

Evaluation of the UNCCD Peace Forest Initiative

Final report

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United Nations
Convention to Combat
Desertification

This independent formative evaluation assesses the results and performance of the UNCCD Peace Forest Initiative. The assessment is conducted against the criteria of relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and a cross-cutting criterion looking at gender responsiveness; building on its findings and analysis according to these criteria, the evaluation presents conclusions and recommendations to guide further action.

This evaluation was commissioned by the UNCCD Evaluation Office and authored by Ms. Zehra Kacapor-Dzihic in January-April 2025. The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the UNCCD Secretariat or the Global Mechanism.

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Acronyms

AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EM	Evaluation Matrix
EQ	Evaluation Question
ER	Evaluation Report
FAO	Food and Agriculture organisation
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women Empowerment
IR	Inception Report
KII	Key Informant Interviews
KFS	Korea Forest Service
LDN	Land Degradation Neutrality
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
PFI	Peace Forest Initiative
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEA	Southeast Asia
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

1 Introduction

This report presents key findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Evaluation of the ***Peace Forest Initiative (PFI) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), with funding of the Korea Forest Service (KFS)***. This evaluation is commissioned by the UNCCD and conducted in the period between January-April 2025.

The evaluation was commissioned as an opportunity to benefit from an independent and impartial assessment of performance and transformative results of the PFI. As a learning input it seeks to inform UNCCD's and KFS's strategic decision-making and design of the next cycle of PFI and serves for accountability to the UNCCD.

This evaluation of the PFI is organised around seven key Evaluation Questions (EQs) set forth in the Evaluation terms of reference (ToR, Annex 1) as further refined during the inception phase, which reflect 6 key evaluation criteria – Relevance, Coherence, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Progress to Impact, Sustainability and Gender responsiveness. These EQs are further elaborated through a set of sub-questions and indicators in the evaluation matrix (Annex 2). The evaluation covers the entirety of the PFI implementation over the period of 2021-2025.

The evaluation started with an inception report and desk review in the period between January-February 2025. Primary data collection (interviews and online survey) took place in February - March 2025. The main findings were discussed and fact-checked during the debriefing session held in April 2025 with the PFI and wider UNCCD teams. The primary users of the evaluation findings and recommendations are the UNCCD and the KFS with additional stakeholders such as other donors and development partners, Parties to the UNCCD, civil society, etc. The draft evaluation outputs were shared with external and internal stakeholders to collect feedback. The use of this report will be ensured through the implementation of an official Management Response to the evaluation's recommendations; the dissemination of various communication products; and by the integration of evaluation results in the next cycle of the UNCCD's PFI.

The report starts with an overview of the contextual background of PFI's work and the presentation of the PFI framework as basis for data collection and analysis. The report then provides details on the purpose and scope of the evaluation, key evaluation design elements, data collection and analysis methods and sources, an overview of field data collection and encountered research limitations and risks. The key findings are presented in chapter 3, followed by conclusions and recommendations in chapter 4. The annexes include the full evaluation matrix, list of persons consulted, bibliography, overview of achievements per indicators, data collection tools and ToR.

1.1 The Peace Forest Initiative framework

The PFI was established by the UNCCD to address the linkages between land degradation, natural resource management, and peacebuilding. Environmental degradation, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected areas, can heighten tensions over land and water, exacerbating instability. At the same time, cooperation on restoring and managing shared ecosystems presents an opportunity to build trust and foster peaceful relations. Recognizing this potential, the PFI was launched in 2019 to promote transboundary collaboration on land restoration, sustainable resource management, and environmental governance in regions where ecological challenges intersect with social and political fragility.

The initiative provides a collaborative platform that enables countries, communities, and stakeholders in transboundary settings to jointly design and implement activities aimed at

conserving, restoring, and managing natural resources. By fostering dialogue and cooperation, the PFI seeks to build confidence, strengthen resilience, and support sustainable development. Its focus is on fragile and conflict-affected areas where environmental issues contribute to socio-political tensions. Through the rehabilitation of degraded landscapes, improved land governance, and regional coordination, the initiative not only enhances environmental sustainability but also contributes to peace and stability. The initiative aligns with the UNCCD's Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets and global commitments to climate adaptation and biodiversity conservation.

The scope of the PFI extends across multiple regions, with initial efforts concentrated in the South Caucasus, Central Asia, Southeast Asia (SEA) and the Horn of Africa. Each of these regions faces distinct environmental and socio-political challenges, requiring context-specific approaches. In the South Caucasus, where land degradation, deforestation, and water scarcity threaten livelihoods, the PFI supports sustainable land management and ecosystem restoration while promoting regional cooperation on biodiversity conservation. In Central Asia, the initiative addresses desertification, sand and dust storms, and the management of shared water and energy resources, recognizing the geopolitical complexities of transboundary natural resource governance. In the Horn of Africa, where climate change and conflicts over land and water heighten vulnerabilities, the PFI supports efforts to restore degraded landscapes and reduce resource-driven tensions. Across all regions, the initiative aligns with broader UNCCD objectives and contributes to global commitments on land restoration, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience.

The initiative aims to strengthen regional cooperation by fostering dialogue between countries and communities that share transboundary ecosystems. It integrates sustainable land management and ecosystem restoration into broader peacebuilding efforts, ensuring that environmental interventions contribute to long-term stability. Another key objective is to enhance the resilience of local communities by improving their capacity to manage natural resources in a sustainable and conflict-sensitive manner. By ensuring participatory approaches that include local communities, governments, civil society, and international partners, the PFI promotes equitable decision-making processes. The initiative also seeks to generate evidence-based knowledge to support policy development and resource mobilization for large-scale restoration and peacebuilding activities. Through technical support, capacity-building initiatives, and pilot projects, the PFI aims to create scalable models that can be adapted and replicated in different regions facing similar environmental and socio-political challenges.

As an evolving initiative, the PFI is designed to respond to the changing dynamics of the regions where it operates. The first phase has focused on conceptual development, stakeholder consultations, and pilot activities, while the next phase will emphasize translating identified priorities into concrete, investable projects. By strengthening synergies with regional and international frameworks, the PFI ensures that its interventions complement existing efforts in environmental governance, climate adaptation, and conflict prevention. Through these integrated approaches, the initiative contributes to sustainable peace and environmental resilience in some of the world's most vulnerable regions.

The first phase of the PFI has centred on conceptual development, stakeholder consultations, and pilot activities, as well as the global advocacy efforts on the nexus of land, peace, and security, laying the groundwork for full-scale implementation. Key achievements include regional assessments, policy dialogues, capacity-building efforts, and the development of investment-ready project proposals. In Central Asia, for instance, the PFI has supported initiatives to combat desertification, promote sustainable mountain ecosystem management, and strengthen transboundary water cooperation. Similarly, in the Horn of Africa, the PFI has contributed to

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projects that enhance climate resilience through sustainable agriculture, improved data-sharing mechanisms, and regional early warning systems. In the South Caucasus, efforts have focused on soil mapping, land restoration, and strengthening governance mechanisms for sustainable land use. Despite these advances, the initiative faces challenges, including limited financial resources, gaps in institutional coordination, and the need for more integrated policy frameworks. During October-December 2024, four project proposals in consultation with the relevant ministries of ten Southeast Asian countries were developed. These ministries were represented by participants at the first PFI regional workshop, and the proposals were based on the initial project ideas brainstormed during the event. The finalized project proposals were presented during the RESULT Asia-Pacific Investment Forum, organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on December 11-12, 2024, in Bangkok, Thailand.

2 Evaluation framework and methodology

2.1 Evaluation objectives and scope

The evaluation was formative in nature and aimed to identify progress made and challenges encountered, in order to guide the second phase of the Initiative. It assessed the design and implementation framework of the PFI at national and (sub)regional levels and reviewed the quality and effectiveness of initial activities, drawing on stakeholder feedback. The evaluation used the OECD/DAC criteria of relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability, and an additional criterion of gender responsiveness, as the basis of the analysis. The evaluation also assessed the performance and progress of the PFI since its establishment. It focused on the activities implemented to date and their contribution to the initiative's overarching objectives. The findings were intended to inform the refinement and planning of the second phase of the PFI, providing an evidence base to support strategic adjustments. The evaluation was designed to support informed decision-making to strengthen the effectiveness, efficiency, and long-term impact of the PFI in its second phase.

The evaluation primarily examined three areas. It assessed the relevance of the PFI by analysing the extent to which the initiative responded to the priorities and needs of participating countries, regions, and institutions, and how it contributed to the mandate of the UNCCD. It also considered the coherence of the PFI, reviewing how well it aligned with and complemented other ongoing efforts in land restoration and peacebuilding, including national strategies and the work of other actors. Furthermore, the evaluation reviewed the effectiveness of the initiative by determining whether planned results had been achieved, whether national and (sub)regional planning had been supported, and whether key stakeholders had been effectively engaged.

Given the early stage of the initiative's implementation, the evaluation addressed the criteria of efficiency, impact, sustainability, and gender responsiveness only to a limited extent. Efficiency was examined with regard to the clarity of the implementation framework, management arrangements, and monitoring processes. Impact was considered only in a preliminary manner, as "progress to impact", as country-level activities had only recently begun, and it was therefore too early to assess long-term results. Sustainability was reviewed through early signs of institutional engagement and indications of potential long-term viability. Gender responsiveness was assessed by examining how gender equality considerations had been incorporated into the PFI's design and initial activities.

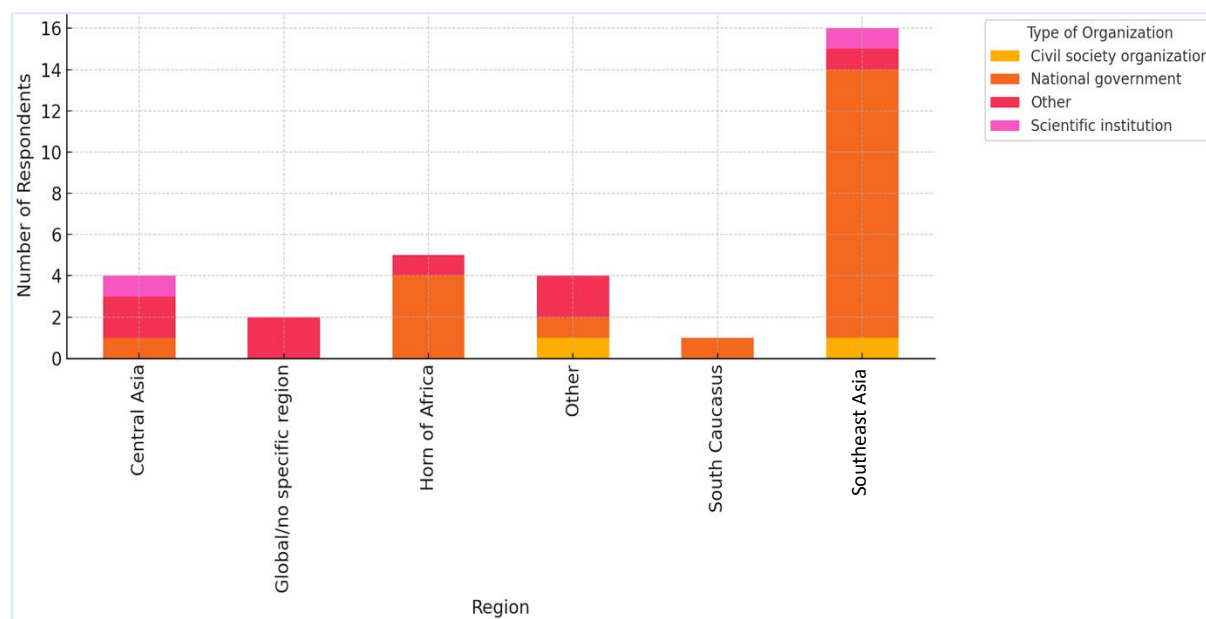
The primary users of the evaluation findings included the secretariat and the Global Mechanism (GM) of the UNCCD, of which the GM oversaw the implementation of the PFI, and the KFS, as the main donor. In addition, the broader UNCCD community and relevant national and regional institutions involved in land restoration and peacebuilding were also expected to benefit from the findings.

