	District Agriculture Development Office
DCC	District Coordination Committee
DDC	District Development Committee
DFCC	District Forest Coordination Committee
DFO	District Forest Office
DG	Director General
DIP	District Implementing Partners
DLAs	District Line Agencies
DLSO	District Livestock Service Office
DNPWC	Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation
DSCO	District Soil Conservation Office
DSCWM	Department of Soil Conservation and Watershed Management
EFLGF	Environment Friendly Local Government Planning Framework
F&A	Finance and Administration
FECOFUN	Federation of Community Forest Users of Nepal
FGD	Focused Group Discussions
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEB	Global Environmental Benefits
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GoN	Government of Nepal
GRM	Grievance Readdress Mechanism
HB	Hariyo Ban
ICIMOD	International Center for Integrated Mountain Development
IEO	Independent Evaluation Office
IFAD	International Fund for Agriculture Development

IGA	Income Generating Activities
ILM	Integrated Land Management
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IPNMS	Integrated Plant Nutrient Management System
IWM	Integrated Watershed Management
IWRMP	Irrigation and Water Resource Management project
LAPA	Local Adaptation Plan for Action
LD	Land Degradation
LDSO	Livestock Development Service Office
LFLP	Leasehold Forestry and Livestock Program
LFP	Leasehold Forestry Program
LGI	Local Government Institutions
LRP	Local Resources Persons
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MFI	Multilateral Financial Agencies
MIT	Micro Irrigation Technologies
MM	Monitoring Matrix
MoAC	Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives
MoAD	Ministry of Agriculture Development
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoFALD	Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development
MoFSC	Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation
MoLD	Ministry of Livestock Development
MoLRM	Ministry of Land Reform and Management
MoPE	Ministry of Population and Environment
MoSTE	Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment
MoV	Means of Verifications
MTR	Mid Term Review
NAP	National Action Program
NAPA	National Adaptation Plan of Action
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NLUP	National Land Use Policy
NPC	National Planning Commission
NTFPs	Non-Timber Forest Products
NTNC	National Trust for Nature Conservation
OGFZ	Open Grazing Free Zone
OPF	Operational Focal Points
OVI	Objectively Verifiable Indicators
PABZ	Protected Area and Buffer Zone
PACT	Project for Agriculture Commercialization and Trade
PCC	Project Coordination Committee
PCCP	President's Chure Conservation Program
PIR	Project Implementation Reports
PIWM	Participatory Integrated Watershed Management
PMU	Project Management Unit
PPMS	Project Planning and Management System
PPR	Project Progress Reports
ProDoc	Project Document
PSC	Project Steering Committee
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation
RF	Results Framework

RMP	Risk Management Plan
SALT	Sloping Agriculture Land Technology
SIA	Social Impact assessment
SIPP	Safeguards Integrated Policies and Procedures
SLM	Sustainable Land Management
SLMCRN	Sustainable Land Management in Churia Range, Nepal
SLMCRNP	Sustainable Land Management in Churia Range, Nepal Project
SLMNRN	Sustainable Land Management in Churia Range, Nepal
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant/Realistic and Tractable
SWC	Social Welfare Council
TAL	Terai Arc Landscape
TE	Terminal Evaluation
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	United Nations Development Programs
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VDC	Village Development Committee
WTCLP	Western Tarai Landscape Conservation Project
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

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Executive Summary

Introduction and background

This is the formal Terminal Project Evaluation on: Sustainable Land Management in Churia Range, Nepal Project (SLMCRNP) that was implemented by the WWF GEF Agency and executed by the WWF, Nepal with the participation of five different Govt. of Nepal (GoN) ministries covering land reform and management (MoLRM), forest and soil conservation (MoFSC), agriculture development (MoAD), livestock development (MoLD) and population and environment (MoPE). Individual ministry led program activities were implemented by the respective district line agencies (DLAs) with active technical and administrative backstopping of the Project Management Unit (PMU) based in the WWF- Nepal, Kathmandu office. A Project Steering Committee (PSC) headed by the Secretary, MoLRM provided policy and governance guidance and a Project Coordination Committee (PCC) headed by the Joint Secretary, MoLRM provided the coordination support. The PMU acted as the Secretariat for the PSC and PCC as well as the nerve center of all the implementation and execution actions.

Churia range is characterized by high geophysical fragility, socio-economic marginality, ecological sensitivity and management specificity. Due to rampant encroachment and wanton destruction of Churia landscape a situation of persistent land degradation, lack of conversion and unsustainable management has been created destroying primary forest and pasture and associated vegetation. Converted agriculture land has suffered unscientific and poor management leading to decreasing productivity, food insecurity, and environment degradation creating a vicious cycle of degradation, poverty, deprivation and further degradation and unsustainable extraction of natural resources in Churia Range causing landslides, soil erosion, flash floods destroying fertile farmlands downstream in the Tarai plains. Also, continuing deforestation, illegal logging and shifting cultivation in the region are causing loss of biodiversity, fragmentation of wildlife habitats, carbon loss and water shortages.

The SLMCRNP was designed as a pilot project aimed at addressing above issues especially focusing on reducing forest and agriculture land degradation, water shortages and biodiversity loss by incentivizing local communities with different kinds of livelihood opportunities especially through forest, pasture and agriculture land based income generating activities. The project area covered Churia hills and Bhawar areas of Rautahat, Bara, Parsa and Makwanpur districts. The overall objective of the project was to "to substantially reduce degradation and maintain or improve conditions of agro-pastoral lands and Churia Sal and mixed forest areas in strategic project locations..." The specific objectives were: a) promote sustainable agricultural and livestock management practices; b) engage local communities in livelihood oriented forest conservation; and c) create the enabling conditions for inter-sectoral collaboration for sustainable land use and management. Specific project targets were: a) substantially reduce degradation in 2,500 ha of agro-pastoral lands, and improve management of 5,000 ha of forests through integrated and community participated land and watershed management work in strategic locations.

Terminal evaluation aim and objectives

The GEF funding policy requires the conduction of terminal evaluation (TE) at the end of all of its medium size projects to: a) promote accountability and transparency, b) synthesize lessons for the selection, design and implementation of future GEF projects, c) provide feedback on issues, and challenges faced, and d) allow the GEF Evaluation Office to analyze and report on effectiveness of GEF operations. With the purpose of providing an independent assessment of the performance of the Project, the major objectives of the TE were set to: a) examine the extent, magnitude and sustainability of project impacts to date; b) assess performance including progress towards project outputs and outcomes; c) identify any project design problems; d) review the roles and responsibilities of relevant stakeholders; e) analyze the implementation -including institutional- arrangements; f)

draw lessons learned that can improve the sustainability of results, enhance future projects and aid the effectiveness of the GEF Agency; and g) make suitable recommendations targeting the GEF, implementing/executing partners and the involved government agencies. The detail terms of reference (TOR) of the TE is provided in Annex 1. The TE was completed by team of 3 experts led by the Lead consultant. (See Annex 2)

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation was conducted by critically assessing the implementation and execution processes followed by the GEF WWF Agency, WWF Nepal based PMU and the GoN partners including the DLAs and reviewing the progress reported and observed by the evaluators. The desk review of the project document and related background reports provided a good understanding of the programmatic content, institutional arrangements and management and operation methods used for the implementation of different field based interventions, training and capacity building activities, generation of knowledge products, awareness raising events, community grants, stakeholder dialogues and the likes carried out by the project in 4 VDCs of the 4 project districts. The primary basis for the evaluation is the desk review of the relevant project documents, back to office trip reports, publications, and M&E reports. Face-to-face interactions were held with the available stakeholders during the field trip and in Kathmandu using the evaluation questions and focused group discussions. A number of respondents based both in Nepal and the US were interviewed with written questions resulting in written answers to the most of the evaluation questions (Annex 8). The evaluation questions were individualized and tailored to the nature of the responsibility of and tasks performed by a particular respondent during the implementation phase of the project.

Key findings

Overall, the project has performed in a **satisfactory** manner. The comprehensive assessment of the design document to the final wrap-up report of the Project gives a conclusion that concerted efforts were made by the PMU to achieve all the objectives of the project overcoming many unexpected challenges and constraints. Evaluation ratings have been assigned based on the performance of the individual project component based activities and their outputs and outcomes undertaken during the entire implementation period. The ratings are assigned based on how well the key issues identified and described in the project document and priorities of the targeted communities were addressed and benefits provided as well as how the performance and results presented the evidence to support these gains. Each rating has been justified by qualifying how the evaluators understood different achievements and shortcomings especially based on the written response obtained from the people involved in the execution and implementation of the project. The overall rating trend indicates that while at the output level the project has performed well but at the outcome level, the project is somewhat lacking in terms of not being able to extract and manage large number of outputs produced by different partners into a common or collective outcome contributed by all the intervening partners. The project impact was not assessed as the 3 year project period is too short to create impact. Similarly, the project performance was assessed for risk it faced in achieving sustainability and scaling up success due to varying level of mainstreaming and ownership indications among the district line agencies.

Although a full review of the Safeguard compliance was not covered under the TE scope, safeguard issues were raised during the evaluation and therefore a general review was done. The issues were first raised by the WWF Safeguard officer during the project supervision visit requiring a mid-course correction and interventions by the PMU. In general, all the activities planned were identified, designed and implemented as `no regret' `doing-no-harm' and `win-win' measures. Therefore, existing safeguard issues were gradually addressed as the project progressed in a satisfactory manner from the perspective of all the affected communities. One of the major activities – declaration of 2500 ha of open grazing land into controlled or managed grazing by designating the

area as `open grazing free zone' had major safeguard implications such as curtailment of traditional pastoralists' rights. This issue was addressed by setting up a `Grievance Redress Mechanism' providing alternate animal forage options to the affected farmers.

The institutional arrangements set up for the project management such as the PSC and PCC provided fairly good governance and coordination support to the PMU. However, due to frequent change of leadership and changing priority of the lead ministry i.e. MoLRM as well as high turnover rate in membership, often affected the functioning and deliverables of these governing bodies. The members seem to have faced constraints such as the lack of time, motivation and unclear terms of reference to get into substantive and problem solving nature of discussions and decision making. It is also felt that instead of having two governance and coordination structures at the Centre, the PCC should have been created at the district level constituting all the DLA heads as members which could have led to better coordination by addressing the major coordination gap identified at the district level that affected the quality of coordination needed.

The PMU and especially the M&E unit functioned well. The team members made regular and timely visit to the field and worked with the focal points in the DLAs diligently to ensure timely occurrence of the planned intervention. The PMU produced timely progress reports and shared with AMU and the PSC and the PCC. The team developed and used activity tracking tool which was laudable. A critical assessment of the Conceptual Model, Summary of Project Level Results Chain as well as Individual Component Level Results Chain of the project indicates that they somewhat lack consistency in logic as actions are not expressed at the same level and threats are mentioned as outcomes making it somewhat not easily comprehendible.

The evaluation rating table below provides the summary rating (Table 2).

Table No. 2. Summary assessment and ratings by evaluation criteria for the SLMCRN project[1]

Rating/ Score	Description of Strong Performance	Evaluator Rating /Score	Evaluator Brief Justification Please note: indicator, source or methodology when relevant.
Relevance	1. The project addresses the necessary factors in the GEF Focal Area of Land Degradation and is able to meet its objective towards achieving Global Environmental Benefits. The outputs generated can bring about positive change in meeting the national conservation targets identified in the project document.	S	Overall, the project demonstrates good relevance. The large number of activities on the ground generally show good beneficiary buy-in, inclusive benefit flow and high conservation values; Perhaps due to inadequate bottom-up planning, weak application of strategic project sites and program selection criteria, some of the activities are overlapping in a some locations, some are difficult to assign by mandated implementing partner (e.g. storage ponds are constructed at the same by DSCO as well as DADO); some activities are not directly related to degraded land management (e.g.
Quality of Design	1. The project has rigorously applied key design tools (e.g. the WWF PPMS).	MS	The design did apply the WWF PPMS and used both bottom-up and top-down planning strategy following the GoN planning framework in general. However, given the pilot nature of the first GEF funded SLM project, the design could have been better on several counts: a) the coordination framework was considered only at the

[1] Annex 7 provides ratings of project objectives and outcomes

			central level ignoring the real need at the district level where implementation level coordination was most needed; b) a large number of similar nature of activities were planned in all districts missing the priority needs based site and activity selection (e.g. Nirmal Basti where water shortage was most only micro irrigation was planned), c) success of SLM is contingent upon secure land tenure which was lacking in all districts; and d) SLM project by nature need both vertical and horizontal integration and dynamic coordination that was poorly ensured.
	2. The project is hitting the right 'pressure points' to meet necessary and sufficient conditions for success.	S	Yes, the Project interventions have targeted the right issues and reached out to needy communities but they are scattered and not well connected; the activities selected are meeting necessary (focus on degraded forest and agro-pastoral land located in the most degraded sites of Churia (upstream areas) but not sufficient as they are not working within the frame of integrated watershed management at river/sub river basin scale.
Efficiency	1. Most/all project activities have been delivered with efficient use of human & financial resources and with strong value for money.	HS	The overall implementation is cost effective, in some cases inputs are shared with local communities. Most of the outputs and outcomes were attained with joint funding and implementation with concerned DLAs
	2. Governance and management systems are appropriate, sufficient, and operate efficiently.	MS	Governance and management systems were in place and worked efficiently to the extent possible. However, since institutional framework was not appropriately designed and governance system not adequately executed (lack of reasonable ownership by DLAs, transparent information flow in fund management, limited coordination and integration)
Effectiveness	1. Most/all intended outputs and outcomes were attained and address identified threats.	S	Most of the outputs have been attained and they are being packaged toward attaining planned outcomes in some components such as agro-pastoral land management. Some outputs like degraded land rehabilitation through plantation, regeneration and construction of gabion wall dykes/spurs have addressed the environmental threats to lives and livelihoods.
	2. There is strong evidence indicating that changes can be attributed wholly or largely to the WWF GEF project	S	Almost all the activities and outputs have strong linkages or footprints of the GEF WWF SLM project. All the sites where plantation, grazing control, dykes/spurs construction and livestock improvement and management as well as large number of income generating activities such as Leaf Plate industry and milk chilling centers provide clear and strong evidence attributed to the SLMCRN Project.
Impact/ Results.	1. Most/all outcomes relating to desired changes in the status of the conservation targets (species, ecosystems,	D/I	Some final outcomes were assessed and they do show good potential to lead to impacts such as improvement in the management of agro-pastoral land and consequently improvement in the quality of life of the agriculture and livestock farmers. However, full impact assessment is not

	and ecological processes) and project objective were realize		possible in 3 years long project.
Sustainability	1. Most or all factors for ensuring sustainability of outcomes/impacts are being or have been established.	S	The activities on the ground are indicating medium to good potential to sustainability although at local level, not all financial, institutional and ecological sustainability indicators are well established yet. It is expected that now they will get established since local elections are being held and more empowered local government will have mandate, will and means to continue all the good work initiated by the WWF GEF project.
	2. Scaling up mechanisms have been put in place with risks and assumptions re-assessed and addressed.	MS	Local beneficiaries and sector line agencies have expressed interest in pursuing scaling out and scaling up[2] of the programs and working mechanisms, however existing management and coordination scenario with poor integration and coordination need to be re- assessed for properly up-scaling the project initiated activities.
Adaptive Management Capacity	1. Project results (outputs, outcomes, impacts) are qualitatively and quantitatively demonstrated through regular collection and analysis of monitoring data.	HS	Regular monitoring and site visits from the PMU and DIP based focal points have been carried out which have demonstrated large volume of project data, outputs such as regular monitoring and activity tracking reports and supervision mission generated BTORs. The project team demonstrated an impressive adaptive management skills and capacity.
	2. The executing project team uses these findings, as well as those from related projects/ efforts, to strengthen its work and performance.	S	The executing agency WWF-Nepal through PMU was found to diligently use these reports including the AMU team's BTORs in improving project activities including the social safeguards and management effectiveness
	3. Learning is documented and shared for project and organizational learning	S	There are evidences of lessons being documented and producing learning documents for wider sharing among the stakeholders and projects; it was observed that the lessons are having some impact in reflecting and sharing for future improvement especially in designing GEF 6 project
Overall		**Satisfactory**	
Notations: S: Satisfactory; MS: Moderately Satisfactory; HS: Highly Satisfactory; L: Likely; ML: Moderately Likely			

Lessons learned, Recommendations and Conclusion

Overall Lessons:

The overall lesson that can be drawn from the SLMCRN project is that SLM projects should be designed using multi-disciplinary knowledge, multi-stakeholder consultation and bottom-up planning processes. A good project design and implementation requires doing and internalizing a critical situation analysis as well as a thorough

[2] Scaling out is understood as "Expansion in or extension of quantitative scale with an increase in geographical areas, or budget, or number of people, or the scope and type of activities or involvement of more number of partners of ongoing project or program – in this case the SLMCRN"; Scaling up is defined as using knowledge, information, lessons learned from good SLM practices to inform local, provincial and national-level policies, plans, programs and practice communities.

reality-check of the implementation environment at operational level. In this project, although the situation analysis rightly identified the lack of coordination at district level, the governance and management structures of PSC and PCC were created at central level only. The lead role of the project steering was given to the MoLRM that although had the mandate but lacked core competence and district level presence. It can be argued that there was lack of full justification to give the lead role to the MoLRM based on the criteria of competence and capacity needed. There was more justification to give the lead role to the MoFSC. However, the evaluator understood that the MoFSC itself shied away from taking up this role. Nevertheless, the project has performed satisfactorily. While it has achieved many successes, it has also faced some set-backs. The lessons learned from the project can be of eye opening nature for designing and managing of projects of this nature. These are described below under 4 different headings:

Lessons on what worked well?

Forest and pastoral land based livelihood is key to the success of SLM: Agro-silvi-horticulture and livestock based income generating activities (IGAs) are receiving higher priority from farmers and are doing well also. For example broom grass, leaf plate making and turmeric cultivation in Chandrapur and vegetable and goat farming in Ratanpuri is popular activities. Compared to tree planting, regeneration yielded faster, cheaper and better results as weather factors are conducive for regeneration of native plants.;

Better coordinated and integrated sites could generate better results: Fewer and more integrated and coordinated sites could have resulted better outputs and outcomes. Specific site and local community needs and capacity tailored conservation and development activities seem to work better. For example, the DLSO has implemented more comprehensive, integrated and coordinated activities in Handikhola scoring more success than in other locations. Here, one can observe more synergy between activities run by different DIPs. Improvement in livelihood and increased flow of ecosystem goods and services from land rehabilitation work is observed. The same is not observed in other 3 districts where it has created scattered cases of successful and not so successful work such as in Ratanpuri and Chandrapur. There, while at one place plastic pond is making women empowered, in another the same has collapsed. Reforestation work in one CFUG is highly successful but in another site, only fences remain. In Chandrapur where in one area broom grass and banana cultivation are doing well and in another they are struggling. In most of the cases where the DLAs are working together, activities are doing very well, where they are working in isolation or in a top-down manner or treating the SLMCRNP work as NGO activity, they are not.

More interactive dialogues lead to improved GESI: The project staffs have reflected that more regular follow-up and dialogues ensures more inclusive and empowered women and disadvantaged communities in decision making. Well informed, capacitated and skilled local entrepreneurs manage forest based enterprises profitably. The examples are in Chandrapur where indigenous and local women are earning decent income from Sal leaf plate and turmeric powder making and marketing since they were provided intensive and interactive workshops and training that transferred skills and knowhow.

Integrated approaches –both intra and inter sector- are working well: In most of the districts, DLSOs were found to run integrated and comprehensive livestock development activities including by collaborating with DFOs and DSCOs mainstreaming the project activities in regular GoN programs and taking full ownership. These activities are integrated with DSCOs (e.g., Handi khola) and DFOs (e.g. Chandrapur), focused and follow bottom-up in planning processes. Consequently there is high local ownership, demand and co-finance. This type of integrated approach has the good probability of meeting the SLM objective and creating impacts. Similar integration exit in the activities run by the DSCOs.

Sustainable livelihood building needs continuous and coordinated efforts: Sustainable livelihood development activities that have poor local ownership and do not yield tangible benefits quickly (e.g. SALT, Zero tillage and

mixed cropping) are not working well. These are not focused, limited resources are scattered too thin and DIP's ownership and technical backstopping is poor.

Lessons on what did not work well and why?

Ensuring necessary safeguards is critical: Proper understanding of and ensuring environmental and social safeguards as per the requirement of the WWF's Social Safeguard Integrated Policies and Procedures (SIPP) is necessary. In this project due to lack of timely communication and realization of the policy requirement a bitter lesson was learnt by the Project team based on which, the Project team had to mid-course correction by developing and implementing necessary mitigation measures. However, full compliance to GEF as well as the WWF's SIPP guidelines might be difficult if `one size fit all' approach is applied. In this project, perhaps a better approach could have been to follow a combination of the WWF and the Govt. of Nepal's safeguard policies that actually seem to have been practiced. The GoN policy is based on the Environment Friendly Local Governance Framework -2013 (http://lgcdp.gov.np/content/environment-friendly-local-governance-framework-2013) that ensures meeting of adequate environment and social safeguards in local level development planning and governance activities. It mainstreams environment, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction in the sustainable development oriented local development planning procedure from VDC to national level planning process in Nepal. The social aspects are covered under the GESI framework.

Institutional structure/form need to follow functions/deliverables: The SLMNP is governed and coordinated respectively by a project steering committee (PSC) and a project coordination committee (PCC) at central level. These are multi-sectoral project governing bodies headed by the MoLRM. Although the PSC met regularly, received briefings on periodic progress and plans and approved the same, they did not seem to go into substantive discussions and involved in resolving issues that are hindering progress such as the implementation of NLUP, 2012. The PCC also did not seem to have adequately facilitated the district level coordination and engagement. Since the Department heads (DGs) are not in the loop of the coordination mechanism (although later a provision was made to invite them to the PCC meetings), these structures could function better. Perhaps the reason for weak coordination was due to not assigning the lead or co-lead role to the MoFSC which by mandate had the jurisdiction over the most of the targeted land for sustainable management under the project i.e. the forest, pasture and riverine land.

Closer collaboration with President's Chure Conservation Program (PCCP) could contribute to sustainability: The SLMCRNP could have yielded more sustainable results if the Project had established a formal collaboration mechanism with the PCCP (e.g. a MOU). The Situation analysis for the Project design had referred MoFSC's Chure Conservation Strategy, 2012 but in the implementation phase there was a `missing link' with PCCP. Some of the co-finances from the GoN ministries came from the budget received by them from the PCCP and therefore more program level coordination and collaboration would help to hand over the Project activities to the PCCP.

Co-financed activities could be integrated better: The project document has indicated 82% co-funding from the GoN ministries in the Project. The financing assessment also took note of the finance available from GoN/WWF implemented TAL conservation program. The GoN ministries directly transferred the funds to their respective district offices (DIPs). The evaluator therefore notes that although the co-funding amount is significantly large commensurate level of activities funded under the co-finance budget heads are not reported in an integrated manner. It seems that the activities are being implemented in a parallel manner by the DIPs and the WWF, Nepal in the project districts. However, there is a need to run the program as an integrated package as is already being done by the DLSO achieving good synergy with the GEF fund covered activities. Better integration will help meet the project objectives better and enhance the spirit of the co-financing and topping nature of the GEF projects.

Lesson on what could be improved?

Coordination and government ownership could be better: A number of district heads of the forest and agriculture offices have themselves admitted that there was lack of coordination – both between the center and the district as well as among district functionaries. The main reason was lack of feeling of ownership among the DLAs. Some of the DLAs have treated the SLMCRN project as a NGO project and assigned the project work to a junior officer or a focal point creating a disconnect between the regular GoN and the WWF/GEF activities which should not be the case as GEF funding is of `topping' or `gap filling' nature to the ongoing government program and they should be implemented in tandem. Some of the beneficiaries mentioned that some of the government staff even charged their travel and related costs from the activity money while delivering their service. Establishing a field level PMU office or setting up of an exclusive District Coordination Committee (DCC) would have helped improve coordination among the district implementing partners (DIPs) resulting in better coordination, communication and coherence in delivering project outputs and outcomes.

Focusing on outcomes could have been more meaningful: Given that the LD-1 and LD-2 objectives are focused respectively on: a) `maintaining or improving flow of agro-ecosystem services to sustain food production and livelihoods', and b) `generating sustainable flows of ecosystem services from forests, including in dry lands', the SLMCRNP's focusing on outcomes could have allowed improving integration and mainstreaming of the project activities with those of the GON ministries in the project districts. This would have also enhanced sustainability and continuity towards achieving better outcomes leading to impacts.

Lessons for wider national level

Design and implementation lesson: There is a need for designing and implementing SLM as an integrated, cross-sectoral, cross-scale community based natural resources management (CBNRM) project in future. This will require designing the projects through a process involving multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary processes and a better internalization of findings of situation analysis. In fact a programmatic approach wherein multiple activities are undertaken by multiple partners at multiple locations – all contributing to singular vision and common outcomes - would be better. In terms of the project components, given the increasing vulnerability and impact of climate change in Churia range and Tarai region, the goal of sustainable land management can be better achieved if all activities are promoting adaptation to changes building climate resilience. The SLM activities in Churia could have been integrated with climate change adaptation using the MoPE's LAPA framework and the resilient building principles based on the MoPE's low carbon development strategy. Nevertheless, the SLMCRNP provides the national NGOs including the WWF-Nepal a good learning in planning and implementing integrated and cross-scale projects and programs.

Lesson to achieve impact at scale: The SLMCRN as a pilot project was expected to be scaled out and scaled up perhaps gradually. Its wider relevance will be seen through achievement of outcomes and impact at scale for which the project partners should be planning both scaling out (geographic expansion) and scaling up (evidence based policy and knowledge influence and impact creation) activities. Based on the large number of projects outputs generated by the Project both horizontal and vertical up-scaling seem feasible. However, the PMU and WWF GEF Agency need to develop concise and comprehensive multi-media based documentation of the project results and do targeted communication and dissemination focusing the participating ministries and the National Planning Commission (NPC), Nepal.

Lessons for regional and global learning

Investment in sustainable land management should be always done in an integrated, holistic, and synergistic manner involving all stakeholders that run land based social and environmental goal based activities. Integrated

projects yield better global environmental benefits (GEBs) as demonstrated by this Project. Here, the central level agencies and stakeholders – the MoLRM, MoAD, MoFSC, MOLD and MoPE in Nepal- and their respective district line agencies have been informally organized to work as one programmatic team for project execution of activities, generation of outputs and management of outcomes. During implementation of the project, there was active involvement of other district and central level stakeholders from the beginning to the end of the project in an integrated manner although they lacked cohesion. Some district level CBOs and NGOs were also involved while implementing the project. This kind of institutional arrangement provides a good model of working among different Rio conventions and Nepal's achievement in this regard is worth sharing at global forums such as in the upcoming UNCCD and UNFCCC conference of party meetings.

Good practices in addressing issues relating to evaluation criteria and management approach

GEF projects follow international best practices and globally applicable frameworks and guidelines which the SLMCRN has tried its best to achieve. However, in the global discourse on implementation of the provision of Rio conventions, there is an increasing realization that `top-down' and `one-size-fits-all' approach does not work. This is perhaps the reason why all the three Rio conventions have the provision of `nationally driven process' and `common but differentiated responsibility based on capability'. Therefore the best practices is to allow local and national processes and procedures to be integrated with globally determined policies such GEF's Environment and Social Safeguard Policy allowing for necessary local customization or adjustment. The bad practice could be to apply blanket solution of globally set standards and rules which the evaluators consider will not be effective in addressing issues relating to evaluation criteria.

