



The World Bank

PROGREEN Kazakhstan Resilient Landscapes Restoration Project (P179008)

Concept Environmental and Social Review Summary

Concept Stage

(ESRS Concept Stage)

Date Prepared/Updated: 05/22/2022 | Report No: ESRSC02803

**BASIC INFORMATION****A. Basic Project Data**

Country	Region	Project ID	Parent Project ID (if any)
Kazakhstan	EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA	P179008	
Project Name	PROGREEN Kazakhstan Resilient Landscapes Restoration Project		
Practice Area (Lead)	Financing Instrument	Estimated Appraisal Date	Estimated Board Date
Environment, Natural Resources & the Blue Economy	Investment Project Financing		9/30/2022
Borrower(s)	Implementing Agency(ies)		
Ministry of Ecology, Geology, and Natural Resources, The Republic of Kazakhstan	Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology, and Natural Resources		

Proposed Development Objective

To pilot agroforestry practices using a community-centered approach and to build government capacity for management of protected areas using an integrated landscape approach.

Financing (in USD Million)	Amount
Total Project Cost	2.00

B. Is the project being prepared in a Situation of Urgent Need of Assistance or Capacity Constraints, as per Bank IPF Policy, para. 12?

No

C. Summary Description of Proposed Project [including overview of Country, Sectoral & Institutional Contexts and Relationship to CPF]

As a part of the Global Partnership for Sustainable and Resilient Landscapes Program PROGREEN trust fund had approved the total amount of US\$2 million allocation for Kazakhstan. The 5-year PROGREEN program is expected to target highly degraded border terrestrial ecosystems focusing on forests and protected areas, and degraded areas with agriculture land uses, such as rangelands in between them in key areas in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan with high poverty indices. The project is processed as a separate project, but has close links with the existing recipient executed



GEF Resiland project and use existing implementation arrangements. PROGREEN Resiland project activities will support capacity building for the forestry organizations in the Aksu Zhabagly and Karatau State Natural Reserves in South Kazakhstan by improving eco-tourism and biodiversity conservation and monitoring infrastructure, pilot agroforestry practices in the territories adjacent to protected areas, and promote restoration and preservation of the unique collection of plants and revival of arboretum at the Kazakh Scientific Research Institute of Forestry.

D. Environmental and Social Overview

D.1. Detailed project location(s) and salient physical characteristics relevant to the E&S assessment [geographic, environmental, social]

Kazakhstan, a landlocked country in Central Asia, is physically the world's 9th largest country with 18.2 million peoples, one of the lowest population densities. Kazakhstan has transitioned from lower-middle-income to upper-middle-income status in less than two decades. Since 2002, GDP per capita has risen six-fold and poverty has fallen sharply. Kazakhstan's Human Development Index (HDI) is 0.817— which makes 50th out of 189 countries. However, when the value is discounted for inequality, the HDI falls to 0.759. While Kazakhstan has a rapidly growing economy, rural population, farmers and pastoralists outside of the main urban centers face significant climate change risks to their livelihoods including increased aridity, water management challenges and extreme weather events. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected economic growth and livelihoods.

Agriculture remains under 10% of GDP and supports only 20% of total labor. A relatively small percentage of land is used for crops, with the percentage being higher in the north. 70% of agricultural land is permanent pastureland. Farms in Kazakhstan are divided into three categories: agricultural enterprises, private (or peasant) farms, and subsidiary household plots. Agricultural enterprises tend to be large-scale operations and are involved strictly in commercial production of commodities, accounting for about 65% of Kazakhstan grain production. Nearly 200,000 peasant (or family) farms produce grain, and they account for about 35 percent of national output. According to the 2006 census, 95 percent of the farms are smaller than 1,000 hectares. Peasant farms, like agriculture enterprises, produce commodities mainly for sale rather than for private consumption. Household farms are small personal subsidiary plots (average size 0.15 hectares) that are used to produce crops or livestock chiefly for personal consumption. Kazakhstan's 3 million household farms produce less than 1 percent of Kazakhstan grain but account for 50 percent of the country's poultry inventory and 85 percent of the cattle. The government owns all agricultural land, and farmland is leased to holding companies, agricultural enterprises, and peasant farmers under 49-year leases.