2.2 Methodology

The evaluation applied a mixed-methods approach, integrating both primary and secondary data collection through qualitative and quantitative techniques. This approach ensured a comprehensive assessment of the PFI, allowing for the triangulation of multiple data sources to enhance credibility and reliability. The evaluation was iterative and consultative, engaging key stakeholders throughout the process to enhance ownership of findings and strengthen the evidence base for decision-making.

Primary data was collected through key informant interviews (KIs) with 13 stakeholders (out of 50 who were contacted), including UNCCD representatives, government officials from participating countries in Central Asia, Caucasus and Horn of Africa (selected regions for their longer-term participation in PFI), regional organizations, international development agencies, donors, and technical experts on land restoration and conflict mitigation. An online survey was also launched targeting participating countries and actors involved in PFI's implementation. The survey collected responses from 33 individuals, who responded to the **closed-ended questions** on relevance, coherence, effectiveness, challenges, and potential improvements of the PFI.

Figure 1. Overview of respondents by region and type of organisation



Source: Survey analysis

Secondary data collection involved a comprehensive review of existing documentation related to the PFI's implementation and performance. This included key strategic documents such as the PFI founding documents and strategy papers, regional scoping studies for the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Horn of Africa, and project-specific concept notes. Additional sources included reports and policy or press materials from the UNCCD and its partners, policy frameworks on land restoration, monitoring data, and any relevant external evaluations of similar environmental and peacebuilding initiatives.

2.3 Data analysis

The Evaluation Matrix served as the main framework for the analysis of data, with Lines of Inquiry and indicators serving as analysis frames towards synthesis of findings at EQ level. The data analysis integrated qualitative and quantitative techniques to ensure a thorough examination of findings. Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data from interviews, identifying key patterns and stakeholder perceptions. Descriptive statistical analysis summarized trends from the survey responses, while comparative analysis assessed differences across regional contexts and identify common lessons. Triangulation of findings from multiple sources was employed to validate insights and enhance reliability. Additionally, a limited contribution analysis explored the role of the PFI interventions in observed changes, considering external influencing factors.

Shortly before completion of the evaluation report, the evaluator conducted a sense-making workshop with the UNCCD staff to discuss preliminary findings, validate conclusions, and refine recommendations. The workshop also served to discuss and finalise the Theory of Change of the next cycle of the PFI. This process was considered to enhance the accuracy of the evaluation and facilitate stakeholder engagement in shaping future PFI directions. Sense-making added another layer to the triangulation of data, since it allowed findings that derive from data analysis to be further discussed and validated in a joint session with UNCCD stakeholders.

2.4 Limitations

Several limitations were encountered during the evaluation process. The number of survey responses was limited, with only 33 individuals completing the questionnaire despite wide distribution across regions and stakeholder groups and multiple reminders and individual follow ups. In the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Horn of Africa, the majority of respondents were NFPs, amounting to no more than 16 individuals in total. In contrast, in Southeast Asia, outreach efforts included nearly all identified NFPs and workshop participants, ensuring a more comprehensive regional engagement. These regional differences in respondent coverage highlight varying levels of accessibility and engagement, and suggest that, in some contexts, participation may have been constrained by limited awareness, availability, or interest in the evaluation process. Similar challenges were observed in securing interviews, where a low response rate—despite repeated outreach—further restricted the diversity of stakeholder perspectives captured.

Moreover, the PFI remains in its early stages in most regions. At the time of the evaluation, regional engagement and consultation processes had only become operational from June 2023 onward, providing approximately 1.5 to 2 years of activity in the Horn of Africa, and less than one year in other regions. During this period, the PFI focused primarily on establishing regional engagement modalities and initiating cooperation with relevant regional and international stakeholders. Country-level engagement and the development of concept notes were largely still in the planning phase or had not yet commenced operational implementation. As a result, many stakeholders had limited exposure to concrete activities, which in turn constrained their ability to provide in-depth feedback on results, relevance, and coordination mechanisms.

This is the first independent PFI evaluation. It relied primarily on internal project reports and survey responses, with limited access to third-party assessments or independent monitoring data. This created challenges in triangulating findings and verifying the practical effects of activities, particularly at the national and local levels. Despite the noted limitations, this evaluation has drawn on the best available evidence to provide a coherent and well-substantiated analysis of the PFI's early progress. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations reflect a careful synthesis of stakeholder inputs, project documentation, and contextual realities. However, given the constraints on data availability and stakeholder engagement, they should be regarded as indicative of initial trends and perceptions, rather than as definitive assessments of the initiative's overall effectiveness or long-term impact.

3 Key findings

This chapter presents the key findings from the analysis of the PFI, focusing on relevance and coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, progress to impact, sustainability, and gender responsiveness.

3.1 Relevance and coherence

EQ 1. How relevant is the PFI to participating countries, regions, and institutions?

Finding 1. PFI is widely regarded as timely, well-intentioned, and strategically aligned in fragile and conflict-affected regions, where PFI is seen as having laid an important foundation for cross-border cooperation on ecosystem restoration and peacebuilding. The initiative's contribution to creating space for dialogue and building cross-border trust is recognised, but its current limitations, particularly a lack of financing, limited implementation, and modest stakeholder engagement at the country and regional levels, have been found to limit its full potential to serve as a practical tool for restoration and peacebuilding.

The evaluation found that the PFI is strategically relevant to the priorities of participating countries, regions, and institutions, particularly in addressing the complex and interconnected challenges of land degradation, environmental fragility, and conflict.¹ The rationale behind the PFI was to respond to a clearly recognised negative loop between land degradation, food security, poverty, and conflict, where prolonged crises degrade ecosystems, undermine livelihoods, and reduce climate resilience in vulnerable areas.² The PFI initiative is built on the premise that environmental degradation, particularly land degradation, is both a driver and consequence of conflict, and that sustainable management of shared natural resources can serve as a constructive entry point for dialogue, cooperation, and trust-building among countries and communities with a history of tension or dispute.³ This marked a step forward in the promotion of transboundary cooperation for LDN to strengthen the resilience of rural communities against climate shocks and support ecosystem restoration.⁴

According to its intervention logic, by focusing on land restoration in transboundary areas, where ecosystems, watersheds, and climate impacts do not follow political borders, the PFI creates opportunities for countries to engage around a common, non-political challenge. This approach enables dialogue on sensitive or unresolved issues to take place within a shared environmental framework, where mutual interests in ecological stability, food security, and livelihoods can open space for cooperation even in otherwise fragile political settings.

The evaluation found that this environmental peacebuilding approach has had conceptual resonance with countries and regional organisations, highlighting the recognition by countries that environmental issues go beyond conflicts. Stakeholders consistently acknowledged the potential of the PFI to act as a neutral platform that encourages joint problem-solving, fosters institutional relationships, and supports the gradual rebuilding of trust between neighbouring countries or communities. Several examples from regional workshops and stakeholder

¹ [Land degradation – created by conflict, driving conflict | Environmental Sustainability and Climate Action | World Vision International](#)

² UNCCD (2019), Concept Note of the PFI, https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/sessions/documents/2019-09/IICCD_COP%2814%29_MISC.1-1915411E_0.pdf

³ UNCCD (2022), Annual Progress Report of The Peace Forest Initiative Implementation 2021-2022, p. 3.

⁴ UNCCD Peace Forest Initiative – brief introduction, page 1.

consultations, such as those in the Caucasus and in the Horn of Africa, illustrate how the initiative has already created space for an exchange on transboundary concerns such as land degradation, desertification, drought management, and biodiversity loss. According to stakeholder feedback, the strong point of the PFI has been the operationalisation of peacebuilding not through direct political negotiation, but by encouraging cooperative environmental action of government institutions, and more technical interaction. This model is particularly relevant in post-conflict or conflict-affected regions where formal diplomatic engagement may be limited, but where shared ecological vulnerabilities require coordinated responses. By promoting shared assessments, co-development of restoration priorities, and collaborative knowledge generation, the PFI supports the creation of a technical environment in which peacebuilding can be anchored in joint environmental outcomes.

Regarding strategic anchoring, the PFI's overall objective "*to contribute to ecosystem restoration and improved security in fragile and conflict-affected settings*" aligns closely with the UNCCD Strategic Framework 2018–2030⁵ (See Table 1). The PFI's efforts to demonstrate linkages between ecosystem restoration, including sustainable land and forest management, and peace and security, are in line with the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration 2021–2030.⁶

Table 1. Linkages between PFI strategic outcomes and UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework

PFI strategic outcomes ⁷	UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework objectives ⁸
Cross-border cooperation on sustainable land and forest management and restoration is enabled through improved relations and technical capacity	To improve the condition of affected ecosystems, combat desertification/land degradation, promote sustainable land management and contribute to land degradation neutrality
Improved well-being of the participating communities in fragile and conflict affected situations	To improve the living conditions of affected populations
	To mitigate, adapt to, and manage the effects of drought in order to enhance resilience of vulnerable populations and ecosystems
Enhanced knowledge of cross border cooperation on sustainable land and forest management and restoration in fragile and conflict affected situations	To generate global environmental benefits through effective implementation of the UNCCD
	To mobilize substantial and additional financial and nonfinancial resources to support the implementation of the Convention by building effective partnerships at global and national level

Source: PFI documentation

The evaluation findings show that PFI also contributes to several SDGs (1 – No poverty, 2 – Zero hunger, 6 – Clean water and sanitation, 12 – Responsible consumption and production, 13 – Climate action, 15 – Life on land), as it helps improve basic living conditions for people living in land-degraded areas.⁹ This alignment is further reflected in the initiative's fit with regional frameworks. For example, the PFI is aligned with the 2021–2025 strategic priorities of Intergovernmental Authority of Development (IGAD, a regional organization for East African

⁵ [UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework | UNCCD](#)

⁶ [UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration | UNECE, UN Decade on Restoration](#)

⁷ UNCCD (2022), Annual Progress Report of The Peace Forest Initiative Implementation 2021–2022, p. 4.

⁸ [UNCCD 2018–2030 Strategic Framework | UNCCD](#)

⁹ UNCCD (2022), Annual Progress Report of The Peace Forest Initiative Implementation 2021–2022, p. 3.

countries)¹⁰ including food security, sustainable resource management, and regional peace. The initiative has benefited from a series of consultations and workshops conducted from 2018 to 2020, involving national and regional actors across Central Asia, the Horn of Africa, the South Caucasus, Southeast Asia, and Ireland/Northern Ireland (e.g., Global LDN Forum, 4-5 July 2018), the concept of the PFI¹¹ (Seoul, 23 July 2019; 11 September 2019), and the Draft Terms of Reference (ToR) of the PFI (26-27 August 2020)). These engagements contributed to shaping the initiative's concept, validating its ToR, and identifying regionally appropriate entry points for future activities.

At the national level, there is evidence of structured coordination between the PFI and national institutions. In multiple pilot regions, national experts and line ministries have participated in technical working groups tasked with developing the PFI concept notes. These groups have contributed to aligning the PFI activities with national restoration targets and ensuring institutional buy-in. In some cases, draft concept notes have been validated through national workshops where stakeholders were invited to provide substantive input, illustrating an effort to anchor the PFI programming in national planning processes. This is particularly relevant in the Horn of Africa, where additional engagement is planned through regional validation events in 2025.