Key Recommendations of the Evaluation

The recommendations are aimed to improve the process and practices of all the relevant stakeholders at center and districts levels for the overall management of projects that focus on the issue of land and natural resources degradation in Churia landscape in Nepal. The recommendations are targeted at multi-sectoral audience operating at different levels

Overall Recommendations (for national and international policy and decision makers):

- *Make integrated and cross-sector design a requirement for sustainable land management in Churia:* One of the key lessons drawn from the SLMCRN project is that integrating upstream-downstream, social-ecological and policy-practice perspectives and factors can deliver better designed and implementable projects in Churia range in particular and the country in general. It is therefore recommended that the GoN and GEF WWF agency use this approach in GEF 6 projects both in Nepal and other developing mountain countries. This learning can be also relevant to the WWF, Nepal and the President's Chure Conservation Program (PCCP) to improve their ongoing work in Churia landscape especially in areas such as forest restoration, integrated land and water management and livelihood improvements.
- *Make SLM a national priority:* The GoN – both at centre and provinces - should use this pilot project to promote SLM as a national strategy committing to revise the NLUP, 2012 and implementing it in the entire Churia range at the first stage. The lessons drawn from the project should be communicated to Nepal's National Planning Commission (NPC) so as to ensure that SLM elements are included in different ministry's annual plans and programs both at the Centre and provinces. This will ensure not only continuity of the successful activities initiated by the Project but also their up-scaling in the entire Churia.
- *Reform Land Use policies and institutional framework for SLM:* The NLUP, 2012 was an effort to introduce the concept of scientific land management in Nepal. This policy remains unimplemented warranting its critical review to transform it into an implementable policy by elevating its ownership to the NPC level. The lessons learned from the Project have clearly shown that this policy needs to be owned up by all the relevant

ministries, first. The MoLRM alone cannot implement the NLUP. In the context of the federalization of the country and land management falling under the jurisdiction of the provinces, a multi-scale new Land Use Policy has to be formulated;

- *Increase investment in SLM:* The project has successfully demonstrated that land restoration and rehabilitation activities through bio-engineering and integrated water source conservation and management can yield multiple local benefits. The Project has also generated environment benefits of national, regional and global environment nature. Investment in SLM which is grossly inadequate at present needs to be significantly increased tapping on both GoN funded agriculture, livestock and local development projects as well as climate change finance flowing from multilateral financial agencies (MFI) such as GEF and Green Climate Fund (GCF). Private and co-operative sector funds can also be mobilized where infrastructure building activities are involved under the Public-Private-Partnership model.

Specific Recommendations (for project developers, managers and NGO/INGOs)

Recommendations (1): *Make interdisciplinary and inter-sector coordination mandatory:* The critical review of the situation analysis of the project clearly indicates that the drivers responsible for the degradation of Churia landscape are complex and operating environment and socio-political contexts are complex and multi-dimensional. Therefore, it is strongly recommended to establish functional co-ordination by using integrated approach and learning from good practices from past and ongoing initiatives such as Leasehold Forestry, President's Chure Program and Local Adaptation Plan of Action in designing and implementing projects in Churia. Since GEF funded projects aim at doing topping-up, critical gap filling and value-adding work, the design should embrace these frameworks and use bottom-up, inclusive and multi-stakeholder consultative process in designing future projects. Given the increasing frequency of flash floods in Tarai districts, it is recommended that integrated river and sub-river basin based watershed management governed by interdisciplinary institutional coordination framework at landscape level should be the basis of SLM project design and implementation in future.

Recommendations (2) – District line agencies and other implementation partners

- *Use multi-stakeholder and collaborative approach in project implementation:* Land degradation issues in Churia Bhawar as well as other parts of Nepal are of cross-sector and multi-stakeholder nature and needs participation of all land-based ministries, departments, CFUGs, CSOs and Pvt. Sector. Integrated projects should be designed, monitored and implemented by multi-stakeholder institutional arrangements at all levels. It is therefore recommended that coordination is treated as the most critical element at cross district and cross sector levels so that at the beneficiary level, SLM projects are presented as a comprehensive package of conservation and development activities. Inter-sector coordination will be more important in project management under the newly formed Gaunpalikas (village councils) and Nagar Palikas (city councils) wherein the role of the district will be to ensure coordination and provide facilitation.

- *Disseminate the SLM learning widely:* Compile the lessons learned and case studies on what worked well (best practice examples) and why and what did not work and why for wider sharing and learning leading to scaling-up and scaling-out successes. Forest and pastoral land based livelihoods and income generating activities (IGAs) were the key to the success of SLMCRNP since these practices generated quick income to the poor farmers besides, restoring the environment. The bio-engineering work has halted land degradation and restored the destroyed agriculture land. In order to sustain, upscale and extended the successful activities it is recommended that the concerned ministries and line agencies continue to use integrated and coordinated approaches in Churia region.

Recommendations (3) – Project Management

- *Improve Adaptive Project Management Capacity:* The PMU has done an excellent job in managing the SLMCRN in an efficient and collaborative manner. The success of the numerous activities under the Project can

be attributed to their hard working abilities and adaptive management skills. However, in the absence of a functional coordination at the district level, the PMU had to make a number of top-down decisions. Learning from the experience, it is recommended that future GEF projects should build adaptive management capacity of project managers by creating functional and effective institutional arrangements at the district level (e.g. by setting up local level PMU covering all the 4 districts). This will ensure high ownership of the project activities by the line agencies and also help achieve sustainability and continuity of the project initiated activities.

- *Introduce appropriate technologies:* As shown by the SLM project's success in introducing proven technologies, tools and services such as Travis for AI, animal shed improvement, Milk Chilling Vat, MIT, Tunnel farming that are helping to promote sustainable land-use management practices helping to establish challenging targets such as the OFGZ and sustainable forest management, the concerned agencies should integrate indigenous and modern technologies and tools in promoting SLM.

- *Integrate Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience Building:* Given the high vulnerability of Churia to growing climate change vulnerability and impacts, future projects are recommended to make all activities climate adaptive and resilient. The high fragility, marginality and specifity of Churia region in terms geo-physical, socio-economic and biodiversity conditions will require future SLM project to be grounded on the principles of sustainability and resilience. Apart from the building of sustainable land based livelihood systems, the conservation of biodiversity and development community infrastructures such as access roads, settlements, river embankments must be designed for adapting to both present and future changes.

Recommendations (4) – Policy piloting and reform

- *Address land rights and encroachment issues in a holistic manner:* Under this project, the MoLRM has prepared land parcel based mapping which can be used for strict zoning of land use in Churia based on land capability classification. The SLM project work can be used as a foundation to develop future strategy addressing chronic land rights, land and tree tenure and property rights issue in Churia. Encroachers to fragile slopes can be provided alternative livelihoods to incentivize them to practices SLM practices.

Recommendations (5): (M&E)

- *GEF project should strive to achieve outcome and impact***:** The overall thrust of the GEF's Land Degradation (LD) focal area is on: promoting "investments in good practices and enabling conditions conducive to SLM", and since the SLMCRN aims to contribute to the GEF LD 1.1 and 1.3 outcomes that respectively aim at achieving: "improved agricultural, rangeland and pastoral management" and functionality and cover of agro-ecosystems maintained" (GEF, 2015). It is therefore recommended that the future GEF projects on SLM strive to achieve outcomes and impacts which would be possible by following a programmatic design and management of projects. Obviously, this will require longer duration project as a 3 year pilot project such as the SLMCRNP can only generate outputs.

Recommendations (6): Future Projects and Follow-up Phase of the SLMCRNP

The TE recommends both to the GoN and the GEF agency, in future, to plan at least 5 year project or at least 2 phases of 3 year projects to achieve SLM outcomes and impacts. As well, given that the GEF funding is of incremental nature, it should strive for making catalytic changes such as rather than focusing on piloting which might be construed as `doing more of the same" it should focus on scaling out and scaling up of already existing successful practices such as the ones already created by WWF, Nepal implemented TAL and Hariyo Ban projects, IFAD funded Leasehold Forestry program and UNDP funded WTCLP all of which had strong Churia and Tarai focus. This will help Nepal to move toward transformative conservation, adaptation and development programs. Since the lead ministry of the SLMCRN – the MoLRM is keen to implement its Parcel based Land use zoning initiative and WWF-Nepal is already providing technical advice to the Ministry on this, it is recommended that a follow-up project preferably under the GEF-6 be developed that includes the implementation of the Parcel based zoning of the land use in Churia range.

I: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Overview of the project

The Sustainable Land Management in Chure Range, Nepal (GoN/GEF/WWF) project- (SLMCRNP) was a pilot project with an overall goal of addressing the chronic problem of land degradation and unsustainable natural resources management in Nepal's Chure range that covers 13% of Nepal's total area. This pilot project aimed to intervene with activities in strategic sites of 4 pilot Chure region districts of Rautahat, Bara, Parsa and Makwanpur. The project aimed to achieve its objective by: a) promoting sustainable agricultural and livestock management practices; b) engaging local communities in forest conservation; and c) creating the enabling conditions for inter-sector collaboration for sustainable land use and management. This project was closely aligned with the GEF Land Degradation focal areas. Specifically, it was linked to the LD Strategic Objective 1: "Maintain or improve flows of agro-ecosystem services to sustain livelihoods of local communities", and Strategic Objective 3: "Reduce pressures on natural resources from competing land uses in the wider landscape".

The project implementation was carried out in collaboration with District Line Agencies (DLA) of the 4 technical ministries: MoAD, MoFSC, MoPE and MPLD by introducing and implementing innovative and sustainable agro-pastoral systems and community forest management to substantially reduce land degradation in the four districts. The technologies and practices identified for piloting includes climate-smart agriculture, terrace improvement to reduce soil erosion, surface and sub-surface water harvesting from rivers by building water storage tanks for irrigation to reduce drought vulnerability. Additionally, the project was expected to improve land use planning and land allocation through better inter-sectoral coordination, institutionalization and implementation. The project also aimed to prioritize institutional capacity building, mechanisms and forums for coordinated inter-sectoral land and resource use planning, support district-level land use planning and analyses to identify important and sensitive areas for restoration and conservation. It was envisaged that successful implementation of the project, besides demonstrating a number of good practices in community conservation through sustainable livelihood creation in the 4 pilot districts, will also have scaling-out (to the surrounding districts and villages) and scaling up (influencing local, and national policies, institutional arrangements and governance system) opportunities. The project's major thrust was to promote inter-sector collaboration and co-operation among the collaborating ministries to achieve implementation of sustainable land use planning and long-term integrated land rehabilitation and management practices.

1.2 Brief description of the project Sites

The SLMCR project activities were implemented in four pilot districts within the Chure Range. They included Makawanpur, Bara, Parsa and Rautahat districts which are located in the south central part of Nepal. These districts were selected because they have been suffering from severe degradation of land and forests, poor agricultural practices and lack of scientific management of all kinds of degraded land since 1970s and 80s. The relevant stakeholders, especially the farmers in the Chure range were very interested to participate in the project as they felt that other conservation efforts such as PCCP and WWF's TAL as well as government programs were fragmented and scattered and they needed focused and integrated package of activities to address the land degradation issue holistically and sustainably

In many ways, these project districts are representatives of the land management problems prevailing in the entire Chure Range – both in terms of degradation of natural resources and socio-economic conditions. These

districts have a relatively high population density (442.8 people/sq. km.) also indicating severe human pressure on the land as indicated by table 1 below:

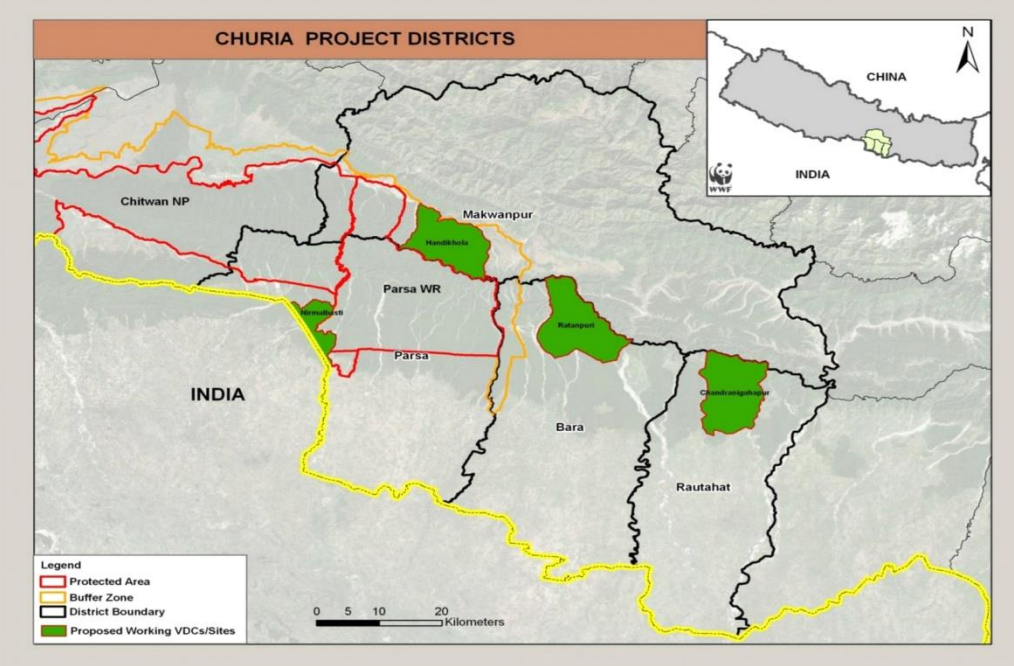
Table 2: Extent of degraded forest and land in the project districts in the Chure Range

District	Total District Area (hectares)	Extent of Degraded Forest area		Extent of Degraded Land		Total population (2011 census)	Population growth 1981-2011 (%)
		Hectares	%	Hectares	%		
Parsa	141,058	4,626	3.28	1,925	1.36	601,017	111
Rautahat	104,013	2,249	2.16	1,054	1.01	686,722	107
Bara	127,687	5,088	3.98	1,827	1.43	687,708	116
Makawanpur	168,326	3,542	2.10	2,692	1.60	420,477	73
Total	541,084	15,505		7,498		2,395,924	
Average			2.87		1.39		101.75

Source: GEF Nepal project Document, 2013

Further, these districts are ranked high (Parsa) to moderate (Rautahat, Bara and Parsa) in their climate change vulnerability index by the 2010 National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA). Two project districts - Makawanpur and Parsa, also harbor part of Nepal's premier protected areas, viz. Chitwan national park and Parsa wildlife reserve.

Figure 1: Location map of project sites in the project districts (Source: GEF Nepal project Document, 2013)[3]



1.3 Salient feature of the project districts

Parsa District: Parsa is located along the southern border of Nepal, which has a total area of approximately 141,058 hectares, with a population of approximately 601,017, and a population density of 420 persons per sq. km.

Rautahat District: Rautahat is also located along the southern border of Nepal, having a total area of approximately 104,013 hectares and a population of approximately 686,722. The population density is around 660 people per sq. km. It has highest population density out of the four project

[3] Annex 3, Chart 1& 2. Provides geo-referenced maps and photos of project sites

districts. Rautahat was considered to have high soil productivity but has experienced significant degradation as a result of increased population encroachment into the Chure Range.

Bara District: Bara is also located along the southern border of Nepal, which has a total area of approximately 127,687 ha, and a population of approximately 687,708. The population density of Bara is 530 persons per sq. km. Over the last forty years, Bara has experienced the largest increase in population at a rate of 116% compared to the other project districts.

The Chure range in Bara has several haphazard settlements, as the communities here are transient in nature; they are practicing intensified and unsustainable use of traditional agriculture practices in the slope lands, resulting in severe land degradation and deforestation.

Makawanpur District: Makawanpur is located above and adjacent to the other three project districts of Parsa, Rautahat and Bara. It has a total area of approximately 168,326 hectares, with a population of approximately 420,477. The population density is 250 persons per sq. km. Over the last forty years, Makwanpur has seen the lowest increase in population at a rate of 73% compared to the other project districts.

In addition to agricultural crops, livestock plays a central role in the Chure Range. As explained in the project documents, at a time of project design, there was a general concern among people in the Chure Range that they did not officially held the land and that the government could evict them at any time. So, the communities had a mindset of extracting or exploiting the resources freely for their immediate livelihoods benefits than conserving them for future use.

1.4 Overall purpose and objective of the evaluation

As discussed in the evaluation guidelines (GEF Evaluation Document # 3, 2008), the main purpose of the terminal evaluation is "to get a comprehensive and systematic account of the performance by way of assessing the project design, process of implementation, achievements against objectives and any other results the project might have produced during the course of its implementation". The specific or complementary purposes are to: i) promote accountability and transparency, and to assess and disclose levels of project accomplishment, ii) synthesize lessons that may help improve the selection, design, and implementation of future GEF activities, iii) provide feedback on issues that are recurrent across the portfolio and need attention, and on improvements regarding previously identified issues, and iv) contribute to the GEF Evaluation Office databases for aggregation, analysis, and reporting on the effectiveness of GEF operations in achieving global environmental benefits and on the quality of M&E across the GEF system.

The objectives of this Terminal Evaluation therefore are also very much consistent with the above descriptions of the purpose which are:

- examine the extent, magnitude and sustainability of any project impacts to date;
- assess performance including progress towards project outcomes and outputs;
- identify any project design problems;
- review the roles and responsibilities of relevant stakeholders;
- analyze the implementation arrangements;
- review donor partnership processes (including co-finance);
- assess supporting efforts of the WWF GEF Agency;
- assess stakeholder involvement;
- assess adherence to policies and procedures, including those for environmental and social safeguards;

- assess the project adaptive management strategy and draw lessons learned that can improve the sustainability of results from this project, enhance future related projects and aid the effectiveness of the GEF agency.

1.5 Scope and Methodology

As explained in the terms of reference (ToR) (Annex 1) and above, the scope of this Terminal Evaluation was to review the outcomes and impacts of the projects by conducting an independent, unbiased and objective oriented gathering and analysis of the views and experiences of the key stakeholders of the project from governance to beneficiary levels. In doing so the evaluation was expected to synthesize lessons for the selection, design and implementation of future GEF projects in Nepal and elsewhere. It was also expected that the TE provide feedback on major issues faced by the project and management interventions executed. The aim was to allow the GEF Evaluation Office to analyze and report on effectiveness of GEF operations, including achievement of Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs). Within this scope, the reviewers devised and implemented the following methods and processes to conduct the TE:

i) Desk review of the project documents. Several documents and communications of the project were reviewed including project document (ProDoc) and CEO endorsement letter, independent project Review Report (March, 2016), project Supervision Mission Reports, Safeguards Documents, Social Assessment, Beneficiaries Selection Criteria Document, Open Grazing Free Zone Mitigation Plans, etc. Also reviewed were the documents related to gender mainstreaming, gender-related concerns/issues, Bi-Annual project Progress Reports (PPR) including Results Framework and AWP Tracking, Annual Work Plans and Budgets, Annual Monitoring Reviews (AMR) and project Implementation Reports (PIRs). Additional documents that were browsed through were the GEF Tracking Tools, Financial Documents, including quarterly financial reports and co-financing letters from government, minutes of the project Steering Committee (PSC) meetings.

ii) Interview and interactive discussions with the members of the project Steering Committee (PSC), project Coordination Committee (PCC) and the project staff members based at the WWF-N PMU. Interviews were conducted using guide questions (list of questions is annexed in Annex 8).

iii) Interview with key personnel in the concerned GoN ministries, especially ministries of land Reform and Management, forestry and soil conservation, agriculture, livestock and population and environment were selected for interview. Guide questions were used for interviewing the responsible persons independently. (see Annex 4 for the list of persons interviewed both physically and virtually)

iv) Interview with key personnel in district based project executing partner agencies and people's representatives, e.g., DFOs, DSCOs, DLSOs, DADOs, Wardens, local government bodies, etc. Guide questions were used for interviews of the responsible persons. In all the interview cases, one to one interviews were administered (Annex 4 provides the list of people met).

v) Focus group discussion with CFUGs, BZCFUGs, specific agricultural commodity enterprise groups, cooperatives, farmers etc. Guiding questions were used to initiate discussions and record information helpful to analyze the situation.

vi) Project sites were visited by independently selecting the activities implemented. The major activities selected were: Open Free Grazing Zone, Livestock feed, breed and management improvement, alternate livelihood, afforestation and natural regeneration, drip irrigation, model biogas village, bio-engineering work for river side protection, milk cooperative site, etc. During these visits, the functional and physical conditions of the supported

activities were observed and onsite interactions with the beneficiaries to understand mainly the management and governance system of these systems were carried out.

vii) TE team used an evaluation matrix (analytical framework, presented below) to guide the data gathering and analysis process. The findings were triangulated with the use of multiple sources of information, especially from district and project site level sources. Particular attention was paid to the GEF principles of independence, impartiality, transparency, disclosure, ethical norms, partnership, competencies / capacities, credibility and utility.

Table 3. Evaluation matrix: A simple evaluation matrix was devised and used for planning and organizing the terminal evaluation as shown below (Adapted from USAID, 2015)

Evaluation Question	**Purpose and methods for answering this question**	**How the evaluators will use the information**
Question 1	Collect data from the key people and stakeholders involved in the design, implementation, and execution of the project	Assessment of the quality of project design and activity plan
Question 2	Collect the reflections and learning from the project governance and management team	Assess the effectiveness of the project management and governance
Question 3	Collect views from the primary beneficiaries and the evidence of the benefit drawn from the Project funded activities	Assess the benefit flow to the people and environment at local, regional and global scale

The purpose of using this matrix was making the methods used; align with the overall GEF-related objectives of: (i) promoting accountability and global environmental benefits, and (ii) promoting learning, feedback and knowledge sharing on results and lessons learned among the GEF and its partners.

Evaluation tools that were used to gather primary data and information for the evaluation included:

- Review of project documentations
- Consultations and interviews with the key persons involved in the project
- Written questions soliciting comments from the i) head of the line agencies of the implementing ministries in the 4 districts; ii) the focal point officers in the 4 ministries; iii) Concerned staff in the WWF, Nepal; and iv) Relevant staff in the WWF GEF Agency and GEF Secretariat, US were used.

In the meantime, information triangulation was done to ensure that empirical evidence collected from one source, for example, project reports, were validated from other sources, for example thorough interviews. Undocumented information was collected through consultations with key persons.

1.6 Limitations of the evaluation

The evaluation was undertaken during summer and when the country was undergoing local government elections in 2017. Due to political protests and transport strikes called by local and regional political parties in Terai districts, the evaluators could not visit the district headquarters of Rautahat, Bara and Parsa and conduct face-to-face interviews in their offices.

1.7 Structure of the evaluation report

This evaluation report is structured into 4 major chapters apart from opening page that includes executive summary, basic project information and a section of annexes. Chapter one covers the introductory descriptions of the project. Chapter two is dedicated for describing the project in the overall development context. Chapter three is on the findings of the terminal evaluation whereas Chapter four is on conclusions, recommendation and lessons drawn out of the evaluation findings. Obviously the most important chapter is on findings that have several important sub-chapters including diagnostic analysis on project design, implementation, safeguard measures, gender main streaming, conclusion, lessons learned and recommendations. Each Chapter has relevant sections and sub-sections. Some relevant information with details is included as annexes.

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

2.1 Project Duration and Budget

The project started on 1st January 2014 and original date of completion was on December 31, 2016. However, the project received a 5 (five) month no-cost extension and therefore the implementation activities ended on 31st May 2017. The project undertook its implementation activities for the total duration of 41 months. The GEF grant to the project was US$ 917,431. The GoN had pledged co-financing of US$ 4,398,864.00 equivalent to 81.5% of the total cost of the project.

2.2 Project Stakeholders

The main stakeholder of the project at the central level was the Ministry of Land Reform and Management (MoLRM) which functioned as the lead ministry. Additionally, the technical ministries like Ministry of Agricultural Development (MoAD), Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation (MoFSC), Ministry of Population and Environment (MoPE) and at later stage the Ministry of Livestock Development (MoLD) functioned as the line ministries and members of the project Steering Committee (PSC). The respective district line agencies (DLAs) of the technical ministries were designated as the district implementing partners (DIPs). In both the ministries and the districts focal point officers were designated to manage the field level implementation work at the district and central levels. The focal point at the centre was headed by a Joint Secretary in the MoLRM. A project Coordination Committee (PCC) with the project Management Unit (PMU) as its Secretariat was created and located at the project executing partner - the WWF, Nepal. The WWF, US through the WWF GEF Agency was the other key stakeholder as the project implementing partner that functioned as Agency Management Unit (AMU) in the US. The local government bodies especially the village development committee (VDC) and CBOs such as Community Forestry User Groups (CFUG) and the local people who actually carried out the work were other key stakeholders as the beneficiaries of the project results. Thus, the project was executed in joint collaboration with the five technical ministries by the WWF; Nepal based PMU staff, VDCs and CBOs.

2.3 Problems Being Addressed and Development Context

The prominent characteristics of the Chure range of Nepal, as described in the project documents, is it being structurally and geologically weak and brittle, hence highly prone to land degradation of different magnitude. The phenomena of land degradation has been further accelerated by i) haphazard, unsustainable and illegal harvest of timber, ii) uninterrupted encroachment on forest areas by communities, iii) unsustainable extraction of NTFPs, iv) the practice of slash and burn, v) over-grazing, and vi) Erosion and landslides. In addition, climate change is exacerbating and accelerating degradation of the Chure range. Land degradation and unsustainable use of natural resources have been recognized by the Government of Nepal (GoN) to be the serious threats to the ecosystem health of the Chure range as well as the livelihoods options of the local communities that rely on sustained flow of ecosystem goods and services. Thus, the resulting land degradation is continuously threatening lives and livelihoods of the local people across the region. To address the problems of land degradation by introducing innovative technologies and techniques, whose best practice models could be replicated to other areas, the Sustainable Land Management in the Chure Range project was in implementation from 01 Jan 2014 until 31 May 2017. The project activities were implemented in four pilot districts falling in the Chure range, Viz. Makawanpur, Parsa, Bara and Rautahat.

Development context

The development goal or vision statement of the project was 'a Chure range with integrated, sustainable land management and functional ecosystem services that sustain its natural and human communities'. In line with the development goal, the project seeks to substantially reduce land degradation from human activities and vulnerability to climate change through improved and sustainable land and forest management practices in the Chure Range. Thus, the project's main thrust was on: addressing of forest, grazing and agricultural land degradation in the four pilot Chure Range districts of Makawanpur, Bara, Parsa and Rautahat by making a critical, incremental and complimentary contributions ensuring that land management on the Chure slopes as well as foothill plains (Bhawar zone) were done sustainably by practicing integrated and environment friendly agricultural and livestock management practices. The complementary thrust was engaging local forest dependent communities in forest and grazing land conservation by creating enabling environment for their participation and interdisciplinary collaboration among relevant district level line agencies for providing technical knowhow, financial incentives and administrative facilitation for achieving the singular goal of sustainable land use and management.

2.4 Project Objectives and Outcomes

As mentioned above, the main objective of the project was: **"**to substantially reduce degradation and maintain or improve conditions of agro-pastoral lands and Chure Sal and mixed forest areas in strategic project locations throughout the four pilots Chure Range districts". The project aims to: a) substantially reduce degradation in 2,500 ha of agro-pastoral lands and 5,000 ha of forests by 2016 through integrated land and watershed management work (IWM and ILM) in strategic locations.

The project made efforts to attain the objectives by: i) promoting sustainable agricultural and livestock management practices; ii) engaging local communities in forest conservation; and iii) creating enabling conditions for inter-sectoral collaboration for sustainable land use and management.

The day-to-day management of the project was the responsibility of the PMU that liaised with the four district implementation partners (DIPs) related to the 4 technical ministries participating in the project. The PMU implemented a number of innovative techniques and practices in promoting sustainable agro-pastoral systems and community participated in forest management in the four districts. Further, technologies and techniques included

Sloping Land Agriculture Technology (SALT) to reduce soil erosion, construction of plastic ponds for storing run-off water for irrigation and decrease climate vulnerability and stress.