The Project is focused on Kyzylorda and Zhambyl oblasts in the South, which have high rates of absolute and relative poverty and where there are dry-lands and degraded landscapes on agricultural lands as well as lands of the State Forest Fund. Both oblasts border on mountains to the south and transition to semi-arid steppe to the north. While there is some potential, there is currently little agroforestry in either oblast. Key social characteristics include: 60% of the population is rural; the majority of labor is employed by government or enterprises, a third is self-employed, and a sizable minority works in subsistence farming, fishery, or livestock production; a high percentage has only temporary employment; the NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) category, includes a large number of youth and fresh graduates; the lack of organization networks limits advocacy and results in low participation in the workforce; and a high percentage of the self-employed receive targeted social assistance.

The government's farmer-centric landscape restoration approach is aimed at "model farmers" taking an active role in the restoration though the introduction of agroforestry and other nature based solutions (NBS). While community-



centered landscape restoration refers to hiring community members to conduct planting around villages to protect from dust storms or along roads and watercourses for stabilization. The targeted degraded landscapes will be pilot dry-land areas in the Kyzylorda and Zhambyl Regions. The exact sites are being selected based on criteria that include degree of degradation, economic potential, capacity of local authorities/communities, the biome's diversity, land use types, and avoiding duplication with other initiatives.

D. 2. Borrower's Institutional Capacity

The implementing agency for the project is the Ministry of Ecology, Geology, and Natural Resources, which will use the existing Project Implementation Unit (PIU) for the GEF Resilient Landscape Project (P171577) at the Forest and Wildlife Committee (FWC) as the executing agency. The PIU has already employed environmental and social specialists under the GEF Project as required by the ESCP. The existing environmental and social staff will be sufficient cover the additional activities financed by this recipient executed grant. The existing project has been implemented successfully to date and the implementing agency has developed sufficient capacity related to the expected environmental and social risks. The ESCP also includes specific training required on the World Bank's ESF and on other environmental and social management aspects including those related to landscape restoration as well as any small-scale construction (renovation) works that may be required.

II. SCREENING OF POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL (ES) RISKS AND IMPACTS

A. Environmental and Social Risk Classification (ESRC)

Moderate

Environmental Risk Rating

Moderate

The Environment Risk Rating is Moderate. The project will involve pilot initiatives for landscape restoration, reforestation, orchard development and pasture management in Southern Kazakhstan and also the now dry Aral Sea bed. The PROGREEN grant will also finance small scale rehabilitation of existing tourist facilities in and near – these activities would be limited to repair and rehabilitation of existing buildings, repair of existing paths, trails, and viewpoints with an eye on improving safety, and other small-scale repairs. No large, significant, or irreversible adverse environmental impacts are foreseen, in fact, positive environmental and safety benefits are fundamental to the project development objective and outcomes. These include reduced desertification, salt and dust control, restoration of degraded lands, improved conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in selected ecosystems, reduced use of potentially harmful pesticides, and improved eco-tourism. The proposed project does not involve any major civil works, though some small-scale repairs or upgrades on existing facilities (local offices; tourist information facilities; nursery out buildings; paths, trails, and viewpoints, etc.) may be required. At this point, it is not clear where exactly the proposed pilot initiatives, landscape management, or repair and rehabilitation activities will take place. Expected environmental risks include temporary minor impact (dust, minor soil loss) can be expected from planting activities, and small-scale restoration of existing facilities; potential for asbestos in facilities being rehabilitated; use of pesticides in forest nurseries; and regular occupational health and safety concerns for such activities, particularly during these times of COVID-19. While none of the pilot landscape activities are expected to be carried out within protected areas or critical habitats, some minor upgrading and rehabilitation activities at existing tourism facilities may take place in designated protected areas, but not critical habitats. The ESMF contains guidelines and selection criteria to prevent any negative effects to protected areas or critical habitats.