Evaluation findings however show that even though the PFI is based on a strong conceptual foundation, the initiative's operational relevance remains so far limited. Stakeholder feedback confirmed that the PFI's strategic rationale is sound but noted that the potential peacebuilding function of the PFI depends on its ability to move beyond dialogue into demonstrable joint action on the ground. The stakeholders understand that peacebuilding efforts depend on longer term, hands-on facilitated interaction and joint work, to root linkages and strengthen interaction between stakeholders, particularly coming from opposing conflict parties. Stakeholders across regions noted that the PFI's focus to date has remained largely at the level of advocacy, awareness raising, and concept development, without stronger or longer-term potential for engagement. While these early-stage activities were recognised as necessary for building initial momentum and establishing strategic direction, many respondents highlighted the importance of ensuring the initiative is tangible country-level engagement or delivery. They indicated that concrete country-level engagement was essential to more active or sustained participation. It is important to note that formal stakeholder consultations only began in June 2023, with varying degrees of activity across regions. In the Horn of Africa, two regional workshops were conducted (one in 2023 and one in 2024). In 2024, additional consultations took place in the South Caucasus (three workshops, although the third was affected by political constraints that limited progress), There were two workshops in Central Asia, and one in Southeast Asia. These timelines indicate that most regional engagement is still in its early stages, which helps explain the limited exposure of stakeholders to concrete activities and the perception that the initiative has yet to move beyond its foundational phase.. Several governments and partners emphasized that the process of preparation of concept notes was interesting and provided a floor to engage and discuss with others, but the PFI's lack of move from conceptualisation toward the design and execution of actual projects limited its relevance and potential.

The evaluation found that one of the critical factors was the PFI's limited leverage in terms of financial resources, which significantly affected its relevance. The initiative does not have a dedicated fund or financing instrument, and while multiple donors have been consulted—including the World Bank, the European Union (EU), the Asian Development Bank, the German international cooperation agency GIZ, and others—formalised funding partnerships are still

¹⁰ UNCCD (2023), Draft Scoping paper Peace Forest Initiative for the Horn of Africa (East Africa), p. 4.

¹¹ UNCCD (2019), Concept Note of the PFI, https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/sessions/documents/2019-09/ICCD_COP%2814%29_MISC.1-1915411E_0.pdf

lacking. For instance, the Progress Report for 2022-2024 indicates that close cooperation has been established with the World Bank, and with UNDP in Central Asia, which raises potential to support the PFI in mobilizing resources and leveraging existing programs and World Bank's lending initiatives in the identified main pilot sites (the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Horn of Africa).¹² A lack of dedicated seed funding for projects that are being developed was considered by stakeholders as limiting the ability of the PFI to deliver tangible support to countries, and reducing its value relative to other well-funded regional or bilateral initiatives, as highlighted by stakeholders. Workshop records and feedback from participating countries indicate that this lack of financial traction has made it difficult for national actors to prioritise the PFI in planning or resource allocation processes.

This situation is compounded by the institutional role of the GM as PFI lead agency, which, as a mechanism linked to an intergovernmental convention with a primary mandate for promoting resource mobilization without significant resources of its own, has a limited operational footprint. The role of the GM in leading the PFI aligns with its role in developing partnerships to support the implementation of the Convention and LDN (decision 3/COP.14¹³, decision 3/COP.15¹⁴). In particular, the UNCCD is entitled to *'develop new and strengthen existing partnerships to support the implementation of the Convention and achievement of land degradation neutrality, collaborating notably with ...the Peace Forest Initiative, and other complementary initiatives, as well as with national, subregional, and regional scientific bodies, to provide support to Parties.'*¹⁵

While the GM is assigned to facilitate resource mobilization, it is essentially a non-implementing body itself and thereby constrained in its ability to directly finance or execute large-scale field activities. This structural limitation has influenced the evolution of the PFI, which to date has focused on convening, policy dialogue, and concept development, rather than implementation. While many stakeholders acknowledge the convening value of the UNCCD and its credibility in promoting global dialogue on land degradation and restoration, they also noted that this advocacy-based model is not sufficient. Concrete implementation is needed to mobilize technical and financial resources necessary to translate concepts into action. This has been especially visible in contexts where cross-border collaboration requires facilitation, investment, and coordinated project delivery across national boundaries.

Survey responses reinforce these findings. While most respondents rated the initiative as *somewhat* or *highly relevant*, many highlighted that this relevance was primarily linked to its value as a platform for joint discussion, rather than as a mechanism for implementation, which is also understandable given the role and limited mandate of the GM. Respondents across different regions and institutional types repeatedly pointed to the need for more actionable engagement, more robust coordination with in-country stakeholders, and mechanisms that would enable direct investment in land restoration and peacebuilding activities. A number of respondents also indicated that the PFI has not yet been meaningfully integrated into national planning frameworks, and that awareness of the initiative remains limited outside of the regional and technical communities involved in its initial design.

In some regions, the initiative is seen as contributing to bridge-building and dialogue between stakeholders with a shared interest in environmental cooperation. The PFI has provided a platform for participating countries to convene, exchange perspectives, and begin formulating joint plans and strategies on shared financing challenges. This role has been particularly valued in politically

¹² UNCCD (2024), Progress Report of The Peace Forest Initiative Implementation 2021-2024, p. 6.

¹³ [ICCD/COP\(14\)/23/Add.1](#)

¹⁴ [Ibid](#)

¹⁵ [Ibid](#)

complex contexts, where the initiative has helped facilitate regional engagement that might otherwise have been difficult to establish. However, the success of these efforts remains heavily dependent on the level of political commitment and the degree of ownership demonstrated by participating governments. Without clear pathways toward project implementation, dedicated follow-up mechanisms, or stronger political leverage, many stakeholders expressed concern that it would be challenging to maintain momentum of the initiative. As a result, despite its value in fostering dialogue and cooperation, the long-term relevance and impact of the PFI will rely on more concrete and sustained engagement at both the regional and national levels. This perception is particularly pronounced in fragile contexts where environmental degradation is acute and where there is an urgent need for practical solutions. The initiative's current structure does not yet allow for timely responses or sufficient support to country-level actors in such settings. For this reason, the initiative's success in using environmental cooperation as a peacebuilding tool is closely tied to its operational relevance and ability to deliver tangible outcomes in contested or fragile border areas.

EQ 2. To what extent is the PFI aligned with – and complementary to – other work on land restoration?

Finding 2. The PFI is well-aligned in terms of objectives and policy frameworks and has made initial progress in establishing practical complementarity with existing land restoration and peacebuilding initiatives. The initiative has demonstrated value in fostering cross-sectoral dialogue and identifying areas of strategic convergence. However, its complementarity in operational terms is still evolving and contingent on further development of financing, coordination platforms, and institutional partnerships.

As noted in the Finding 1 above, the evaluation found that the PFI was broadly aligned with global, regional, and national strategies on land restoration. The Initiative has taken deliberate steps to establish complementarity with other ongoing initiatives, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected transboundary areas, though with variation by region or success. From the onset, the PFI was designed with the explicit objective of fostering synergies with existing frameworks, notably the Rio Conventions (UNCCD, CBD, and UNFCCC),¹⁶ and national and regional land restoration programmes. Through its focus on LDN, the PFI also aimed at integrating land restoration with biodiversity conservation and climate adaptation in transboundary areas. This integrative ambition has been consistently articulated in the PFI documents, as well as in technical and policy-level consultations conducted since the initiative's inception.

The review of regional workshops also shows that the PFI has actively promoted cross-sectoral dialogue and coordination. For example, the 2024 PFI workshop in Uzbekistan¹⁷ served as a forum to explore synergies between land, biodiversity, and climate agendas in Central Asia, where participants emphasised the need for improved mechanisms for joint funding mobilisation and a unified platform for information exchange, which remain underdeveloped.¹⁸ These workshops were considered by stakeholders as a space for technical alignment and forward-looking

¹⁶ UNCCD (2025), Peace Forest Initiative, Operational Guidelines, available at [Peace Forest Initiative Operational Guidelines UNCCD.pdf](#)

¹⁷ UNCCD (2024), Draft Concept Note, Joint workshop on regional cooperation in Central Asia 'Leveraging synergies for integrative land-biodiversity-climate action and Development of the Peace Forest Initiative for land restoration, prevention of sand and dust storms and shared natural resources', 12-15 March 2024, Uzbekistan

¹⁸ UNCCD (2024), Joint workshop on regional cooperation in Central Asia – Leveraging synergies for integrative land-biodiversity-climate action and Development of the Peace Forest Initiative for land restoration, prevention of sand and dust storms, and shared natural resources, Meeting Report, March 12-15, 2024 Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

collaboration, even though institutional and financial integration remains limited at the time of this evaluation for reasons elaborated in Finding 1 above.

The evaluation also found some evidence of complementarity with other land restoration and peacebuilding initiatives. For instance, in the South Caucasus, actions were coordinated between the PFI 'Regional Landscapes Restoration Program' and the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) on the development of a consolidated dashboard regarding the Geoguard platform¹⁹, to include the soil map as a data layer.²⁰ The PFI Environmental Dashboard (prototype) for the Horn of Africa was developed, a GIS-based tool monitoring land degradation and conflict risks to support fragile and conflict-affected countries with informed decision-making over the environment, natural resources, and land-use. The PFI has also engaged with the UNFCCC's Needs-based Finance Project to support countries in accessing and coordinating climate finance for land-related adaptation and mitigation priorities.²¹ In addition, there is evidence of collaboration between the World Bank and the PFI in the South Caucasus. The Progress Report of The Peace Forest Initiative Implementation 2021-2024 states that the World Bank project 'South Caucasus: Resilient Landscapes Restoration Program' will be synchronized with PFI activities through a joint steering committee, joint workshops and training sessions, and joint development of information materials.²² Additionally, the World Bank has collaborated with the PFI on the coordination of regional initiatives in the Horn of Africa region,²³ as well as in Central Asia where World Bank's RESILAND is the PFI flagship initiative.²⁴

However, interviewed stakeholders noted that PFI could have done more to actively link with and leverage the work of other related initiatives operating in the land restoration and peacebuilding space. While efforts at alignment and consultation were acknowledged, stakeholders observed that systematic engagement with complementary programmes, and in particular those with operational presence and financing in the targeted regions or countries, was necessary. More active and systematic engagement would have increased the potential for synergies and helped the PFI operate in coordination with ongoing efforts..

Some stakeholders suggested that deeper engagement with platforms and initiatives already supporting cross-border cooperation, such as those led by IGAD, the African Union, or regional development banks, could have enhanced the initiative's relevance and avoided duplication. While the PFI has made efforts to engage with several regional actors, further efforts are needed to facilitate stronger responses and sustained collaboration and to increase the potential for stronger alignment and coordination. Others emphasised the importance of institutionalising coordination mechanisms and co-financing pathways to ensure that the PFI is embedded in the broader architecture of regional environmental governance and peacebuilding programming. Desk review and further interviews with PFI team indicate that the PFI approach includes a review of existing regional coordination frameworks, including those focused on environmental restoration, peacebuilding, and broader regional cooperation. Initial workshop concept notes and umbrella documents outline intentions to identify complementarities, engage regional stakeholders from the outset, and align strategies accordingly. However, the extent to which these steps have translated into sustained coordination and collaboration with regional mechanisms

¹⁹ [Geoguard: a new tool for climate, peace and security | United Nations](#)

²⁰ Second Round of the Consultation Workshop on the Development of a Transformative Project The Peace Forest Initiative in South Caucasus, 30 April – 2 May 2024, Tbilisi, Georgia, p. 6.

