



1. Project Data

Project ID P143914	Project Name GA- Sustainable Mgmt Critical Wetlands	
Country Gabon	Practice Area(Lead) Environment, Natural Resources & the Blue Economy	
L/C/TF Number(s) TF-16689	Closing Date (Original) 30-Apr-2020	Total Project Cost (USD) 7,067,669.10
Bank Approval Date 27-Mar-2014	Closing Date (Actual) 31-Dec-2020	
	IBRD/IDA (USD)	Grants (USD)
Original Commitment	7,521,000.00	7,521,000.00
Revised Commitment	7,521,000.00	7,067,669.10
Actual	7,125,048.14	7,067,669.10

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2. Project Objectives and Components

a. Objectives

The project development objective/global environment objective (PDO/GEO) of the project was to enhance protection of biodiversity in selected forested wetlands on the Ramsar List through knowledge creation and development of conservation measures for sustainable wetlands management (Grant Agreement, Schedule 1, page 6). The formulation of the objective in the PAD (para 25) was identical to the one in the Grant Agreement.



b. Were the project objectives/key associated outcome targets revised during implementation?
No

c. Will a split evaluation be undertaken?
No

d. Components

Component 1: Generating Knowledge and Monitoring of Selected Critical Wetlands Ecosystems (Estimated: US\$0.60million; Actual: US\$0.59 million) intended to generate knowledge on wetlands in Gabon and set up a reliable monitoring system to produce early warnings on potential alterations of wetland ecosystems. The component was divided into the following two subcomponents. *Subcomponent 1.1: Knowledge Creation on Wetland Ecosystems* supported research on the biological wealth and socio-economic dimensions of Gabon's wetland ecosystems, in order to help decision makers better understand their importance. *Subcomponent 1.2: Monitoring System for Wetland Ecosystems* defined and operationalized an appropriate monitoring system for the wetlands by developing monitoring strategies in management plans and building upon the preceding monitoring system work for the Petit Loango and Monts Birougou national parks.

Component 2: Support for Sustainable Management of Selected Critical Wetland Ecosystems (Estimated: US\$3.11 million; Actual: US\$3.00 million) intended to promote sustainable management of critical mangrove ecosystems through the following three subcomponents. *Subcomponent 2.1: Planning for Sustainable Management of Selected Sites* developed monitoring plans for the selected Ramsar sites in line with the Ramsar Handbooks and based on extensive consultations at those sites and the research conducted under Subcomponent 1.1. *Subcomponent 2.2: Strengthening Surveillance Capacities in the Selected Sites* intended to enhance monitoring of the selected Ramsar sites by providing equipment, infrastructure, and training. This subcomponent also intended to strengthen capacities of local communities to monitor wetlands activities through consultations, technical assistance, and awareness raising. *Subcomponent 2.3: Environmentally Friendly, Community-Driven Activities in Wetlands* intended to help communities adjacent to the selected Ramsar sites develop income-generating activities for sustainable wetlands management.

Component 3: Strengthen Institutional Framework to Support Wetlands Management (Estimated: US\$3.33 million; Actual: US\$3.04 million) intended to establish an institutional framework favorable to the sustainable management of the Wetlands of International Importance (WII) at both the national and local levels. With guidance from the Ramsar Handbooks, analyses were undertaken to: (i) assess the existing policy framework for wetland protection in Gabon; and (ii) assess the institutional structures currently governing each WII site. The studies proposed recommendations to strengthen policy and institutional frameworks to better achieve wetland protection objectives. With support from the Ramsar Convention (and based on the data analysis and information obtained in Component 1 and the work on priority setting and resource use planning of Component 2), this component developed a national wetlands strategy in consultation with appropriate agencies.

Component 4: Project Management, Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) (Estimated: US\$0.48 million; Actual: US\$0.48million) intended to support the overall daily administration of the project to ensure that regular M&E was carried out and that results fed back into decision making on project implementation. As the Directorate for Environment and Nature Protection (DGENP: Direction Générale de l'Environnement et la Protection de la Nature) was responsible for the overall administration, coordination, and



implementation of the project, Component 4 supported the DGENP by recruiting specialists and assistants for procurement, financial management, and M&E.

e. Comments on Project Cost, Financing, Borrower Contribution, and Dates

Project Cost: At appraisal, the project was estimated to cost US\$7.521 million (PAD, para 50). At project closing, the actual cost was US\$7,125,048 (ICR, page 2).

Financing: At appraisal, the project was planned to be financed by US\$7.521 million grant from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) (PAD, para 50). At project closing, the project was financed by US\$7,125,048 grant from the GEF (ICR, page 2).