Social Risk Rating

Moderate



Social risk is rated Moderate. The project will be implemented in several pilot areas in Kyzylorda Region and in Zhambyl Region in the south of the country where both agriculture land and State forests exist, allowing the piloting of PPP in 'model farms'. The project's major social impacts/ risks emanate from three key interventions: 1) three agroforestry demonstration plots in Kyzylorda oblast (5 ha each) combining forestry with fruit production and horticulture; 2) six plots in Zhambyl oblast (20 ha each) on the territory of forest pastures for combining forestry with livestock production; and (3) community centered forestation around Kyzylorda city. Of these, the first two assume significance. The sites for the first two activities within these regions will be selected during implementation based on their degree of degradation, economic potential, capacity of local authorities/ communities to carry out activities and accept new tools, the biome's diversity and land use types. Demo Plots will be created on the existing lands/farms and no new lands will be acquired. Land plots so selected will be such that the farmers and/or local communities already have long-term forest and/or land usage agreements with local authorities and have proven record of operations in agriculture in the recent years. Any land that has been used by farmers and/or local communities for livelihoods purposes without long-term forest and/or land usage agreements with local authorities will be excluded from the project. No changes in the land usage are envisaged. Nor any access restrictions likely to happen. The only major social issue the project needs to address relate to effective outreach such as to ensure successful community mobilization. This would demand an inclusive information, education and communication (IEC) campaign and technology demonstrations and dissemination. Further, the project would rely rather exclusively on local labor force for all the land and tree activities such as preparation of lands – cleaning of weeds, leveling etc. - planting of seedlings, irrigating, pruning, cutting, drafting etc.). So, special attention will have to paid to ensure that working atmosphere will be community friendly and all labor management practices are in accordance with the provisions of ESS 2 – all workers will be hired fairly without discrimination and that no child/ forced labor risks arise as well as safe and healthy conditions with special regard to COVID-19 Situation.

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse/Sexual Harassment (SEA/SH) Risk Rating

Moderate

The risk of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse/Sexual Harassment (SEA/SH) is moderate to low. The policy to use community or locally recruited workforce as much as possible, thus avoiding or substantially reducing labor influx mitigates the risk to a large extent. However, there could also be contractors/associated labor for minor civil thus, cumulatively there could be a significant contractor workforce in a particular area at any given time. The Labor-Management Procedures prescribes the inclusion of Code of Conduct in contracts and associated training as well as the setting up a Grievance Mechanism with a special track for processing complaints related to SEA/SH.

B. Environment and Social Standards (ESSs) that Apply to the Activities Being Considered**B.1. General Assessment****ESS1 Assessment and Management of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts*****Overview of the relevance of the Standard for the Project:***

The environment and social risks are both rated moderate; therefore, the overall ESF risk level is moderate. There are no anticipated negative long-term environmental or social effects. The following World Bank's Environment and Social Standards (ESSs) are relevant: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, and 10. The project will also keep abreast with and follow current World Bank and World Health Organization COVID-19 Guidelines.



Towards addressing the risks, the following instruments have been prepared and approved by the Bank the GEF Resilient Landscape Project (P171577): (i) Environment and Social Management Framework (ESMF); (ii) Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP); and (iii) Labor Management Procedures (LMP). Since this is a recipient executed grant from PROGREEN, it is being processed as a separate project; however, the activities are in line with the original project and the instruments prepared are expected adequately cover all of the activities envisaged. Public consultations on these instruments were conducted during and the instruments have been disclosed on Project and World Bank websites. Nevertheless, prior to approval, these instruments will be reviewed and, if necessary, updated. During implementation, the Project will also undertake a Gender Gap Analysis to assess gender issues in the forestry sector and provide recommendations for any necessary mitigation.