²¹ Second Round of the Consultation Workshop on the Development of a Transformative Project The Peace Forest Initiative in South Caucasus, 30 April – 2 May 2024, Tbilisi, Georgia, p. 6

²² UNCCD (2024), Progress Report of The Peace Forest Initiative Implementation 2021-2024, p. 6-7.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ <https://www.unccd.int/news-stories/stories/resiland-ca-flagship-peace-forest-initiative-tackles-land-degradation-central>

has varied. In some cases, the lack of alignment stems from the fact that many regional institutions do not explicitly link environmental degradation and peacebuilding, due to mandate limitations or sectoral focus. In response, the PFI has intensified advocacy on the interlinkages between environmental degradation and security, including through facilitated discussions at the Berlin Climate Security Conference 2024, the Munich Security Conference, and the UNCCD COP16, as well as through the Grounds for Peace report. These efforts seek to address the conceptual and institutional gaps that limit integrated approaches and to raise awareness of the relevance of environmental peacebuilding, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings where investment remains limited.

Survey responses confirmed the stakeholder feedback, noting that while PFI is conceptually aligned with other initiatives in their region, there is still room for improvement in terms of integration at the operational level. Several respondents described the PFI as still being primarily a convening platform rather than an implementation mechanism and thus confirmed that its complementarity with other land restoration efforts remains largely potential rather than realised.

3.2 Efficiency

EQ 3. How efficient is the PFI set-up for implementation?

Finding 3. The PFI is implemented within a well-developed institutional and procedural framework, which efficiently supported the dialogue initiatives within demanding contexts shaping peacebuilding efforts through investment in environment. The efficiency challenge remained PFI's capacity and human resource limitations to sustain close follow up of diverse regional initiatives and factors across its global reach.

Evaluation findings indicate that the PFI has developed a comprehensive conceptual and operational framework that provides a solid foundation for implementation. The GM, as the coordinating body, has defined its roles and responsibilities in alignment with its broader mandate under the Convention. It has developed operational guidance and governance mechanisms, secured core funding, and fostered initial partnerships to support coordination and capacity-building efforts. However, despite this strong structural setup, efficiency is constrained by several interrelated factors, including limited operationalisation at country level, gaps in monitoring systems, and the lack of active implementation experience to test and refine the model..

The institutional framework of the PFI is articulated in its Concept Note (2019)²⁵ and further elaborated in the Operational Guidelines launched at COP16 in December 2024.²⁶ According to the Concept Note, 'The overall operation of the Initiative could be supported by the UNCCD Secretariat

²⁵ UNCCD (2019), Concept Note of the PFI and PFI (2022), Peace Forest Initiative, Operational Guidelines, p. 46 According to this document, the PFI was tasked to conduct: i) 'Site specific research on the nexus of environmental degradation/ natural resource management with conflict/peacebuilding, including the identification of critical issue(s); ii) Initial stage concept note development including the production of background studies or technical/feasibility assessments; iii) Mapping and engagement of a broad spectrum of public and civil society stakeholders; iv) Support for a process of formal or informal dialogue and consultation around joint natural resource asset management planning in fragile and conflict affected areas, resulting in a joint statement and/or agreement; v) Deployment of confidence-building measures. This could involve technical exchanges among the concerned stakeholders, joint workshops or training, pilot testing or the development of base/common resources (such as a soil base map and environment dashboard) that are an initial shared asset to facilitate further dialogue; vi) Co-design of a natural resource asset management plan – including joint/common target setting and agreed governance; vii) Translation of the plan into an investable project/programme to support resource mobilization; viii) Support for plan/project/programme launch. PFI can support donor outreach or partner round table events and/or communications related activities in this regard; and ix) Monitoring and documenting/ reporting on progress

²⁶ UNCCD (2024), Progress Report of The Peace Forest Initiative Implementation 2021-2024, p. 5.

*in collaboration with relevant United Nations entities, including the United Nations Headquarters/Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and the Peacebuilding Support Office.*²⁷ Framework documents outline a staged process for project development and implementation—from site-specific research and concept note development to stakeholder dialogue, plan co-design, and eventual translation into investable programmes. The PFI's design includes mechanisms for stakeholder coordination, conflict-sensitive planning, confidence-building measures, and joint resource governance, which are particularly relevant in transboundary and conflict-affected contexts. The planning logic is well structured and reflects principles of adaptive peacebuilding and integrated natural resource management.

The GM, with support of the UNCCD secretariat, plays a central role in strategic planning, coordination, and partner engagement. In this role, it is supported by other UN entities, including DPPA and the Peacebuilding Support Office. Regional partners such as the Centre for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF) (Horn of Africa), the Regional Environmental Centre (REC) for the Caucasus, the Regional Environmental Centre for Central Asia (CAREC), UNDP Kyrgyzstan (for Central Asia), and the Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO), (ASEAN and Timor-Leste) have also supported coordination and convening efforts. These partnerships have been instrumental in organising regional workshops and developing early-stage concept notes and technical proposals. The establishment of technical working groups at regional workshops has provided a structure for information sharing and proposal development, though there is limited evidence on their ongoing functionality or effectiveness in practice.

The funding model of the PFI has relied primarily on a multi-year contribution from the KFS, based on a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between the two institutions in 2020,²⁸ in support to all PFI related preparatory activities including workshops, assessments, and concept development. According to the analysis of financial data, approximately 59 percent of the total donor funding had been expended on project activities as of 28 February 2025, with the majority allocated to sustainable land and forest restoration and governance. The remaining 41 percent of the funds remains unspent.

While the initiative's institutional arrangements are sound at the strategic level, operational efficiency is currently limited by the absence of project execution mechanisms, limited human resources and the early stage of implementation. According to the PFI Operational Guidelines, once a project is approved and financing is secured, implementation will be jointly managed by UN and international partners alongside national actors.²⁹ However, as no proposals have yet been funded, these mechanisms remain unutilised. As such, there is currently no evidence on the efficiency of delivery at the country or project level.

Internal coordination mechanisms appear well-defined in theory, but evidence of their functionality in practice is limited. The Partners' Roundtable (PFI-PR), which convenes during the UNCCD COP sessions, serves as the main global platform for consultation and knowledge exchange. It has been used to present draft operational documents, concept notes, and vision papers, and has generally been viewed as positive. Workshops at regional level have allowed for feedback and participatory refinement of proposals. However, beyond these periodic forums, there is limited documentation of structured and ongoing coordination between the Global Mechanism and implementation partners. While the PFI invests efforts to maintain communication and consultation with regional organisations and stakeholders, and to engage

²⁷ Ibid, p. 8.

²⁸ UNCCD (2025), Peace Forest Initiative, Operational Guidelines, p. 67.

²⁹ UNCCD (2025), Peace Forest Initiative, Operational Guidelines, p. 57.

them in planning high-level and annual events, the nature of this coordination has not always been clearly formalised.

While the survey respondents acknowledged the strong conceptual design of the PFI and the structured process outlined in its guidelines, many also noted the lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities for/during implementation. In particular, stakeholders highlighted the need for clearer delineation of mandates between the UNCCD, regional partners, and national institutions, especially in the context of transitioning from planning to implementation. Some also noted that the future projects, once concept notes are operationalised, would require mechanisms to manage operational risks and ensure coordination during project delivery.

The evaluation found that the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system of the PFI remains underdeveloped. Its outcome indicators are vague, mostly qualitative, and lack a clear methodology for measurement. For example, it is unclear how indicator 1b, 'Participating stakeholders recognize their improved technical capacity,' or 2b, 'Participating stakeholders recognize improvement in their well-being' will be measured. Annual progress reports largely focus on activity tracking rather than results-based performance measurement or reflection. There is limited evidence of a clearly defined methodology for assessing changes in technical capacity, peace building outcomes (or progress), or stakeholder perceptions. The Operational Guidelines state that monitoring will be carried out by implementing partners using conflict-sensitive M&E systems,³⁰ but no such systems have yet been operationalised. Furthermore, there is no indication that real-time learning or adaptive planning is currently embedded in the implementation process.

External factors have also influenced the pace and efficiency of the initiative. The process of launching the PFI and consolidating it with stakeholders' needs has been time consuming and dependent on constantly changing geopolitical circumstances.³¹ Political instability, regional conflicts, and the COVID-19 pandemic have disrupted engagement in targeted regions, affecting the scheduling of workshops and stakeholder consultations, but also wider transformative potential. In the South Caucasus, for example, political tensions have prevented formal trilateral engagement, limiting the initiative to rounds of bilateral exchanges between selected countries.³² In such contexts, the complex nature of cross-border restoration and peacebuilding requires even greater coordination and flexibility, which have been at times challenging for the PFI team to fully follow up on, given the capacity and human resource limitations. Namely, the operationalisation of an initiative such as the PFI, with its broad geographical outreach and context-specific engagements, presents significant coordination and implementation demands. As of the time of this review, the PFI is active across four major regions (the Horn of Africa, the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia) as well as in additional locations including Ireland and Northern Ireland, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Further sites have also been identified for future engagement, which will expand the scope and complexity of the initiative. Despite this wide geographical coverage, the core programme management structure remains limited. Currently, operational delivery at the global and programmatic level is carried out by a single Programme Management Officer, supported by one full-time consultant, one of whom was engaged in the periodn 2023-2024, and the other mid-2024-present assisting with the development of project concept notes. This small team is responsible for coordinating and supporting a growing portfolio that requires sustained engagement across highly diverse political, environmental, and institutional contexts, which demand thorough analysis and tailored follow-up, not only on

³⁰ Ibid, p. 57.

³¹ UNCCD (2024); Progress report 2021-2024, p. 10

³² UNCCD (2024), Draft Concept Note: The Peace Forest Initiative Project: Joint monitoring of migratory species including development of common methodologies and approaches in the South Caucasus

environmental restoration but also in relation to political processes and diplomatic considerations at both regional and global levels. As the scope of the initiative continues to grow, ensuring an adequately resourced and appropriately sized operational team remains essential to maintain the quality, relevance, and responsiveness of PFI implementation.

3.3 Effectiveness

EQ 4. How effective has the first phase of the PFI been?

Finding 4. The first phase of the PFI has demonstrated the feasibility of building dialogue and planning processes around shared environmental challenges. The PFI has been most effective in delivering against its first outcome, laying the institutional and technical groundwork for regional cooperation. It has made modest progress in generating knowledge and raising awareness under the third outcome, but no progress has yet been achieved under the second outcome, which relates to improved well-being and environmental conditions. Stakeholders have viewed the initiative as a credible platform for regional engagement and a promising tool for supporting peacebuilding objectives. While the core strength of the PFI lies in its ability to foster cross-border cooperation and dialogue, the absence of concrete, context-specific initiatives to operationalise identified priorities may limit its perceived relevance and long-term impact, or an incentive for targeted actors to remain engaged. Tangible actions, including pilot projects or demonstrable follow-up to planning processes, are likely to be necessary not as an end in themselves, but as a means to sustain engagement, validate the process, and progressively move toward more measurable outcomes. Without such a transition, the effectiveness of the PFI may remain constrained to the conceptual and preparatory level.

The evaluation finds that the PFI has been effective in establishing a platform for cross-border dialogue and technical cooperation on land restoration in fragile and conflict-affected regions. The PFI has become operational due to various preparatory and advocacy activities, starting with the first Global LDN Forum (4–5 July 2018, Seoul), followed by its launch at the 14th Session of the Conference of the Parties of the UNCCD, and later several consultations and advocacy activities. In addition, a webpage for the PFI was launched,³³ and the PFI brochure³⁴ was published on the UNCCD website. The report 'Ground for Peace: Land Restoration for International Peace and Security'³⁵ has been produced and presented to policymakers during COP 16 to inform them of the nexus between land, peace, and security.