Dates: The project was approved on March 27, 2014, and became effective on July 29, 2014. The Mid-Term Review was completed on February 2, 2018. The project was closed on December 31, 2020, which was eight months after the original closing date of April 30, 2020.

Restructuring: The project was restructured in April 2020 to extend the project duration for a total of eight months mainly due to implementation delays as a result of: (i) the serious conflicts after the 2016 general election which halted the project activities for five months; and (ii) changes to public bank accounts which required project accounts to be closed and then re-opened under the new location and system and halted the project activities for three months (ICR, para 92).

3. Relevance of Objectives

Rationale

Country and Sector Context. Gabon was endowed with exceptional biodiversity, yet it faced challenges in biodiversity management outside the national parks network. The Government set the preservation of critical wetlands as one of its priorities, as wetland ecosystems were essential in providing drinking water and energy to major urban centers, and also sustaining fisheries production. Gabon became a party to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (WII) in 1987 and registered nine sites on the WII list. Those sites represented a wide variety of aquatic ecosystems, such as mangroves, savannas, waterfalls and rapids, lagoons, rivers, and lakes, of more than 2.8 million hectares (PAD, para 14). New priorities set by the Government for biodiversity preservation clearly targeted the WII, which allocated all the funds from the GEF-5 replenishment (2010-2014) to foster significant progress on WII management.

Relevance to Government Strategies. At appraisal, the project's objective was in line with the Government's economic vision to modernize and diversify the country's economy by 2025, called Emerging Gabon, as well as its strategic roadmap, called the Strategic Plan for an Emerging Gabon (PSGE: Plan Strategique Gabon Emergent, 2011-2025). Specifically, the objective was aligned with the PSGE's one of three pillars on Green Gabon (Gabon Vert) that aimed at instituting sustainable forest management and transforming Gabon into a global leader in certified tropical timber production; developing agriculture and livestock farming to improve food security; and creating sustainable and responsible fisheries strategic plan. In addition, the objective was aligned with the National Climate Plan established in 2010, which aimed to control greenhouse gas emissions and improve climate change adaptation capacity. At project closing, the



objective was in line with the PSGE and the Government's new wetlands management strategy that was developed with support from the project. In addition, the objective was aligned with the Nationally Determined Contribution submitted in 2016 with a target year of 2025.

Relevance to Bank Assistance Strategies. At appraisal, the project's objective was in line with the Country Partnership Strategy (CPS) FY2012-2016, specifically, *Outcome 5: Sustainable management of natural resources* under *WBG Strategic Theme 2: Vulnerability and Resilience*. At project closing, the objective was in line with the same CPS at the time of appraisal, as a succeeding Country Partnership Framework was still under development.

Previous Sector Experience. This project built upon the past experience with the GEF-funded project called Strengthening Capacity for Managing National Parks and Biodiversity project (PARCS, P070232, US\$10 million, 2006-2013), including the development of Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tools (SMART) in the selected Ramsar sites. The National Agency of National Parks (ANPN: Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux), which was an Implementing Agency of the past project, retained key staff to execute this project's Components 1 and 2. The DGENP, which was an Implementing Agency of this project and executed Components 3 and 4, participated in an earlier World Bank-funded Development Policy Operation together with ANPAN and received capacity building support from an Institutional Development Fund.

Rating

Substantial

4. Achievement of Objectives (Efficacy)

OBJECTIVE 1

Objective

Enhance protection of biodiversity in selected forested wetlands on the Ramsar List through knowledge creation and development of conservation measures for sustainable wetlands management

Rationale

Parsing the Objective Statement: Based on the formulation of the objective statement, "to enhance protection of biodiversity in selected forested wetlands on the Ramsar List through knowledge creation and development of conservation measures for sustainable wetlands management," the expected outcome of the project objective was to enhance protection of biodiversity in selected forested wetlands on the Ramsar list. Both the knowledge creation and the development of conservation measures for sustainable wetlands management were considered intermediate outcomes contributing to the PDO/GEO outcome.