Analysis of Results Framework (RF), Monitoring Matrix (MM), project logic, strategies:

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The Results Framework (RF) for the SLMNP titled: Sustainable Management for Improved Flows of Agro-ecosystem Services is presented under Appendix 3 of the project document. An analysis of the RF conveys that the project aims to contribute to SLM through inter-sectoral and integrated landscape management approach and efforts to achieve interlinked results by supporting creation of enabling policies, legal frameworks and administrative mechanism based on Nepal's Forest Policy (1988, 2000, and 2015) and Forest/Community Forest Regulations 1993 that have been recently revised to make them compatible with the Forest Policy, 2015. Besides sustainable land management in Chure has to also follow the Chure Strategy, 2013 of the MoFSC that has to ensure the consideration of necessary social and environmental safeguards.

2.5 Pre- Project Situation in the Project Areas

The project prepared the baseline data using the GIS database on SLM for the pilot districts. These included thematic and land-cover maps and baseline database of the villages to be covered by the project. The development of this database has enabled the project to assess the extent of desertification at the pilot sites. Also, as the GIS mapping and ground truthing was conducted with the help of community activists and IP staff thus building capacity of the local on base line data preparation.

Land degradation and the unsustainable use of natural resources are the serious threats to the ecosystem health of the Chure Range as well as the livelihoods of the local communities who rely on a sustained flow of ecosystem goods and services. The National Land Use Policy seeks to classify and manage land for optimum long term use. However, the policy is facing difficult to be implemented due to lack of political will, local leadership and most important of all lack of alternative livelihoods. There are also conflicting policies and complex tenure issues in the Chure Range. As a result, the Chure Range has become an open access resources requiring collective action based conservation by local stakeholders since the command-and-control system of the government agencies has not been effective in controlling degradation of land and ecosystems. The President Chure Conservation Program (PCCP), 2011 is being implemented in 26 districts of the 33 Chure Range districts by the MoFSC, addressing four issues: sustainable development, conservation, livelihoods, and ecosystem maintenance. Both the National Land Use Policy and the President Chure Conservation Program prioritize sustainable natural resource management, but are without the necessary financial and institutional capacity to support or achieve successful implementation.

Additionally, two donor-funded projects: the Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) Program and Hariyo Ban are also addressing environmental conservation issues in the Chure Range. While the TAL Program aims to conserve the biodiversity, forests, soils and watersheds of the Chure Range to ensure ecosystem integrity and habitat improvement for the wildlife of the region, the Hariyo Ban Program complements activities in the TAL by restoring and conserving forests, as well as helping to build resilience to climate change in communities and ecosystems.

These baseline activities are not able to address the underlying drivers causing land degradation in Chure due to two critical issues. The first baseline problem is the scattered, fragmented and un-coordinated interventions characterized by duplication and ad-hocism. The State's inability to address the food security and land tenure issues of the local communities is causing further degradation. Currently, there are donor-funded programs addressing biodiversity and landscape conservation in the western Chure Range. However, these programs neglect to address the severely degraded forests and agricultural lands in the central and eastern Chure Range including the districts of Rautahat, Bara, Parsa, and Makwanpur. Thus, there is a significant spatial as well as knowledge

gap in the central and eastern Chure Range communities, specifically concerning the ability to sustainably manage their natural resources.

The second baseline problem is the lack of capacity and technical and financial resources for government initiatives that prevent the NLUP and the PCCP from having any sustainable success. Both of these government initiatives were enacted before the SLMCRNP was launched. The donor funded programs: TAL and Hariyo Ban planned small number of scattered activities in the project districts.

Therefore the baseline situation clearly indicated the need to improve the conceptual understanding of the problem, implement integrated and coordinated activities and address the larger issue of land tenure to achieve sustainable flow of ecosystem goods and services to local communities. The long-term conservation of the Chure Range requires first the entire hilly slopes to be conserved with or without the people living there and secured from degradation. If the deforestation and land degradation in the Hills is not drastically reduced immediately lives and livelihoods of entire Terai plain will be threatened, in turn the biodiversity and ecosystems will be lost. Therefore, there was a strong rationale for launching an integrated and interdisciplinary project in Chure range to prevent land degradation and unsustainable uses.

2.6 Project Outputs and Outcomes (expected results)

The project planned four major components and five outcomes as shown in the Table 4 below in order to achieve the project objective:

Table 4. Project components, outcomes and indicators

Component no. and topic	Outcome and indicators
1. Sustainable management for improved flows of agro-ecosystem services.	Outcome 1.1 - Improved agricultural management through innovative pilot practices introduced at the field level that reduce erosion and climate vulnerability across 1,000 hectares (ha) with 4 outputs level indicators.
	Outcome 1.2 - Improved land management across 1,500 hectares (ha) through an enhanced enabling environment within the agricultural sector with 6 outputs level indicators.
2. Integrated landscape management in forested areas.	Outcome 2.1 - Integrated landscape management practices adopted by local communities in 5,000 hectares (ha) of forested areas within the four pilot Chure districts with 5 outputs level indicators.
3. Cross-sector coordination and local community engagement	Outcome 3.1 - Enhanced cross-sector enabling environment for integrated landscape management with 6 outputs.
4. Monitoring and Evaluation	Participatory monitoring and evaluation

3. Evaluation Findings

The Terminal Evaluation (TE) was conducted with an open, independent, in-depth and critical mind in reviewing of the progress reported during the entire duration of the project (Jan. 2014- May, 2017). The information and insights on which the review was based primarily on project documents, response to the evaluation questions by key informants, observation of the select interventions in the 4 VDCs of the 4 project districts. The TE team held interactions with key informants and conducted focused group discussions (FGD) with activity participants, focal points and head of the District Line Agencies (DLAs), CFUG leaders, project beneficiaries, selected PCC and PSC members and concerned WWF-Nepal based project management unit (PMU) staff. The list of documents and literature reviewed are provided in Annex 5. The consultant team closely liaised with the PMU and the WWF GEF Agency (AMU) in planning and conducting field visits and obtaining long list of people to be

contacted and any other additional queries for conducting the evaluation. The review process followed the TOR provided by the WWF GEF agency (Annex 1).

The presentation of the overall findings is based on the GEF's evaluation criteria: Relevance, Quality of Design, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Impacts/Results, Sustainability and Adaptive Management.

3.1 Project Design/Formulation

Assessment of the performance as per Results Framework (Project logic/strategies/Indicators)

The objective of the SLMCRN project was to improve land management practices in at least 2,500 ha of agro-pastoral lands and 5,000 ha of Churia range Bhawar sal and mixed forest ecosystems in strategic locations of the 4 pilot districts of Bara, Parsa, Rautahat and Makwanpur by creating an enabling condition for enhanced community participation and alternate livelihood improvement. This would eventually arrest soil erosion and fertility degradation and maintain and/or improve environment conditions in Churia range landscape that is an important habitat for wildlife also.

A review of the SLMCRN project document and communication between the WWF and GEF indicate that due to the increasing trends of land degradation in Chure Range, the GoN first expressed its interest to the GEF and the WWF GEF Agency help address the persistent problem of land degradation in Chure Region. The project was then designed as a pilot project by the WWF GEF Agency with support from the WWF, Nepal taking into account of the national priority and planning process of the Govt. of Nepal as well as project's relevance of the project to the GEF. One of the key assumptions made with respect to how the project design and interventions will ultimately impact the direct threats of Chure land degradation was that Project had to respond well to the long standing demands of the district level stakeholders. The project was therefore, designed in close consultation with concerned line ministries that included the ministries of land reform and management, forestry and soil conservation, agriculture development, and science and environment (MoLRM, MoFSC, MOAD and MoSTE (now MoPE) respectively). While the representatives from the MoLRM, MoAD, MoSTE, and the MoFSC were more involved in the design of the institutional arrangements, the overall content of the initial draft project document was prepared by the GEF Agency and the WWF-Nepal in consultation with the concerned ministries. Thereafter, it was critically reviewed by the stakeholders in a series of stakeholders' consultation at center, district and sub-district level meetings. The key stakeholders involved in the process were selected based on their having adequate knowledge of local contexts and therefore include the heads and/or representatives of the ministries, DDC, DSCO, DADO, DFO, DLO, District Land Survey, and relevant NGOs and CBOs including chairperson of the CFUGs, BZUGs, BZMCs and members from the selected VDCs for piloting of the project activities.

The reviewers have analyzed the project design by dividing it into two parts: 1) Program or content; and 2) Institutional arrangements. The reviewers find that the content – the substantive elements of the program - is based on the expressed needs and aspirations of the people and stakeholders in Churia range. However, the institutional arrangements are found somewhat incompatible with the tasks laid down in the design. The institutional arrangements should have been ideally based on organization's mandate and core competence. Evaluation team feels that the institutional framework designed might not have taken the full views of some of key national stakeholders in Churia such as the President's Chure Conservation Program (PCCP), concerned district line agencies, key national land related federations such as FECOFUN and others. If these important organizations' views were not adequately considered, there is likelihood of them not fully participating and facilitating the project. The evaluators feel that the active and meaningful participation of the heads of the district implementation partners (DIPs) is critical for the success of the project especially to achieve good coordination among the District line agencies (DLAs) as well as in priority setting on activities that met the livelihood needs of the people practicing unsustainable management.

The institutional arrangements also seem to have faced the problem from the very beginning. Perhaps the institutional arrangement was decided first and the content design of the project followed later. This is because the activities and deliverables assigned to the DIPs in the annual work plan and budget do not seem to match their respective mandates. The DLAs consulted by the reviewers were mostly unaware of Project's Results Framework (RF) and the Logical Matrix (LM). As some of them recall when they were assigned the tasks to be delivered by the PMU, they had expressed their concerns regarding the top- down nature of the project planning approach. They had also indicated that other than the output level indicators to be met in 3 years, they would be unable to contribute to the outcome as a whole. Therefore, the evaluators' conclude that the design aspect of the project had some inherent problems.

Rating: Moderately satisfactory

3.1.1 Analysis of results framework

Result Framework had described the logical sequence of inputs-outputs-outcome-impact chain to some extent. But, the sequence was clear only up to the output level but not to the activity level resulting in the above described duplications. The TE team believes that a simple, appropriate and standard logical sequence linking the project goal, objective, outcome, outputs to activity levels would have been better to implement, monitor (or track) and evaluate the project in a relatively straight forward manner. The consultants feel that the indicators of Result Framework could be made more SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant/realistic and tractable) although the team does realize that as such also given outputs and outcomes are measurable and achievable. It is felt that the RF was not reviewed and reflected regularly by the all executing partners at the district level and revised incorporating the required changes and new challenges as well as opportunities so as to keep the project on track toward achieving the anticipated outputs and outcomes including accountability of the district level institutions for the project intervention. The consultant also found too many physical or quantitative indicators and too few socio-economic and qualitative indicators.

The Result Framework of the project conveys the overall goal and objective of the project that are to be achieved by implementing the planned interventions in agriculture, livestock, forestry, soil and water conservation and land use policy implementation areas under the three major project components summarized below:
A critical review of the Logical Matrix (LM) and Results Framework (RF) of the project makes it obvious that the project is overly output focused with not much emphasis on outcome and impact. In fact, the four Project Outcomes have 21 outputs (targets or activities). The project is ambitious in setting numerous physical targets to be achieved during a short period of three year period – extended by another six months. A total of 21 outputs were to be achieved across many strategic locations – often poorly accessible due to non-existence of bad roads – across four districts. The scattered nature of activity locations is one of the short-comings in the project design. In terms of the five (5) outcomes the project set out to achieve, the four are largely distinctive of each other and most of the indicators provided in the log frame are quantifiable and verifiable. However, outcome 1.1 and 1.2 under the component 1 has cumulative indicators to be demonstrated through outputs 1.1.1 and 1.1.2. The output 1.2.6 has no indicator and the target indicators within Component 3 are disaggregated by social and gender class. Also most of the indicators are kept in cumulative number under the general topic of sustainable land improvement, which is proving difficult to monitor.

The RF has not clearly identified and designated a particular DIP responsible to carry out a particular activity so as to be able to assign and assess the outputs produced by each DIP in each field site. The consequences are the duplication of activities conducted by the district implementing parts (DIPs) as similar outputs are produced by different DIPs or even worse similar activities are being carried out under both GoN funded program such as PCCP and other donor funded projects being implemented by the same executing partner. As an example WWF,

Nepal has three donor funded projects working in the same districts. They are: Hariyo Ban, Tarai Arc Landscape and SLMCRN projects. These duplications and discrepancies in the production of outputs make it difficult to relate to the inputs-outputs described in the LM. The RF also does not distinguish cumulative and disaggregated indicators creating difficulty to evaluate which activities were achieved and which were not achieved.

Rating: Moderately Satisfactory

3.1.2 Assumptions and Risks

The project logic matrix in the RF provides OVI, MoV but does not show any assumptions and risks although they are provided elsewhere in the project document. Perhaps this has diluted the importance of assumptions in the project planning and management as the project districts were experiencing politically volatile situations prior to and during the implementation phase of the project. The explicit presence in the RF would have better prepared the PMU to deal with the conditions especially the issue of mobility restrictions. For example, the Prodoc could have included a Risk Management plan indicating the possibility of activating B plan under which the PMU could have recruited more Local Resources Persons (LRPs) as has been done under the WWF, Nepal implemented Hariyo Ban project thus avoiding the need to bring the livestock and veterinary experts from the district headquarters of three Tarai districts. Assumptions and Risks are necessary in the RF developed for conservation and development projects such as SLMCRN to support the cause and effect linkages between activities performed to outcomes accomplished for better achieving project objectives. Clear establishment of cause and effect link is the core concept of good project design. Although the risk and assumption are beyond the control of project team and are external in nature of the logical framing, yet a foresight planning based risk management strategy improves adaptive management. During the implementation of the project, a number of political strikes, bands, political rallies, Nepal earthquake, and frequent transfer of government staff (causing loss of institutional memories and affecting continuity in implementation momentum) occurred in the project districts. These are generally expected but not adequately anticipated risks every project faces but can be managed if a proper Risk Management Plan (RMP) is in place. The team did not find any plan of this nature existing in the project. The RMP could guide the PMU on ensuring sufficient and necessary conditions required to meet the project objectives and deadlines. In general, the rule is lesser number of the assumptions, stronger the project design. But not having any assumptions and risks also mean poor design. The consultant team could not discern this aspect well recognized in the result framework of the project.

Rating: Moderately Satisfactory

3.1.3 Lessons from other relevant projects

Lessons from past and present WWF affiliated projects

Most relevant district level plans and programs that are being implemented under other government and donor funding schemes in the four project districts on similar issues and the topics as the SMLNCRN is dealing with are the programs being run under the President's Churia range Conservation Program (PCCP); WWF, Nepal run Tarai Arc Landscape (TAL) and the Hariyo Ban (HB) programs. GON's regular programs run through DLAs especially DSCOs, DLSOs, DADOs, and DFOs. Among them the most relevant lessons relevant for this project are those from the WTCLP. The two key lessons drawn from the WTCLP which has been well documented (UNDP, 2012) clearly are: a) "The landscape approach is more than the WTLCP". Under this, the key lessons is that all the individual activities (field level demonstration, tools, capacity building events and policy products) need to be planned and implemented as a program not as an individual project if the aim is to impact at landscape level on a sustainable basis. Here, the lesson learnt by the MoFSC according to the terminal report of the WPCLP is that the concerned ministry/ministries should pilot the `whole system' not individual project. The SLMCRN is

an attempt in this direction although not a perfect one; and b) the second lesson drawn from the WTCLP is the "direct payments make excellent incentives to achieve conservation goals". The SLMP has piloted a number of incentive activities in which local user groups and other members of the villages or communities are participating and getting benefitted. In this regard, if the lessons learned from the WTLCP's incentive programs are to be implemented then the payment or financial reward should be linked to production of conservation outcomes such as ` demonstration of certain agreed behaviors while participating in conservation work' work more effectively. For example, in the WTCLP, for achieving the outcome of the maintenance of the wildlife friendly habitat through reduced forest clearance or reduced grazing or reduced poaching of key species through increased vigilance, no payments were made if any of these activities occurred. In the SLMCR also, open free grazing behavior change is being linked with the project provided incentives such as improved animal breed, grass and fodder seeds and seedlings, veterinary including AI services, animal shed improvement and other income generating opportunities. This type of learning from WTCLP and other projects such as HB and TAL, future SLM types of projects has helped the project design incentive schemes that are helping in mainstreaming projects by establishing linkages between the reward and conservation and/or behavior change related outcome. In future, to ensure that outcomes are achieved, local user groups should be directly provided the cash or in-kind support.

3.1.4 Lessons from the Govt. of Nepal funded projects

The SLM project is providing incentives through district line agencies. This has caused delays, extra costs for participating groups, relatively high transaction costs – made worse due to repeated transport strikes and office closures. This is because many of the DIPs feel that this is a donor supported project and therefore an extra work for them. Perhaps this is the reason a number of DIPs to pay for their service in the form of cost recovery, fee/commission (charged by some of the DIPs). This should not be the case however, as the GEF project is an incremental project co-financed by the Govt. of Nepal's participating ministries. Therefore, the TE concludes that the project should have made arrangements to directly pay the beneficiary communities with the project inputs during (cash or kind) and after (ensured ecosystem goods and services) satisfactory production of outputs in installment. This would have acted as a strong incentive for outcome oriented changes such as change in knowledge, attitude, practice, skills, behavior and awareness among the CFUGs for ensuring output and outcome achievement and continued provision of both the agency and ecosystem delivered goods and services.

In Churia range, the problem of land degradation is chronic, complex and poverty or livelihood need driven. Therefore, achieving sustainable land management (SLM) in Churia range in its entirety needs integrated, cross-scale and multi-stakeholder approach. Considering the nature of complexities of the multifaceted problems, it is almost impossible to address such complex problems by the efforts of a single agency or project effectively at all levels. However, SLMP as a pilot project has made concerted efforts during the last 3 years by piloting the a large number of management strategies in the 4 Churia range region districts through both inter and multi-disciplinary approaches so as to contain the process of land degradation. The SLMP in this respect has indeed proven to be an innovative project moving in the mainstreaming direction. The experience and lessons learned from 4 pilot districts in improving the management strategy for degraded agro-pastoral and forest land. However, achieving a truly SLM in forest and agriculture land across the Churia range need to be well planned through documentation of best practices generated by the SLMP and establishment of a strong Knowledge Management group within the WWF so that other government, NGO, INGO and other partners working in the area of agriculture, forestry, soil conservation and livelihoods improvement projects in Churia range Region could integrate and replicate SLMP concepts and strategies into their work on ground.

Rating: Highly Satisfactory

3.1.5 Planned Stakeholders Participation

A wide range of stakeholders are participating in the management and implementation of SLMP. At central level, they included relevant ministries namely MoLRM, MoAD, MoFSC, MoPE and MOLD. At the district level, district government line agencies (DLA) namely DoF, DoA, DLS, DSCO are actively involved in the SLMP. Similarly, at local level, local communities like farmers, livestock herders, forest and buffer-zone communities and community organizations are the key stakeholders and beneficiaries of the SLMP. Enabling regular and active participation of Center and District level stakeholders is one of the key achievements of the project. Central level stakeholders jointly contributed in decision making process in ensuring co-financing from the government budget and providing guidelines and technical support to their respective DLA for carrying out the SLMP interventions in the project districts. The PCC had been a crucial platform for maintaining coordination and encouraging participation among central level stakeholders in project management particularly in planning, implementation and resolving key issues of the SLMP. At district level, the local level stakeholders participated in implementing the SLMP by sharing either some cost or providing labor contribution to carry out the activities jointly. Such local participation by labor contribution were well illustrated by local farmers by providing labor contribution in stone collection, transportation, loading and unloading and site clearance for the construction of Gabion wire Dyke/Embankment in Makwanpur and Rautahat districts.

The SLMCRN project is the first pilot project implemented by the WWF GEF Agency. WWF especially WWF, Nepal has distinct comparative and complimentary advantage in implementing this project due to several factors: a) It has been working in Tarai and Churia range for many years and currently has two projects: Hariyo Ban and the Tarai Arc Landscape (TAL). Both of these projects include all the 4 districts covered by the SLMCRN project; b) since this project aims to simultaneously contribute to all the three Rio conventions, WWF with its environment related conventions

DLA participation, contribution and interaction in district level PCC meeting, monthly, quarterly and annual review meetings and the timely completion of their responsibility to accomplish the assigned interventions of the project were mostly at the level of the focal points. The TE team feels that the stakeholders' participation as envisaged by the project has been achieved since active participations of stakeholders had taken place at the community and project execution processes. The planned participation of district level stakeholders in the implementation of SLMP is also satisfactory.

Rating: Highly successful

3.1.6 Up-scaling and replication approach

The involvement of beneficiary local communities and farmers from selection of activity to benefit sharing is commendable. It is observed that selected CFUGs, water users and women's groups are actively and meaningfully participating in the activities. For example, the leadership, energy, enthusiasm and above all the dedication with which the Chair of the Pashupati CFUG, Ratanpuri, Bara has made the afforestation work successful is an exemplary case of women's empowerment, awareness and capacity building and successful women's leadership. Under her tireless efforts, the CFUG has achieved successful afforestation that has high replication possibility. This is a good sign for future plans to replicate the project's wider best practices toward the goal of achieving sustainable forest management. Based on the team's intensive interactions with other community and farmers' groups involved in Sal Leaf plate making, animal fodder development, milk production and marketing and biogas village; Most of the members involved in these activity groups are satisfied with their work and benefit received from the project in all the 4 pilot districts. The communities living outside the pilot VDCs are keen to start SLM work and expect the donor and government agencies involved to replicate the SLMP work into their communities

as well. The activities that are in high demand and also have high replication and up scaling opportunities are: Dyke/embankment construction, forest protection through fencing for natural regeneration, fodder tree plantation, cattle shade improvement, water source protection and plastic ponds. The outside communities feel that farmers participating in the SLMP have significantly benefited from the SLMP and therefore are willing to participate in the SLMP. Other communities outside the pilot sites expressed interest in learning from their peers some of the good practices. The TE team concludes that there is high potential for the replication and scaling-up of SLM was very high, and therefore rates the replication approach.

Rating: Moderately Satisfactory

3.1.6 WWF comparative advantage

WWF- Nepal key mission to SLMP was to reduce the degradation process of the Churia range natural environment and built sustainable communities live in harmony with natural environment. For the past several years, WWF has been implementing conservation and development programs in various parts of Nepal including the SLMP. WWF has extensive in house and field implementation experiences, it has technical and administrative capacity to handle and implement various large, medium and small projects like SLMP. Throughout the 3 years of SLMP, WWF–Nepal had maintained excellent working relationships with both the government partner ministries, departments, DLA and local communities. WWF Nepal has also been providing significant support to the Government of Nepal for policy related work. WWF Nepal represented the Steering Committee of the National Land Use Policy formulation team of the MoLRM and SLMP. Participation of WWF in SLMP has provided an excellent opportunity to engage with the government line ministries, departments and DLA to bring the policy changes envisioned under this project. WWF Nepal has always had a strong field presence, and has established excellent working relationship with the local communities and government. WWF Nepal is also supporting the GoN on policy development, including contributions to the National Land Use Plan, TAL Strategic Plan and implementation plan (2004 – 2014). The comparative advantage of WWF- Nepal rests in the extensive experience of years of field implementation.

The involvement of WWF- Nepal (including the Project Manager, Program Officer, Finance and Communication Officer, M/E Associate Officer of WWF-Nepal) in project implementation, supervision and monitoring were noted and have been very significant and useful. The Project manager and program officer of WWF-Nepal maintained a close and healthy relationship with the MoLRM, MoAD, MoFSC, MoPE and district government line agencies (DLA) namely DoF, DoA, DLS, DSCWM including the focal persons. The frequent visits of Program Officer and M/E Officer of WWF-Nepal to the 4 pilot districts, central level stakeholders, frequent briefing and sensitizing of SLMP to district government line agencies (DLA) and focal persons about the working modalities and fund flow mechanism, process of GEF investment, and acquiring investment to GEF, project interventions and enquiry on project progress and participation on PCC and DCC meetings were commendable. These activities maintained an excellent communication between WWF Nepal, WWF GEF Agency and government partners and communication gap were not existed. The WWF-Nepal also implicitly provided a monitoring role by visiting field and reviewing progress reports prepared by the DLAs. These reports were subsequently shared with the WWF and government partner ministries. In general, the evaluation team rated the WWF Comparative Advantage as excellent.

Rating: Highly Satisfactory

3.1.7 Linkages between project and other interventions within the sector

Governmental and non-governmental agencies in Nepal have been working to rehabilitate degraded lands of Churia range through various development interventions. The key ministries involved in this process are: MoFSC, MoAD, MOLD, MoLRM and MoPE.

The Government of Nepal's Ministry of Land Reform and Management (MoLRM) enacted a National Land Use Policy (NLUP) 2012 to address rapid land degradation across the country. The NLUP aims to classify and manage land for optimum long term use. Among other objectives, the policy seeks to identify and protect environmentally sensitive land, and discourage people from residing in areas prone to natural disasters. This was one of the reasons MoLRM was chosen to lead this project by the GoN.

In addition to the NLUP, the importance of the Churia Range was specifically acknowledged by the Government of Nepal with the formulation of the President's Churia Conservation Program (PCCP) in 2011. This program aims to stop further degradation of the environment in the Churia Range and ensure development of local communities. The Program is being implemented in 26 districts of the 33 Churia Range districts by the MoFSC. The Program addresses four sectors: sustainable development, conservation, livelihoods, and ecosystem maintenance.

The Tarai Arc Landscape (TAL) Strategic Plan, Nepal (2004-2014) also identified the importance of watershed conservation in the Churia Range, and recognizes several drivers of land degradation, with possible mitigating strategies. The primary strategy for forest restoration has been through community-based programs such as community, collaborative, and leasehold forestry, which provides the local communities with usufruct and management rights.

Among all the above described initiatives, the PCCP is most relevant to eh SLM project as it addresses four development sectors: Sustainable development, Conservation, Livelihoods, and Ecosystem Maintenance – all important aspects of SLM. Both the NLUP and the PCCP strategies have prioritized sustainable and integrated management of natural resources in Churia. The Chure Conservation Strategy (MoFSC, 2012), National Biodiversity Strategy (MoFSC, 2014), Tarai Arc Landscape (TAL) project documents have identified the importance of Churia range watershed and several drivers responsible for land degradation and their mitigation strategies. These key documents have presented the strategic framework for Churia range conservation with goals, objectives and implementation plan. These initiatives have emphasized the need for rehabilitation of degraded forests, environmental conservation and conservation of soil and forests through integrated soil and watershed management, livelihood based conservation and management of forest ecosystem and biodiversity. The overall approach is that livelihood improvement of poor and marginalized groups in Churia range will incentivize the participation of local communities in forest and biodiversity conservation.

The NLUP seeks to classify and manage land for optimum long term use. One of the major justifications for initiating the SLMP is to pilot this pioneer policy. The goal, objective, strategies and the activities fewer than 3 components of SLMP were closely aligned with the interventions that are being carried out by the PCCP's Churia Conservation Strategy, 2012. Therefore, the SLMP strategically links with major interventions of the Govt. of Nepal focused on the Churia range. The evaluation team finds good linkages between the project and other interventions.

Rating: Satisfactory

3.1.8. Alignment with GEF and WWF priorities

The three-year GEF Medium Sized Project main goal was to substantially reduce degradation in 2,500 ha of agro-pastoral lands and 5,000 ha of forests through integrated land and watershed management working in the strategic

locations of 4 Churia pilot districts. The objective of the project was to substantially reduce degradation and maintain or improve conditions of agro-pastoral lands and Churia Sal and mixed forest areas in strategic project locations throughout the four pilots Churia Range districts". The objective was to achieve by: a) promoting sustainable agricultural and livestock management practices; b) engaging local communities in forest conservation; and c) creating the enabling conditions for inter-sector coordination and collaboration for sustainable land use and management.