Through its collaborative approaches, the PFI has helped participating countries initiate collaborative thinking around shared environmental challenges and the potential of using environmental cooperation, which is considered as an entry point for peacebuilding, as confirmed by interviewed stakeholders. The process of bringing actors together, including in politically sensitive contexts, has in itself been viewed as a significant achievement and an added value of the PFI.

Particularly valuable from the peacebuilding perspective has been the fact that the initiative grounded its peacebuilding efforts around dialogue and joint work on the development of regional concept notes, which allowed national and regional stakeholders to engage in joint planning and to define priority areas for action spanning more than one country. The PFI has engaged a broad range of stakeholders to identify and formulate potential entry points for the PFI activities. The

³³ [The Peace Forest Initiative | UNCCD](#)

³⁴ [Peace Forest Initiative: Restoring peace and trust through nature | UNCCD](#)

³⁵ [Ground for peace: Land restoration for international peace and security | UNCCD](#)

GM has finalized an initial mapping of potential PFI sites and identified 17 locations involving 44³⁶ countries.³⁷ Technical snapshot notes have been prepared for Central Asia, Southeast Asia, the Horn of Africa, Bosnia & Herzegovina, the South Caucasus, Central Africa and West Africa, providing a brief situation analysis, the PFI action elements, potential partners, and precautions.³⁸ These documents have served as a basis for input into the development of concept notes. This has resulted in the development of draft concept notes, as presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Overview of achieved results through workshops/consultations

PFI Pilot Sites	Workshops/ consultations	Results
Horn of Africa (Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda)	June 5-9, 2023, Nairobi, Kenya	- Draft Scoping paper 'Peace Forest Initiative for the Horn of Africa (East Africa)'
	May 28-30, 2024, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	<u>Draft Concept Notes:</u> - Development of agricultural commodities, value chains and trade in Horn of Africa countries, - Improvement of natural resources and climate change data management, sharing and access in Horn of Africa countries, - Sustainable, integrated landscapes management in the countries of the Horn of Africa.
South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia)	February 13-15, 2024, Shekvetili, Georgia	- PFI umbrella document 'Transboundary Cooperation in South Caucasus – Development of "The Peace Forest Initiative"'
	April 30-May 2, 2024, Tbilisi, Georgia	- Draft Regional Vision Document for Sustainable Land Management
	September 17-19, 2024, Kvareli, Georgia	- Draft concept notes on three priority areas (Development of a Regional Soil Mapping and Data Platform; Regional Programme on Land and Ecosystem Restoration; Joint Monitoring of Migratory Species)
Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan)	March 12-15, 2024, Tashkent, Uzbekistan	- PFI umbrella document 'Transboundary Cooperation in Central Asia - Development of the "Peace Forest Initiative" for Land Restoration, Prevention of Sand and Dust Storms and Shared Natural Resources'
	August 19-21, 2024, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan	<u>Draft Concept Notes:</u> - Prevention of drought impact on natural ecosystems and biodiversity in mountain and desert transboundary areas of Central Asia. - Ecosystems Resilience Strengthening of the Fergana Valley through Area Based Development Approach. - Provision of Land Degradation Neutrality in Mountain Areas of the Central Asia

³⁶ Jordan/Israel, Ireland/Northern Island (UK), Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda), South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan), Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), Lower Mekong (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia), West Africa (Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea), Panama/Columbia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Central African Republic/Chad, Haiti/Dominican Republic, Ecuador/Peru, Iraq/Kuwait, Indonesia/Timor-Leste, Surinam/Guyana, Korean Peninsula (DPRK, RoK), Afghanistan

³⁷ UNCCD (2024), Progress Report of The Peace Forest Initiative Implementation 2021-2024, p. 7.

³⁸ UNCCD (2024), Progress Report of The Peace Forest Initiative Implementation 2021-2024, p. 7.

ASEAN and Timor-Leste (Southeast Asia)	September 11-13, 2024, Bangkok, Thailand	<u>Draft Concept Notes:</u> - Forest and Land Rehabilitation Project with Agroforestry Model on Talau-Loes Transboundary Watershed Management, - Mangrove Restoration in the ASEAN member countries, - Forest and Landscape Restoration in Southeast Asia. - Enhancing Sustainable Supply Chains in the Mekong Countries
Ireland/Northern Ireland	January 25, 2024, Derry–Londonderry, Northern Ireland	An action plan for the Great Ulster Peace Forest

Source: PFI datasets

Stakeholders acknowledged that the concept notes have been valuable not only from a project perspective, particularly in addressing shared environmental challenges, but also as a means of fostering dialogue, building confidence, and maintaining engagement among regional actors. For some, the process of joint planning has served as an important entry point for collaboration in politically sensitive environments. However, there have been challenges in sustaining momentum due to a lack of concrete follow-up activities. Several interlocutors noted that without tangible initiatives or visible progress, maintaining the engagement of institutional actors, and particularly those navigating complex political or diplomatic dynamics has proven challenging. While projects are not the end goal, many stakeholders see them as a necessary tool to sustain cooperation and demonstrate the value of the PFI process. As of the finalisation of this report, four pilot projects were under review, pending confirmation from KFS on the 2025 PFI activity. Once confirmed, these projects are expected to move forward without delay, marking a shift from conceptual planning to initial implementation.

Detailed assessment of PFI performance within each outcome area is presented below.

Outcome 1: Cross-border cooperation on sustainable land and forest management and restoration is enabled through improved relations and technical capacity

Under this outcome, the PFI has made the most visible progress. Stakeholders across all pilot regions recognised the value of the initiative in creating space for engagement with counterparts from neighbouring countries, including in areas affected by conflict or political tension. The regional consultations and technical workshops facilitated multi-country dialogue and led to the development of joint vision documents and concept notes reflecting shared priorities.

Participants emphasised that these processes enabled technical actors to engage in a constructive, depoliticised dialogue. In contexts such as the South Caucasus, the initiative was seen as a rare opportunity to facilitate communication on issues of common concern, bringing together countries that were in open conflict at the time interaction took place. Despite challenges, interviewed stakeholders pointed to success in coming up with a common platform in these circumstances. The analysis of regional examples shows that the PFI demonstrated that land degradation and environmental issues can be used effectively as a common platform for initiating and sustaining cross-border cooperation and peacebuilding more broadly. The concept notes are widely viewed as enabling tools within a broader peacebuilding process, but stakeholders indicated that their utility as such tools is dependent on maintaining the space for engagement. In

this regard, the effectiveness of the PFI in supporting cross-border cooperation may be at risk if no further steps are taken to translate planning into action.

Outcome 2: Improved well-being of participating communities in fragile and conflict-affected situations

No results under this outcome have been achieved to date. As noted above, the PFI has not yet moved into implementation, and as such, no field-level activities have been launched, and no tangible transformative effects on land, livelihoods, or resilience are observable. The key reason is that over the reference period, PFI focused on laying groundwork through multi-stakeholder consultations, regional workshops, and the co-development of concept notes aligned with local priorities, which are considered as prerequisites for the work on Outcome 2.

The themes identified in the regional concept notes, such as agroforestry, watershed management, and ecosystem restoration, are closely aligned with community needs and if implemented, have the potential to generate environmental and social benefits. As such, the development of concept notes was recognised by stakeholders as an important milestone, marking a shift from dialogue to more structured planning around shared environmental challenges. These documents have helped to frame regional priorities, clarify areas of technical cooperation, and in some contexts, reinforce dialogue among countries with limited prior engagement. For instance, in the South Caucasus, concept notes focused on soil mapping and land restoration have undergone review by national technical agencies and have been refined through several consultation rounds. In Central Asia, stakeholders have expressed a willingness to link the PFI with existing regional initiatives addressing desertification and sand and dust storm control, thereby reinforcing alignment with ongoing efforts. These developments illustrate the potential of the concept notes to evolve beyond planning tools and serve as a basis for programme alignment and policy coherence. However, stakeholders in several regions expressed frustration that the concept notes had not yet translated into implementation or concrete funding opportunities. While not all contexts are ready to move forward at the same pace, due to differing levels of conceptualisation, political alignment, institutional capacity, or regional dynamics, many stakeholders noted that continued engagement will be increasingly difficult to justify unless there is some degree of operationalisation (e.g. through seed funding, piloting of joint activities, or collective efforts to mobilise resources around identified priorities). The absence of such follow-up was identified as a limiting factor, particularly in institutional settings where actors are expected to demonstrate tangible results in order to sustain political and organisational commitment. The operationalisation of concept notes was also viewed as a driver for maximising the core purpose of the PFI, which lies in creating a sustained, inclusive, and politically sensitive process that facilitates cross-border cooperation, joint planning, and alignment on shared environmental and peacebuilding challenges. In this regard, concept notes should be understood not only as potential project pipelines but also as platforms for strategic dialogue, trust-building, and policy coherence. From that perspective, many stakeholders view the operationalisation of selected concept notes as a necessary step to sustain momentum, validate the process, and strengthen institutional buy-in. In contexts where political sensitivities are high, and cooperation remains fragile, even small-scale implementation efforts can serve as confidence-building measures that support longer-term engagement.

The first cohort of concept notes progressing toward operationalisation has been noted as a positive development. These cases offer an opportunity to demonstrate how the PFI process can evolve from planning and consultation to practical cooperation, reinforcing its relevance while maintaining its core function as a platform for dialogue and regional coordination.

Outcome 3: Enhanced knowledge of cross-border cooperation on sustainable land and forest management and restoration in fragile and conflict-affected situations

The evaluation finds that the PFI has contributed to increased awareness and understanding of the linkages between land degradation, cooperation, and peacebuilding. Knowledge products such as the *Ground for Peace* report, regional scoping papers, and technical briefs have served to clarify the conceptual foundation of the initiative and support outreach efforts.

Workshops and consultations have also functioned as knowledge exchange platforms, helping stakeholders to identify common challenges and areas of convergence. Participants valued the learning opportunities these events offered, particularly where regional dialogue was new or previously limited.

However, there is no structured learning mechanism in place. Evidence shows that many valuable discussions have taken place, but knowledge management remains ad hoc. The initiative's monitoring framework does not include indicators to track the uptake or application of knowledge, and there is limited evidence that lessons learned have been systematically documented or used to adapt programming.

As with other areas, the lack of implementation has limited opportunities for applied learning. Stakeholders noted that experience gained through joint project implementation would likely yield deeper insights and support the development of scalable models for transboundary cooperation.

3.4 Progress to impact

EQ 5. How likely is it that the PFI results will contribute to long-term impact? What plans are in place to ensure that any momentum generated by the PFI is maintained?

Finding 5. The evaluation finds that the PFI has laid an important foundation for cross-border dialogue and joint planning on land restoration in fragile and conflict-affected regions, but its contribution to long-term environmental, social, or institutional impact remains prospective and theoretical at this point of implementation. The PFI concept notes has not translated into the implementation of projects or programmes that could deliver measurable improvements in land management or peacebuilding outcomes. As such, while the initiative's strategic objectives are relevant and its foundational activities are promising, the extent to which it will contribute to long-term impact depends on the transition from preparatory work to operationalisation, and on sustained momentum, financing, and political will.

Evaluation findings shows that the PFI positioned itself as a platform for promoting cooperation on LDN in politically sensitive and environmentally vulnerable cross-border contexts. The initiative has succeeded in bringing together a wide array of stakeholders across regions, including the Horn of Africa, Central Asia, the South Caucasus, Southeast Asia, and Ireland/Northern Ireland. It has facilitated dialogue, produced regional vision papers, generated concept notes, and introduced a shared framing of land restoration as a peacebuilding tool. These achievements represent early milestones toward the PFI's overarching outcomes, including the enhancement of cross-border cooperation and the promotion of sustainable, conflict-sensitive land management.