The client has prepared and disclosed an ESMF, which is in compliance with the ESF and has been reviewed and approved by the World Bank during the preparation of that Project. The framework approach is being used since the project is financing small and medium scale pilot activities, most of which will not be identified until implementation begins. The ESMF covers applicable national environmental and social legislation and regulations as well as the relevant ESSs and the World Bank Group's Environmental Health and Safety Guidelines. Where the ESF differs from national legislation and regulations, the stricter standards will take precedence. The Project financed activities, including pilot initiatives, will be screened, based on ESMF. The ESMF outlines the guiding principles of environmental screening, assessment, review, management, and monitoring procedures for the landscape restoration, reforestation, and pasture management activities. The ESMF also provides a check-list for determining if and when site-specific Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIA)/Environmental and Social Management Plans (ESMP) might be required for proposed pilot activities. When required, those ESAs/ESMPs will be prepared, consulted on, and disclosed - they will also be reviewed by the World Bank during regular implementation support missions. The reforestation is expected to utilize native species including pine, saxaul, tamarix, poplar, willow, and aspen. The sustainable pasture management activities will focus on a multi-species approach to pasture management that encourages increased carbon sequestration. The landscape planning and management activities (including fire management strategies) will address natural habitat considerations in both the site-specific and landscape context. Pilot activity designs will examine the cumulative impacts of proposed activities. While pilot activities and small-scale repair and rehabilitation of existing facilities may be carried out within or near designated protected areas, will be

The ESMF structure includes: a project description; an outline of both the World Bank's and the national environmental and social regulatory framework; potential impacts and mitigation measures; guidelines and criteria prohibiting proposed landscape pilot activities within protected areas or critical natural habitats; selection criteria that preclude pilot activities that might require physical and economic displacement as well as loss of livelihoods; an environmental and social assessment of project and subprojects activities; instructions for screening and preparing site specific ESIA/ESMP and ESMP Checklists; instructions for preparing Forest Action Plans, where necessary; institutional implementing arrangements; pest management procedures and safety guidelines for pesticide use in orchards, nurseries and other project activities; planned capacity building activities; minutes of disclosure and public consultations; and monitoring and supervision activities. The ESMF criteria for determining where and when site specific ESIA/ESMP or generic ESMP checklists for the small-scale activities including both landscape restoration, reforestation, and pasture management as well as repair and rehabilitation at existing facilities. Pilot activities will not be undertaken in designated protected areas, though some small scale repair and rehabilitation of existing facilities will be. The review criteria prohibit any activities from being carried out within critical habitats.



Anticipated risks, which are addressed in the ESMF and are expected to be easily mitigable, include dust and minor soil loss during planting; use of pesticides for nurseries or during planting; possible encroachment on natural habitats; and occupational risks and safety issues, including asbestos, related to small-scale construction/ rehabilitation of existing facilities (dust and waste disposal etc.).

The social risks and impacts are related to potential access restriction to both agriculture and State forests as a result of piloting of "model farms" in Kyzylorda Region within the Aral Sea Basin and in Zhambyl Region in the south of the country. To mitigate this risk, the ESMF clearly precludes pilot activities that might require physical and economic displacement or cause loss of livelihoods. Community-centered afforestation pilots to be conducted around Kyzylorda city would not be conducted where prior use of lands by local communities for their livelihoods is observed. Demo Plots will be created on the existing lands/farms and no new lands will be acquired. Land plots so selected will be such that the farmers and/or local communities already have long-term forest and/or land usage agreements with local authorities and have proven record of operations in agriculture in the recent years. Any land that has been used by farmers and/or local communities for livelihoods purposes without long-term forest and/or land usage agreements with local authorities will be excluded from the project. Pilot activities will take place on "model farms", which have been established by the Government of Kazakhstan to pilot innovation and provide a venue for training and extension on successful pilots.

The studies and capacity building financed under both Components 2 will be prepared in line with the ESF to ensure recommendations for future activities are sustainable, and environmentally and socially sound.

Areas where "Use of Borrower Framework" is being considered:

The borrower framework is not being used.