Theory of Change (TOC): A significant issue for enhancing biodiversity within wetlands in Gabon was that a wide array of resources and ecosystems exist outside of the protected area system. This meant the project needed to undertake capacity strengthening and awareness raising not only within ANPN, which managed parks and protected areas, but also within DGENP under the Ministry of Forests, Environment and Protection of Natural Resources, which managed the Wetlands of International Importance (WII) network as the



focal point for the Ramsar Convention. Moreover, the WII sites without an associated National Park status did not benefit from any targeted government resources but were supported by conservation activities funded by local and international NGOs. Public awareness raising was also critical to ensure the success of surveillance and monitoring activities. Given the development challenges described above, the project objective's TOC envisioned that project activities such as enhancing knowledge creation for sustainable wetlands management would result in outputs such as critical data and studies delivered, including: baseline data on flora and fauna for ecological monitoring; identification of new species; and economic valuation of ecosystem services. The TOC also envisioned that project activities such as collecting baseline data necessary for implementation of the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tools and strengthening capacity of Geographic Information System (GIS) in the government institutions would result in outputs such as ecological monitoring system implemented. Those outputs above would result in an intermediate outcome of **an increased knowledge base for effective design of conservation and management of wetlands**. A critical assumption here was that knowledge and data created was of high quality and relevant. Moreover, the project objective's TOC envisioned that project activities such as preparing and initiating wetlands management plans based on the data and studies generated above would result in outputs such as: management plans developed; Ramsar info sheets updated; a national wetlands management strategy developed; and a manual for the management of wetlands developed. The TOC also envisioned that project activities such as supporting implementation of (i) surveillance programs, including equipment purchase, training, and base rehabilitation, and establishing Local Management Consultative Committees (CCGLs: Comites Consultatif de Gestion Locale) as Ramsar sub-committees, and (ii) Income-Generating Activities (IGAs) for the surrounding communities of the Ramsar sites to gain alternative livelihoods in fishing, non-timber forest products, tourism, and agriculture sectors would result in outputs such as an increase in areas of forests and lands under sustainable management. A critical assumption here was that local communities were willing to engage in monitoring sites and participate in alternative IGAs that were environmentally sustainable. The outputs above would result in an intermediate outcome of **conservation measures for sustainable wetlands management strengthened**. The two intermediate outcomes above would result in PDO/GEO outcome of **enhanced protection of biodiversity in selected forested wetlands**. The PDO/GEO outcome would contribute to longer-term impacts of preservation of critical wetlands ecosystems for biodiversity conservation and delivery of economic and ecosystem services. A critical assumption here was that the Government's commitment to sustainable management remained high and would be matched with budget resources.

Outputs:

- A research scheme for the three selected Ramsar sites was developed and being implemented, meeting the target. The project initiated eight specific studies to fill in priority information gaps, which increased the available historical data by nearly 25 percent (ICR, para 41). In total, the project conducted nine studies with a focus on: (i) environmental services of wetland ecosystems; (ii) wetland habitats; (iii) wetland fauna, including birds, fish, and large aquatic species; and (iv) flora and fauna of mountain wetlands. The research findings informed baseline data of an ecological monitoring system of wetlands. In addition, the research supported the development of the national strategy on wetlands that was about to be effective by the President's signature.
- An ecological monitoring system of wetlands was implemented, meeting the target. The project initiated implementing the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tools that was already set up under the past GEF-funded project by the National Agency of National Parks by providing baseline data through the studies above.
- Land area of 12.01 hectares (ha) adopted sustainable land management practices as a result of the project, surpassing the target of 10 ha. Sustainable artisanal organic agricultural activities