The SLM pilot project is found to closely align with the GEF Land Degradation focal areas especially to objectives Nos. 1 and 3. The GEF LD Strategic Objective 1 and 3 respectively intends to: m*aintain or improve flows of agro-ecosystem services to sustain livelihoods of local communities*, and *reduce pressures on natural resources from competing land uses in the wider landscape*. The SLMP goal and objective and the components designed to achieve these goals closely align with the two GEF LD strategic objectives. The project components as already described covered sustainable agricultural and livestock management, participatory forest conservation and inter-sector collaboration for sustainable land use and management. The various technical interventions launched to reduce soil erosion, improve water sources for drinking and irrigation, restoration of degraded forest land through plantation and protection, programs to achieve outcomes such as improved community livelihoods and address climate vulnerability and stress were in line with GEF land degradation strategies.

In addition, the GEF envisaged to address relevant policy gaps to provide secure land tenure, improve land use planning, develop better inter-sector coordination, institutionalization and institutional capacity building were all in line with the SLMP strategies. The Program Management Standards and Participatory M&E framework of WWF – Nepal, have been employed throughout the SLMP project life cycle. Utilizing experiences and lessons learnt from the past and ongoing programs such as WWF Eastern Himalayas program, the WWF Tarai Arc Landscape Program, and the WWF Hariyo Ban Program on adaptive management, feedback mechanisms at different implementation levels and sustainable forest resource management and agro-pastoral practices were in-built while designing the SLMP project. Based on this background, the consultant team believes that the alignment with GEF and WWF priorities in SLMP is highly relevant.

Rating: Highly satisfactory

3.1.9 Project Management Arrangements

Project management arrangement like provisioned of focal person and establishment of PMU, PSC, and PCC and conducting monthly meetings, Quarterly and Annual review meetings at the district level combined with monitoring visits were professional steps required in modern day project management. These arrangements were significant in terms of addressing the coordination gaps among DLAs in the districts. The quarterly and annual reporting and sharing meetings organized by the PMU together with the PCC and PSC meetings were noteworthy. Such meetings were used to share the reports and allow reflections on the project's successes, failures, and challenges faced and lessons learned. These types of regular interactions allowed analyzing the progress and lack of it from different perspectives and planning adaptive management that can help address specific concerns of the stakeholders about lack of progress. This also helped identify and address challenges faced by the DLAs and focal persons in a timely manner.

Regular monitoring visits by the PCC members and supervision mission from the WWF GEF Agencies were also well planned and organized. However, the recommendations made in the PRISM report such as `improving priority/capacity of DLAs and improving access to markets were not well captured and followed-up. It was informed by the DLA that the Agreements signed between GEF and WWF and between WWF and the co-executing agencies were not made available to them. The consultant team feels that at least the non-confidential

part of the agreement between GEF Agency and the Govt. of Nepal as well as the project document should have been made available to each of the DLAs involved in executing the project activity. This way, they could have better mainstreamed the project activities in their respective annual program and progress reported as a part of the annual report on project tracking.

Rating: Moderately Satisfactory

3.1.10 Country ownership

In the process of selecting SLMP pilot districts in Churia range, central level stakeholders namely MoLRM, MoAD, MoFSC, MoPE and at district level district government line agencies (DLA) namely DoF, DOA, DLS, DSCWM were generous and actively participated in the process. During implementation of SLMP, there was full involvement of district and central level stakeholders from beginning to end of the project. There were regular project steering committee meetings, PCC meetings, other informal and formal meetings at center and districts. District government line agencies were actively involved and participated in these meetings and gave their project related feedback to the management and decision makers. DLA frequent visits in the project intervened areas and interactions with local stakeholders were praiseworthy despite their additional workload and responsibilities in the office. Designation of government focal persons in DLA particularly for SLMP reflects the ownership of government in the project. Reflection of land degradation issues of Churia range in country relevant policies and programs were also the indicators for country ownership in SLMP.

The alarming degradation of Churia watershed due to forest degradation, deforestation and open grazing has been recognized as the national problem. Therefore, the rationale and need for sustainable land management (SLM) in Churia range is very high indeed. Among the key drivers responsible for land degradation is unsustainable land use cover and land use change and Churia range were assessed by government. A wide range of drivers have been acting in clearing of forests for timber and domestic firewood, causing frequent forest fires, continuing overgrazing, forest encroachment, and sand and stone (aggregates) mining, unsustainable agricultural practices and illegal human settlement. These drivers still existed and continue to exist in Churia range districts, the consequences of which are land degradation that have resulted in river flooding, soil erosion, loss of water sources, scarcity of drinking and irrigating water, loss in forest and biodiversity, loss in productivity, increased poverty. These negative impacts of land degradation in Churia range were not only the concerns of Government of Nepal but to neighboring country and global organization partnering with GoN in development.

Realizing the acute problems of land degradation in Churia range, SLMP has been implemented by GoN in partnership with GEF and WWF in four districts of Churia range as a 3 year pilot project. As mentioned by the central and district level stakeholders, GoN had taken full ownership of SLMP. They also mentioned that the relevant national policies, programs and projects of the country has also given high priority to land degradation issues and importance of sustainable land management for food security and sustainable development of Churia range. Overall, various events as described above led the evaluation team to believe that the country ownership of the SLMCRN project was strong.
Rating: Satisfactory

Overall output and outcome progress assessment: Table 5 below provides a summary assessment of the output and outcome progress under the 4 components of the Project. The aim of the table is to show the links between outputs and outcomes.

Table 5: Evaluation Ratings of Project Outputs and Outcomes

Component	Output progress	Outcome progress	Rating
1.1	Output progress is more than 90%; the project significantly reduces soil erosion and climate vulnerability in 1000 ha of agro-pastoral land by bringing them under SLM practices.	*Under outcome 1.1* the project was expected to significantly reduce soil erosion and climate vulnerability in 1000 ha of agro-pastoral land by bringing them under SLM practices. This outcome achievement is weak since activities such as SALT and Zero tillage practices lacked strong evidence of financial attraction although others such as tunnel farming showed success. Lack of institutional fit and trained human resources are attributed to poor performance;	*Moderately Satisfactory*
1.2	The output progress was slow as it depended on the creation of an enabling environment for gradually wean away traditional pastoralists from open grazing culture to controlled grazing land management of pastoral and river affected agriculture lands.	*The outcome 1.2* was creating enabling environment for improved management of pastoral and river affected agriculture lands. Through intensive awareness raising, community mobilization, provision of alternate livelihoods, the achievement of this outcome is near successful as the river damaged lands have been restored to agriculture use and more than 8900 ha of community managed forests are ready for declaring OGFZ. Similarly by training both CFUG and DFO crew on fire management, hazard mapping and DRR, vulnerability of the areas has been reduced.	*Satisfactory*
2.1	Under this component, 5000 ha of forest land was put under integrated landscape management practice by addressing the underlying drivers of forest degradation in Churia range. An integrated livelihood improvement and forest conservation programs was launched. such as forest regeneration, livestock development, clean energy options and NTFP based enterprise. 12 CFUGs are sustainably managing about 3,500 of forest land.	*Under outcome 2.1*, 5000 ha of forest land was to be put under integrated landscape management by addressing the underlying drivers of forest degradation in Churia range. By launching integrated livelihood improvement and forest conservation programs such as forest regeneration, livestock development (milk and meat production), clean energy, and NTFPs marketing etc. The cumulative result is empowered 12 CFUGs sustainably managing about 3,500 of forest land.	*Highly Satisfactory*
3.1	The output progress is putting in place a cross-sector coordination and community engagement mechanism for implementing integrated landscape management. The main outputs included the implementation of the national Land Use Policy, 2012 through the collaboration of all land-based ministries in piloting	*The outcome 3.1* aimed to result in an enabling environment that can enhance cross-sector coordination and community engagement for integrated landscape management. The main activities included the implementation of the national Land Use Policy, 2012. This required the collaboration of all land-based ministries in piloting the LUP in all the project districts triggering scaling out. However, beyond some outputs such as workshops and meetings, this outcome remained unfulfilled. However, given strong creation of success of integrated approach such the one seen in Nirmal basti between DLSO, PWR and DSCO, potential for implementation does exist.	*Moderately Unsatisfactory*

	the LUP in all the project districts. However, outputs were limited to workshops and meetings.		
4.1	The output progress is full achievement of participatory M&E. The targets set are fully achieved maintaining quality and regularity. The M&E team used the Project Logical Framework and Results framework implemented diligently. Despite large number of indicators, the team did manage to practice adaptive management and reporting.	*The Outcome 4.1* of achieving participatory M&E is achieved. The M&E team used the Project Logical Framework and Results framework implemented diligently. Despite large number of indicators, the team did manage to practice adaptive management and reporting.	*Highly Satisfactory*

3.2 Project Implementation

Overall responsibility for the project implementation rested with the WWG GEF Agency or the AMU based in Washington, DC. The WWF, Nepal together with the four technical ministry of the Govt. of Nepal executed the project through WWF, Nepal based Project Management Unit (PMU). The PMU prepared the annual plan, program and budget and the PSC approved them. The actual field level activities were carried out by the community forest user groups (CFUGs), Women's groups, forest based enterprise groups, CBOs, consultants under the guidance and supervision of focal persons in the DIPs and the PMU staff. A number of good and not-so-good practices were analyzed:

The good practices generated by the project were a) empowering nature of community mobilization and beneficiary participation in the project activities; b) excellent development women's leadership in conservation (see box 1), c) a good communication between PMU and stakeholders in the districts through the focal points; and d) excellent monitoring and documentation of the project activities by the PMU including the regular monitoring of the project activities.

At the field level, the fencing of the degraded forest area designated for regeneration allowed quick establishment of natural forest and grass species faster than the replanting with nursery grown seedlings. Water source protection and utilization of run off and river water by developing plastic layered storage ponds supplied water for irrigation and drinking purposes. Similarly, installing micro irrigation technologies (MIT) such as drip irrigation, setting-up a model bio-gas village, and were innovative and people friendly activities.

Agriculture, forest and pastoral land based livelihood enhancing activities such as introduction of commercial vegetable farming, milk production and marketing by setting up chilling centers, leaf plate making enterprise for women, and improved marketing of other NTFPs are the successful activities of the SLMCRN. In general, the dairy and livestock development activities are successful income generating activities (IGAs) since these start giving income to the communities in a short term and are also replicated easily showing high potential for scaling up and scaling out.

Box 1: Women's empowerment for successful Forest protection in Chure:

Menuka, Chair of the Pashupati Community Forestry User Group, Ratanpuri: A proud women who has made successful reforestation her mission proudly narrates her story in the following manner to a project staff: "asked as to what percentage of plantation she has protected? she quips: don't know how to put in percentage but we protected lot of plants; this is the reason you see them so dense; she goes on "to protect these plants we faced all kinds of difficulties; many people abused us; many threatened our lives; this is the fruit of our tireless efforts; plants kept on growing in the reforested areas; together with them natural regeneration also thrived; she also proudly says; we could succeed in protecting plantation only on third attempt and proclaims: people who raise cattle now should not even think of leaving their cattle to do open free grazing as before in our forest..". She also freely shared her advice to the project: "for long term protection of Chure, free grazing should be completely banned; improved breeds of cattle should be distributed; artificial insemination and cattle shed improvement programs should also be given to us"

Box 2: Participatory Integrated Watershed Management: taming of wild chure rivers:

Every year farmers living in both sides of the Masine Khola in the Handikhoal VDC in Makwapur have been losing their valuable farm land, livelihoods and property caused by flash floods orginating in Chure hills. After the SLMCRN project in collaboration with the district soil conservation office (DSCO) started building gabion box embankments many farmers under the Masine Shanti Buffer Zone User Committee, have started rehabilitating and restoring their degraded farm lands. The project team has so far built 200 m of gabon wall protecting farm lands on one sdie of the river. However, as is the nature of flash flood water it has shifts course to other side where it finds soft spots. While farmers such as Sadhuram Bist is happy that he has recoved much of his lost farm land, farmers on the other side are fearing damage and many other farmers both upstream and down stream are demanding more gabion walls. The long-term solution to this perenial and widespread problem is in planning participatory integrated watershed management (PIWM) which requires that the entire upstream and downstream river watershed community and the project/government staff jointly identify the problems, decide on the scope and types of interventions considering social, economic, environmental, hydrological and cultural factors. The activites are implementated in an integrated manner by bringing experts from different disciplinesand meeting multiple objectives of ensuing security of ecology, livelihood, food, water and energy in a sustainable and holisitc manner.

The bio-engineering based gabion embankment and dykes have been very effective and efficient endeavors to halt land degradation and recovery of agriculture land destroyed by river flooding and siltation. Communities have taken full ownership of these activities for maintenance and follow up through their own efforts (see Box 2):

Livestock shed improvement activities and establishment of Milk cooperatives by providing chilling vats were found highly popular activities as these provided incentives to the livestock farmers to participate in the open free grazing initiative of the project. This has also helped reduce the incidence of animal diseases and raise their income substantially. Other activities like installation of bio-gas and solar units, drip irrigation facilities, multiple cropping among others were fruitful to the communities, although they were implemented in a small scale basis.

Integrated approaches –both intra and inter sector- was working well. The DLSOs, DSCOs and DFOs in all project districts have run integrated approaches in restoring and rehabilitating forest, agriculture and pasture land management, which were instrumental for meeting the project targets. These activities were integrated demonstrating the effectiveness of the bottom-up planning success.

Consequently there were high local ownership, demand and co-financing by the regular budget of the MOLD. This is an ideal approach that meets the SLMNRN objective and vision. However, TE team has identified some practices that are found not working or working but not in an effective and efficient manner: SALT was not working at all due to its improper design and implementation strategy. Due to its long gestation period before it starts generating benefit to farmers and also need for investment in terms of time and money in building terrace benches and planting perennial crops, SALT generally works in farms where land tenure is secure which is not the case in Churia. Secondly, the DADO did not have any experience and expertise in implementing SALT and therefore were not willing to undertake this venture which led to its transfer it to the DSCO which did try to salvage this new technology on a trial basis which did not show expected results of farmers willingly embracing SALT.

Zero tillage and mixed farming are working but not that well as these activities were designed without due considerations of local socio-economic conditions and felt demand of local communities. The activities do not yield additional tangible benefits and therefore has poor ownership. The TE team feel that scattering

limited resources of the project too thin without good local ownership and adequate technical backstopping resulted less successful practices.;

Adequate understanding of the environmental and social safeguards at district level as required by GEF Agency was lacking and compliance to the WWF's SIPP was also often difficult to achieve the environmental and social safeguards measures of the project.

As mentioned above, the institutional arrangements for governing and managing the project such as the Project Steering Committee (PSC) and Project Coordination Committee (PCC) headed by the MoLRM and with members from MoAD, MoFSC, MoPE for ensuring smooth implementation of the project did not work well also. These committees lacked motivation and guidance to engage with PMU and GEF agency on substantive matters such as discussion on lack of progress on implementation of the NLUUP, 2012. Regular meetings and active participation of the members of the committees were also not organized. Since the executing agency's department heads (DGs) of the concerned DLAs were either in the PSC or in the PCC loop, the consequences of which were not involved in the institutional arrangements, DLAs did not receive executive instructions from their respected DGs to implement the project activities. DLAs felt no obligation and responsibility to implement the project activities leaving them at the hands of focal persons as a routine work done to NGO led development work.

TE team therefore feel that the project was not designed taking into considerations of the salient features of the Chure conservation strategy, 2012; leasehold forestry, community forestry and livelihood forestry programs and participatory watershed management experiences of the MOFSC. (More justification on good and bad practices are provided in 4.2 Lesson Learned Section)

Box 3: Sal leaf plate: turning indigenous women into entrepreneurs:

Ranmaya Musuwar of Janekta Forest User Group in Chandrapur, Rautahat is busy and happy women. Vice-chair of the group she spends all her spare time in making Sal leaf plates and cups. With the decent income she makes she proudly says "I am turning into an independent women from my dependent past". After she started earning cash income for the family, she feels that male members' attitude and behavior has changed although she laments that "home-based work of women is neither valued by the State nor by the family". Ranmaya along with 25 indigenous women of the Leaf Plate and Cup Enterprise under her leadership is earning on an average Rs. 2000 per month. This is a model all women managed industry promoted by the project.

Rating: Satisfactory

3.2.1 Assessment of project strength and success

The vision statement of the project is 'a Churia range with integrated, sustainable land management and functional ecosystem services that sustain its natural and human communities'. The biggest strength of the SLMCRNP is therefore its integrating power. It is also a strategic project and aligns well with the national, regional and local priorities of Nepal. The project districts and VDCs selected for piloting are good representative districts for piloting SLM project. These districts are at the centre of the problems and challenges that prevail in the entire Churia region. In fact the 4 project districts having high population density and highly dependent people on the flow of ecosystem goods and services such as water, forests and grazing from Churia region are at risk of facing drought, flash floods and water shortage for drinking and irrigation which will worsen due to climate change. Therefore, the project's focus on afforestation, reforestation, forest regeneration, community participated forest management and grazing control is a major strength of the SLMCRN project.

The other most important strength is the focus on indigenous communities, women, poor and marginalized groups. The Project made concrete efforts to reach out to the indigenous women and empower them economically. One of the successful interventions that adds to the project strength is the development of women led NTFP enterprises in the form of Sal Leaf Plat and Turmeric powder marketing (see Box 3)

Regarding the success achieved, the project has been successful in introducing and practicing adaptive and flexible management by technically backstopping some of the key activities run by the DIPs such as the OFGZ and income generating activities based on the lessons learned from the previous years. Some of the most relevant activities like plantation of fodder and fuel wood trees, grass and bamboo rhizomes, fencing of degraded forest land, stall feeding, biogas construction, construction of dykes/embankments, bio-engineering work, water source conservation, pond construction, cattle shade improvement, mixed cropping, control of forest fire, broom grass plantation among others, are already owned up by the DIPs as pilot lessons learned for improving and/or expanding regular government activities implemented by them. The project has also been learning from the TAL and HB projects run by the WWF, Nepal since these projects are flagship projects of the executing agency WWF, Nepal. PCCP funded activities that are also implemented by the same DLAs that are also involved in the SLM project are also providing good lessons to the project. The DSCO has integrated most of the project activities in their regular program. It has already replicated SLMP introduced technologies such as SALT and Zero tillage practices in Churia region although initial trials have not been successful and negative lessons learned are being used to improve design and implementation in subsequent trials. Some of the SLMP supported activities planned without due consideration of local communities are not doing well and as such provide good lessons for the future sustainable land management related endeavors.

Box 4: Broom Grass: Potential plan to save Chure Hills

Members of the Kalapani Forest User Group in Chadrapur are in competition to plant as much slopy areas of Chure as possible to grow broom grass –locally called Amriso. The group has so far covered 4 ha of barren land under lush Amriso grasses and has already sold brooms each earning Rs. 2500/month. Their group is the most successful broom grass farmers' group who are doing a laudable job in controlling landslides and soil erosion from Chure. The group has swelled to 63 families from original 43 members. Besides earning individual income each farmer deposits Rs. 300 in the CFUG's account. Thus they are contributing to family and community income besides saving Chure. One user Badri Timilsina has earned Rs. 30,000 by selling brooms in last 3 years. However, broom grass cultivation faces several problems the most serious of them is damage by free grazing goats. Strict control of goats by famers of neighboring villages, timely supply of grass seedlings and proper management of the grasses is a must for achieving success as done by Mr. Timilsina.

3.2.2 Review of challenges and shortcomings

The project implementing and executing partners indeed faced a number of challenges – some of them serious ones. First and foremost, the goal of implementing the SLM concept in Churia range is unnecessarily politicized and sometimes the environmental problems get sidelined by socio-political and legal issues such as resource tenure, land rights, right of indigenous communities and community verses collaborative models of forest management. The project has faced this challenge particularly in implementing the NLUP, 2012. The MoLRM carried out a series of awareness raising workshops and parcel based mapping of the land in the project districts but the NLUP implementation even at a pilot scale has not been possible. Secondly, the project governance and management structure was top-heavy (e.g. the PSC being headed by the Secretary, MoLRM with membership of joint secretary from other technical ministry). These senior most bureaucrats besides being too

busy and pre-occupied with other much larger national level projects have obviously do not have time in getting involved with management and operational issues. The PSC was expected to provide policy and governance guidance and support (see sample minutes of the PSC in Annex…) which they have done as much as possible given the nature of the PSC structure. The PCC headed by the Joint Secretary, MoLRM also had similar performance due to lack of funds and logistics. Not having a coordination platform similar to the PCC at the district level was another challenge to the PMU as the DIPs implemented their portfolio of activities in a compartmentalized manner resulting in duplication and poor supervision. Thirdly, the ongoing Tarai Madhesh Andolan (political protest) created another major challenge to the project team since it severely restricted the mobility of both the staff and the project beneficiaries.

Among the shortcomings of the Project, first and foremost the evaluation team feels that incompatible governance and management structure was the major shortcoming of the project. The created structures such as PSC and PCC were not as effective in discharging the functions as envisaged. The reason is not for lack of capability, authority, capacity and knowledge but due to different understanding of the project and incompatibility between the mandate and function of the PSC members. The concept of SLM was new to all the ministries involved and required a truly programmatic approach which means the PSC should have taken the responsibility of outcome tracking. The reason for the low effectiveness of the institutional arrangement is due to frequent transfer of PSC and PCC chair and members. The PMU running with a small staff of 4-5 people at the WWF was often overwhelmed with the workload.

3.2.3 Sustainability scope and issues

The TE team feels that the SLMN project has good scope for sustainability. It is because the PCCP is a mandated organization dedicated to Churia landscape conservation. It can provide continuity to the good practices and physical assets created such as the water storage ponds, embankments and dykes. Since the PCCP works through the same technical ministries as in the SLMNP did, there is a high chance that the ministries will continue to build on to the physical, institutional and social capital created by the project. The newly created local government institutions (LGI) provide another avenue for sustaining the project activities as these new LGIs are much empowered compared to the earlier VDCs and therefore can take up SLM related projects and also support successful community development facilities such as milk chilling vat, micro irrigation facility and water storage ponds.

However not all programs have high scope for sustainability. Although a large number of training and workshop sessions have been organized as a part of the broader capacity building program under the SLMCRNP, their impact is not so strong. The level of awareness and skills required at the community level is still not adequate. Another issue is the lack of knowhow and capacity at professional level to address land degradation problem in Churia which requires a more holistic farming system approach as opposed to the commodity or disciplinary based approach practiced by the specialized ministries and their district offices.

Another issue related to the sustainability is the lack of enabling environment for CBOs such as CFUGs, Women's enterprise groups and milk co-operatives as they often face restrictive policies and regulations to access resources and sale their products to the markets. Although the policy priority for conserving Churia is high and political commitment is low and unstable due to frequent change of governments and multiplicity of political parties exerting their influences regarding sustainable management of forest and pasture lands. Also, institutional framework is rather weak due to lack of coordination among different ministries. This fact was realized by the SLMNP and a component on inter-sector coordination was provisioned but the lesson learned is that interdisciplinary coordination is needed where the interventions are planned and executed not where policies and

regulations are framed in the context of the SLMN Project. The WWF, Nepal has now realized that the PMU should have been set up in one of the project districts not in Kathmandu.

3.2.4 Adaptive Management Approach

The PMU with support from the AMU managed the project professionally. Since, the project implementation period has gone through while Nepal in general and the project districts in particular are going through political transition and changes. During this period, different disgruntled political groups organized violent protests and forced transport shut down especially in Tarai region and Kathmandu. Three out of four project districts of Rautahat, Bara and Parsa were severely affected by these protests and shut downs. The project staff's movement was severely restricted and to cope with the situation, the PMU devised and adopted adaptive management techniques and approaches. Fortunately, the project activity sites were less affected and therefore the project staff managed to keep their monitoring visit and reporting schedules more or less on time.

Under the adaptive management approach, one of the major approaches used was the provision implemented by the district forest offices with the support from CFUGs and SLMCRN project to gradually declare about 3000 ha of open degraded grazing land first into restricted or controlled grazing land and later by declaring the area as `open grazing free zone (OGFZ)'. This provision did have some social safeguard implications such as curtailing of traditional pastoralists' rights but this issue has been addressed by implementing a mitigation strategy of setting up a `Grievance Redress Mechanism' and providing alternate animal fodder supply through winter pasture seed and fodder tree sapling distribution.

3.2.5 Assessment of M&E systems and adaptive capacity

The M&E system was found to be designed well and implemented satisfactorily though out the project period. A dedicated M&E officer maintained a planned monitoring schedule and submitted timely half yearly and yearly reports. Two mid-term evaluations (one by the WWF GEF Agency and another by Social Welfare Council (SWC) were carried out. Accordingly feasible mid-course correction was done. The PMU prepared and submitted reports and deliverables on time. The team tracked all activities, participants and disaggregated data by gender and ethnicity. The PMU faced many challenges such as the staff turnover, Nepal earthquake, 2015; Madhesh Banda; poor engagement by district level staff, lack of documentation/ monitoring on the part of district partners. However, the PMU managed the project professionally and diligently through hard work, adaptive management and flexible attitude. The original Project coordinator worked very hard in coordinating among different partners both at the Centre and the districts and engaging with the communities in the field to achieve progress. The PMU introduced the Smart sheet that helped to keep everything organized in one place. The work plan tracking document was extremely useful but included too many activities and therefore is output focused and burdensome; future projects should be outcome focused. There were too many output indicators and few and –mostly inappropriate or inadequate –outcome indicators.

Also, the M&E system seems to be focused on tracking progress against the log frame. Given the need to maintain flexibility and mid-course correction, activities were modified to ensure greater community participation during project implementation. Again, there has been limited focus on monitoring for outcome and impact. This is the key weakness in the project's M&E system. Also, in between, the M&E system has undergone changes which do not seem to be well documented.

3.2.6 Project Reporting

The reporting carried out by the PMU is satisfactory meeting the requirements of all the three donors - the GEF, WWF, US and the Govt. of Nepal. The PMU has maintained good coordination with the district implementation partners (DIPs) in meeting the reporting needs of their respective ministries and the WWF GEF agency'.

3.2.7 Catalytic role of the project

The project is playing a truly catalytic role. It has a number of catalytic elements. For example, in Churia region, open grazing has been a major problem in Tarai district. The project has also implemented an innovative integrated of catalytic elements – the integrated approach, focus on uncontrolled grazing and river bank protection has high sustainability and out scalability.

3.2.8 Partnership arrangements

The SLMCRN project is a partnership based project. Apart from the GEF-GON-WWF partnership that can be characterized as a global partnership for environment management; five land resources management related ministries – mostly technical have formed interdisciplinary and collaborative partnership to execute this project. This is a unique experiment made possible through this GEF grant project. Most importantly, there is also a partnership developed among the WWF, DLAs and CBOs at the district and VDC level which is most important and crucial for the continuity of the project activities. In fact, further strengthening of this partnership will go a long way to ensure sustainability and impact of this project.

3.2.9 Review of WWF Agency support (AMU, PMU, coordination issues)

The WWF GEF agency and WWF Nepal supported SLMCRN project can be characterized as professional and optimal project. The PMU in particular was staffed with qualified and hardworking staff and functioned well. Despite facing number of unanticipated challenges, the team always tracked project activities and submitted reports on time. Their compilation of project participants and beneficiary's list disaggregating by gender is praiseworthy. Since the involvement in and inputs from the DIPs was less than expected the PMU had to fill in the gaps by mobilizing focal points and often preparing reports on their behalf. The PMU's success in mobilizing the CFUGs and other groups to engage with the project team is notable. The PMU's use of Smart sheet to keep all the activity related information well organized and work plan tracking documents were innovative tools, the PMU used. Project activity documentation, reporting and communication gradually improved from first year onward. Within the PMU, there were high turnover of the staff but the PMU managed the transition well by smooth handing over process.

However, since this is the first project the WWF as a GEF Agency piloted, there are important lessons to be learned. Based on our review, we make following comments on WWF Agency support through AMU and PMU and communication and coordination issues:

- The roles and responsibilities of the AMU and PMU were not clear and this created unmet expectations if not frustrations. The clarity of roles was not fully established between them early on and trying to do in the middle of the project created confusion; In future projects, the AMU as an implementing agency should discuss with the executing agencies (in this case WWF, Nepal and GoN ministries) and transfer adequate programmatic and financial decisions to PMU. This is in line with the management principle of `giving authority along with responsibility'. AMU might want to keep oversight responsibility only.