ESS10 Stakeholder Engagement and Information Disclosure

Stakeholder Engagement includes the following: (i) stakeholder identification and analysis; (ii) planning for stakeholder engagement; (iii) grievance mechanism; (iv) consultations on ESMF, LMP; and (v) continuous interface with and reporting to the stakeholders on overall project design and implementation. A Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) has been prepared that enables the project to identify different stakeholders and provides an approach towards engaging with them throughout the project's life. Beneficiaries include farmers, livestock producers, foresters, scientists, and research institutions. Other interested parties include local communities who do not directly benefit from project interventions but will have interest in their potential positive and negative impact on local economy and environment, NGOs, and government agencies. The SEP also identifies impediments, if any, at reaching out to stakeholders as well as reflect/build capacity of the client in engaging with stakeholders. The SEP has been prepared by the client, reviewed by the Bank, and disclosed on both the Bank and Client websites. The client has also developed and put in place a Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) to enable stakeholders to air their concerns/ comments/ suggestions, if any. The SEP details procedures used for consulting and disclosing all ESF instruments prepared for the project (ESMF, LMP, SEP, etc.). Public consultations, compliant with current COVID-19 restrictions, on ESMP, LMP, and SEP will be conducted during Project Appraisal, following the Bank's "Technical Note: Public Consultations and Stakeholder Engagement in WB-supported operations when there are constraints on conducting public meetings".



B.2. Specific Risks and Impacts

A brief description of the potential environmental and social risks and impacts relevant to the Project.

ESS2 Labor and Working Conditions

The Project is expected to encompass the following categories of workers: direct workers, contracted workers, and community workers. Direct workers could be either government civil servants or those deployed as ‘technical consultants’ by the project. The former will be governed by a set of civil services code, the latter by mutually agreed contracts. Local community members will be engaged in community works under the project on a voluntary basis as a result of an individual or collective agreement, and third parties (contractors/subcontractors) may hire local community members in non-complex seasonal, large-scale work that must be performed within a short period of time according to agro-technical terms (e.g. forest planting, planting, weeding, harvesting, etc.).

The LMP includes measures to ensure labor and working conditions are consistent with the ESS 2. And contract workers will be employed as deemed appropriate by contractors, sub-contractors, and other intermediaries, details of which will be known as and when activities' implementation begins. The risk of child/ forced labor is considered to be limited; however, the LMP, in line with national legislation, does prohibit child labor and limits labor by those under 16. The client prepared LMP sets out details for how labor is being managed under the project. Efforts will be made to train and hire as many as possible from local communities where the activities are taking place. The LMP prescribes the inclusion of Code of Conduct in contracts and associated training as well as the setting up a Grievance Mechanism with a special track for processing complaints related to SEA/SH.

The ESMF includes sections on Environment Health and Safety (EHS) based on the World Bank Group EHS Guidelines (EHS checklists for expected types of works, codes of conduct; safety training, procedures for dealing with and disposing of hazardous materials, from any minor rehabilitation financed, like asbestos and lead based paint, construction noise and dust, pesticide management for nurseries, etc.). These issues will be also included in the site specific ESIA/ESMPs and/or ESMP checklists, as relevant, and followed during sub-project implementation.

All project workers will be trained in and expected to adhere to standard Codes of Conduct that address measures to prevent Gender Based Violence/Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (GBN/SEA). In light of the risks due to COVID-19, the Bank's “ESF/Safeguards Interim Note: COVID-19 Considerations in Construction/Civil Works Projects” will be applied.

ESS3 Resource Efficiency and Pollution Prevention and Management

The ESMF includes assessment of risks and impacts and proposed mitigation measures related to relevant requirements of ESS 3, including pesticide use and a pesticide management plans for plantation activities; water use; air pollution; hazardous materials management; and procedures for handling and disposing of hazardous and construction (including asbestos) waste – for subprojects involving civil works. Site specific ESMPs which, where necessary, will include a Pest Management Plan , will address these issues, as relevant.

ESS4 Community Health and Safety



Community health and safety is not expected to be a major risk, since the scale of civil works conducted under the project will be of limited and unlikely to cause risks to local communities, who will play a key part in the design of interventions at the community level. The ESMF includes assessment of work-related health risks; works and road safety; COVID -19 infection; HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases; handling and disposal of hazardous materials such as agrochemicals and possibly asbestos; excessive noise and dust levels, site safety awareness and access restrictions; and labor influx.

ESS5 Land Acquisition, Restrictions on Land Use and Involuntary Resettlement

The team clarified that the project will not cause any physical displacement, livelihoods, or economic displacement impacts.