- were developed as part of the IGAs, namely, the Haute Boumi cooperative (4 Ha of banana and cassava plantations); the Itsana agricultural cooperative on the outskirts of the Birougou National Park (3 ha); the Ebel Vert agricultural cooperative (3.01 ha); and the Moukimbi agricultural cooperative (4 ha) (ICR, para 55). These IGAs were provided with technical support on organic farming methods and agreed to stop the use of chemical pesticides and slash-and-burn agriculture techniques. The IGAs induced positive changes in community behaviors by supporting the communities adjacent to the Ramsar sites to access non-destructive activities and related incomes (ICR, para 46). Following project closing, the beekeeping project part of the IGAs continued to support livelihoods of the vulnerable population of Babongo through honey harvesting and commercialization (ICR, para 81).
- Forest area of 71,331 ha was under sustainable forestry management according to forest type, surpassing the target of 30,000 ha. This indicator was limited to the conservation efforts, sustainable monitoring, and management of forests degraded as a result of illegal mining activities in the Birougou area. This indicator was measured through the SMART patrol monitoring system, which tracked the rehabilitation of the old gold-mining activities sites in the premises of the national park covered by surveillance patrols (ICR, page 69).
 - Direct project beneficiaries reached 524 people, surpassing the target of 100 people. Female beneficiaries were 68.9 percent of the direct beneficiaries, surpassing the target of 30 percent.
 - The National Ramsar Committee was in place and functional, meeting the target.
 - Ramsar Subcommittees at the three selected sites were in place and functional, meeting the target of three. The National Ramsar Committees and Subcommittees served as a formal exchange framework through which the administration and the rural communities support the development and implementation of effective policies for sustainable management of wetland ecosystems.
 - Ramsar Information Sheets were updated for nine Ramsar sites, surpassing the target of four sites. The RISs were updated for all the nine sites in Gabon, namely, Bas-Ogooué, Monts Birougou, Petit Loango, Setté-Cama, Wonga-Wongué, Akanda, Pongara, Chutes du rivièrè Ivindo, and Chutes du Mboundou Badouma and Doumé.
 - Environmental audits for extractive industries operating in the four selected Ramsar sites were conducted, meeting the target of four sites. The project widened its scope in 2019 beyond the set target to include agro-industrial and petroleum companies in the Ramsar sites of Bas-Ogooué and Petit Loango/Settè-Cama, bringing the number of companies monitored to 25 companies.
 - Two maps including human settlements, industrial activities, and hydrological systems for the selected Ramsar sites were elaborated, not meeting the target of three maps.
 - Implementation of annual work plan was completed for 91 percent (ICR, page 51), not meeting the target of 100 percent (PAD, page 27).
 - Project safeguard instruments were diligently implemented, meeting the target. This Intermediate Results indicator added no value to the Results Framework, as it was mandatory for the project to comply with the World Bank's safeguards policy.
 - A wetlands management strategy was developed, meeting the target but at project closing it had not yet been implemented as it was awaiting signature by the President (ICR, para. 40). Though this indicator was designed as a PDO outcome indicator, the development of the strategy was an output as nothing has been implemented.
 - Management plans were prepared for two sites, not fully meeting the target of preparing management plans for three sites. Though this indicator was designed as a part of a PDO outcome indicator, the preparation of the management plan was an output as nothing has been implemented. Two management plans for the Bas-Ogooué and Settè-Cama sites were prepared under the project



and finalized in later half of December 2020, just before the project closing date of December 31, 2020.

Outcomes:

- Ecosystem services valuations were undertaken for four selected sites, meeting the target of three sites. At appraisal, the target was set to cover three Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance sites, namely, Bas-Ogooué, Monts Birougou, and Petit Loango/Setté-Cama. The last site was later divided into two separate sites, making the total four sites. The ecosystem services valuation considered an assessment of 6 priority services, namely, fishery products, hunting products, biomass fuel, global climate regulation, water regulation, and erosion protection. The results of the ecosystem services valuations showed the Government that the wetlands were important not only for biodiversity protection but also economic vulnerability reduction. One key finding of the economic valuation of the selected Ramsar sites showed that the value of avoided loss of ecosystem services due to conservation of the Ramsar sites amounted to US\$43-60 million (ICR, para 39 and page 65). Key findings were disseminated in 2018 to stakeholders in government agencies, research institutions, and NGOs. Later during the project implementation, the studies on ecosystem values provided inputs to development of the wetland management strategy.
- Management plans were implemented for two sites, not fully meeting the target of implementing management plans for three sites. The preparation of two management plans for the other sites was listed as an output above. The two management plans for Petit Loango and Birougou had been prepared by the Government before the project; therefore, the project supported implementation of the management plans by financing outlined activities relating to the management of protected areas and the engagement of communities.
- The ICR reports that Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) scores for the selected four sites were improved as follows. The improvements in management effectiveness of the target sites were outcomes of the project, though the results were measured by the Intermediate Results indicators. However, it was unknown what project activities contributed to changes in which question in the METT questionnaire, as well as what portion of the total wetland areas the project aimed to enhance the management of were covered by the sites with METT scores.
 - Monts Birougou site improved from the baseline of 36 to the actual achievement of 64, surpassing the target of 45.
 - METT score for Bas Ogooué site improved from the baseline of 13 to the actual achievement of 63, surpassing the target of 20.
 - METT score for Setté-Cama site improved from the baseline of 36 to the achievement of 62, surpassing the target of 45.
 - METT score for Petit Loango site improved from the baseline of 49 to the actual achievement of 74, surpassing the target of 55.