- The WWF GEF Agency's environmental and social safeguard policies and procedures were not discussed during the design phase itself. This created unnecessary confusion and extra costs on the part of the WWF Nepal and WWF US to develop necessary mitigation measures. In future this needs to be defined and made part of the project design document.

- Given that two major projects being managed by the WWF, Nepal: TAL Conservation and Hariyo Ban, there was an expectation that the project staffs of these two projects will provide their professional inputs based on WWF, Nepal's own internal learning and sharing mechanisms. However, the evaluation team has not been able to find inputs and learning coming from these projects by way of creating complimentary and synergistic effects. However, during the field visits, some of beneficiary groups especially in Makwanpur reported that they were confused with the overlapping types of activities from GEF, TAL and Hariyo Ban projects.

3.3. Safeguard assessment

The review of the Project Document of the SLMCRN project indicate that the "Safeguards Team of the WWF GEF t Agency classified the project as "Category B" recognizing the potential social impacts on local human populations resulting from specific proposed project activities". Regarding the environmental safeguards, overall benefits of the proposed activities were expected to have positive effects on the generation of environment benefits to Churia region and its biodiversity. The Agency's review did not foresee any "negative impacts on the environment" as well as people living therein. Subsequent review by the Agency's Safeguard Officer however, raised some biodiversity related issues and asked the PMU to implement WWF's Safeguards Integrated Policies and Procedures (SIPP) which was not done during the design phase . In reviewing the safeguard compliance by the Project the evaluators focused on the effectiveness and efficiency of the implementation of the WWF's SIPP critically. The stated purpose of the SIPP is "to ensure that adverse environmental and social impacts are avoided or, when unavoidable, minimized and appropriately mitigated and/or compensated for". In this respect, the compliance of GEF's environmental safeguards was specifically reviewed. The specific issue regarding planting of exotic species such as Eucalyptus and Leucaena plantations raised by the WWF's Safeguard officer was discussed with the PMU and WWF, Nepal. It was found out that during the initial period of the project, a small number of Eucalyptus saplings was planted due to lack of knowledge about the GEF's environmental safeguard policy. However, after the Supervision Mission's directive, the planting of Eucalyptus was stopped. The TE team observed some eucalyptus plantation mixed with other native tree plantation as a result of this initial planting activity. Regarding the plantation of the fast growing plant species of Leucaena leucocephala as home stead fodder trees, the project team informed the TE that planting of leucaena as a fodder tree was done in consultation with DLS as per the Govt. policy of promoting fast growing fodder trees to encourage stall feeding of animals and discourage open grazing. One of the major objectives of the SLMCRN is to promote sustainable grazing land management by declaring a large part of the degraded forest land as `open grazing free land' this action was necessary and unavoidable. Also, the Project execution team ensured that the plantation was not done in natural habitats and when done in modified habitats, mono cropping was avoided ensuring that "no damage or modification of natural habitats occurred" in compliance with the WWF's Safeguard Integrated Policies and Practices (SIPP). Also, the project by promoting mixed plantation has taken appropriate mitigation measures as per the SIPP guidelines. The project team was also found to have taken the opinions and concerns of the beneficiary communities while deciding on the planting of fodder species during the planning process. Therefore, the review finds the GEF's Safeguard compliance satisfactory.

The evaluation team has noted that based on the recommendation from the Safeguards Team, a full Social Impact assessment (SIA) was done to assess the potential impacts the project on vulnerable community stakeholders like women, the poor, indigenous people and other traditionally marginalized groups. The study was done by an

independent national consultant. The study carried out full and critical review of the project design, project team interviews, site visits and consultations with relevant community groups and indigenous peoples were conducted through June and July of 2013. The consultations included disclosure and discussions of project designs, assessments, stakeholders, environmental and social benefits and impacts, as well as proposed mitigation plans. The reports summarized the results of the assessments and consultations and provided useful recommendations for the project design many of which were considered by the Project design. Some of the important recommendations that have been implemented are: a) Selection criteria to promote standardized and equitable distribution of project resources and benefits; 2. diverse community participation in project decision-making and planning; and 3. dissemination of a project contact and grievance information for community panels to voice concerns and facilitate complaints regarding project implementation, management, or negative impacts affecting communities.

In order to ensure the full implementation of the SIA report, an independent consultant financed by GEF Agency was hired to prepare a Mitigation Plan especially to address the social safeguard issues arising due to the declaration of OGFZ that might affect traditional grazing communities. The aim was to prepare mitigation plan as per the recommendation of the Safeguard review team. All the suggested mitigations measures were incorporated into the project design as part of Component 3 to enhance cross-sectoral engagement and local community engagement. In addition, tracking and monitoring of these safeguards was added to the Project Monitoring & Mitigation Plan. This decision and a summary matrix were provided in the final Program Document for submission to the GEF.

The PMU regularly monitored the safeguard issue and progress on the mitigation plan implementation. Stakeholder consultation and participation were held throughout project implementation to ensure continued collaboration with local communities and indigenous peoples affected by the project activities including OGFZ. Compliance with these recommendations was reviewed by the AMU also. The Agency's Safeguard officer during her mission gave specific suggestions to improve the implementation of the safeguard measures agreed. The mid-term reviews of the project also pointed out gaps and provided recommendations to adherence to WWF and GEF Safeguards policies and procedures.

The mitigation plan prepared was in line with the recommendations of the AMU based Safeguard Officer who specifically asked to address the grievance of the indigenous Tharu and Tamang communities in Chandrapur, Rautahat District who felt that they were being denied their traditional grazing rights as a result of declaring a large portion of the traditional open forest land as Open Grazing Free Zone (OGFZ). A Plan of Action for Impacts Mitigation of the Open Grazing Free Zone (OGFZ) Initiation in Chandrapur Municipality was prepared and following measures were taken: a) supported (technically as well financially) affected HHs for planting of forage, grass, fodders in their private as well as community forest lands for stall feeding of animals; b) carried out inclusive interactions and wider consultations with affected HHs for devising feasible mitigation solutions; c) provided training on improved/high breed livestock farming; d) given support to establish water pond for livestock animals in suitable locations, e) given support to affected HHs for improving their cow/buffalo sheds; f) provided support to affected HHs for improving their goat shed; g) Organized animal health camp providing free veterinary services including medicines; h) established grievance readdress mechanism (GRM) or Complain Hearing Committee at the CFUG and DFO levels. The TE team has not reviewed the implementation of these mitigation plans.

3.4 Gender Mainstreaming Review

Overall, the SLMCRN project has adhered well to the WWF and GEF policies and procedures on gender mainstreaming. Critical assessment of the gender inclusion, empowerment and mainstreaming was regularly monitored through the tracking tool used by the project's M&E officer. Among the largest beneficiary groups of

the project are the 28 community forest user groups out of which 24 groups are found to be gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) compatible as indicated by the table below?

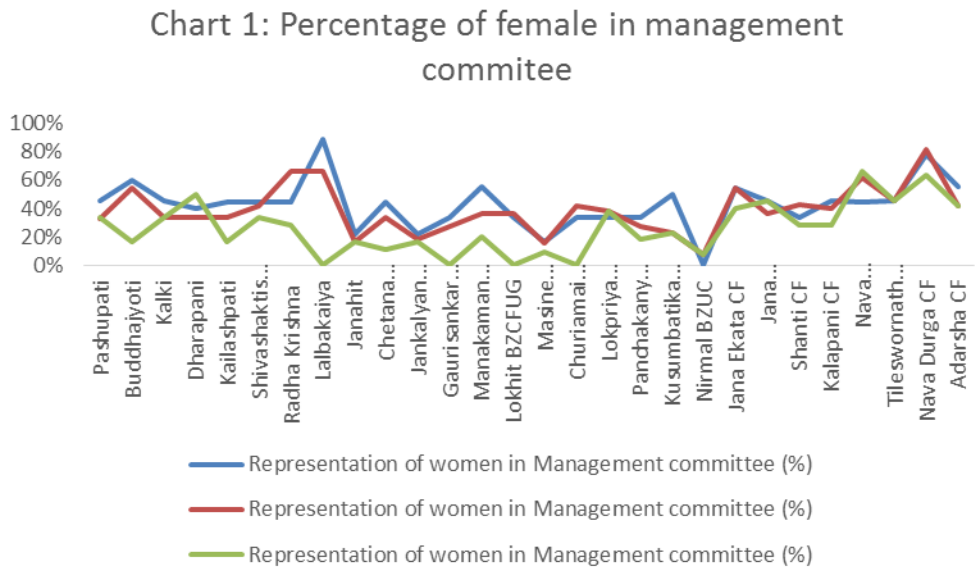


Fig 1: Representation of female in the management Committee

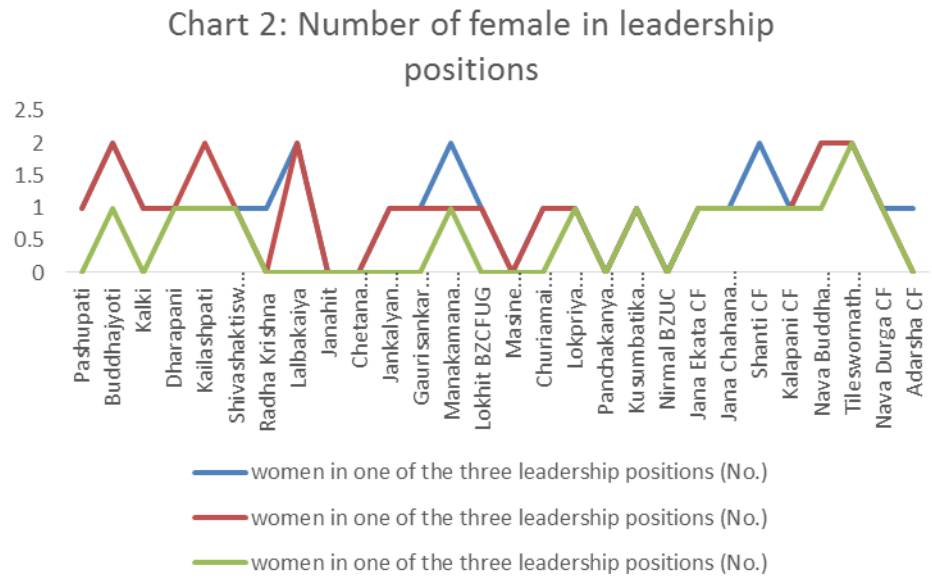


Fig. 2. Representation of female in decision making positions

The above two graphs indicate that the 24 CFUGs have significantly high representation and participation of women in decision making bodies such as the Executive Committee (at least 4 female members in the 9 member committee). The second graph indicates that women occupy 2 out of 4 higher positions (Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and Treasure) - in many cases that of the Chair itself thus demonstrating that they are the leaders and mangers of these user groups.

The PMU engaged Tara Gnyawali to prepare *Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Audit Report*

The PMU also prepared action initiative to improve the engagement of women in the project activities. Gender empowerment and capacity building activities run by the project were found to be effective. This is indicated by several women leaders of the CFUG who are showing tremendous leadership skills, enthusiasm, and energy and determination to make their efforts successful. The examples are many.

3.5. Finance and Co-finance review

Financial management: The WWF is a reputed international non-governmental organization (INGO) that has its own robust finance management and control system on par with recognized international financial management standard. As an accredited implementation agency of the GEF, it was entrusted the task of designing and implementing the SLMCRN project by the GEF and the GoN. The WWF, Nepal as an executing agency of the project managed the entire finance of the project by hiring a dedicated Finance officer to work as a member of the PMU. The finance officer operated under the guidance and supervision of the senior finance controller of the WWF, Nepal. WWF, Nepal employs financial management tools, standards and principles of accounting codes, manuals, budgetary system, procurement policy and procedure that were also applied by the Project's finance officer. Based on the desk review of semi-annual and annual financial review, the TE team concludes that the WWF/PMU have operated and managed the project finance efficiently and diligently.

Co-finance review: The SLMCRN Project is co-financed by GEF, WWF, and Government of Nepal (GoN). The project document (page 66) indicates that project is supported by US$4,398,864 in the form of co-financing from different GoN ministry's budgetary allocations. According the co-finance disbursement figures provided by the PMU at the closure of the project the total co-finance contributed was US$ 4,748,615.08. The contribution form the partner exceeded the original commitment by US$ 748,615.08. (Table 7). The majority of the co-financing (US$3,846,600 or 81%) came from the Ministry of Agriculture Development, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation who exceeded their original commitment by US$ 465,154 and US$ 589,862 respectively. The contribution from the Ministry of Land Reform and Management fell short by US$ 231, 566 (Table 7). The government co-financing came both as in-kind and cash support for various site level project interventions, project monitoring, and project management. The co-finance support built off three ongoing programs – President Churia Conservation Program (PCCP), Leasehold Forestry Program (LFP) and Implementation of the National Land Use Plan (NLUP). WWF Nepal provided 375,165.08 out of the US$450,000 committed amount all of which was provided in the form of cash financing the project management and monitoring costs and building off the baseline activities of the Tarai Arc Landscape Program.

In addition, the communities participating in activities under Outcome 1, Outcome 2 and Outcome 3 are also provided co-financing mostly in- kind, particularly in Outcome 3. Co-financing from the communities was not well recognized and quantified by the project as it was not foreseen at the time of Project design and document preparation. The summary of the co-financing amount by participating ministries is given below:

Table 7. Summary of the co-financing amount by WWF and the participating GoN ministries (Unit: US$)

SNO	**GRANTEE NAME:**				
	PROJECT NAME:				
	PROJECT PERIOD: (Jan. 2014-June 2017)				
	AGREEMENT NUMBER:		0		
	CURRENT REPORTING PERIOD :	From :	1-Jan-17	Through :	31-June-17
	PREPARED BY:		Shruti Dhungel, Finance and Compliance Officer - GEF		
	List each donor separately				
SNo	**Reporting Office/Organization**	**Amount Anticipated Overall (A)**	**Amount Contributed During Current Reporting Period**	**Amount Contributed To Date (B)**	**Balance (A-B)**
1	WWF Nepal Program Office	450,000.00	253,166.50	375,165.08	74,834.92
2	Ministry of Land Reform and Management	758,416.00	526,850.00	526,850.00	231,566.00
3	Ministry of Agriculture Development	1,444,818.00	2,034,680.00	2,034,680.00	(589,862.00)
4	Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation	1,346,766.00	1,811,920.00	1,811,920.00	(465,154.00)
5	**Total co-finance**	**4,000,000**	**4,626,616.50**	**4,748,615.08**	**(748,615.08)**

Grants: Regarding the project grant management and disbursement to the executing agencies through the PMU, the WWF Nepal and MoLRM have signed Grant Agreements on the basis of the approved annual program. The GEF Project Management Team has signed sub-grant or Inter Office Agreement with partner ministries (MoLRM, MoFSC, and MoAD). The respective ministries have devised a fund flow mechanism to their respective district offices or community groups based on their own government approved systems and mechanisms. The amount of grant disbursed by partners is given in Table 8 below:

Table 8. Partner-wise grant amount (2014-16) (Amount in NRS & USD)

Implementing partner	**CY2014**	**CY2015**	**CY 2016**	**Total Grant Given (NRs)**	**USD equivalent (at an average exchange rate of 1USD=NRS 100)**
MoLRM	2,086,120	3,500,000	909,000	6,495,120	649,51.20
MOAD	5,486,250	4,508,846	4,999,910	14,995,006	149,950.06
MoFSC	7,201,475	6,338,700	3,499,500	17,039,675	170,396.75
Total	14,773,845	14,347,546	9,408,410	38,529,801	385,298.01

The project fund flowed from the project account managed by the PMU to the accounts of the respective district offices, local communities, and NGOs/CBOs will be in the form of grants (either cash or in kind), based on the nature of the approved program by the PSC. The grant liability was managed by deducting the amount on subsequent disbursements to the respective partner organizations.

Variances in planned and actual expenditures: The final financial progress report is waited. Based on the last available reporting, the PMU has booked a total expenditure of US$ 880,459 as against the grant fund received US$ 800,128 with deficit and recoverable amount of $ 80,331. Since the GEF Project Grant is US $ 917, 431

Financial audits: The PMU has prepared annual reports well supported by "Notes to Account" as per the WWF's accounting policy. Financial report of each year was duly audited by recognized auditors. The audit observations and recommendations were also found to have been submitted to the management for necessary action. Overall, the financial management was found professionally done and sound.

Consolidated Evaluation Rating

The evaluation rating was done taking into consideration of the above individual activity wise assessment and rating as well as the rating of the objectives and outputs provided in Annex 7. The rating table below provides the summary rating as per the GEF rating criteria (Table 2).

Table No. 9. Summary assessment and ratings by evaluation criteria for the SLMCRN project[4]

Rating/ Score	Description of Strong Performance	Evaluator Rating /Score	Evaluator Brief Justification Please note: indicator, source or methodology when relevant.
Relevance	1. The project addresses the necessary factors in the GEF Focal Area of Land Degradation and is able to meet its objective towards achieving Global Environmental Benefits. The outputs generated can bring about positive change in meeting the national conservation targets identified in the project document.	S	Overall, the project demonstrates good relevance. The large number of activities on the ground generally show good beneficiary buy-in, inclusive benefit flow and high conservation values; Perhaps due to inadequate bottom-up planning, weak application of strategic project sites and program selection criteria, some of the activities are overlapping in a some locations, some are difficult to assign by mandated implementing partner (e.g. storage ponds are constructed at the same by DSCO as well as DADO); some activities are not directly related to degraded land management (e.g.
Quality of Design	1. The project has rigorously applied key design tools (e.g. the WWF PPMS).	MS	The design did apply the WWF PPMS and used both bottom-up and top-down planning strategy following the GoN planning framework in general. However, given the pilot nature of the first GEF funded SLM project, the design could have been better on several counts: a) the coordination framework was considered only at the central level ignoring the real need at the district level where implementation level coordination was most needed; b) a large number of similar nature of activities were planned in all districts missing the priority needs based site and activity selection (e.g. Nirmalbasti where water shortage was most only micro irrigation was planned), c) success of SLM is contingent upon secure land tenure which was lacking in all districts; and d) SLM project by nature need both vertical and horizontal integration and dynamic coordination that was poorly ensured.
	2. The project is hitting the right 'pressure points' to meet	S	Yes, the Project interventions have targeted the right issues and reached out to needy communities but they are scattered and not well connected; the activities selected

[4] Annex 7 provides ratings of project objectives and outcomes

	necessary and sufficient conditions for success.		are meeting necessary (focus on degraded forest and agro-pastoral land located in the most degraded sites of Churia (upstream areas) but not sufficient as they are not working within the frame of integrated watershed management at river/sub river basin scale.
Efficiency	1. Most/all project activities have been delivered with efficient use of human & financial resources and with strong value for money.	HS	The overall implementation is cost effective, in some cases inputs are shared with local communities. Most of the outputs and outcomes were attained with joint funding and implementation with concerned DLAs
	2. Governance and management systems are appropriate, sufficient, and operate efficiently.	MS	Governance and management systems were in place and worked efficiently to the extent possible. However, since institutional framework was not appropriately designed and governance system not adequately executed (lack of reasonable ownership by DLAs, transparent information flow in fund management, limited coordination and integration)
Effectiveness	1. Most/all intended outputs and outcomes were attained and address identified threats.	S	Most of the outputs have been attained and they are being packaged toward attaining planned outcomes in some components such as agro-pastoral land management. Some outputs like degraded land rehabilitation through plantation, regeneration and construction of gabion wall dykes/spurs have addressed the environmental threats to lives and livelihoods.
	2. There is strong evidence indicating that changes can be attributed wholly or largely to the WWF GEF project	S	Almost all the activities and outputs have strong linkages or footprints of the GEF WWF SLM project. All the sites where plantation, grazing control, dykes/spurs construction and livestock improvement and management as well as large number of income generating activities such as Leaf Plate industry and milk chilling centers provide clear and strong evidence attributed to the SLMCRN Project.
Impact/ Results.	1. Most/all outcomes relating to desired changes in the status of the conservation targets (species, ecosystems, and ecological processes) and project objective were realize	D/I	Some final outcomes were assessed and they do show good potential to lead to impacts such as improvement in the management of agro-pastoral land and consequently improvement in the quality of life of the agriculture and livestock farmers. However, full impact assessment is not possible in 3 years long project.
Sustainability	1. Most or all factors for ensuring sustainability of outcomes/impacts are being or have been established.	S	The activities on the ground are indicating medium to good potential to sustainability although at local level, not all financial, institutional and ecological sustainability indicators are well established yet. It is expected that now they will get established since local elections are being held and more empowered local government will have mandate, will and means to continue all the good work initiated by the WWF GEF project.

	2. Scaling up mechanisms have been put in place with risks and assumptions re-assessed and addressed.	MS	Local beneficiaries and sector line agencies have expressed interest demanded scaling out and scaling up[5] of the programs and working mechanisms, however existing project management scenario with poor integration and coordination need to be re- assessed for scaling up the programs
Adaptive Management Capacity	1. Project results (outputs, outcomes, impacts) are qualitatively and quantitatively demonstrated through regular collection and analysis of monitoring data.	HS	Regular monitoring and site visits from the PMU and DIP based focal points have been carried out which have demonstrated large volume of project data, outputs such as regular monitoring and activity tracking reports and supervision mission generated BTORs. The project team demonstrated an impressive adaptive management skills and capacity.
	2. The executing project team uses these findings, as well as those from related projects/ efforts, to strengthen its work and performance.	S	The executing agency WWF-Nepal through PMU was found to diligently use these reports including the AMU team's BTORs in improving project activities including the social safeguards and management effectiveness
	3. Learning is documented and shared for project and organizational learning	S	There are evidences of lessons being documented and producing learning documents for wider sharing among the stakeholders and projects; it was observed that the lessons are having some impact in reflecting and sharing for future improvement especially in designing GEF 6 project
Overall		**Satisfactory**	
Notations: S: Satisfactory; MS: Moderately Satisfactory; HS: Highly Satisfactory; L: Likely; ML: Moderately Likely			

4. Conclusions, Lessons Learned and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

Overall, the performance of the SLMCRN Project is rated Satisfactory. The justification for reaching this conclusion is that the Project has nearly achieved most of its progress targets mobilizing a large number of community groups and multiple stakeholders while using an adaptive management approach to implementation. The Project has been able to introduce a number of pioneer and innovative/new ideas such as the community grant, bio-gas village, open grazing free zone and plastic layered water storage ponds. As a result of its Pilot Phase activities that have good visibility and local buy-ins, the Project has gained trust of the local and district officials (VDC level and district level). As a result, a number of DIPs have contributed co-financing for the replicating and scaling-up the successful activities.

Major gaps and weaknesses observed are somewhat ineffective institutional arrangements and inclusion of large number of activities and targets to be achieved in 4 scattered sites over a three year project period. This

[5] Scaling out is understood as "Expansion in or extension of quantitative scale with an increase in geographical areas, or budget, or number of people, or the scope and type of activities or involvement of more number of partners of ongoing project or program – in this case the SLMCRN"; Scaling up is defined as using knowledge, information, lessons learned from good SLM practices to inform local, provincial and national-level policies, plans, programs and practice communities.

ambitious approach forced the Project to focus attention on achieving targets instead of ensuring sustainability through measures such as capacity building and other arrangements for long term management of activities implemented. The gap is poor institutional arrangements which is `top-heavy and bottom-thin' meaning the coordination committee should have been created at district level not at center where PSC already existed. Although, there were outcome mapping and logical sequence of outputs, outcomes and impacts in Result Framework Matrix, the indicators provided for impacts, outcome and outputs were vague, confused and mixed up those resulted difficulties to ascertain impact due to outcome and outputs. Such a mechanism is critical to ascertain the feasibility of up-scaling a Pilot Project. A critical review of logical framework and results chain suggests the following gaps: the framework components are not consistent in logic; b) activities are not expressed at the same level; and c) threats are expressed as outcome statements.

4.2 Lessons from the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project, using core evaluation criteria

The overall lesson that can be drawn from the project is that future projects that are of piloting nature and have up-scaling objective need to invest more time to do a strategic situation analysis. This along with the institutional assessment of the government implementing agencies are critical documents and therefore needs to be done in a more consultative, diagnostic and inclusive manner. The reviewer feels that in this project the situation analysis was not fully internalized which affected both the structure and the quality of governance and management (e.g. PSC and PCC). A better diagnosis of the existing institutional and governance arrangements would have helped create a better coordination structures and systems. For example, in deciding to give the lead role to the MoLRM for overseeing governance and coordination of the SLMCRN project, in the short term scenario, there might have been a good logic but if a long-term view was taken, there was lack of full justification in that the MoLRM neither had the mandate nor the operational presence in the districts. In fact there existed some incompatibility and mismatch between structure and functions in the structures of the PSC and PCC in that project defined targets and deliverables adequately justify the lead role of the MoFSC. The key lessons that can be drawn from this is that institutional arrangements should match the program content and implementation functions i.e. *the form should follow the function.*

Another general lesson is from the perspective of planning of project activities. While the SLMCRN has taken both bottom-up and top down approaches but top down solutions were dominant. For example, while stakeholders were consulted to seek their inputs into the planning of both the program activities and the institutional arrangements but the activities and process decided poorly reflect the inputs provided by the stakeholders consulted. For example, the institutional framework adopted does not reflect the suggestion to set up a district level coordination mechanism. The governance framework and institutional arrangements should have been created by considering the lessons and recommendations made by the similar past projects especially by the government agencies such as the MoFSC and the WWF-Nepal. Nevertheless, the overall lesson from this project should help the GoN and the GEF Agency in designing better projects in future based on better reality check of the operating environment in districts. Also, learning from lessons and experiences of similar but successful projects that have performed well would have been particularly useful to study by the design team. In the context of the SLMCRN project, while it has achieved many successes, it has also overcome numerous challenges and faced some setbacks. Therefore, a numbers of possible lessons are being listed here under 4 categories below:

Lessons on what could be improved?

1. Coordination and government ownership could be better: A number of district heads of the forest and agriculture offices have themselves admitted that there was lack of coordination – both between the center and the district as well as among DLAs. The main reason was lack of feeling of ownership among them. One DLA head candidly shared his view saying that while they are mandated to implement the ministry approved development projects, it would have been better if they had consulted the DLAs before deciding on the activities unilaterally. All the DLAs have treated the SLMCRN project as a development project and assigned all responsibility to a junior officer or a focal point creating a disconnect between the regular GoN and the GEF activities which should not be the case as GEF funding is of `topping' or `gap filling' nature to the ongoing government program and they should be implemented in tandem. The users have generally mentioned that the government staff often treated the project as a NGO project and some of them deducted their travel and other costs from the allocated program money to User Groups while providing their service. Establishing a field level PMU office or setting up of a District Coordination Committee (DCC) would have helped improve coordination among the DIPs resulting in better coordination, communication and coherence in delivering project outputs.

Focusing on outcomes could have been more meaningful: Given that the LD-1 and LD-2 objectives are focused respectively on: a) `maintaining or improving flow of agro-ecosystem goods and services to sustain food production and livelihoods', and b) `generating sustainable flows of ecosystem services from forests, including in dry lands', the SLMCRN's focus on outcomes could have allowed improving integration and mainstreaming of the project activities with those of the GON ministries in the project districts. This would have also enhanced sustainability and continuity towards achieving impacts.