However, the evaluation finds that it is currently too early to assess the PFI's contributions to long-term impact. The evaluation could not evidence examples of joint transboundary resource management or restoration activities implemented as spin off or through the PFI, and no evidence of changes in environmental or socio-economic conditions, that could be linked to the initiative

explicitly or implicitly. Similarly, no policy reforms, legal frameworks, or institutional structures have emerged directly as a result of PFI-supported activities. Stakeholders have acknowledged the initiative's role in catalysing dialogue and bringing people together, but they also emphasised that tangible progress on the ground is essential for securing and sustaining impact.

Survey responses reflected cautious optimism. Many respondents expressed confidence in the PFI's long-term potential, particularly in regions where environmental degradation is linked to regional tensions and conflict. The initiative's emphasis on using shared environmental challenges, such as watershed degradation, food insecurity, and desertification, as a neutral entry point for cooperation was widely appreciated. Respondents noted that by creating opportunities for engagement in politically sensitive contexts, the PFI has promoted confidence building regionally, which has been an added value of such initiative. Several respondents emphasised that without funded demonstration projects, the initiative risks losing relevance and failing to sustain momentum. The potential funding for four pilot projects by KFS (mentioned under Finding 4 above) is encouraging.

3.5 Sustainability

EQ 6. To what extent are the results of the first phase of the PFI likely to be sustained?

Finding 6. The sustainability of results achieved during the first phase of the PFI remains limited at this stage. The initiative has made initial progress in building interest, generating technical outputs, and convening stakeholders across regions. These relationships, capacities, or mechanisms are yet to be formally institutionalised and are not likely to endure in the absence of continued external support.

The PFI's long-term goal - to promote sustainable land and forest management in fragile and conflict-affected areas through regional cooperation - presupposes the establishment of sustained institutional arrangements, technical capacities, and policy integration at both national and regional levels. However, the evaluation did not find concrete evidence that these foundational capacities have been embedded within the institutional systems of participating countries. While several workshops and consultations have produced regional documents and concept notes, these outputs have yet to be formally endorsed, integrated into national plans, or linked to existing implementation mechanisms.

The evaluation finds that the GM has played a central role in coordinating the PFI, and managed to establish regional partnerships with technical institutions, including CAREC, REC Caucasus, AFoCO, and CIFOR-ICRAF. These partnerships represent an important foundation for upscaling and sustaining the initiative. However, these actors have primarily been engaged in workshop facilitation and concept development, and their long-term role in implementation remains undefined.

Similarly, while regional workshops brought together technical experts, government focal points, and civil society representatives, the PFI needs to ensure continuity in its engagement with its stakeholders. No formal technical working groups have been institutionalised, and participants from several regions noted that engagement with the PFI has been intermittent rather than sustained. Survey responses also reflected this gap: many respondents reported that the PFI had created useful opportunities for exchange, while few indicated that these engagements had led to lasting changes in institutional practice or strengthened long-term technical capacity.

In terms of capacity-building, the initiative has focused primarily on convening and awareness-raising, but these activities are yet to yield sustained systematic uptake in terms of changed institutional practices going forward, given the global and regional nature of interaction. Stakeholders expect that project implementation would enhance the ability of national institutions to develop and retain practical expertise in implementing the PFI approach.

The evaluation highlights the PFI objectives have yet to be integrated into national or regional strategies. Despite early alignment efforts and conceptual complementarity, the PFI has not yet been included in national development plans, sectoral policies, or cross-border cooperation agreements. For instance, in the South Caucasus, the development of a Regional Vision Document for Sustainable Land Management represents a notable output of the first phase. However, the document remains in draft form and has yet to be approved by national governments. Without official endorsement and integration into national or regional frameworks, the utility of such products is likely to diminish over time, and their influence on planning or implementation remains uncertain. This limits the initiative's visibility, reduces opportunities for mainstreaming, and increases dependence on external facilitation.

Furthermore, the initiative lacks a defined exit or transition strategy that would enable participating institutions to assume ownership or carry forward core functions. The PFI's operational guidelines foresee the gradual handover of responsibilities to national actors following the mobilisation of implementation funding, which is expected to take place once projects are implemented.

A key factor constraining sustainability is the lack of predictable and long-term financing of projects. The PFI's core funding during the first phase was provided by the KFS and used for coordination, technical preparation, and workshop delivery. While some outreach has taken place with international partners such as the World Bank, the Green Climate Fund, and the EU, no dedicated financing mechanism is currently in place to support the implementation of PFI projects or to institutionalise its structures at regional or national levels. Without such mechanisms, countries have little incentive to maintain engagement or allocate their own resources to carry forward PFI-related initiatives.

Several stakeholders noted that the PFI's reliance on external convening and its limited field presence have contributed to a lack of national ownership. In survey responses and KIIs, some interlocutors indicated that, while the initiative aligns with regional priorities, it remains perceived as externally driven. Others observed that without demonstrable benefits or implementation experience, there is little basis for advocating for the PFI's integration into institutional agendas.

3.6 Gender

EQ 7. To what extent is the PFI gender-responsive? How is gender equality addressed across the PFI?

Finding 7. The Gender considerations have been formally integrated in the design of the PFI, but the elaboration of gender equality principles into the initiative's planning, implementation, and monitoring frameworks remains limited.

The document review found some references to gender equality in key foundational documents, notably the PFI Concept Note and Operational Guidelines, which make explicit reference to gender as a cross-cutting principle. The PFI Guidelines affirm the inclusion of women, youth, and children

as integral actors in the design and implementation of initiative activities.^{39,40} This commitment is repeated in several regional outputs, including the PFI scoping paper for the Horn of Africa and the umbrella documents for the South Caucasus and Central Asia. These documents do make links between the sustainable land management and peacebuilding efforts and the need to consider the differentiated roles, needs, and vulnerabilities of women and men, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected areas.

The evaluation did not find consistent evidence of translation of these principles into operational practice. Some concept notes, such as the one focusing on agricultural value chains in the Horn of Africa, do include gender as a secondary consideration, but most technical proposals lack explicit objectives, actions, or indicators related to women's participation, empowerment, or benefit-sharing. This points to a gap between normative commitment and applied programming.

The initiative's monitoring and reporting frameworks also lack gender-specific indicators or disaggregated data. The reviewed annual progress reports do not report on women's participation in the PFI activities, nor do they assess the extent to which the initiative has contributed to gender-responsive outcomes. The survey responses regarding the integration of gender considerations into the PFI activities, show that gender had been "*somewhat*" integrated, while stakeholder feedback noted that gender is often mentioned in workshop discussions and official statements, but not followed through consistent practical measures to ensure women's active participation, including in terms of including women's organisations in technical workshops and regional consultations.

The evaluation found no evidence of activities designed specifically to address the gendered dimensions of land degradation, access to natural resources, or the gender-specific impacts of conflict and environmental insecurity. There are no gender-focused training modules, guidance notes, or tools developed under the PFI to support regional partners or national stakeholders in applying a gender lens.

³⁹ UNCCD (2019), Concept Note of the PFI, p. 6.

⁴⁰ UNCCD (2025), Peace Forest Initiative, Operational Guidelines, p. 59.

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1. Relevance and coherence

The PFI is timely and strategically well-positioned, particularly in regions affected by conflict and environmental fragility. It addresses a recognised need for cross-border cooperation on land restoration and provides a credible platform for dialogue on shared environmental and land degradation challenges. Its alignment with national, regional, and global policy frameworks, including the UNCCD Strategic Framework and relevant SDGs, reinforces its conceptual relevance and policy coherence.

The current emphasis on advocacy, dialogue, partnership-building, and concept development reflects the initiative's strategic positioning as a facilitative platform for regional cooperation. However, in the absence of mechanisms for implementation and financing, the initiative's capacity to function as a practical instrument for environmental restoration and peacebuilding remains constrained. This limits its overall relevance to contexts where concrete action is required alongside coordination and planning. To strengthen its utility and ensure it can support real-world outcomes, there is a need for more strategic investment in collaborative mechanisms and better integration with existing funding frameworks. Enabling the transition from planning to action in a coherent and sustainable manner will enhance the initiative's practical value and position it as a more effective contributor to regional stability and environmental resilience.

Conclusion 2. Efficiency

The PFI is supported by a clear institutional framework, structured operational guidance, and established partnerships, all of which provide a sound basis for implementation. Its procedural set-up has enabled effective planning and coordination of preparatory activities, particularly in complex and politically sensitive regions. However, needs to be enhanced by strengthening human resources, establishing more clear implementation mechanisms/mandate, and building stronger monitoring systems. The current structure is not yet equipped to manage or follow up on multi-country processes at scale, and gaps remain in translating strategic planning into operational delivery. Without dedicated mechanisms for project execution, risk management, and adaptive learning, the initiative's ability to deliver results efficiently at country level remains challenging.

Conclusion 3. Effectiveness

The first phase of the PFI has laid important groundwork by providing a credible platform for regional dialogue and cross-border engagement around land degradation and peacebuilding. The initiative has been effective in facilitating joint planning processes and in building institutional and technical foundations for future cooperation. Progress has been most evident under Outcome 1, where stakeholder interaction and regional concept note development illustrate the initiative's convening value. However, effectiveness needs to be improved in terms of its transformative potential. The PFI needs to implement concrete projects on the ground, transitioning from planning to delivery. While the PFI has made progress in establishing a platform for dialogue and joint planning, the lack of tangible follow-up limits its ability to demonstrate concrete contributions to peacebuilding and environmental outcomes. The design of the PFI appropriately prioritises process, coordination, and regional engagement, but without the operationalisation of activities,

its influence will remain confined to the conceptual level. Advancing from preparatory work to implementation, even at a pilot scale, is necessary to reinforce the credibility of the approach, maintain the coherence of the initiative, and support the gradual achievement of its intended objectives. A balanced approach that preserves the PFI's role as a cooperation mechanism, while enabling targeted action aligned with agreed priorities, will be critical to realising its full potential.

Conclusion 4. Progress to impact and sustainability

The PFI has made important strides in establishing a conceptual and institutional basis for promoting cross-border cooperation on land restoration in fragile and conflict-affected regions. Its efforts to frame environmental collaboration as a pathway to peace have resonated with stakeholders and demonstrated the feasibility of convening dialogue across politically sensitive contexts. However, with a lack of project implementation and demonstrable results on the ground, the initiative's contribution to long-term environmental, social, or institutional impact remains to be seen.

The sustainability of these early achievements is currently limited. The PFI has succeeded to generate interest, technical outputs, and promote regional networks, but these have not yet been translated or embedded within national or regional frameworks. Without continued external support, including financing and operational partnerships, there is a risk that stakeholder engagement and momentum will not be maintained.

Conclusion 5. Gender responsiveness

The PFI has integrated gender considerations at the conceptual level, but these commitments were not systematically translated into project planning, implementation, and monitoring frameworks. The absence of gender-specific objectives, indicators, or disaggregated reporting reflects a persistent shortcoming in the programme's design and limits its ability to systematically address gender equality in practice. Without targeted measures to address gender-specific dimensions of land degradation, environmental cooperation, and peacebuilding, the initiative's potential to contribute to inclusive and equitable outcomes remains limited.

4.2 Recommendations

Given that the PFI is geared towards a potential phase II, the following recommendations are drawn from key conclusions and findings to inform the design and execution of that second phase. They are addressed primarily to the GM/UNCCD, although the first recommendation should be seen to target also KFS. Consideration of these recommendations can strengthen effectiveness and sustainability and promote the long-term results of the PFI.