Referring to the TOC above, the project supported capacity development and awareness raising to enhance protection of biodiversity in the selected Ramsar sites that some of the areas fell outside of the National Park status. First, the project extended support to the government institutions on capacity development and awareness raising beyond the National Agency of National Parks, which was the government entity responsible only for management of parks and protected areas. By reaching out to support the Directorate for Environment and Nature Protection, the project also supported the government department responsible for management of wetlands under the Ramsar convention. These government institutions were supported by technical studies and knowledge generation including ecosystem services valuation, in order to develop the



national strategy and the management plans for the selected Ramsar sites. The project further supported the government institutions to implement two management plans for the Ramsar sites in Petit Loango and Birougou through strengthening law-enforcement and conducting environmental audits for the industries operating within or close to the Ramsar sites. Second, the project extended support to the community-level and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The project implemented the Income-Generating Activities for the neighboring communities, supported surveillance to detect illegal mining, and created the Ramsar Subcommittees based on local committees, which supported strengthening local capacities to protect biodiversity of wetlands. However, the PDO/GEO outcome indicators in the Results Framework were not fully adequate to measure the outcome-level achievements. Though those indicators provided evidence for the two streams of expected outputs indicated in the PDO/GEO statement, those indicators did not provide evidence on to what extent the biodiversity protection was enhanced in selected forested wetlands, and to what extent the above changes were attributable to the project. Without evidence on the degree of achievement against the expected transformation or at least progress against the assumptions embedded in the theory of change, it is difficult to claim progress against the PDO. Thus the overall efficacy is rated modest due to insufficient evidence on outcomes.

Rating
Modest

OVERALL EFFICACY

Rationale

The PDO/GEO outcome indicators in the Results Framework did not provide evidence on to what extent the biodiversity protection was enhanced in selected forested wetlands, and to what extent the above changes were attributable to the project. Overall, the efficacy is rated modest due to insufficient evidence on outcomes.

Overall Efficacy Rating
Modest

Primary Reason
Insufficient evidence

5. Efficiency

Economic Analysis for the Project: At appraisal, no Internal Rate of Return (IRR) was calculated because most of the benefits of this project were broad-based public goods and only qualitatively assessed in the PAD. At project closing, the most conservative calculation showed that an IRR was 4 percent with negative project NPV of minus USD5,922,814 with assumptions of lower-bound annual benefits of US\$13,824,740 and 3 percent annual increase in O&M costs over the 20-year period of economic feasibility of the project (ICR, page 66). When the higher-bound annual benefits of US\$18,062,118 were used with the same assumptions above, the IRR was 16 percent with a project NPV of US\$44,862,099.



Regarding the methodology for the ex-post economic analysis, the economic benefits generated by the project were assessed in accordance with the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, which classified ecosystem services to the following four categories: (i) Provisioning services (i.e., products obtained from ecosystems); (ii) Regulating services (i.e., benefits obtained from the regulation of ecosystem processes); (iii) Cultural services (i.e., nonmaterial benefits people obtain from ecosystems through spiritual enrichment, cognitive development, reflection, recreation, and aesthetic experiences); and (iv) Supporting services (i.e., those that are necessary to produce all other ecosystem services). The monetary value of the various types of wetlands ecosystem services widely varied among the existing literatures that were published approximately 10 years ago (ICR, page 63). For example, the monetary value of coral reef services widely varied from the minimum value of \$14 per ha/year and the maximum value of \$1,195,478 per ha/year, mainly due to different assessments for cultural services which covered a variety of items such as cultural diversity, knowledge systems, educational values, social relations, sense of place, cultural heritage, and ecotourism. Project costs were estimated from the project financing of US\$7.1 million by the GEF and capital one-time investments by the government at the time of project approval (US\$5.4 million) (ICR, page 66).

Economic and Financial Analysis for the Income-Generating Activities (IGAs): At appraisal, no IRR for IGAs was calculated. At project closing, an IRR for IGAs promoting ecotourism was estimated to be 33 percent at the lowest estimate with 6 percent discount rate and 10 years project life (ICR, page 67).

Regarding the methodology for financial and economic analysis for the IGAs, it considered net revenues from tourism, which were estimated at an average based on 2016-2018 reports. Sensitivity analysis considered at least 50-80 percent of revenue reduction as a result of the COVID impact on the local economy. Project costs for the IGAs were US\$53,000, input from the NGO as US\$200 per year, and O&E costs as 5 percent of the project amount (ICR, page 67).

Aspects of Design and Implementation that Affected Efficiency: The implementation delays caused by the post-election conflicts and the relocation of project accounts resulted in the extension of the project period for eight months, as described in Section 2. After the loss of the M&E officer, the post was not refilled with new personnel, increasing tasks for the project coordinator.

Though there were project delays, the ex-post economic analysis shows there was value to the range of investments. Given the limitation of working without an ex-post analysis, the overall efficiency is rated substantial, though marginally so.

