

Annex 2: Update on the main changes in the project context

Ecuador:

The context in which the project began in 2017 has not remained constant during the project period. At the political level, the country has seen changes in the State structures, particularly in Ecuador's Ministry of the Environment (MAE), an institution whose authorities have been frequently replaced (ministers, undersecretaries, directors, etc.). These changes have not only led to criticism of the government's environmental policy but have also limited the fluidity of the Ministry's actions and presence in the field, as more than 200 forest rangers have been dismissed. In addition, in early March 2020, the Ministry of Environment was merged with the National Water Secretariat and other agencies and institutes were attached to this new ministry and, the Ministry of Environment and Water of Ecuador (MAAE) was created. The Covid-19 pandemic had an important influence on the State's presence in the field, as Ecuador was one of the countries most affected by the pandemic. The mortality rate was very high in the first wave of the pandemic and warned the population in general, especially the indigenous communities due to its great vulnerability and poor access to health services in the communities. All these events have delayed the activities that were to be carried out in the landscapes, but once the estate structures were organized, and confinement was over, the activities have started again without too many problems, especially because the local partners had access to the communities.

In May 2021, Ecuador had new government authorities (presidential elections). One of the first changes was the expansion of the Ministry of Environment and Water, which became the Ministry of Environment, Water and Ecological Transition (MAATE). While it is not yet clear what this entails, early communications from MAATE refer to a transition to a circular economy, reducing waste and ecological footprint, and a transition to a greener economy.

At the programmatic level, in 2019, WWF EC commissioned a two-phase mid-term evaluation. The first phase of the mid-term evaluation (executed with own funds, without DGD funding) aimed to determine how the project is progressing in achieving its expected outcomes and impacts, and to develop strategies and actions to improve its performance. The second phase of the mid-term evaluation was expected to deepen the understanding and diagnosis of the most important difficulties/opportunities of the project (based on the issues identified in Phase 1), and to generate recommendations and an action plan. However (in agreement with DGD), the second phase of the mid-term evaluation was cancelled and DGD agreed that this time and budget should be used to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation system in order to start the second phase well. This proposal arose from the fact that the indicators and baseline for the first phase were not accurate and reliable. In addition, and based on this observation, the DGD agreed that WWF did not measure the mid-term and final indicators (also not including the information on IATI), because the quality of the methodology used did not allow for the correct measurement of the impact of our intervention.

DRC - Mai Ndombe:

Additional context for the Mai Ndombe project includes:

- The proposed component on wood-energy was deleted from the final version of the project, as the final DGD budget was less than the one originally requested.
- The COVID-19 crisis has put the expected ecotourism development on hold (before the crisis two professional tourism operators were interested) and led to travel constraints within the country (WWF support missions, domestic tourism). Travel to the Malebo area and viewing bonobos was in particular risky as (i) no COVID cases have been diagnosed among the local communities (with the risk of infection coming from Kinshasa), and (ii) the risk for a bonobo die-off if they get infected (by villagers or tourists) which would destroy the results of years long habituation efforts).

- The project has suffered from long term staffing issues and high turn-over (with long gap periods with their successors) and the absence of a fully empowered project leader 100% FTE based in Malebo. Two key persons (head of Malebo station, head of bonobo habituation) left in July respectively November 2019. The project then suffered from the lack of a clear leader in the field and of a field accountant/administrator, and suffered from conflicts between staff and some irregularities. The gender officer was dismissed in July 2020, and the forest officer left for another WWF project. Other, experienced, WWF staff from WWF DRC took up interim project management in the field but only for relatively short periods, and had to focus on easing tensions with communities. This has had its impact on project implementation.
- The relationship with MMT has not been easy, and field capacity of MMT has been weaker than expected.

DRC – North Kivu

The COVID-19, the eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano on 22nd May 2021, and the earthquakes that have affected the region negatively impacted the smooth implementation of the project. Due to the restrictions imposed by the government, the local staff didn't travel to the field. This led to a slowdown of the project activities. Just like the COVID, also the volcano eruption led to a stop in implementing activities for more than one month, since the staff had to flee Goma.

Moreover, the political and economic instability of the region has affected the project. The State of emergency declared in North Kivu and Ituri regions in May 2021 led to a delay in finalizing the Simple Management Plans (PSGs) and to a halt to the activities of Bahatsa Forest Community Assembly in Beni territory. At the economic level, it is worth highlighting the soaring prices and illegal exploitation of charcoal by armed groups in Virunga National Park. The exchange rate was relatively stable, but food prices increased slightly due to the paralysis of the economic situation. This paralysis has impacted activities linked to the charcoal value chain and the marketing of improved stoves in the territory of Lubero and Beni.

WWF BE asked DGD to revise the objectives to reach at the end of year 5 for 2 out of 11 indicators¹. 'Nevertheless, during the subsequent Institutional Dialogue with DGD, it was replied that targets didn't need to be adapted, and that a justification would suffice.

Cambodia

In 2020 and 2021, the main external factor that impacted the project was the COVID-19 outbreak. We document increased pressure on natural resources (terrestrial and aquatic).

After the policy reform of natural resource management in 2016, in early 2017, the Cambodian Government issued a sub-decree on establishment of biodiversity corridor in protected area system which resulted in the change of authorisation of some forest areas from the Forestry Administration to the Ministry of Environment. However, this did not affect the project activities.

In 2018, a positive result, where the team was able to build on their lobby & advocacy efforts was to have official designation of two protected areas at six-times the original size presented in the proposal document. Needless to say, an original budget calculated for managing smaller-sized PAs was insufficient, so analyses on budget execution should keep this success at the forefront. In 2019, flooding in the Mekong river affected some activities, notably, the fish-pond of a project beneficiary (supported through the livelihood component) was flooded.

¹ The two indicators for which an adaptation of the target was requested concern the indicator linked to community forest concessions (CFCs; BL: 0ha; 1.000ha of CFC's legalized by the end of year 5; new target value proposed: 20.000ha) and the production and marketing of charcoal (BM: 513 tonnes; 170.000 tonnes of charcoal produced by the end of year 5; new target value proposed: 20.000 tonnes).