Better integrated sites could generate better outcomes: Fewer and more integrated and coordinated sites could have resulted better outcomes and show impact potential. Specific site and local community needs and capacity tailored conservation and development activities seem to work better with fewer struggling activities. For example, the DLSO has implemented more comprehensive, integrated and coordinated activities in Handikhola scoring more success than near failures where one can observe outcomes in terms of synergy between activities, improvement in livelihoods and increased flow of ecosystem goods and services from land rehabilitation work. The same is not observed in other 3 districts where it has created scattered cases of successful and not so successful work such as in Ratanpuri and Chandrapur where in one place plastic pond is making women empowered, in another village the same has collapsed. Reforestation in one CFUG in Chandrapur is highly successful but in another site, only fences remain. In Chandrapur itself, in one community, broom grass and banana cultivation are creating prosperity but in another, they are struggling. In Nirmalbasti, biogas and milk co-operatives are working well but tree and grass plantation and micro-irrigation are not. In most of the cases where the DLAs are working together, activities are doing very well, where they are working in isolation or top-down manner treating the SLMCRN work as a NGO activity, they are not. Regarding reforestation timely supply of tree saplings has found to be critical in its success. Related to reforestation natural regeneration enabled through barbed wire fencing, has been found more cost effective and

Forest and pasture land based livelihood is key to the success of SLM: Various agri-silvi-horticulture and livestock based income generating activities (IGAs) are receiving higher priority from farmers with greater ownership. For example, broom grass, leaf plate making and turmeric cultivation in Chandrapur and vegetable and goat farming in Ratanpuri are popular activities. Rather than new plantation, regeneration yields faster, cheaper and better results in forest conservation work. Native Sal and mixed species based forest restoration in Churia region is doing better as weather factors are conducive for regeneration of native

plants. The lesson learned here is that in order to achieve faster growth of forest cover give more priority to regeneration than plantation which has shown multiple problems.

More interactive dialogues lead to improved GESI: The project team members have reflected that more regular follow-up and dialogues ensured more inclusive and empowered women and disadvantaged communities in decision making. Well informed, capacitated and skilled local entrepreneurs managed forest based enterprises profitably. The examples are Chandrapur where indigenous and local women are earning decent income from leaf plate and turmeric powder marketing. However, they need more intensive and interactive workshops and training that transfers skills to the new members. Here key lesson is peer learning among women farmers and entrepreneurs leads to better gender equality and social inclusion.

Integrated and cross-disciplinary approaches –both intra and inter sector- are working well: DLSOs in all project districts run comprehensive livestock development approaches that are mainstreaming project activities into the regular program which is enhancing local ownership. These activities are also integrated with those of DSCOs (e.g., Handi khola) and DFOs (e.g. Chandrapur) and are focused and had followed bottom-up planning processes. Consequently there is high local ownership, demand and co-financing through the regular budget of the MOLD run activities. Thus integrated approaches have high probability of meeting the SLM objective and creating impacts. Similar integration exit in the activities run by the DSCOs also in some districts. However, the DFO and DOAD run activities are found less integrated.

Lessons on what is not working well and why?

Sustainable livelihood development needs continuous and coordinated efforts: Sustainable livelihood development activities having poor local ownership do not yield tangible benefits (e.g. SALT, Zero tillage and mixed cropping). These are not focused, limited resources are scattered too thin and DIP's ownership and technical backstopping are poor. The SALT, although a good concept requires secure land ownership, fair deal of awareness raising and skill oriented training. Besides, the technology cannot be applied in blanket manner requiring a tailored approach. Multipurpose tree species supplying food, fodder, water conservation and erosion controlling have to be carefully selected for plantation in order to provide alternate animal feed since the open grazing has to be banned. Similar case of poor planning was also found in the implementation of mixed cropping and zero tillage related activities. The key lesson learned here is that customization and localization of new technology is must before their promotion.

Ensuring necessary safeguards is critical: Proper understanding and ensuring environmental and social safeguards as per the WWF policy on Social Safeguard Integrated Policies and Procedures (SIPP) is critically important. In this project, the GEF WWF Agency communicated the above policy making it an integral part of the Project document after the project agreement was signed and implementation had already commenced. Naturally, the implementation of SIPP after the first year's activities created problems. Both the implementing and executing agencies – GEF WWF Agency and WWF, Nepal - faced a number of challenges and difficulties especially convincing the district and VDC level stakeholders. Some of the safeguard issues such as addressing the grazing rights of the traditional grazing communities needed development of mitigation plan in Chandrapur where in order to declare a large forest area as the Open Grazing Free Zone (OGFZ), as per the advice of the Safeguard Officer of the WWF GEF Agency, a mitigation plan has been prepared and implemented. Putting in place the safeguard measures did cause additional costs teaching a good lesson that these measures should be considered during design phase itself. However, compliance to GEF guidelines is often difficult due to its `one size fit all' approach adopted by the GEF Agency. A better approach would have asked the recipient country - the Govt. of Nepal – to apply the country driven process. The GoN uses the Environment Friendly Local Governance Framework-2013

(http://lgcdp.gov.np/content/environment-friendly-local-governance-framework-2013) that ensures meeting of adequate environment and social safeguards in local level development planning and governance activities. This framework is approved by the Govt. of Nepal and implemented by the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development Ministry. It also mainstreams environment, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction aspects in the sustainable development oriented local development planning procedure from VDC to national level in Nepal.

Institutional arrangements need to ensure smooth implementation of the activities: The SLMNP is governed and coordinated respectively by a project steering committee (PSC) and a project coordination committee (PCC) at central level. These are multi-sectoral project governing bodies headed by the MoLRM. Although the PSC met regularly, received briefings on periodic progress and plans and approved the same, they did not seem to go into substantive discussions and involved in resolving issues that are hindering progress such as the implementation of NLUP, 2012. The PCC also did not seem to have adequately facilitated the district level coordination and engagement. Since the Department heads (DGs) are not in the loop of the coordination mechanism (although later a provision was made to invite them to the PCC meetings), these structures could function better. Perhaps the reason for weak coordination was due to not assigning the lead or co-lead role to the MoFSC which by mandate has jurisdiction over the most of the targeted land for sustainable management under the project i.e. the forest, pasture and riverine land. Chure Conservation Strategy based design could have yielded better results: The SLMPN could have been better designed taking elements from MoFSC's Chure conservation strategy, 2012 and Nepal's successful leasehold and livelihood forestry programs implemented under different. Improving agro-pastoral land can also learn from FAO and ICIMOD's New Generation of Participatory Watershed Management experiences.

Co-financed activities could be integrated better: The project document and the co-finance amount invested indicated more than 82% co-funding investment from the GoN ministries in the Project. The financing assessment also took note of the finance available from GoN/WWF implemented TAL conservation program. The GoN ministries directly transferred the funds to their respective district offices (DIPs) to spend on project related activities. The evaluator therefore notes that although the co-funding amount is significantly large commensurate level of activities funded under the co-finance budget heads are not reported in an integrated manner. The activities are being implemented in a parallel manner by the DIPs in the project districts. However, there is a need to run the program as a package as is already being done by the DLSO to achieve good synergy with the GEF fund covered activities. Pooling together of all funding will help meet the project objectives better and enhance the spirit of the co-financing and topping nature of the GEF projects.

Lessons for wider national level

Design and implementation lesson: There is need for designing and implementing SLM as an integrated, cross-sectoral, cross-scale using community based natural resources management (CBNRM) principles and approaches in future. This will require designing the projects through a process involving multi-stakeholder consultation and critical situation analysis. In terms of the components, given the increasing vulnerability and impact of climate change in Churia range and Tarai region as a whole, apart from sustainably managing land and related natural resources to create community assets, building resilient infrastructure and community based conservation and development (C&D) activities are likely to make the interventions not only achieve better outcomes and impacts but also adaptive to climate change. This project provides the WWF-Nepal and other national NGO/INGOs a good learning in planning and implementing integrated, cross-scale and climate resilient project. There is also a lesson on the need for resolving the issues of providing secure land and tree tenure through land registration before starting conservation activities in

agro-pastoral lands. This calls for wider national level discussion on challenges in implementing NLUP, 2012.

Lesson to achieve impact at scale: The SLMCRN being a pilot project was expected to be scaled out and scaled up during its 3 year duration so that its wider relevance could be seen through achievement of outcomes and impact. The lesson that can be learned from the project assessment is that although both scaling out (geographic expansion) and scaling up (evidence base for policy and knowledge influence and impact) are possible but it requires continuity of activities by the GoN ministries through their regular budget and creation of enabling environment for cross-sector collaboration. However, the PMU and WWF GEF Agency should first develop a concise and comprehensive documentation of the project results and lessons learned and mount targeted communication including to the participating ministries and the National Planning Commission (NPC), Nepal.

Lessons for regional and global learning

Investment in sustainable land management should be always done in an integrated, holistic, and synergistic manner involving all stakeholders that run land based social and environmental activities. Integrated projects yield better global environmental benefits (GEBs) as demonstrated by this Project. Here, the central level agencies and stakeholders – the MoLRM, MoAD, MoFSC, MOLD and MoPE in this Project- and their respective district line agencies were identified and organized to work as one programmatic team for project execution of activities, generation of outputs and management of outcomes. During implementation of the project, there was active involvement of other district and central level stakeholders from the beginning to end of the project in integrated manner. Some district level CBOs and NGOs were also involved while implementing the project. This kind of institutional arrangement provides a good model of working among different Rio conventions and Nepal's achievement in this regard is worth sharing at global forums such as in the upcoming UNCCD and UNFCCC conference of party sessions.

Good practices in addressing issues relating to evaluation criteria, management and approach

GEF projects follow international best practices and globally applicable frameworks and guidelines which the SLMCRN has tried its best to achieve. However, in the global discourse on implementation of the provision of Rio conventions, there is an increasing realization that `top-down' and `one-size-fits-all' approach does not work. This is perhaps the reason why all the three Rio conventions have the provision of `nationally driven process' and `common but differentiated responsibility based on capability'. Therefore the best practices is to allow local and national processes and procedures to be integrated with globally determined policies such GEF's Environment and Social Safeguard Policy allowing for local customization or adjustment. The bad practice could be to apply blanket solution of globally set standards and rules which the evaluators consider the will not be effective in addressing issues relating to evaluation criteria. In this Project, the bad practice may be to suggest not planning *Leucaena leucocephala* plant as fodder trees on the basis of its `exotic origin'. However, this plant is widely planted under GoN programs.

4.3 Terminal Evaluation Recommendations

The terminal evaluation has made recommendations that are both policy and practice relevant and contextualized to Nepal's land degradation problem in general and Churia degradation in particular. These are aimed to improve the process and practices of all the relevant stakeholders at center and districts levels for the improved management of similar projects in future focusing particularly to the issue and solution of land and natural resources degradation in Chure landscape in Nepal. The recommendations are targeted at different audience operating at different levels

Overall Recommendations (for national and international policy and decision makers)

Make integrated and cross-sector project design a requirement for SLM projects: One of the key lessons provided by the SLMCRN project is that integrating upstream-downstream perspectives and ecological and economic sectors makes the SLM project design and implementation much more robust and result oriented especially in a complex landscape such as Churia range. This lesson can be immediately used by both the Govt. of Nepal and GEF WWF agency to improve its design work under the GEF 6 funding cycle – both in Nepal and other developing countries. In Nepal, the learning could be particularly relevant to the WWF, Nepal and the President's Chure Conservation Program (PCCP) to improve its ongoing work in Chure landscape especially in areas such as forest restoration, integrated land and water management and livelihood improvement activities. Nepal's globally recognized community forestry program can also benefit by learning from the good practices of the Project such as the provision of incentives in terms of comprehensive development of livestock sector to induce zero grazing in forest and sustainable community forest management. Similarly, the lessons learned from the work on community mobilization and GESI achieved by incentivizing the communities with different income generating activities can be useful to the MOAD and MOLD in achieving sustainable agro-pastoral land management. It will also help in promoting conservation farming and ecologically sound agriculture practices. The PCCP should use the lessons to replicate, scale up and scale out its work in bio-engineering, forest regeneration and water conservation throughout the Chure range.

Make SLM a national priority: The Project has successfully demonstrated that land degradation problem in Chure Bhawar region can be addressed if we take integrated watershed management approach (e.g. a beginning has been made Handi Khola). Therefore both PCCP and Nepal Govt. should use this pilot project to make SLM as their priority. This will help the GoN to make the SLM a national strategy to address fast rate of land degradation. The lessons drawn from this project should be communicated to Nepal's National Planning Commission so as to ensure that SLM elements are included in different ministry's annual plans and programs both at the Centre and provinces. This will also ensure not only continuity of the successful activities initiated by the Project but also their up-scaling.

Revise NULP, 2012 for nationwide implementation of SLM: The NLUP, 2012 was formulated and approved to introduce the concept of scientific land management in Nepal. However, this policy remains unimplemented necessitating its further review and revision. As such with the federalization of the country and sharing of jurisdiction over land between Centre, Province and Gaunpalika/Nagarpalika, this policy has become outdated. The learning from the SLMCRN comes handy in revising and making this good intentioned policy implementable by upgrading its ownership to the NPC level. The lessons learned from this Project have clearly shown that this policy had ownership problem by the relevant ministries. The MoLRM neither has the technical knowhow nor district level staff to implement land use policy that has multi-dimensional complexity and implications;

- *Increase investment in SLM:* The project has successfully demonstrated that land restoration and rehabilitation activities through bio-engineering and integrated water source conservation and management can yield multiple local benefits. The Project has also generation of national, regional and global environment benefits. Investment in SLM which is grossly inadequate now needs to be significantly increased tapping on both GoN funded agriculture, livestock and local development as well as climate change finance flowing from multilateral financial agencies (MFI) such as GEF and Green Climate Fund. Private sector funds can also be mobilized where infrastructure building activities are involved.

Specific Recommendations (for Project developers, managers and NGO/INGOs)

Increase investment in SLM: The project has successfully demonstrated that land restoration project through bio-engineering, gabion box embankment and water source conservation and management can yield multiple benefits including the generation of national, regional and global environment benefits. Investment in SLM which is grossly inadequate now needs to be significantly increased tapping on both agriculture

development and climate change finance flowing from multilateral financial agencies (MFI) such as GEF and Green Climate Fund as well as annual national budget.

Specific Recommendations (1) - Design

- *GEF project design should be based on critical `reality check' of the operating environment.* The review of the Situation Analysis of the Project indicate that the drivers responsible for the degradation of Churia are identified properly, complex environment and socio-political contexts described well and prevailing policies and strategies linked to the possible solution. However, while the analysis repeatedly identifies lack of coordination, need for integrated approach, and past experiences of Leasehold Forestry and emergence of President's Chure Program and LAPA as possible instruments, the design document has not considered these possibilities in its approach. It wrongly identifies the need for coordination at ministry level whereas experience has shown that it is at implementation level where the coordination is lacking. The case in point is the NLUP, 2012 which is a good policy but is um-implementable. In Nepal under the existing decentralized and environment friendly planning framework of the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development (MoFALD) which is expected to be further reinforced under the new federalized governance system, an environment friendly local government planning framework (EFLGF) exists that is being linked to NPC's 14 point bottom-up planning framework and MoPE's 7 step Local Adaptation Plan of Action (LAPA) framework. Since GEF projects are of topping-up, critical gap filling and value-adding nature, the design should embrace these frameworks and use bottom-up, inclusive and multi-stakeholder consultative process in designing future projects. Given the increasing trend of flash flooding in downstream areas in Tarai, it is recommended that integrated river and sub-river catchment based watershed management governed by interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary institutional framework at landscape level should be the basis of SLM project design to ensure greater success in implementation.

Recommendations (2) -Implementation

- *Develop cross-sector and cross-stakeholder coordination mechanism at implementation level:* Land degradation issues are of cross-sector and multi-dimensional nature and needs multi-stakeholder participation involving ministries, departments, CFUGs, CSOs and Pvt. Sector. Such projects should be designed, monitored and implemented by multi-stakeholder participated institutional arrangements at all levels. Learning lessons from this project it is clear that coordination is most critical when and where interventions are panned and therefore coordination will be needed in future at Village and City Councils and district levels.

- *Disseminate the SLM learning widely:* Compile the lessons learned and case studies on what worked well (best practice examples) and why and what did not work and why for wide dissemination leading to scaling-up and scaling-out successes. Some of the good practice examples are: a) integrated livestock development work in Handikhola, b) women led plantation in Ratanpuri and c) Sal Leaf plate enterprise in Chadrapur. The regeneration of degraded forest by fencing the area has led to quicker establishment of forest and grass vegetation compared to replanting of the area. Water source protection and utilization, particularly taping of water at source in the river bed and piping it to storage pond provide good water management practice for irrigation and drinking purposes. Forest and pastoral land based livelihoods and income generating activities (IGAs) were key to the success of SLMCRN since they generated quick income to the poor farmers besides restoring the environment. The bio-engineering work such as gabion wall is worth extending to both to halt land degradation and restore the destroyed land for agriculture. In summary, it is recommended to sustain, upscale and extended activities that have used integrated approaches and have high local ownership.

Recommendations (3) – Project Management

- *Improve adaptive and flexible project management capacity:* The project managers have to operate in unpredictable and complex operating environment characterized by high and competing expectations of the local population as experienced by the SLMCRN. Learning from the lack of active and meaningful participation both by the head of district line agencies as well as local stakeholders, future GEF projects should create functional and dynamic institutional arrangements to ensure high ownership of the project activities by the line agencies and local communities by adopting adaptive and flexible management. This will ensure sustainability and continuity of the project generated good practices. Activities designed without critical understanding of the local implementation environment and needs and aspirations of local communities do not yield expected results and lead to poor sustainability. Limited resources should not be scattered too thin in pilot projects where technical backstopping and intensive engagement with local communities are necessary. Future GEF projects should design the institutional framework to match with the tasks and in case of SLM types of projects in Churia range the MoFSC affiliated PCCP might be the best institution to lead the coordination committee at the districts or future provinces level.

- *Introduce appropriate technologies:* As demonstrated by the SLM project's success in introducing proven technologies, tools and services such as Travis for AI, Cattle shed improvement, Milk chilling vat, Micro Irrigation technology (MIT), Tunnel farming that are helping to promote sustainable land-use management practices besides helping to establish challenging targets such as the OFGZ declaration and sustainable forest management, the concerned agencies should integrate indigenous and modern technologies and tools in promoting SLM. Integrated management of land and water resources is necessary to reduce climate change vulnerability in Churia as the region is prone to both drought and flood hazards. Similarly to prevent flash flood disaster upstream-downstream linkages have to be strengthened by setting up early warning system and ensuring supply of ecosystem services to downstream people by working in the framework of river basin wide watershed management;

- *Consider Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience Building:* Given the high vulnerability of Churia, future projects need to all good practices climate adaptive and resilient. Given the high fragility, marginality and specifity of Churia region in terms geo-physical, socio-economic and biodiversity, any future SLM project must be grounded on the principles of sustainability and resilience. Apart from the building of sustainable land based livelihood systems, the conservation of biodiversity and development community infrastructures such as access roads, settlements, river embankments must be designed for adapting to both present and future changes. The Chure Conservation Strategy, 2012 and subsequent GoN policy on Nepal is to follow integrated landscape management approaches which the evaluator endorses as a suitable tool to build long-term climate resilient livelihoods, ecosystems and development infrastructure in Chure range.

Recommendations (4) – Policy piloting and reform

- *Address land rights and encroachment issues in a holistic manner:* Under this project, the MoLRM has prepared land parcel based mapping which can be used for strict zoning of land use in Churia based on land capability classification. This work can be used as a foundation to decide on land ownership (tenure) and property rights issue in Churia. Forest encroachers to fragile slopes and biodiversity rich habitats can be provided alternative livelihoods to incentivize them to practices SLM practices. In order find a long-term solution to the encroachment, proper land use classification, zoning and other land use decisions have to be considered holistically since there are a complex interrelationships and interdependencies between land-use options and land right recognition. Sustainable solution will require proper understanding of the land use

capability, land use history, context, and genuineness of the encroachers being a landless or marginalized farmer in order to avoid conflicts and achieve a balanced solution through SLM options;

Recommendations (5): (M&E)

- *GEF project should focus on outcome and impact***:** The overall thrust of the GEF's Land Degradation (LD) focal area is on: promoting "investments in good practices and enabling conditions conducive to SLM", and since the SLMCRN aims to contribute to the GEF LD 1.1 and 1.3 outcomes that respectively aim at achieving: "improved agricultural, rangeland and pastoral management" and functionality and cover of agro-ecosystems maintained" (GEF, 2015), it is recommended that the future GEF projects on SLM focus on outcomes and impacts. Obviously this will require longer duration project as a 3 year pilot project such as the SLMCRN has mostly generated outputs. Therefore the TE recommends that in future GEF Agency should plan at least 5 year project or at least 2 phases of 3 year project to achieve SLM outcomes and impacts at scale. Given that the GEF funding is of incremental nature, it should strive for making catalytic changes such as rather than focusing on piloting which might be construed as `doing more of the same", it should focus more on scaling out and scaling up already existing success stories such as the ones already created by WWF, Nepal implemented TAL, Hariyo Ban and IFAD funded Leasehold Forestry program and UNDP funded WTCLP all of which had strong Churia and Tarai focus. This will help Nepal to move toward transformative conservation, adaptation and development. However, the evaluator is cognizant of the fact that the decision to implement the SLMCRN as a pilot project in the 4 district was made by the GoN as per the advice of the WWF, Nepal as the TAL project did not cover the 4 project districts. However, the TE strongly recommends to the WWF GEF Agency, GEF and the GoN to fund second phase of the SLM to ensure continuity and achieve the SLMCRN aimed outcomes and impacts.

Recommendations (6): Future Projects and Follow-up Phase of the SLMCRNP

The TE recommends both to the GoN and the GEF agency, in future, to plan at least 5 year project or at least 2 phases of 3 year projects to achieve SLM outcomes and impacts. As well, given that the GEF funding is of incremental nature, it should strive for making catalytic changes such as rather than focusing on piloting which might be construed as `doing more of the same" it should focus on scaling out and scaling up of already existing successful practices such as the ones already created by WWF, Nepal implemented TAL and Hariyo Ban projects, IFAD funded Leasehold Forestry program and UNDP funded WTCLP all of which had strong Churia and Tarai focus. This will help Nepal to move toward transformative conservation, adaptation and development programs. Since the lead ministry of the SLMCRN – the MoLRM is keen to implement its Parcel based Land use zoning initiative and WWF-Nepal is already providing technical advice to the Ministry on this, it is recommended that a follow-up project preferably under the GEF-6 be developed that includes the implementation of the Parcel based zoning of the land use in Churia range. This will also help implement the 20-year Master Plan for Chure Tarai Madhesh launched by the PCCP which is a significant but challenging undertaking of the GoN. However, the institutional arrangements should be devised based on the lessons learned from this project.

It is learnt by the evaluator that the Ministry of Population and Environment may be interested to work with WWF Nepal on submitting a proposal to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) in compatible areas. The WWF GEF Agency and WWF-Nepal should coordinate with the MoPE to ensure that the SLMCRN does not become one-off project leading to loss of the momentum in the SLM movement and risk of endangering continuity and sustainability of the overall successful undertaking by the SLMCRN Project team.

Lessons from the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project, using core evaluation criteria

The overall lesson that can be drawn from the project is that future projects that are of piloting nature and have up-scaling objective need to invest more time to do a strategic situation analysis. This along with the institutional assessment of the government implementing agencies are critical documents and therefore needs to be done in a more consultative, diagnostic and inclusive manner. The reviewer feels that in this project the situation analysis was not fully internalized which resulted into somewhat ineffective governance and management structures (e.g. PSC and PCC). A better diagnosis of the existing institutional and governance scenario would have helped create a better coordination structures. For example, in deciding to give the lead role to the MoLRM for overseeing governance and coordination of the SLMCRN project, there might have been a good logic but it there was lack of full justification in that the MoLRM neither had the mandate nor the operational presence in the districts. In fact there exist some incompatibility and mismatch between structure and functions in these structures in that project defined targets and deliverables adequately justify the lead role of the MoFSC. The key lessons is that can be drawn from this is institutional arrangements should match the program content and implementation functions i.e. *the form should follow the function.*

Another general lesson is from planning of project activities. While the SLMCRN has taken both bottom-up and top down approaches but top down solutions were dominant. For example, while stakeholders were consulted to seek their inputs into the planning of both the program activities and the institutional arrangements but only the activities to be done neither reflect neither stakeholders' inputs nor the suggested process for their delivery. For example, the institutional framework adopted does not reflect the suggestion to set up a district level coordination. The governance framework and institutional arrangements should have been created by considering the lessons and recommendations made by the similar past projects especially by the government and the WWF-Nepal. Nevertheless, the overall lesson should help the GoN and the GEF Agency in designing better projects in future based on better reality check of the operating environment in districts. Also, learning from lessons and experiences of similar but successful projects that have achieved outcomes and impacts would be particularly useful to study by the design team. In the context of the SLMCRN project, while it has achieved many successes, it has also faced numerous challenges. There are large numbers of lessons that can be drawn from the project that are divided into 4 categories:

Lessons on what could be improved?

Coordination and government ownership could be better: A number of district heads of the forest and agriculture offices have themselves admitted that there was lack of coordination – both between the center and the district as well as among DLAs. The main reason was lack of feeling of ownership among them. One DLA head candidly shared his view saying that while they are mandated to implement the ministry approved development projects, it would have been better if they had consulted the DLAs before deciding on the activities unilaterally. All the DLAs have treated the SLMCRN project as a development project and assigned all responsibility to a junior officer or a focal point creating a disconnect between the regular GoN and the GEF activities which should not be the case as GEF funding is of `topping' or `gap filling' nature to the ongoing government program and they should be implemented in tandem. The users have generally mentioned that the government staff often treated the project as a NGO project and some of them deducted their travel and other costs from the allocated program money to User Groups while providing their service. Establishing a field level PMU office or setting up of a District Coordination Committee (DCC) would have

helped improve coordination among the DIPs resulting in better coordination, communication and coherence in delivering project outputs. :

Focusing on outcomes could have been more meaningful: Given that the LD-1 and LD-2 objectives are focused respectively on: a) `maintaining or improving flow of agro-ecosystem goods and services to sustain food production and livelihoods', and b) `generating sustainable flows of ecosystem services from forests, including in dry lands', the SLMCRN's focus on outcomes could have allowed improving integration and mainstreaming of the project activities with those of the GON ministries in the project districts. This would have also enhanced sustainability and continuity towards achieving impacts.

Better coordinated and integrated sites could generate more impact: Fewer and more integrated and coordinated sites could have resulted better outcomes and impacts. Specific site and local community needs and capacity tailored conservation and development activities seem to work better with fewer struggling activities. For example, the DLSO has implemented more comprehensive, integrated and coordinated activities in Handikhola scoring more success than near failures where one can observe outcomes in terms of synergy between activities, improvement in livelihoods and increased flow of ecosystem goods and services from land rehabilitation work. The same is not observed in other 3 districts where it has created scattered cases of successful and not so successful work such as in Ratanpuri and Chandrapur where in one place plastic pond is making women empowered, in another village the same has collapsed or reforestation in one CFUG is highly successful but in another site, only fences remain or in Chandrapur where in one area broom grass and banana cultivation are creating prosperity and in another they are struggling. In Nirmalbasti, biogas and milk co-operatives are working well but tree and grass plantation and micro-irrigation are not. In most of the cases where the DLAs are working together, activities are doing very well, where they are working in isolation or top-down manner treating the SLMCRN work as a NGO activity, they are not.

Forest and pasture land based livelihood is key to the success of SLM: Various agri-silvi-horticulture and livestock based income generating activities (IGAs) are receiving higher priority from farmers with greater ownership. For example, broom grass, leaf plate making and turmeric cultivation in Chandrapur and vegetable and goat farming in Ratanpuri are popular activities. Rather than new plantation, regeneration yields faster, cheaper and better results in forest conservation work. Native Sal and mixed species based forest restoration in Churia region is doing better as weather factors are conducive for regeneration of native plants;

More interactive dialogues lead to improved GESI: The project team members have reflected that more regular follow-up and dialogues ensured more inclusive and empowered women and disadvantaged communities in decision making. Well informed, capacitated and skilled local entrepreneurs managed forest based enterprises profitably. The examples are Chandrapur where indigenous and local women are earning decent income from leaf plate and turmeric powder marketing. However, they need more intensive and interactive workshops and training that transfers skills to the new members.