Efficiency Rating

Substantial

a. If available, enter the Economic Rate of Return (ERR) and/or Financial Rate of Return (FRR) at appraisal and the re-estimated value at evaluation:

	Rate Available?	Point value (%)	*Coverage/Scope (%)
Appraisal		0	0 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable



ICR Estimate	0	0 <input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
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* Refers to percent of total project cost for which ERR/FRR was calculated.

6. Outcome

The relevance of objective is substantial, as it aligned with the strategies of the Government and the Bank assistance. The efficacy is modest due to insufficient evidence on outcome-level achievements. The efficiency is rated substantial given the likely benefits, though these are likely to be affected by the current COVID situation affecting tourism numbers. Given the efficacy rating, the outcome must be rated moderately unsatisfactory.

a. Outcome Rating

Moderately Unsatisfactory

7. Risk to Development Outcome

There were following risks to the sustainability of the achieved results presented in the ICR:

Technical Risk: The innovative system on conservation management established at the Ramsar sites might observe technical risk. To mitigate the risk, the project integrated the monitoring system within the existing national parks program and SMART system which was expected to be funded and managed by National Agency of National Parks (ANPN: Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux). Moreover, the Bas Ogooué site’s ecological monitoring system was established within the framework of a sponsorship by the Presidential Reserve, Ramsar Site of Wonga Wongué (contiguous to Bas Ogooué). Surveillance and anti-poaching activities would also continue to be supported by ANPN.

Stakeholder Ownership Risk: To mitigate the risk and ensure continuity of community involvement in management after project closing, the project established Ramsar sub-committees based on the existing CCGLs, whose formulation was already required under national legislation. While this applies specifically to sites that are within the borders of the national parks, the road map for the Bas Ogooué site includes the establishment of a sustainable financing mechanism with the support of private sector companies operating within the forest to ensure operation of its Ramsar sub-committee. Moreover, the investments in Income-Generating Activities (IGA) made within communities indicated the potential continuity of micro-projects after the project, given that their social utility and the economic rationalization would remain in order.

Economic and Financial Risk: The recession followed by the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 and the ongoing drop in oil revenues could affect budgets of the project’s implementing agencies to continue maintenance of equipment and sites, training, and staffing support, particularly in the field. Without sufficient budget, the work programs of the National Ramsar Committee and other entities established with the support of the project could be adversely affected. Financial problems for funding national park staff and operations were reported in a recurring manner. The funding available for surveillance operations did not address the funding needs for monitoring potential environmental and social impacts by extractive industries. The sustainable financing



issues were not part of the project design (ICR, para 116). To address the risk in the long-term, the ICR recommended the Government to focus on a sustainable funding option, such as a conservation trust fund.

8. Assessment of Bank Performance

a. Quality-at-Entry

The strategic relevance and approach of the project design was adequate. Technical, financial, and economic aspects were appropriately designed. The social development aspects including poverty, gender, and indigenous people were integrated in the project design. The fiduciary and implementation arrangements including relevant risks were well considered at the design stage. On the other hand, the design of the Results Framework showed some shortcomings, including a misalignment between the PDO/GEO statement and the indicators for measuring the achievements of development outcomes. As described in Section 4, the Results Framework and the PDO/GEO indicators in the PAD (Annex 1, page 23-27) were designed to measure not the enhancement of biodiversity protection but only the knowledge creation and the development of conservation measures for sustainable wetlands management. This shortcoming in the project design caused vagueness in what the project objective expected as outcomes and this limited the ability for claims made at the outcome level. Thus, the overall quality at entry is rated moderately satisfactory.

Quality-at-Entry Rating
Moderately Satisfactory

b. Quality of supervision

The Bank provided adequate supervision at procurement aspects to achieve coordination and collaboration between the two implementing agencies which was challenging at times due to political issues within the Ministry. The ongoing focus and support to making this coordinated approach work served the project well and also helped to support the strengthening of both institutions. Fiduciary compliance was highlighted when issues arose, such as the closure of the project's bank account as per the Government's request close to the end of the project. Throughout the project, the supervision and reporting were consistent on all aspects of project tracking, including the annual work plans. The Bank team ensured compliance of the IGA micro-projects to the environment and social safeguards, by equipping each micro-project with a screening checklist, an environmental and social impacts assessment, and related environmental and social management plans to mitigate any potential negative impacts. On the other hand, the project faced challenges in financial management such as delays in submission of annual financial reports, non-compliance with expenditure ceilings and cash balances, and lack of overall documentation. The details on supervision missions, such as the frequency and team compositions of the missions and what technical support on financial management was provided, were not mentioned in the ICR. Overall, the quality of supervision is rated moderately satisfactory.