ESS6 Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Management of Living Natural Resources

The proposed pilot activities in landscape restoration, reforestation, and pasture management are likely to involve sustainable use of natural resources that may include innovative pasture management, forestry, and orchard development. It may also support investment in rehabilitation of existing degraded forests and woodlands to restore protective cover and to make these and other forests more productive. The ESMF sets out the requirement that in such cases, any harvesting of trees by local communities or other local entities supported by the project would adhere to a time-bound action plan for achieving a standard of forest management developed with the meaningful participation of locally affected communities, consistent with the principles and criteria of responsible forest management.

The project will not finance activities that involve any conversion or degradation of critical natural habitats. The project will also not finance industry-scale commercial harvesting operations. Any harvesting of trees by local communities or other local entities supported by the project is unlikely; however, if it occurs, in accordance with ESS 6 paragraph 35(b), a local, time bound Forest Action Plan will be prepared. Such a plan would be prepared for achieving a standard of forest management consistent with the principles and criteria of responsible forest management. These action plans would also be developed with the meaningful participation of locally affected communities, and be acceptable to the PIU and the World Bank prior to being implemented.

As the specific locations of pilot landscape activities are not yet known, the ESMF contains criteria prohibiting them within protected areas or critical natural habitats. The only activities that might take place in designated protected areas are not landscape activities, rather they are minor upgrade and rehabilitation to existing tourist facilities such as visitor centers, paths, trails, and viewpoints. During the review of the ESMF prior to the grant's approval, this issue will be looked at carefully and any updates required for the ESMF will be made. The ESMF also contains check-lists and guidance to help the client deal with issues related to ESS 6 for the different types activities being piloted. Additionally, ESMF criteria include requirements for plantation of only native species, detailed mapping and, where necessary, identification of species and habitats.

ESS7 Indigenous Peoples/Sub-Saharan African Historically Underserved Traditional Local Communities

Based on the screening against ESS 7, this ESS is not considered relevant to the project.

**ESS8 Cultural Heritage**

It is highly unlikely that the project will have any result in any chance finds; however, Southern Kazakhstan is home to several bronze age sites. Therefore, the ESMF includes a section on protection of Cultural Heritage including "chance find" procedures to be followed for proposed pilot activities.

ESS9 Financial Intermediaries

This standard is not currently relevant as no financial intermediaries are party to the project implementation modality.

C. Legal Operational Policies that Apply

OP 7.50 Projects on International Waterways No

OP 7.60 Projects in Disputed Areas No

III. WORLD BANK ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL DUE DILIGENCE**A. Is a common approach being considered?** No**Financing Partners**

None identified at present.

B. Proposed Measures, Actions and Timing (Borrower's commitments)**Actions to be completed prior to Bank Board Approval:**

This recipient executed grant is providing additional funds for the Kazakhstan Resilient Landscapes Restoration Project (P171577), which is already under implementation. As the grant only allows for the financing of additional interventions and does not change the scope of any potential activities, the ESF instruments including ESMF, LMP, and SEP prepared for the Project will be applied to this grant. During preparation, prior to approval, each of these instruments will be reviewed and, if necessary, updated to ensure the new activities under the PROGREEN Grant are fully covered and compliant with the ESF and ESCP.

Possible issues to be addressed in the Borrower Environmental and Social Commitment Plan (ESCP):

A separate ESCP, based on the P171577 ESCP will be prepared for this grant. The ESCP will similar to the one in place for P171577. It will also indicate which, if any, of the ESF instruments require updating and a timeline for accomplishing those updates. It will spell out the need to comply with the ESMF, LMP, and SEP as well as maintain qualified staffing at the PIU.



The World Bank

PROGREEN Kazakhstan Resilient Landscapes Restoration Project (P179008)

IV. CONTACT POINTS

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Borrower/Client/Recipient

Borrower: Ministry of Ecology, Geology, and Natural Resources, The Republic of Kazakhstan

Implementing Agency(ies)

Implementing Agency: Forestry and Wildlife Committee of the Ministry of Ecology, Geology, and Natural Resources

V. FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

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VI. APPROVAL

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