Integrated and cross-disciplinary approaches –both intra and inter sector- are working well: DLSOs in all project districts run comprehensive livestock development approaches that are mainstreaming project activities into the regular program which is enhancing ownership. These activities are also integrated with those of DSCOs (e.g., Handi khola) and DFOs (e.g. Chandrapur) and are focused and had followed bottom-up planning processes. Consequently there is high local ownership, demand and co-financing through the regular budget of the MOLD run activities. Thus integrated approaches have high probability of meeting the

SLM objective and creating impacts. Similar integration exit in the activities run by the DSCOs also in some districts. However, the DFO and DOAD run activities are found less integrated.

Lessons on what is not working well and why?

Sustainable livelihood building needs continuous and coordinated efforts: Sustainable livelihood development activities having poor local ownership do not yield tangible benefits (e.g. SALT, Zero tillage and mixed cropping). These are not focused, limited resources are scattered too thin and DIP's ownership and technical backstopping are poor. Similar examples exist in tree plantation where the DFOs decide what to plant and when to plant. In Ratanpuri, the plantation work has failed due to poor quality of seedlings and late supply of seedlings.

Ensuring necessary safeguards is critical: Proper understanding and ensuring environmental and social safeguards as per the WWF policy on Social Safeguard Integrated Policies and Procedures (SIPP) is critically important. In this project, the GEF WWF Agency communicated the above policy making it an integral part of the Project document after the project agreement was signed and implementation had already commenced. Naturally, the implementation of SIPP after the first year's activities created problems. Both the implementing and executing agencies – GEF WWF Agency and WWF, Nepal - faced a number of challenges and difficulties especially convincing the district and VDC level stakeholders. Some of the safeguard issues such as addressing the grazing rights of the traditional grazing communities needed development of mitigation plan in Chandrapur where in order to declare a large forest area as the Open Grazing Free Zone (OGFZ), as per the advice of the Safeguard Officer of the WWF GEF Agency, a mitigation plan has been prepared and implemented. Putting in place the safeguard measures did cause additional costs teaching a good lesson that these measures should be considered during design phase itself. However, compliance to GEF guidelines is often difficult due to its `one size fit all' approach adopted by the GEF Agency. A better approach would have asked the recipient country - the Govt. of Nepal – to apply the country driven process. The GoN uses the Environment Friendly Local Governance Framework-2013 (http://lgcdp.gov.np/content/environment-friendly-local-governance-framework-2013) that ensures meeting of adequate environment and social safeguards in local level development planning and governance activities. This framework is approved by the Govt. of Nepal and implemented by the Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development Ministry. It also mainstreams environment, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction aspects in the sustainable development oriented local development planning procedure from VDC to national level in Nepal.

Institutional structures need to follow the functions: The SLMNP is governed and coordinated respectively by a project steering committee (PSC) and a project coordination committee (PCC) at central level. These are multi-sectoral project governing bodies headed by the MoLRM. Although the PSC met regularly, received briefings on periodic progress and plans and approved the same, they did not seem to go into substantive discussions and involved in resolving issues that are hindering progress such as the implementation of NLUP, 2012. The PCC also did not seem to have adequately facilitated the district level coordination and engagement. Since the Department heads (DGs) are not in the loop of the coordination mechanism (although later a provision was made to invite them to the PCC meetings), these structures could function better. Perhaps the reason for weak coordination was due to not assigning the lead or co-lead role to the MoFSC which by mandate has jurisdiction over the most of the targeted land for sustainable management under the project i.e. the forest, pasture and riverine land. Chure Conservation Strategy based design could have yielded better results: The SLMPN could have been better designed taking elements from MoFSC's Chure conservation strategy, 2012 and Nepal's successful leasehold and livelihood forestry

programs implemented under different . Improving agro-pastoral land can also learn from FAO and ICIMOD's New Generation of Participatory Watershed Management experiences.

Co-financed activities could be integrated better: The project document has indicated 82% co-funding from the GoN ministries in the Project. The financing assessment also took note of the finance available from GoN/WWF implemented TAL conservation program. The GoN ministries directly transferred the funds to their respective district offices (DIPs). The evaluator therefore notes that although the co-funding amount is significantly large commensurate level of activities funded under the co-finance budget heads are not reported in an integrated manner. It seems that the activities are being implemented in a parallel manner by the DIPs in the project districts. However, there is a need to run the program as a package as is already being done by the DLSO to achieve good synergy with the GEF fund covered activities. Better integration will help meet the project objectives better and enhance the spirit of the co-financing and topping nature of the GEF projects.

Lessons for wider national level

Design and implementation lesson: There is need for designing and implementing SLM as an integrated, cross-sectoral, cross-scale using community based natural resources management (CBNRM) principles and approaches in future. This will require designing the projects through a process involving multi-stakeholder consultation and critical situation analysis. In terms of the components, given the increasing vulnerability and impact of climate change in Churia range and Tarai region as a whole, apart from sustainably managing land and related natural resources to create community assets, building resilient infrastructure and community based conservation and development (C&D) activities are likely to make the interventions not only achieve better outcomes and impacts but also adaptive to climate change. This project provides the WWF-Nepal and other national NGO/INGOs a good learning in planning and implementing integrated, cross-scale and climate resilient project. There is also a lesson on the need for resolving the issues of providing secure land and tree tenure through land registration before starting conservation activities in agro-pastoral lands. This calls for wider national level discussion on challenges in implementing NLUP, 2012.

Lesson to achieve impact at scale: The SLMCRN being a pilot project was expected to be scaled out and scaled up during its 3 year duration so that its wider relevance could be seen through achievement of outcomes and impact. The lesson that can be learned from the project assessment is that although both scaling out (geographic expansion) and scaling up (evidence base for policy and knowledge influence and impact) are possible but it requires continuity of activities by the GoN ministries through their regular budget and creation of enabling environment for cross-sector collaboration. However, the PMU and WWF GEF Agency should first develop a concise and comprehensive documentation of the project results and lessons learned and mount targeted communication including to the participating ministries and the National Planning Commission (NPC), Nepal.

Lessons for regional and global learning

Investment in sustainable land management should be always done in an integrated, holistic, and synergistic manner involving all stakeholders that run land based social and environmental activities. Integrated projects yield better global environmental benefits (GEBs) as demonstrated by this Project. Here, the central level agencies and stakeholders – the MoLRM, MoAD, MoFSC, MOLD and MoPE in this Project- and their respective district line agencies were identified and organized to work as one programmatic team for project execution of activities, generation of outputs and management of outcomes. During implementation

of the project, there was active involvement of other district and central level stakeholders from the beginning to end of the project in integrated manner. Some district level CBOs and NGOs were also involved while implementing the project. This kind of institutional arrangement provides a good model of working among different Rio conventions and Nepal's achievement in this regard is worth sharing at global forums such as in the upcoming UNCCD and UNFCCC conference of party sessions.

Good practices in addressing issues relating to evaluation criteria, management and approach

GEF projects follow international best practices and globally applicable frameworks and guidelines which the SLMCRN has tried its best to achieve. However, in the global discourse on implementation of the provision of Rio conventions, there is an increasing realization that `top-down' and `one-size-fits-all' approach does not work. This is perhaps the reason why all the three Rio conventions have the provision of `nationally driven process' and `common but differentiated responsibility based on capability'. Therefore the best practices is to allow local and national processes and procedures to be integrated with globally determined policies such GEF's Environment and Social Safeguard Policy allowing for local customization or adjustment. The bad practice could be to apply blanket solution of globally set standards and rules which the evaluators consider the will not be effective in addressing issues relating to evaluation criteria. In this Project, the bad practice may be to suggest not planning Leucaena leucocephala plant as fodder trees on the basis of its `exotic origin'. However, this plant is widely planted under GoN programs.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Terminal Evaluation

SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES FOR THE EVALUATION

WWF Nepal is seeking an independent consultant to undertake a Terminal Evaluation (TE) of the Project. The TE will comply with the guidance, rules and procedures as described in the GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) Terminal Evaluation Guidelines1 as well as the GEF Ethical Guidelines.2

The GEF Independent Evaluation Office requests a Terminal Evaluation in order to 1) promote accountability and transparency, 2) synthesize lessons for the selection, design and implementation of GEF projects, 3) provide feedback on issues, and 4) allow the GEF Evaluation Office to analyze and report on effectiveness of GEF operations, including achievement of Global Environmental Benefits (GEBs).

The objectives of this terminal evaluation are to examine the extent, magnitude and sustainability of any project impacts to date; assess performance including progress towards project outcomes and outputs; identify any project design problems; review the roles and responsibilities of relevant stakeholders; analyze the implementation arrangements; review donor partnership processes (including co-finance); assess support efforts of the WWF GEF Agency; assess stakeholder involvement; assess adherence to policies and procedures, including those for environmental and social safeguards; assess the project adaptive management strategy; and draw lessons learned that can both improve the sustainability of results from this project, enhance future related projects and aid the effectiveness of the GEF Agency.

EVALUATION APPROACH AND METHOD

The Evaluator will be contracted and report to the WWF Nepal Representative. As such, WWF Nepal will also provide documentation, reimbursement, payment and logistical support for the consultant. The WWF GEF Agency will provide feedback to the reports and support as necessary.

1 Please see the GEF Terminal Evaluation Guidelines, published on the GEF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) website. The WWF Evaluation Guidelines are also useful, but do not substitute for the requirements under the GEF IEO. 2 Please see the GEF Ethical Guidelines as published on GEF website.

While this TOR provides an overview of the requirements of the TE and report, the consultant is expected to follow all procedures and requirements detailed in the GEF Terminal Evaluation Guidelines.3 The evaluation must provide evidence-based information that is useful, independent, participatory, respectful, credible, transparent, and ethical. The evaluator(s) must be unbiased and free of any conflicts of interest with the project. As such, the Evaluator cannot be previously employed by the Executing Agency, except as an independent evaluator.

The evaluator(s) is expected to reflect all stakeholder views and follow a participatory and consultative approach. There should be close engagement with government counterparts, the GEF operational focal point, the Executing Agency (WWF Nepal), partners and key stakeholders. Contact information has been provided on the cover page.

The consultant will liaise with the WWF Nepal Representative and Project Management Unit (PMU) and WWF GEF Agency on any logistical and/or methodological needs for the evaluation. In addition to the inception report, a draft terminal evaluation report will be prepared and circulated to WWF Nepal and the WWF GEF Agency to solicit comments and suggestions for incorporation into the final report.

The evaluation process will consist of:

A. Desk review of project documents, including but not limited to:

• Project Document (ProDoc) and CEO Endorsement Letter; • Independent Project Review Report (March, 2016); • Project Supervision Mission Reports; • Relevant safeguards documents, including safeguards Categorization Memo, Social Assessment, Beneficiaries Selection Criteria Document, Open Grazing Free Zone Mitigation Plan, etc; • Relevant documents assessing gender mainstreaming, gender-related concerns/issues • Bi-annual Project Progress Reports (PPR) including Results Framework and AWP Tracking; • Annual Work Plans (AWP) and Budgets; • Annual Monitoring Reviews (AMR) and Project Implementation Reports (PIRs); • GEF Tracking Tools; • Relevant financial documents, including quarterly financial reports and co-financing letters from government; • Meeting minutes, including those from Project Steering Committee (PSC) meetings; and • Other relevant documents provided by the Executing Agency and partners.

B. In-person visit to Kathmandu and follow-up to interview and consult with Executing Agency, WWF Nepal PMU and/or WWF Nepal Representative, Operational Focal Points (OPF), Project Steering Committee (PSC) members and Project Coordination Committee (PCC) members; C. Interviews with WWF GEF Agency staff who were involved in the preparation of the project and during project supervision; D. Visits to project field sites for interviews, discussions and consultations with local partners and beneficiaries; E. Post-field visit presentation on initial findings to PMU and partners[6];

F. Draft report to be shared with WWF GEF Agency and WWF Nepal for review and feedback. A sample TE report outline is provided in Annex A; and

G. Final TE report not to exceed 40 pages (excluding annexes) that has incorporated feedback and comments from WWF GEF Agency, WWF Nepal representative and partners.

The evaluator(s) is expected to frame the evaluation findings using the six (6) core criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, results/impact, sustainability and adaptive capacity. Definitions of each of these criteria are available in Annex B. The evaluator(s) will provide a rating on relevance, effectiveness and efficiency to assess the level of achievement of project objectives and outcomes compared to the expectations set out in the Project Results Framework (will be provided). The Evaluator will also provide a rating on Sustainability/Risk and a rating of the project M&E system. A ratings summary table template will be provided to the Evaluator(s) as well as GEF rating scales and definitions.

EXPECTED OUTPUTS OF EVALUATION REPORT

The TE will comply with the rules and procedures referenced in the TOR and outlined in more detail in the GEF Terminal Evaluation guidelines.4 Please see Annex A for a sample outline of the report.

The Terminal Evaluation report should include:

• Identification of project strengths and successes, including ratings for relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, results/impact and overall achievement of outputs and outcomes; • Identification of challenges and shortcomings; • Analysis of risk to sustainability of project outcomes, including Sustainability rating; • Review of Monitoring and Evaluation systems, including rating for M&E and adaptive capacity; • Description of the catalytic role of the

[6] See the GEF Terminal Evaluation Guidelines , published on the GEF Independent Evaluation Office website

project;5 • Analysis of alignment between project and GEF and WWF priorities; • Analysis of whether the project interventions addressed the challenges outlined in the ProDoc as well as the independent project review. Include a description of the success to date; • Assessment of WWF GEF Agency performance during: i. Preparation phase; and ii. Implementation phase; • Assessment of the performance of WWF Nepal PMU and project partners during: i. Preparation phase, including but not limited to establishing enabling environment, beneficiary/stakeholder consultations and involvement; and ii. Implementation phase, including, but not limited to: gender mainstreaming and inclusion; compliance with WWF safeguards policies, quality of external relationships and participatory processes. • Assessment of country ownership and alignment with government policies and frameworks; • Assessment of co-finance, financial planning and management;

4 For additional information on the GEF Terminal Evaluation Guidelines, see the GEF Terminal Evaluation Guidelines, published on the GEF Evaluation Office website. 5 See details in the GEF Terminal Evaluation Guidelines.

• Identification of lessons learned regarding: project design (theory of change), implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, using the core evaluation criteria (see Annex B); • Recommendations that cover: practical and short-term corrective actions, as applicable; recommendations for PMU and WWF GEF Agency; project M&E; recommendations on best practices towards achieving project outcomes and their sustainability; and replication for other projects of similar scope; • Information on terminal evaluation team, as well as date of evaluation, sites visited, participants, key questions and methodology used.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING the TE team will: • Evaluate adherence to WWF and GEF-5 policies and procedures on mainstreaming of gender, in both the project design and implementation; and • Assess gender inclusion and extent to which gender was tracked through the monitoring of the project, including use of gender disaggregated monitoring indicators.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND CO-FINANCE

The evaluation will assess and explain the key financial aspects of the project, including: general financial management of the project; the extent of co-financing planned and realized; utilization of grant funds distributed to project partners; any variances between planned and actual expenditures; results from financial audits, etc.

All financial audits and reporting should be taken into consideration. The evaluator will receive assistance from the WWF Nepal Representative and W WF GEF Agency to obtain financial data in order to complete the project identification and financial tables required (format will be provided).

Annex 2: Evaluators' composition and expertise

The Terminal Evaluation has been done by a team 3 consultant evaluators and two research associates led by the Principal Evaluator Dr. Madhav Bahadur Karki supported by two evaluators Dr. Mohan Wagley and Dr. Sarba Raj Khadka. Mr. Kulendra Kunwar and Sanjeev Poudel have provided supporting inputs.

1. Mr. Madhav Bahadur Karki, has Ph.D. Forestry (Minor –Resource Economist) from Michigan State University (1988 – 1992), M.S. in Range Management (Minor – Forest Management and International Agricul. Dev.; Training in Economic Analysis) from Colorado State University (1980 – 1982), and B. Sc. Agriculture (Hons.) from Punjab Agricultural University (1971 – 1976). He has more than 37 years of work experience in different agencies and areas of expertise. Dr. Karki has made following contributions related to this assignment (some selected only):

- Worked as the International External Reviewer of the SWISS-ASEAN Social Forestry and Climate Change Project in ASEAN countries (April-May), 2016.
- Worked as the Mid-term External Evaluator by the WWF/GEF to evaluate the GEF funded Sustainable Land Management Project in Churia Region, Nepal (February-March, 2016).
- Prepared Knowledge Gaps and Capacity Development Action Plan for Climate Change Management in Bangladesh (ADB/BAN/PPCR TA Project).
- Developed a Strategy and Action Plan for Involving Private Sector in Forestry for Nepal's Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI).
- Worked as a Team Member of the Mid-term Performance Evaluation team hired by the ECODIT, Washington DC, USA for evaluating the USAID/WWF Hariyo Ban Project.
- Worked as the NRM Expert for preparing the report on establishing National Forestry Entity (NFE) in Nepal.
- Worked as the Team Leader of the ADB/ISET/IDS Study on Indigenous and Local Adaptation Practices in Nepal; study successfully. Worked as the Team Leader of the ADB/ISET/IDS Study on Indigenous and Local Adaptation Practices in Nepal; study successfully completed and report published by the MoSTE, Govt. of Nepal and ADB, Manila.

He has following publications to his credit:

- Madhav Bahadur Karki, Arun Bhakta Shrestha, and Matthias Winiger (2011); Enhancing Knowledge Management and Adaptation Capacity for Integrated Management of Water Resources in the Indus River Basin. In: Mountain Research and Development, 31(3):242-251. 2011; Published By: International Mountain Society; DOI: 10.1659/MRD-JOURNAL-D-11-00017.1 URL: http://www.bioone.org/doi/full/10.1659/MRD-JOURNAL-D-11-00017.1
- Karki, Madhav Pradeep Mool, and Arun Shrestha (2011). Impacts of Climate Change on the Water and Ecological Security of the Himalayan Mountains and need for Adaptation through South-South Exchange. In: Climate Change and Water: Experiences from the Field; proceedings of the XIVth IWRA World Water Congress. September 25-29, 2011 – Porto de Galinhas, Recife, Brazil.

• Karki, Madhav, Ajaya Dixit, Kamal Thapa, Moon Shrestha (2013). Assessing Vulnerability and Planning Adaptation in Panchase: An Ecosystem-based Adaptation Approach; In: proceedings (forthcoming) of the International Conference on Forests, People and Climate: Changing Paradigm (FPCCP); Institute of Forestry, Pokhara, Nepal;

• Dixit, A. Karki, M. and Shukla, A. K. (2014). Vulnerability Impact Assessment and Adaptation Planning in Panchase. Ecosystem Region Nepal. Kathmandu: Institute for Social and Environmental Transition-Nepal/UNEP/UNDP/BMU; http://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/vulnerability-and-impactsassessment-adaptation-planning-panchase-mountain-ecological; isbn : 978-9937-8519-2-3

• Karki, Madhav (2014). Green Economy for Sustainable Development in Nepal: Role of Forestry Sector; In: The Initiation; Journal of the Student Forum for Forestry Research and Environment Conservation (SUFFREC). http://www.nepjol.info/index.php/INIT/article/view/10259;

• MoSTE (2015). Indigenous and Local Knowledge and Practices for Climate Resilience in Nepal, Mainstreaming Climate Change Risk Management in Development, Ministry of Science, Technology, and Environment (MoSTE). Vol. 1: Synthesis Report; Vol. 2. Case Studies. Publisher, Govt. of Nepal; ISBN: 978-9937-2-9310-5; http://ppcr.moste.gov.np/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/ADB-reportfinal_Web.pdf; http://ppcr.moste.gov.np/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Indigenous_Complete_web.pdf

• Karki, Madhav (2015). Challenges, opportunities and trade-offs in commercialization of medicinal and aromatic plants in South Asia region; South Asia Regional Chair, Commission on Ecosystem Management (CEM), IUCN & Global Task Force member, Indigenous and Local Knowledge, IPBES;
http://www.academia.edu/12863952/challenges_opportunities_and_tradeoffs_in_commercialization_of_medicinal_and_aromatic_plants_in_south_asia_region

2. Dr. MOHAN PRASAD WAGLEY, PH.D. is the Watershed Specialist working in the Centre for Green Economy Development- Nepal (CGED-Nepal).

Qualifications: (i) Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Watershed Management from Forest Research Institute (FRI), Dehra Dun (ii) MS . in Range Management from Colorado State University, USA (iii) MSc in Forest Management from Forest Research Institute (FRI), Dehra Dun. (iv) Bachelor's Degree in BSc pure science from Tri-chandra College, Kathmandu.

Major Trainings received : Training in Forestry Project & Planning and Management. University of Philippines, LOS BANOS, College of Forestry, PHILIPPINES, Mar 6- Apr 16, 1988: Training Course in the Resources Development of Watershed Lands. University of Arizona, School of Renewable Natural Resources, TUCSON, ARIZONA (USA), Jun 8- Jul 17, 1987; Training Course on Integrated Resources Development Planning and Management, Los Banos, PHILIPPINES, Dec 12, 1984-Jan 27,1985 ; Regional Training Course on Erosion Control and Reforestation in SE-ASIA. The University of the Philippines, College of Forestry, Los Banos, PHILIPPINES, Aprl 4, to May 2, 1997

Major Seminars and workshops attended : 7th Session on United Nations Forum on Forests, New York, USA Apr 16-27, 2007 ; 6th Session on United Nations Forum on Forests, New York, USA Feb 13-24, 2006 ; workshop on Country- led Initiatives on Multi-year Program of Work of UNFF, Berlin, Germany. Nov 15-18, 2005; 5th. Session on United Nations Forum on Forests, New York, USA, May 16-27, 2005 ; XII World Forestry Congress, Quebec, CANADA (A member of Nepal delegation lead by Minister for Population and Environment),Sept 21-28, 2003: World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, 26, Aug to Sept 4, 2002; Earth summit 1992 (UNCED). Rio-de-Janeiro, BRAZIL.(A member of Nepal delegation led by Prime Minister), Jun 3- 12 ; Senior Level Expert Workshop to Evaluate Benefit and Constraints of Environmental Impact Assessment Process in SACEP Countries, Colombo, Sri Lanka. UNEP/SACEP/Govt.of Sri Lanka 1992; March 2-6, 1987

Work Experiences :

Position	Duration
Watershed Specialist **Centre for Green Economy Development- Nepal (CGED-Nepal).**	**August 2016 to till date**
Team Leder **Mainstreaming Climate Change Impact on Development Infrastructure – PPCR Component 3 ; ADB/MoSTE, Singa Durbar, Kathmandu**	**June 2013 – Dec 2014**
Project Director NARMA Consultancy Pvt. Ltd. (Centre for Natural Resources Analysis, Management, training and Policy Research), Naya Baneshwor, Kathmandu. Nepal	Jan, 2011 - 2013
Poverty and Environment Initiative (PEI) Advisor Poverty Environment Initiative (PEI)Program UNDP/UNEP	April – December 2010
Project Director NARMA Consultancy Pvt. Ltd. (Centre for Natural Resources Analysis, Management, training and Policy Research), Naya Baneshwor, Kath. Nepal	April, 2008 – March, 2010
Executive Chairman Forests Products Development Board, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, Kathmandu, Nepal	July, 2007- March, 2008
Chief of Planning and Human Resource Development Planning and Human Resource Division, Ministry of Forests and soil Conservation, Kathmandu, Nepal.	June 2002- July, 2007
Director General Department of Soil Conservation/Watershed Management Kathmandu, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, Kathmandu, Nepal.	Nov. 1996–2002
Chief of Planning / Monitoring Division Department of Soil Conservation/ Watershed Management, Ministry of	Sept. 1993 – Nov.

Forests and Soil Conservation, Kathmandu, Nepal	1996
Chief of Environment Division Department of Soil Conservation/Watershed Management, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, Kathmandu, Nepal	Oct. 1990 – Sept. 1993
Project-in-Charge USAID funded Integrated Rural Development Project (Soil Conservation / Watershed Management Office) Dang District, W. Nepal, Department of Soil Conservation and Watershed Management, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, Kathmandu, Nepal.	Jan. 1988 - Oct. 1990
Senior Planning Officer Department of Soil Conservation /Watershed Management, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation Kathmandu, Nepal	July. 1985 - Jan. 1987
Land Use Planner/Soil Specialist USAID funded Resources Conservation and Utilization Project (RCUP), Department of Soil Conservation and Watershed Management, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, Kathmandu, Nepal.	July. 1984 - July. 1985
Watershed Conservation Officer District Soil Conservation and Watershed Management Office, Gorkha. W. Nepal. Department of Soil Conservation and Watershed Management, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation.	Aug. 1983 - July. 1984
Assistant Soil Conservation Officer Department of Soil Conservation and Watershed Management, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation Kathmandu, Nepal.	Sept 1979 - Aug 1983
Field Implementer/Co-coordinator USAID funded Resource Conservation/Utilization Project in Kulekhani, Gorkha, Mygdi and Mustang districts, Department of Soil Conservation and Watershed Management, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation.	Aug 1977- Sept 1979
Assistant Soil Specialist (Project-in Charge, Lother River Catchments Project) Dhading and Chitwan Districts, Department of Soil Conservation and Watershed Management, Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation Kathmandu, Nepal	July 1976- Aug 1977

C. Dr. Sarba Raj Khadka

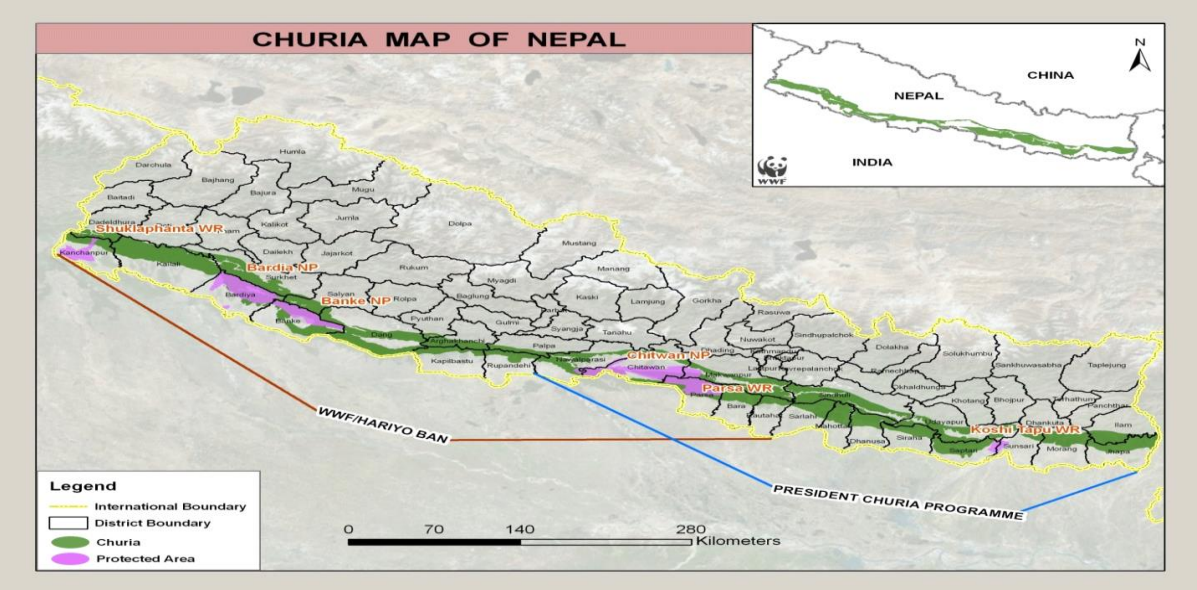
Mr. Khadka has earned Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Master (MSc) Degrees in Natural Resources Management from the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Thailand and Bachelor Degree in Agriculture (BSc Ag) from Tribhuvan University, Nepal. He has more than 25 years of experiences and proven track records of conducting similar studies, implementing projects and undertaking advocacy on DRR and Climate Change. Being engaged in planning, designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating different DRR, Climate Change, food security, agricultural, livelihoods, resources management and community infrastructure development programmes and projects in different socio-economic contexts of Nepal, he has earned adequate experiences in understanding and analyzing the complexity of the Nepalese rural economic and social structures, and local governance of Nepal. Similarly, he has several years of experiences analysing socio-economic conditions, group dynamics, access to finance, rural poverty, partnerships and capacity development of both partners and community level institutions.