Quality of Supervision Rating

Moderately Satisfactory

Overall Bank Performance Rating

Moderately Satisfactory

9. M&E Design, Implementation, & Utilization

a. M&E Design

The M&E design and arrangements were well-embedded institutionally by utilizing existing reporting modalities of the implementing agency to ensure consistency with the preceding monitoring activities. On the other hand, the project's Results Framework mainly focused on measuring output-level achievements. As described in Sections 4 and 8.a., the PDO/GEO outcome indicators were not designed appropriately to measure the enhancement of biodiversity protection, which was the intended project outcome stated in the PDO/GEO. The PDO/GEO outcome indicators focused on outputs-level achievements such as a number of ecosystem services valuations undertaken in the PDO/GEO outcome indicator 1, which did not thoroughly illustrate what changes in biodiversity protection on the ground were brought or expected to be brought by the project. Moreover, it was not clear what rationale was used to set up the baseline and target values of the PDO/GEO outcome indicator 2 at the design stage because two sites out of the selected four sites had already developed management plans prior to the project. It was also not clearly measured by the indicator what changes in the protection of the biodiversity were observed in the selected sites as a result of the implementation of the management plans. The PDO/GEO outcome indicator 3 on the wetlands management strategy targeted only development of the strategy and not implementation of it. The Intermediate Results indicators on the areas with sustainable forestry or land management only showed the areas where the income-generating or surveillance activities were implemented by the project. The Intermediate Results indicator on the implementation of project safeguard instruments was mandatory for compliance and thus not adequate to measure outputs. The Theory of Change (ICR, Table 2, page 9) did not fully document how the short-term outcomes would lead to the PDO/GEO and then to the long-term impacts.

b. M&E Implementation

All the indicators in the Results Framework were set with baseline data, but the baseline of the PDO outcome indicator on management plans did not reflect the actual value at appraisal, as described in Section 9.a. The M&E implementation focused on outputs-level results rather than outcome-level results as per the design of the Results Framework. The M&E officer who was lost during implementation was not replaced with another specialist and compensated by the project coordinator.

c. M&E Utilization

The M&E findings were communicated to the implementing agencies and the project beneficiaries to make positive shifts in the implementation direction of the project, such as improving compliance with fishing regulations in the IGAs, standardizing periodic reports, and enhancing collaborations between the field teams in the Ramsar sites. On the other hand, the M&E data was not able to provide evidence



beyond achievements of output-level achievements due to the inadequate design of indicators described in Section 9.a.

Overall, the weaknesses in the Results Framework at the M&E design stage limited full utilization of the M&E data to present evidence on outcome-level achievements by the project. The M&E quality is thus rated modest.

M&E Quality Rating

Modest

10. Other Issues

a. Safeguards

Environmental and Social Safeguards: The project was classified as category B and triggered the following policies: Environmental Assessment (OP 4.01), Natural Habitats (OP 4.04), Forests (OP 4.36), Indigenous Peoples (OP 4.10), and Involuntary Resettlement (OP 4.12). The project prepared the Environment and Social Management Framework, Process Framework, and Indigenous Peoples Planning Framework, all of which were disclosed both in-country and at the Infoshop prior to appraisal. The safeguard on Involuntary Resettlement (OP 4.12) was triggered to address any potential risk of restriction of access to resource use as the project prepared management plans for selected Ramsar sites. As a result, the project did not encounter any land-taking or compensation-related issues associated with the Involuntary Resettlement Policy. The Bank confirmed compliance of the IGA microprojects to environmental and social safeguards with support from the Bank specialist to monitor the execution of environmental and social specifications and the awareness raising of workplace safety. The project also prepared an Action Plan to support indigenous population was developed for the Babongo population and enabled the Babongo populations of Mbigou to carry out beekeeping activities under enhanced safety and environmentally friendly measures.

Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM): The GRM established in the Local Management Committees was not fully functional and received only a few complaints. The Bank team addressed this issue through a GRM review and assessment allowing the GRM to be more effective by the project closure.

b. Fiduciary Compliance

Procurement: Procurement was conducted in line with the Bank's guidelines. The procurement plan was regularly updated and disclosed. Procurement capacity was determined to be adequate throughout the project and in line with the workload. Procurement processes and asset verification under the IGA program were verified by external auditors acceptable to the Bank, and no issues were raised. All the planned procurement activities were completed before project closing and the procurement system was updated accordingly.