Recommendation 1. Establish a seed funding mechanism to maintain momentum gained through dialogue and joint concept development efforts

To preserve stakeholder engagement and avoid loss of momentum, the PFI should introduce a modest, well-targeted seed funding facility. Such facility could be used to support selected pilot actions derived from the regional concept notes and co-designed with national partners. In support to seed funding, the PFI should provide technical assistance to preparatory work, successful piloting of intervention, and technical exchanges to help anchor regional cooperation and incentivise sustained engagement. The seed funding provided through the PFI should be matched with contributions from donor/national or local budgets and linked to a clear strategy for leveraging larger-scale funding.

Recommendation 2. Invest more intensively in the establishment and sustaining of structured partnerships with donors and financing institutions

The PFI should systematically establish and formalise collaboration with institutions capable of delivering and funding projects on the ground, such as UNDP, UNEP, GIZ, donors and IFIs. The partnerships should focus on jointly advancing project pipelines based on the PFI concept notes, aligning with the mandates and financing modalities of respective partners. These actors can assist with implementation of projects, while UNCCD maintains a convening and coordination function.

Recommendation 3. Ensure hands-on technical assistance for resource mobilisation and translation of the PFI concept notes into project documents

To address the gap between concept development and implementation, the PFI should include a structured support function to help countries and regions adapt concept notes into full project proposals for submission to relevant funds (e.g. GEF, GCF, Peacebuilding Fund, bilateral donors). This function should provide technical backstopping and coordination support to proposal writing. Targeted alignment between country-defined priorities and donor funding pipelines can help to ensure that promising concept notes are further developed into mature, fundable proposals.

Recommendation 4. Prioritise practical integration of gender equality into PFI

The PFI should adopt a more systematic and measurable approach to integrating gender equality. This includes developing gender-responsive indicators, incorporating gender considerations into project proposals and concept notes, and ensuring gender-disaggregated data is collected and reported. The initiative should also provide targeted guidance and capacity support to partners and stakeholders on integrating gender into environmental peacebuilding activities. Where relevant, partnerships with women-led organisations and gender experts should be prioritised to ensure that interventions are inclusive and responsive to the needs and contributions of both women and men.

Recommendation 5. Strengthen operational staffing capacity to match the scope and complexity of the PFI.

Given the PFI's growing regional coverage, the diversity of engagement contexts, and the need for sustained follow-up on technical, political, and diplomatic dimensions, PFI team should be expanded, to enhance PFI's regional coordination capacity, technical expertise, and support for project development and monitoring. Enhancing staffing levels would enable the PFI to maintain engagement across multiple sites, support the transition from planning to delivery, and respond more effectively to emerging opportunities and challenges.

Annex 1 Evaluation matrix

Lines of Inquiry	Indicators	Data sources	Data collection techniques	Data analysis methods
Relevance				
EQ 1. How relevant is the PFI to participating countries, regions and institutions?				
1.1 Relevance of PFI to the priorities and needs of participating countries and regions and UNCCD mandate	- Degree to which PFI strategic approaches align with needs and priorities of targeted countries and regions - Degree of alignment of the PFI strategic outcomes with UNCCD mandate and SDG ambitions - Degree of alignment of the IPFI strategic outcomes with donors priorities and strategies	- UNCCD and PFI specific documents, reports and budgets - UNCCD strategic documents - Country-specific and UN system policy, strategy and action plan documents⁴¹ - UNCCD team, country focal points - Government officials at national levels in targeted regions - Development partners - Online survey	Document review Semi-structured interviews Survey	- Thematic Analysis - Content Analysis - Comparative Analysis - Triangulation between data sources, data collection techniques, and data types
EQ 2. To what extent is the PFI aligned with – and complementary to – other work on land restoration?				
2.1 Alignment of PFI with the work of other initiatives in the peace building/conflict mitigation and land restoration domain	Evidence of shared expertise, or knowledge exchange between PFI and other programs on land restoration and peacebuilding. Evidence of formal collaboration, joint planning, or coordinated actions between PFI and other land restoration and peacebuilding/conflict mitigation	- UNCCD and PFI specific documents, reports and budgets - UNCCD strategic documents - Country-specific and UN system policy, strategy and action plan documents⁴² - UNCCD team, country focal points	Document review Semi-structured interviews Survey	- Thematic Analysis - Content Analysis - Comparative Analysis - Triangulation between data sources, data collection techniques, and data types

⁴¹ Such as National policies on climate change, UN country frameworks, etc.

⁴² Such as National policies on climate change, UN country frameworks, etc.

Lines of Inquiry	Indicators	Data sources	Data collection techniques	Data analysis methods
	initiatives at regional or cross-border levels. Evidence of structured coordination and engagement between PFI and national institutions or between PFI and relevant other initiatives or institutions working on land restoration and conflict mitigation.	- Government officials at national levels in targeted regions - Development partners - Online survey		
Efficiency				
EQ 3. How efficient is the PFI set-up for implementation?				
3.1 PFI framework	- Evidence of a clear, structured, and contextually appropriate framework guiding PFI implementation at global, regional and country levels. - Evidence of structured and well-coordinated planning processes across the three regions, ensuring effective implementation and stakeholder engagement.	- UNCCD and PFI specific documents, reports and budgets - UNCCD strategic documents - UNCCD team, country focal points - Government officials at national levels in targeted regions - Development partners - Online survey	- Document review - Semi-structured interviews - Survey	- Thematic Analysis - Content Analysis - Comparative Analysis - Triangulation between data sources, data collection techniques, and data types
3.2 Human resource and institutional capacity	- Evidence of clear roles, responsibilities, and accountability structures within the PFI's management framework at global, regional and country levels. - Evidence of efficient internal coordination and communication mechanisms that facilitate smooth implementation and stakeholder collaboration. - Degree of efficiency of task distribution in terms of avoidance	- UNCCD and PFI specific documents, reports and budgets - UNCCD strategic documents - UNCCD team, country focal points - Government officials at national levels in targeted regions - Development partners - Online survey	- Document review - Semi-structured interviews - Survey	- Thematic Analysis - Content Analysis - Comparative Analysis - Triangulation between data sources, data collection techniques, and data types

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Lines of Inquiry	Indicators	Data sources	Data collection techniques	Data analysis methods
	of overlaps or gaps in responsibilities that may affect the delivery of interventions			
3.3 Adequacy of monitoring data in capturing the progress of interventions	- Evidence of PFI's capacity to incorporate real-time learning into adjustments to respond to emerging needs and priorities, including: - Mechanisms for periodic collection, analysis, and utilisation of monitoring data to record lessons learned and analyse factors to inform planning and results - Quality and use of monitoring data for intervention adjustments during implementation and to inform specific actions by UNCCD and partners to enhance efficiency - Effectiveness of feedback systems in dynamically adapting strategic plans amidst evolving needs and priorities.	- UNCCD and PFI specific documents, reports and budgets - UNCCD strategic documents - UNCCD team, country focal points - Government officials at national levels in targeted regions - Development partners - Online survey	- Document review - Semi-structured interviews - Survey	- Thematic Analysis - Content Analysis - Comparative Analysis - Triangulation between data sources, data collection techniques, and data types
3.4 Factors influencing achievement of results	Evidence of factors facilitating or hindering the efficient, timely, and adequate delivery of activities (exogenous and endogenous factors that promoted the achievement of results)	- UNCCD and PFI specific documents, reports and budgets - UNCCD strategic documents - UNCCD team, country focal points - Government officials at national levels in targeted regions - Development partners - Online survey	- Document review - Semi-structured interviews - Survey	- Thematic Analysis - Content Analysis - Comparative Analysis - Triangulation between data sources, data collection techniques, and data types

Lines of Inquiry	Indicators	Data sources	Data collection techniques	Data analysis methods
Effectiveness				
EQ 4. How effective has the first phase of the PFI been?				
4.1 Attainment of results	• Evidence of progress toward planned PFI results and deliverables ◦ Evidence of completion of key activities, outputs, and milestones outlined in the PFI's work plans ◦ Stakeholder feedback on the extent to which implemented activities align with expectations and intended outcomes. • Evidence of regional and national planning processes incorporating PFI principles, including policy references, strategic frameworks, and multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms. • Perceptions from government and regional actors on whether PFI has contributed to structured and coherent planning at different levels. • Evidence of collaboration with regional and international technical experts, organizations, and knowledge-sharing platforms in capacity-building, advisory, and policy support roles. • Stakeholder assessments of whether external expertise has	• UNCCD and PFI specific documents, reports and budgets • UNCCD strategic documents • UNCCD team, country focal points • Government officials at national levels in targeted regions • Development partners • Online survey	• Document review • Semi-structured interviews • Survey	• Thematic Analysis • Content Analysis • Comparative Analysis • Limited contribution analysis • Triangulation between data sources, data collection techniques, and data types

Lines of Inquiry	Indicators	Data sources	Data collection techniques	Data analysis methods
	been effectively leveraged to strengthen PFI implementation.			
Impact				
EQ 5. How likely is it that the PFI results will contribute to long-term impact? What plans are in place to ensure that any momentum generated by the PFI is maintained?				
5.1 Progress towards contributions to strategic outcomes and impacts	- Evidence of early indications that PFI-supported activities contribute to positive environmental, social, or institutional changes - Examples of improved land restoration practices, increased stakeholder cooperation, or enhanced policy alignment resulting from PFI interventions. - Stakeholder perceptions on the potential of PFI to influence broader land restoration and peacebuilding efforts beyond its immediate scope	- UNCCD and PFI specific documents, reports and budgets - UNCCD strategic documents - UNCCD team, country focal points - Government officials at national levels in targeted regions - Development partners - Online survey	- Document review - Semi-structured interviews - Survey	- Thematic Analysis - Content Analysis - Comparative Analysis - Limited contribution analysis - Triangulation between data sources, data collection techniques, and data types
Sustainability				
EQ 6. To what extent are the results of the first phase of the PFI likely to be sustained?				
6.1 Sustainability of results	- Evidence of long-term integration of PFI-supported relationships and capacities at national, institutional, and individual levels - Stakeholder feedback on whether capacity-building efforts have translated into sustained institutional expertise, policy alignment, or long-term engagement in land restoration and peacebuilding. - Evidence of key enabling and constraining factors influencing	- UNCCD and PFI specific documents, reports and budgets - UNCCD strategic documents - UNCCD team, country focal points - Government officials at national levels in targeted regions - Development partners - Online survey	- Document review - Semi-structured interviews - Survey	- Thematic Analysis - Content Analysis - Comparative Analysis - Limited contribution analysis - Triangulation between data sources, data collection techniques, and data types

Lines of Inquiry	Indicators	Data sources	Data collection techniques	Data analysis methods
	the sustainability of PFI contributions			
Gender				
EQ 7. To what extent is the PFI gender-responsive? How is gender equality addressed across the PFI?				
7.1 PFI's gender integration	- Evidence of gender considerations integrated into the design and implementation of PFI activities, policies, and implementation frameworks - Stakeholder perceptions on the extent to which PFI has effectively engaged women and addressed gender equality - Evidence of diverse types of activities to ensure PFI initiatives are relevant to evolving beneficiary needs, local contexts, and best practices	- UNCCD and PFI specific documents, reports and budgets - UNCCD strategic documents - Country-specific and UN system policy, strategy and action plan documents⁴³ - UNCCD team, country focal points - Government officials at national levels in targeted regions - Development partners - Online survey	- Document review - Semi-structured interviews - Survey	- Thematic Analysis - Content Analysis - Comparative Analysis - Triangulation between data sources, data collection techniques, and data types

⁴³ Such as National policies on climate change, UN country frameworks, etc.

Annex 2. Online survey questionnaire

Dear colleague,

This survey is part of the **Evaluation of UNCCD's Peace Forest Initiative**. The evaluation's objective is to assess the PFI's strategic, institutional, and operational approach, focusing on relevance, performance and results.