Mr. Sarba Raj Khadka, a resident of Dailekh district (Pradesh 6) of Nepal, has been engaging in development sector as a civil society actor, development practitioner, researcher, human rights defender, academician and social development activist since long. He has been active at local, national and international levels' development policy discourses and practices, mainly in the areas of peoples' empowerment, social mobilization, livelihoods, governance and resources management. So, he possesses extensive experience, knowledge and expertise in development planning and management for quality results through his continuous engagement of more than 25 years in this field. His PhD thesis in Natural Resources Management awarded in 2007 by the School of Environment, Resources and Development (SERD) of the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Thailand, is grounded in original research on agriculture and forestry resources management of Nepal. Mr Khadka has worked as the Executive Director (a.i.) of Rural Reconstruction Nepal until July 2016. He is serving as Executive Member of FIAN International Board, Germany. He had served as the Executive Director of Social Welfare Council, the government of Nepal. An account of his professional and voluntary engagements, contributions and experiences are presented below.

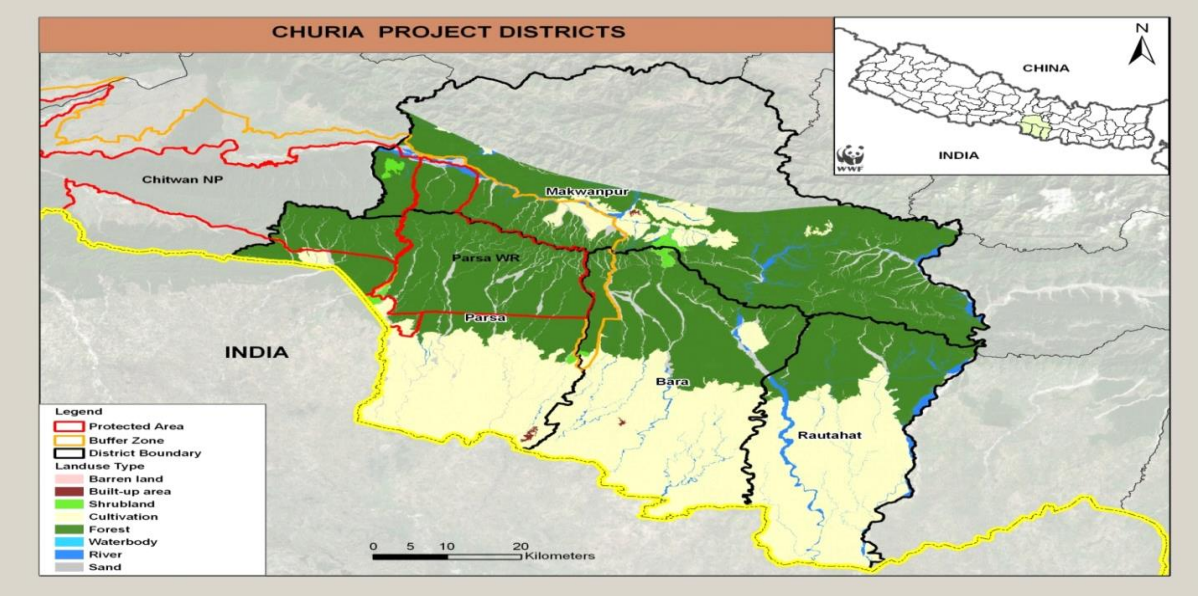
Mr. Khadka has prepared/written several reports/articles in the fields of contemporary development issues, some of which may be accessed through the following links.

- Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Aid Governance and the CPDE in Nepal, a research report on aid governance and development effectiveness in Nepal, 2016 (unpublished). It was submitted to Civil Society Organisations' Partnership for Development Effectiveness (CPDE) Secretariat, Manila, the Philippines.
- "Unsustainability: Causes and Consequences", Social Watch report, 2012. Sustainable development: the right to a future. The Third World Institute and Social Watch, Jackson 1136, Montevideo 11200, Uruguay. Pp 144-145 (available online: http://www.socialwatch.org/node/14008).
- "The need for a new development programme", 2010. Social Watch Report 2010: poverty eradication and gender justice, http://www.socialwatch.org/node/12097
- "Crises, challenges and perspectives", 2009. Social Watch Report, 2009. The Third World Institute and Social Watch, Jackson 1136, Montevideo 11200, Uruguay, pp 124-125 (available online: http://www.socialwatch.org/sites/default/files/Social-Watch-Report-2009.pdf

Annex 3, Chart 1& 2. Geo-referenced maps and photos of project sites



Annex Figure 1. The Churia and Tarai districts which are included in the TAL/Hariyo Ban and President's Churia Conservation Program portfolios of conservation interventions.



Annex Figure 2: Location of four pilot Churia Range districts identified by the project.

Annex 4: List of persons interviewed and the persons met during field visit

A. List of Persons Interviewed:

1. Mr. Kamal Rai, Project Coordinator, PMU, WWF, Nepal
2. Ms. Amelia Kissick, M&E Officer (Result Based Management expert), AMU
3. Ms. Anushika Karunaratne, WWF Safeguard Officer
4. Mr. Matt Erke, Project Support WWF GEF Agency, US
5. Dr. Ghana Shyam Gurung Deputy Country Representative
6. Mr. Santosh Mani Nepal, Senior Director, WWF, Nepal
7. Mr. Sagar Rimal, Ministry of Forest and Soil conservation, rimalsagar@yahoo.com; Phone:
8. Mr. Ram Hari Panta, MoPE, Email: erhpantha@hotmail.com; Mobile: 9851150202
9. Dr. Sujan Rana, Ministry of Livestock Development, Email: sujanrana@yahoo.com; 9841303190
10. Mr. Binod Bhattarai, Ministry of Agriculture Development, Email: binod.sabinaya@gmail.com; Mobile: 9841154892

B. List of people met during the field trip

Makwanpur

1. Mr. Raju Dahal, Chief DSCO, Makwanpur
2. Mr. PurnaKaji Maharjan, Assist. DSCO, Focal Person, Makwanpur
3. Mr. Nirmal Gadal, Chief DADO, Makwanpur

Rautahat

1. Mr. Shyam Sundar Shrestha, Chief DSCO, Rautahat
2. Mr. Naina Kumar Tamang, Assist. DSCO, Focal Person, Rautahat
3. Mr. Dirga Narayan Koirala, DFO, Rautahat
4. Mr. Ram Prasad Shaha, AFO, Focal Person, Rautahat

Parsa

1. Mr. Hari Bhadra Acharya, Warden, PWR, Parsa
2. Mr. Birendra Kandel, Assist. Warden, PWR, Parsa
3. Mr. Sagar Kumar Pathak, Focal Person, PWR, Parsa

Bara

1. Mr. Yugal Kishore Singh, Assist. DLSO and focal Person, Bara

Annex 5. List of documents consulted

Project and Related WWF and GEF Documents:

1. WWF/GEF (2013). Sustainable Land Management in the Churia Range, Nepal. WWF GEF Project Document – Updated Version: 20 September 2013;
2. WWF/GEF (2013). Social Impact Assessment on proposed project: Sustainable Land Management in the Churia Range, Nepal; 22-06-2103
3. WWF (2015) Environment and Social Safeguards Integrated Policies and Procedures (SIPP); March 12, 2015; WWF, USA
4. GEF (2015). Sustainable Land Management Financing in the Global Environment Facility (GEF): A Primer for the Sixth GEF Replenishment Phase (GEF-6); Editor :Jonathan Adams; document prepared by the Land Degradation Focal Area Cluster;

Progress Reports:

1. WWF, Nepal/PMU (2017) Project Closure Meeting Report Sustainable Land Management in the Churia Range, Nepal; Project Closure Meeting; 27 May 2017.
2. Sustainable Land Management in the Churia Range, Nepal Social Impact Mitigation Plan (SIMP) Implementation SIMP Completion Report January-May 31, 2017;
3. SWC (2017). MID-TERM EVALUATION REPORT of Project 'Sustainable Land Management in the Churia Range, Nepal' MTR Report prepared by: Dr. Saroj Gyawali – Team Leader Mr. Sundar Man Shrestha- Member (Financial Expert) Mr. Ram Sharma, Member (SWC) Mr. Arjun Pant, Member (MoLR&M); Social Welfare Council (SWC) Lainchaur, Kathmandu Nepal; March, 2017
4. WWF/PMU (2017). Open Grazing Free Zone (OGFZ) Mitigation Plan; Final Revised Mitigation Plan document
5. CGED-Nepal (2016) MID-TERM REVIEW REPORT For Sustainable Land Management Project in Churia Region, Nepal; WWF/GEF/Government of Nepal; MTR Consultant: Madhav Karki; March, 2016
6. WWF GEF Project Progress Report January – December 2015
7. WWF GEF Project Progress Report January- July 2015
8. FRAGILE: Towards a Sustainable Chure, 2017; Video documentary version Final06; WWF/GEF

Technical and General References:

1. Bhattarai, Hari Prasad (2015). Plan of Action for Impacts Mitigation: Open Grazing Free Zone (OGFZ) Initiation in Chandranagar Municipality, Rautaht District; Sustainable Land Management in Churia Region; WWF/GEF/Government of Nepal; Document submitted to the WWF, US
2. GoN/GEF/WWF (2014). Project Beneficiary Selection criteria; Sustainable land management in churia range; Date: 14th July, 2014
3. WWF-Nepal (2014). Baseline Study of "Sustainable Land Management in Chure Region, Nepal" Project; WWF Nepal Land Degradation Project Baluwatar, Kathmandu, Nepal
4. Practical Solution Consultancy Nepal Pvt. Ltd. (PSPL);June, 2014

5. Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation, Department of Soil Conservation and Watershed Management (DSCWM); Proceedings of the national seminar on Chure; Sustainable management of Chure: efforts, challenges and potential; 2012
6. ICIMOD/CEAPRED (2015). Climate Smart Villages Building Affordable and Replicable Adaptation Pilots in Mountain Areas; contact: International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development GPO Box 3226, Kathmandu, Nepal.
7. Capacity Building of Local Stakeholders on Forest Fire Risk Preparedness under project Capacity Building of Local Forest User Groups of the Buffer zone of Parsa Wildlife Reserve on Forest Fire Risk Preparedness (Hadikhola VDC), Gyanendra Karki, June 2015
8. Sustainable Land Management and Productive Agriculture Practices in Churia Region. Shrawan Kumar Sah, PhD. Professor of Agronomy and Director, CDC Agriculture and Forestry University, Rampur, Chitwan, Nepal. December 2014;
9. Conservation with Earning; Reworked GEF SLMCR Lesson Learned and Good Practices Report; WWF/GEF; 2017

GEF related documents:

- WWF Safeguards Integrated Policies and Procedures (SIPP)
- Evaluation Policy for GEF Funded Projects
- Sustainable Land management financing in the GEF. A Primer for the Sixth GEF Replenishment phase (GEF-6)
- Mid-term review of the GED resource allocation framework (full report), Prepared by the GEF evaluation office. 30 October 2008.
- Mid-Term Review of the UNEP GEF Project "Addressing Land-based Activities in the Western Indian Ocean (WIO-Lab)" April 2007.

Trainings Reports:

- Conceptual Orientation cum Training to Increase Capacity on Integrated Land Management in the Churia Region Bijay Kumar Singh, Ph.D. Consultant/Facilitator June 2014.
- Refresher Training Workshop on Climate Change Adaptation Planning

For Sustainable Land Management in Chure Region Project, Nepal (GoN/GEF/WWF) 07-10 October, 2015, Hetauda, Makwanpur, Nepal

Miscellaneous

- GEF Project Database: https://www.thegef.org/gef/project_detail?projID=5596
- The Global Mechanism: Land Degradation Neutrality- http://www.global-mechanism.org/
- GEF Focal Area (s): https://www.thegef.org/gef/land_degradation

Annex 6: Summary of Field Visits

The field visit and discussions with the district level line agencies started on 27th May while the Lead consultant participated in the Project Closure meeting in Hetauda. Then the field trip was planned (Final schedule is given in Table 1) to last between 11 to 20 June. However, due to political unrest in the 3 Tarai districts of Rautahat, Bara and Parsa beginning 13th June, the field trip was slightly revised and accomplished as shown below. Telephone/email interviews are being arranged with the head of line agencies in these districts. Table 1 presents the revised and adapted Field Visit plan implemented by the Team. Annex Table 1 presents the original field trip plan that has been affected as a result of the ongoing political unrest and transport shut down in the 3 Tarai districts.

Table 1. Itinerary of the Field Visit by the TE Team

Dr. Madhav Karki, Dr. Mohan Wagley and Kulendra Kunwar

Date	Site	Activity	Remarks
27/5/2017	KTM to Hetauda	Participated in the Project closure meeting organized by the PMU	Madhav Karki participated in the meeting
11/6/2017	KTM to Hetauda	Overland travel	Mohan Wagley and Kulendra Kunwar undertook the field trip Overnight stay at Hetauda
12/6	Makawanpur	**Morning:** Interview head of the DFO, DSCO, • Travel to Handikhola-7, Masine and conduct Focused Group Discussion of key people involved in the project supported activities • Visit to Masinaekhola river embankment and bioengineering works, **Afternoon** • Travel to Handikhola-1 • Observe IGA related to agriculture and FGD interaction with beneficiaries	• Collection and understanding of views of on the project along with SLMP focal persons
13/6	Rautahat	• Travel to Chandra Pur and conduct interview with DFO and DSCO • Visit to Gaidatar, observe afforestation at Tileshwornath CF and Kalapani CF; Visit to Milk Cooperatives at Aadarsha CF and interaction with cooperatives member; Visit to Bamboo and Broom grass demo plot of Nava Durga CF • Activities of SIMP	• Collection and understanding of views of DADO, DLSO and DSCO on the project along with SLMP focal person • OGFZ Assessment of the performance of the Zero grazing and/or controlled grazing

			in forest land • Overnight stay at Chandra pur
14/6	Rautahat	• Continue field observation and interview with local communities	• Collection and understanding of views of DADO, DLSO and SLMP focal persons were done by phone • Overnight stay at Chandra pur • Travel to Gaur postponed
15/6	Bara	• Travel to Ratanpuri VDC • Observation of forest nursery, critical afforestation sites (Pashupati CF) and interaction with CFUG members • Visit to Dharapani CFUG, observe water conservation initiative and interaction with beneficiaries	• Evaluate the performance of Zero grazing, afforestation, water conservation and other activities Overnight stay at Hetauda
16/6	Parsa Parsa/Bara	• After breakfast, travel to Aadhabar • Meeting with Warden at PWR • After lunch, travel to Nirmalbasti VDC, Parsa • Observe Biogas tol and Drip irrigation site, interaction with the beneficiaries • Interaction with milk farmers associated with Milk Cooperatives • Interaction with Chairpersons of Nirmal & Kusumbatika BZUC	• Evaluate the performance of activities aimed at SLM to reduce wild life-people conflict • Overnight stay at Hetauda or Parsa wildlife reserve • Collection and understanding of views of DADO, DLSO and DSCO on the project along with SLMP focal person • Travel to Simara, Birgunj, Kalaiya postponed
17/6	Bara to KTM	• Return back to Kathmandu	Kathmandu

Annex 7: Evaluation Question questions

Terminal Evaluation: Sustainable Land Management in the Churia Range, Nepal Project (GoN/GEF/WWF)
Draft Evaluation Questions

for

Ministry of MoLRM

1. Could you pls. share with us on how collaboration and cooperation among different ministries could be made more effective so that each can complement other's outputs and outcomes?; The aim is to collaboratively produce experiences, knowledge and good practices that are more applicable in managing degraded agriculture, forest and grazing lands leading to better and sustainable quality of outputs, outcomes and impacts;

2. Have the completed project activities under the SLMCR project by different district implementing partners (DIPs) achieved their specific objectives and the planned outcomes and are the outputs replicable and sustainable in other districts?

3. How is the progress of the SLMCR project was monitored and assessed, and are there any grants awarded to the MOLRM related agencies? Did the fact that there was no activity under the MOLRM affect the quality of coordination on the part of the MoLRM?
4. What tools were used to ensure the quality, relevance and effectiveness of the outputs (e.g., knowledge products or publications, trained human resources etc.) to different stakeholders?

5. Are there new opportunities and areas to be capitalized by MOLRM and other GoN ministries in using the SLMCR concept and practices to build and strengthen their capacity in land and natural resources management practices in Nepal; this includes human resources development for coordinated or joint working, to enhance sustainable forest management and the livelihood improvement of indigenous and local communities, and other forest-dependent communities? If yes, please provide the major opportunities from the perspective of the MOLRM?

5. What are the lessons learned from the SLMCR that could serve as inputs for the MOLRM based initiatives such as National Land Use Policy and Resettlement programme for the landless people especially in Chure region? Please provide the lessons into the following categories:

i) Lessons on what is working well and why:

ii) Lessons on what is not working and why?

iii) Lessons for wider sub-national or local level

iv) Lessons for wider national and regional levels

Ministry of Agriculture Development (MoAD)

1. What was the reason and attraction for MoAD's interest to and participation in WWF GEF funded SLMCRN Project?

2. One of the activities undertaken by the MoAD was Sloping Land Agriculture Technology or SALT; Was this activity decided based on the demand of the local people in Churia and also through consultation with the DADO staff? If it was not what was the rationale for accepting SALT by the MOAD? What was the reason that SALT was later handed over to DSCO?

3. Some of the other activities such as mixed cropping, plastic ponds, micro irrigation, vegetable farming and banana farming are ongoing but most of the farmers complain of lack of technical supervision and quality seeds as major problems of even successful programme not getting replicated and extended; Even the DADOs accepts that they have hardly visited the site and let the focal points run the programme which local people complain is very top-down and supply drive; kindly share your thoughts why this lack of DADO's ownership has happened? Farmers complain that DADO and DLSO especially in 3 tarai districts do not release fund and make people travel to HQ many time and when they come they take commission out of the project budget? How cans this tendency of treating GEF's incremental funding as ` donor programme' prevented?

4. At the policy and strategic level, how could the results and learning of the SLMCRNP assist MoAD's in implementing MOAD's programmes such as climate smart agriculture (CSA) and food security improvement especially in Churia range?

5. Are there new opportunities to be capitalized by MoAD in promoting Value Chain Development in commercial vegetable farming based on the outputs of and learning of the project?

- What are the lessons learned by the MoAD from the SLMCRNP that could serve as inputs for the design of future projects?
- Lessons on what worked well and why:
- Lessons on what did not work well and why?
- Lessons for Govt. of Nepal in promoting integrated Hill and Tarai agriculture?
- Lessons for wider regional and global learning?

6. While reflecting back do you feel that instead of the SLMP fund being managed by a ingle entity the WWF-Nepal, a government entity such as Rashtrapati Chure Program could be given the responsibility? Please focus on efficiency, fiduciary risk management, timely budget release and synergy.

7. Can you pls. share with us based on the experiences gained in SLMCRNP, how in future we could improve collaboration and cooperation among different ministries (MoLM, MoAD, MoFSC, MoPE, and MoLD) and departments both at centre and district levels ?. The aim will be to complement outputs leading to better impacts at ground level.

Nepal – WWF-GEF Sustainable Land Management Project in Churia region

Terminal Evaluation Questions: Ministry of Livestock Development (MoLD)

1. How effective has been the Zero Grazing (ZG) or Open Grazing Free Zone (OGFZ) initiative implemented by the SLMP especially in Chandrapur, Handi Khola, and Nirmal Basti/Kusumbatika VDCs? what are the major good practices that the DLSO can replicate and/or upscale?

2. Some project activities such as OGFZ seems to have created some unintended consequences such as degradation of adjoining national forests and also exclusion of some of the traditional grazing land users who are not included among the project beneficiaries? Do you agree with these reporting and do you think a Grievances Redress Mechanism (GRM) being planned will address these issues?

3. Are there new opportunities to be capitalized by MoLD in managing degraded forest and grazing lands to enhance sustainable forest management and improve the livelihood and well-being of forest-dependent livestock farmers? If yes, please provide the major ones?

4. Could you share with us on how you would further enhance collaboration and cooperation among different district level line agencies in SLMP like projects and complement their outputs so that they jointly or collaboratively produce knowledge based solutions that can lead to better quality of program design, implementation, outcomes and impacts;

5. With the knowledge and knowhow gained and information gathered thus far on most successful activities such as Milk Collection and Chilling Centre, how would you see the project induced results being mainstreamed in the livestock production and development policies, plans and programmes?

6. Are there new opportunities as a result of the SLM to be capitalized by the MoLD in managing forest and agriculture land for improving the livestock based livelihood and well-being of indigenous peoples, local communities, forest dwellers and other forest-dependent communities? If yes, please provide the major ones.

7. What are the lessons learned from the SLM activities implemented in 4 districts that could serve as inputs for the sustainable development and adaptation plans and programmes? Please provide the lessons into the following categories:

I. Lessons on what is working well and why:

II. Lessons on what is not working and why?

III. Lessons for wider sub-national or local level

IV. Lesson for wider national or regional, and global (cross-regional and global)

8. What is your view on having the funds contributed by GEF/WWF being managed by a single entity, for example, through the WWF-Nepal and/or Chure Rashtrapati programme? Please focus on efficiency, fiduciary risk management and synergy.

9. Could you share with us on how you would further enhance collaboration and cooperation among land based ministries and complements each other's outputs? The aim is to promote all land based and community based service oriented programs and knowledge are managed in a more synthesized and applicable manner leading to better quality of programmatic influence and outcome/s.

Evaluation Questions (GEF WWF Agency)

Sustainable Land Management in Churia Range, Nepal Project

1. What are the major strengths and weaknesses in the relationship between the implementing agency (WWF GEF AMU and support team) and executing agency (WWF Nepal PMU)?; Please focus on a) clarity of roles and responsibilities especially in decision making processes, b) level of support provided to each other, c) communication methods and usefulness (timeliness, inclusivity), d) involvement/engagement on critical issues and e) capacity enhancement and training (on-the-job) and orientation (in view of the high turnover of the staff especially in the PMU).

2. The SLMP being a pilot global project aiming to achieve synergistic and coherent results relevant to all the three Rio conventions i.e. CBD, UNFCCC and UNCCD; in your views, are the assumptions used by the

Project design team still valid? If yes, why there seems to be relatively poor coordination and collaboration among the implementing ministries and low compliance of the SIPP guidelines?

3. Given the fact that the insecure land tenure is the principal cause of unsustainable land management practices leading to degradation of forest and grazing lands in Chure region, what past lessons especially in terms of policy incentives and disincentives should the WWF as the GEF agency and GEF itself team have suggested (e.g. Nepal's largely successful Leasehold Forestry Policy) in assuring successful accomplishment of SLM project objectives?

4. How effective has been the Governance and management structure put in place for implementation of the SLMP? There is perception that the functions assigned in the project and mandate/specialization of the GoN ministries did not match well resulting in less active and meaningful participation by key ministries especially Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation in the Project?

5. To what extent SLMP been able to reduce the climate endued vulnerability of the indigenous and poor communities by reducing the forest and agriculture land degradation and increasing the benefits accrued from the land managed by the beneficiary communities in an inclusive and sustainable manner?

6. How successful has the project been in building capacity of women and vulnerable peoples' institutions? In particular which aspect of institutional capacity (leadership, decision making capability, and technical knowhow) was felt critical in ensuring fair and transparent access and benefit sharing among the participating users in community forest and grazing land management?

7. Are there new opportunities for the indigenous and marginalized communities to be capitalized by Nepal in managing its Chure region to enhance sustainable land management and improve the livelihood and well-being of indigenous peoples, local communities, forest dwellers and other forest-dependent communities? If yes, please provide the major ones from integrated social and environmental perspectives?

8. Given the common saying: `Monitoring is as good as Planning or Design' how effective have been the Participatory M&E tools employed in the Project?; in particular given the fact that out of 3 intervention areas, only one area is of `hardware' types, do you feel that the SLM has disproportionate number of quantitative indicators whereas the need was to monitor more qualitative indicators?

9. Could you share with us on how to ensure better collaboration and cooperation among GoN ministries in managing land resources in an integrated manner so as to ensure that the process brings in complementarities and synergy in outputs and outcomes? The aim is to collectively co-produce and apply knowledge that is more synthesized and applicable leading to better quality of programmatic influence and outcome/s?

10. What are the lessons learned from the SLMP that could serve as inputs for designing and implementing similar projects the WWF-US? Please provide the lessons into the following categories:

a. I) Lessons on what is working well and why:

b. ii) Lessons on what is not working and why?

c. iii) Lessons for overall country or local level?

d. iv) Lessons for wider regional and global (cross-regional) level?

11. 10. How can the lessons drawn from the SLMP be internalized by the GoN land management related ministries and/or by the participating stakeholders including the WWF and GEF to better understand, practice and

institutionalize the essence of SLM principles and rationale in the context of rapid socio-economic and climatic changes happening in Nepal?

Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation (MoFSC)

1. How were the SLM activities implemented at the local and district levels identified and agreed upon, and how did you ensure that these support and complement each other in an integrated and synergetic manner?

2. Could you elaborate on the major Project outputs to identify, assess and address common land use policy and strategic issues in promoting SLM in Nepal?

3. Are there any evidence of SLM PIU mainstreaming policy recommendations that enhance SLM including community-based; sustainable management, CC adaptation strategies and best practices in grazing land management, arising from the project in managing, conserving and developing their land and other natural resources?

4. Are the established User Groups (UGs) formed under the SLMP sustainable without continuous funding? Has the SLMP enabled GoN ministries and line agencies to enhance their SLM, SFM, CSA practices to achieve sustainable natural resources management, address climate change adaptation and mitigation, and improve the well-being of the local communities?

5. Could you share with us the progress/results of the Adoption of Sloping Agriculture Land Technology: SALT carried out in the 4 districts and how it has reduced the land degradation trend?

6. Are there new opportunities to be capitalized by participating ministries in managing agriculture and forest land considering climate and socio-economic change using the outputs of the project?

7. What are the lessons learned from the SLMP that could serve as inputs for the future SLM based projects? Please provide the lessons into the following categories:

   i), lessons on what is working well and why:

   ii) Lessons on what is not working and why?

   iii) Lessons for wider national, sub-national or local level

   iv) lesson for wider national, and sub-national (cross-districts and national)

8. What is your view on having the funds contributed by GoN ministries being pooled by a single entity, for example, through the Rashtrapati Chure Program or a dedicated Fund at the national level? Please focus on efficiency, fiduciary risk management and synergy.

Ministry of Population and Environment (MOPE)

1. Could you share with us on how you would further enhance collaboration and cooperation among different ministries and complement each others' outputs?; The aim is to collaboratively produce knowledge and good practices that are more applicable in nature leading to better quality of integrated programme implementation and outcome/s;
2. Have the completed projects by different ministry line agencies achieved their specific objectives and the planned outcomes and are the outputs replicable and sustainable?

3. How is the progress of the SLM project was monitored and assessed, and are there any grants awarded to the MOPE related agencies? What tools are being used to ensure the quality, relevance and effectiveness of the outputs (knowledge products and human resources)?

4. Are there new opportunities and areas to be capitalized by GoN ministries in using the SLM to build and strengthen their capacity in SLM practices, including human resources development, to enhance sustainable forest management and the welfare and livelihoods of indigenous and local communities, and other forest-dependent communities? If yes, please provide the major ones?

5. What are the lessons learned from the SLM that could serve as inputs for the MOPE based initiatives such as NAP, NDC, NAPA, LAPA and CAPA and/or next phase of the NCCSP? Please provide the lessons into the following categories:
    I. Lessons on what is working well and why:
    II. Lessons on what is not working and why?
    III. Lessons for wider sub-national or local level
    IV. Lesson for wider national or regional level

6. Could you share with us on how you would further enhance collaboration and cooperation among different ministries so that such collaborative efforts in nature leading to better quality of outcomes?

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