Financial Management: The internal control system had weaknesses which led to delays in submission of annual financial reports, non-compliance with expenditure ceilings and cash balances, and lack of overall



documentation. In the early stage of project implementation, issues in installing TOMPRO were raised. Towards the end of project, the Government required the closure of the project bank account and the transfer of remaining funds to a new bank account, causing major delays and financial shortfalls. No comment was included in the ICR regarding the timeliness of project external audits and whether the external auditor’s opinions were qualified.

c. Unintended impacts (Positive or Negative)

Land-use planning reform progressed: The wetlands management plans and the intersectoral zoning carried out within the selected sites and the implementation of project activities, especially in the Bas-Ogooué, provided key opportunities for the Government to pilot national land-use planning processes and their adoption at the local level. It was essential for the ongoing work of the Land-Use Planning national commission under the lead of the Ministry of Environment.

Marine and coastal protected areas network created: The 13 national parks network created in 2001 was extended to nine marine parks and 11 aquatic reserves in 2017, with several of these protected areas overlapping or directly linked with the project targeted wetlands. The studies carried out within the project framework directly contributed to the extension of the protected areas network in the country.

Institutional reforms proposed: It was recommended to the Parliament to expand the ANPN’s mandate to include protection of all the natural areas within and outside of the national parks and transform the ANPN to a country-wide Nature Protection Agency, based on the ANPN’s field results and inter-agency collaboration capacity demonstrated under the project. While the institutional reform was ultimately not approved by the Parliament, the requested reform demonstrated a recognition of one of the project’s key messages of the importance of establishing effective natural resource management mechanisms beyond the national parks and the effective institutional strengthening and collaboration of involved agencies.

d. Other

11. Ratings

Ratings	ICR	IEG	Reason for Disagreements/Comment
Outcome	Satisfactory	Moderately Unsatisfactory	The Modest rating for efficacy necessitates a Moderately Unsatisfactory rating. There is a lack of evidence on progress at the outcome level to show the impact of the changes on biodiversity.
Bank Performance	Satisfactory	Moderately Satisfactory	The quality at entry is moderately satisfactory due to shortcomings in the design of



			the Results Framework. The quality of supervision is moderately satisfactory due to insufficient evidence on the effectiveness of support to financial management. Overall, the bank performance is rated moderately satisfactory.
Quality of M&E	Substantial	Modest	The shortcomings in M&E design such as missing indicators to measure outcome-level achievements on enhancements of biodiversity protection affected the M&E implementation and utilization. Overall, the quality of M&E is rated modest.
Quality of ICR	---	Substantial	

12. Lessons

The following lessons in the ICR can be relevant to other projects on natural resource management and conservation, and are presented here with some editing.

1. Sustainable financing for conservation of wetlands can potentially enhance a flexibility in budget allocations to finance essential costs to implement field activities within and beyond the protected areas. Under the project, provision of operational costs addressed issues of the recurring shortages of human resources funding due to the inflexible usage of natural resources management budgets that overly focused on surveillance activities within the protected areas. Tapping multiple financing options, including conservation trust funds, endowment funds, green bonds, and debt-for-nature swap, can enable versatile budget allocations to the environmental and social activities in the fields.

2. Strengthening local capacities on financial management and transferring accounting responsibilities to decentralized entities can enhance project effectiveness and sustainability of results. The project supported capacity development in local entities by: (i) opening project accounts in the field to enable transferring money on the ground; (ii) utilizing local ANPN offices; (iii) utilizing the decentralized accountant capacity built under the past GEF-funded project; and (iv) incorporating Ramsar subcommittees and CCGLs into site management. Building upon the project's achievements, establishing financial management control systems with appropriate accounting software would support the decentralized financial management to function well.

3. Integrating the landscape approach into project design can enhance stakeholders' understanding on issues affecting conservation of wetlands and their biodiversity in the long-term. Mapping of human activity, flora, fauna, and ecosystems at the project design stage articulated complex and intersectoral issues to be addressed by the project components and



activities. The landscape approach needs to be directly linked to structured national Land Use Plan approaches and local development planning to further enhance its effectiveness.

13. Assessment Recommended?

No

14. Comments on Quality of ICR

The ICR provides a detailed overview of the project. The narrative generally supports the ratings and available evidence with an attempt to triangulate data to reach conclusions. The quality of evidence and analysis is aligned to the messages outlined in the ICR. The ICR's lessons are clear and based on evidence outlined in the ICR. Although the TOC illustrates expected outcomes from the two streams of project activities, there is a disconnect between these expected outcomes and the PDO/GEO. The ICR did not mention: (i) the timeliness of project external audits and whether the external auditor's opinions were qualified; and (ii) the details of the Bank's support through supervision missions, especially on the effectiveness of the support on financial management. Overall, the quality of ICR is rated substantial.

a. Quality of ICR Rating Substantial