Answering the survey is voluntary and should take you between **10 minutes**. Survey responses will remain completely **anonymous**. If you have any questions or comments regarding this evaluation in general, or this online survey, your contact persons are: _____

The survey is submitted by clicking the "submit" button. All information provided will be held securely and kept confidential, no IP address will be kept or tracked, so please feel free to express your views. Please kindly fill the questionnaire by __, 2025.

The final page of the Survey contains a "Submit" button. By clicking the 'Submit' button of the survey you will agree to participate in this survey.

Please, contact for any further details with regards to this Evaluation.

Thank you very much in advance for your time and support!

1. Section 1: General Information

2. In which region do you work? (Select one)

- ☐ South Caucasus
- ☐ Central Asia
- ☐ South East Asia
- ☐ Horn of Africa
- ☐ Global/no specific region
- ☐ Other (please specify)

3. What type of organization do you represent? (Select one)

- ☐ National government
- ☐ UN or other intergovernmental organization
- ☐ Scientific institution
- ☐ Private sector
- ☐ Civil society organization

- Other? Please explain:
- 4. How familiar are you with the PFI and its activities?
 - Very familiar and directly involved
 - Somewhat familiar and indirectly involved
 - Aware, but not involved in any PFI activities
 - Not familiar at all
- 5. How long have you been aware of or involved in PFI activities?
 - Less than 1 year
 - 1-2 years
 - More than 2 years

6. Section 2: Relevance and Coherence

- 5. To what extent is the PFI relevant to addressing land degradation and ecosystem restoration in your region?
 - Highly relevant
 - Somewhat relevant
 - Neutral
 - Not very relevant
 - Not relevant at all
- 6. To what extent is the PFI relevant to supporting **cooperation between countries or stakeholders on land restoration and peacebuilding**?
 - Highly relevant
 - Somewhat relevant
 - Neutral
 - Not very relevant
 - Not relevant at all
- 7. To what extent does the PFI align with other land restoration, peacebuilding, or environmental governance efforts in your region?
 - Strongly aligned
 - Somewhat aligned
 - Neutral

- Not very aligned
- Not aligned at all

7a. If strongly aligned/aligned, please elaborate in what ways it aligns: _____

8. Have the objectives of PFI been **clearly communicated** to stakeholders in your region?

- Yes, very clearly
- Somewhat clearly
- Neutral
- Not very clearly
- Not clearly at all

8a. If your response was not very clearly/or not clearly at all, pls share with us what was missing:

7. Section 3: Early Results and Transformative Potential

9. Has the PFI helped to **increase awareness or dialogue on land restoration and cooperation in your region?**

- Yes, significantly
- Yes, to some extent
- Neutral
- No, not really
- No, not at all

10. To what extent has the PFI helped bring together different stakeholders to discuss **shared environmental challenges?**

- To a great extent
- To some extent
- Neutral
- To a limited extent
- Not at all

11. Have PFI-related discussions or activities influenced national or regional policies in your country/region?

- Yes, significantly
- Yes, but only to a limited extent

- Neutral
- No, not really
- No, not at all

13. To what extent has PFI **mobilized technical expertise or knowledge-sharing** on land restoration?

- Very significantly
- Somewhat significantly
- Neutral
- Not very significantly
- Not significantly at all

14. How well do PFI activities reflect the needs and priorities of participating countries and communities?

- Very well
- Somewhat well
- Neutral
- Not very well
- Not well at all

8. Section 4: Stakeholder Engagement and Implementation

15. Has PFI successfully engaged the **right stakeholders** in your region?

- Yes, very effectively
- Somewhat effectively
- Neutral
- Not very effectively
- Not effectively at all

16. Which types of stakeholders have been **most actively involved** in PFI activities in your region?
(Select up to three)

- National government institutions
- Regional organizations
- Local communities
- Non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
- Donor agencies

- Research institutions
- Private sector actors
- Other (please specify)

17. Have there been **challenges in stakeholder coordination or engagement** within PFI activities?

- Yes, significant challenges
- Yes, some challenges
- Neutral
- No major challenges
- No challenges at all

18. What are the main challenges affecting the implementation of PFI in your region? (Select up to three)

- Limited financial resources
- Lack of institutional coordination
- Political or security issues
- Low stakeholder engagement
- Limited technical capacity
- Limited data availability and monitoring mechanisms
- Other (please specify)

9. Section 5: Future Potential and Sustainability

19. How likely is it that the **momentum generated by PFI** will continue beyond the current phase?

- Very likely
- Somewhat likely
- Neutral
- Not very likely
- Not likely at all

20. What are the most important factors for ensuring the **long-term impact of PFI** in your region? (Select up to three)

- Continued funding and resource mobilization
- Stronger institutional frameworks and policies
- Strengthened regional cooperation and stakeholder commitment

- Increased technical capacity-building
- Integration with national environmental and peacebuilding strategies
- Other (please specify)

21. To what extent has PFI helped **lay the groundwork for larger-scale investment in land restoration and transboundary cooperation?**

- Very significantly
- Somewhat significantly
- Neutral
- Not very significantly
- Not significantly at all

22. What should be prioritized to improve the next phase of PFI? (Select up to three)

- More financial support and investment
- Stronger institutional frameworks and governance
- Increased technical training and capacity-building
- More engagement with local communities and stakeholders
- Better monitoring, evaluation, and data-sharing mechanisms
- Expansion of activities to new regions or transboundary areas
- Other (please specify)

10. Section 6: Gender and Inclusion

23. To what extent has PFI integrated **gender considerations** into its activities?

- Very well integrated
- Somewhat integrated
- Neutral
- Not very well integrated
- Not integrated at all

24. To what extent has PFI integrated **vulnerability considerations** into its activities?

- Very well integrated
- Somewhat integrated
- Neutral

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- Not very well integrated
- Not integrated at all

Final thoughts

Thank you for completing this survey. Your feedback is invaluable in shaping the future of the Peace Forest Initiative. If you have additional comments, please share them in the space below:

Annex 3. Interview guide

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. The purpose of this discussion is to gather insights on the Peace Forest Initiative (PFI) as part of its formative evaluation. Your responses will help assess the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability of the initiative. All information will be kept confidential and used solely for evaluation purposes.

Do you agree to participate (Yes/No) - verbal confirmation

Interview questions	Targeted interlocutors
1.1 Alignment with National and Regional Priorities	
1. How well does the PFI align with the priorities and needs of participating countries and regions?	UNCCD External Stakeholders
2. In what ways does the PFI support national strategies on land restoration, peacebuilding, and sustainable development?	UNCCD External Stakeholders
3. How does the PFI align with the UNCCD mandate and global frameworks, such as the SDGs?	UNCCD
4. How well does PFI align with donor priorities and funding strategies?	UNCCD External Stakeholders Donor
1.2 Inclusion of Vulnerable Groups	
5. To what extent have gender and social inclusion considerations been integrated into PFI activities and policies?	UNCCD External Stakeholders Donor
6. How effective has the PFI been in engaging women and marginalized communities in land restoration efforts?	UNCCD External Stakeholders Donor
7. Are there specific mechanisms in place to ensure that PFI activities remain responsive to evolving beneficiary needs?	UNCCD
1.3 Complementarity with Other Initiatives	
8. How well does the PFI complement and align with other land restoration and peacebuilding/conflict mitigation initiatives?	UNCCD External Stakeholders – Regional Organizations, NGOs, Government Officials, Regional Bodies
9. Can you provide examples of joint initiatives, knowledge-sharing, or coordinated actions between PFI and other programs?	UNCCD External Stakeholders – Regional Organizations, NGOs, Government Officials, Regional Bodies
10. How well has PFI engaged with relevant national institutions and regional bodies working in land restoration and peacebuilding?	UNCCD External Stakeholders – Regional Organizations, NGOs, Government Officials, Regional Bodies
2. Efficiency	
11. Is the overall PFI framework clear, structured, and appropriate for implementation at global, regional, and country levels?	UNCCD External Stakeholders

How well-coordinated is PFI planning across regions to ensure stakeholder engagement and smooth implementation?	UNCCD External Stakeholders
13. Are roles, responsibilities, and accountability mechanisms within PFI management sufficiently clear?	UNCCD + External Stakeholders – National Focal Points, Implementing Partners, Regional and National Actors
14. How would you assess the efficiency of internal communication and coordination within PFI?	UNCCD
15. Are there any overlaps or gaps in task distribution that have affected implementation?	UNCCD
16. How well does PFI collect and utilize monitoring data to track progress and inform decision-making?	UNCCD
18. How effective are PFI feedback systems in adapting plans based on evolving needs?	UNCCD External Stakeholders – Governments, NGOs, Donors
3. Effectiveness	
19. What are the most significant achievements of PFI's first phase?	UNCCD External Stakeholders – Implementing Partners, Governments, NGOs
20. Have PFI's planned activities, milestones, and deliverables been met as expected?	UNCCD
21. In what ways has PFI contributed to structured and coherent land restoration and peacebuilding planning at regional and national levels?	UNCCD External Stakeholders – Implementing Partners, Governments, NGOs
22. Has PFI successfully engaged national institutions critical for successful implementation?	UNCCD External Stakeholders – National Governments, UNCCD Focal Points
23. How well has PFI involved regional and international expertise in capacity-building, advisory, and technical support?	UNCCD External Stakeholders – UN Agencies, Technical Experts, NGOs
4. Impact	
24. Have there been any observable improvements in land restoration practices, stakeholder cooperation, or policy alignment as a result of PFI interventions?	UNCCD External Stakeholders – National Focal Points, Regional Organizations, Technical Experts
25. Do you see potential for PFI to influence broader land restoration and peacebuilding efforts beyond its immediate scope?	UNCCD External Stakeholders – Donors, Governments, Regional Bodies
5. Sustainability	
26. Have PFI-supported relationships and institutional capacities been embedded at national or regional levels?	UNCCD External Stakeholders – Governments, Regional Organizations, National Implementing Partners
27. Have capacity-building efforts contributed to sustained expertise, policy alignment, and long-term engagement in land restoration and peacebuilding?	UNCCD External Stakeholders – National Implementers, NGOs, Donors

28. What key factors (financial, institutional, policy-related) could support or hinder the long-term sustainability of PFI's contributions?	<i>UNCCD External Stakeholders – Governments, Donors, Technical Experts</i>
29. Are there national or regional funding or policy mechanisms that could support the continuation of PFI activities?	<i>UNCCD External Stakeholders – Governments, Regional Organizations, Donors</i>
30. What are the most critical gaps or challenges that were not adequately addressed in the first phase of PFI?	<i>UNCCD External Stakeholders – National Implementers, Technical Experts, NGOs</i>
31. How could PFI's next phase better address the needs of participating countries and institutions?	<i>UNCCD External Stakeholders – Governments, UN Agencies, NGOs, Donors</i>
32. What additional steps should be taken to ensure gender-responsive land restoration and peacebuilding efforts in the next phase of PFI? ()	<i>UNCCD External Stakeholders – Regional and National Implementers, Gender Experts, NGOs</i>
Closing Questions	
35. In your opinion, what are the most significant successes of PFI so far?	<i>UNCCD + External Stakeholders – All</i>
36. What are the key areas for improvement in the next phase of PFI?	<i>UNCCD + External Stakeholders – All</i>
37. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding PFI's relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, or sustainability?	<i>UNCCD + External Stakeholders – All</i>
Final Note Thank you for your time and valuable insights. Your input will contribute to the improvement of the PFI and help ensure its future relevance and effectiveness. If you have any further thoughts, please feel free to share them with the evaluator.	

Annex 4 List of Interviewed persons

enclosed as a separate file for confidentiality reasons.