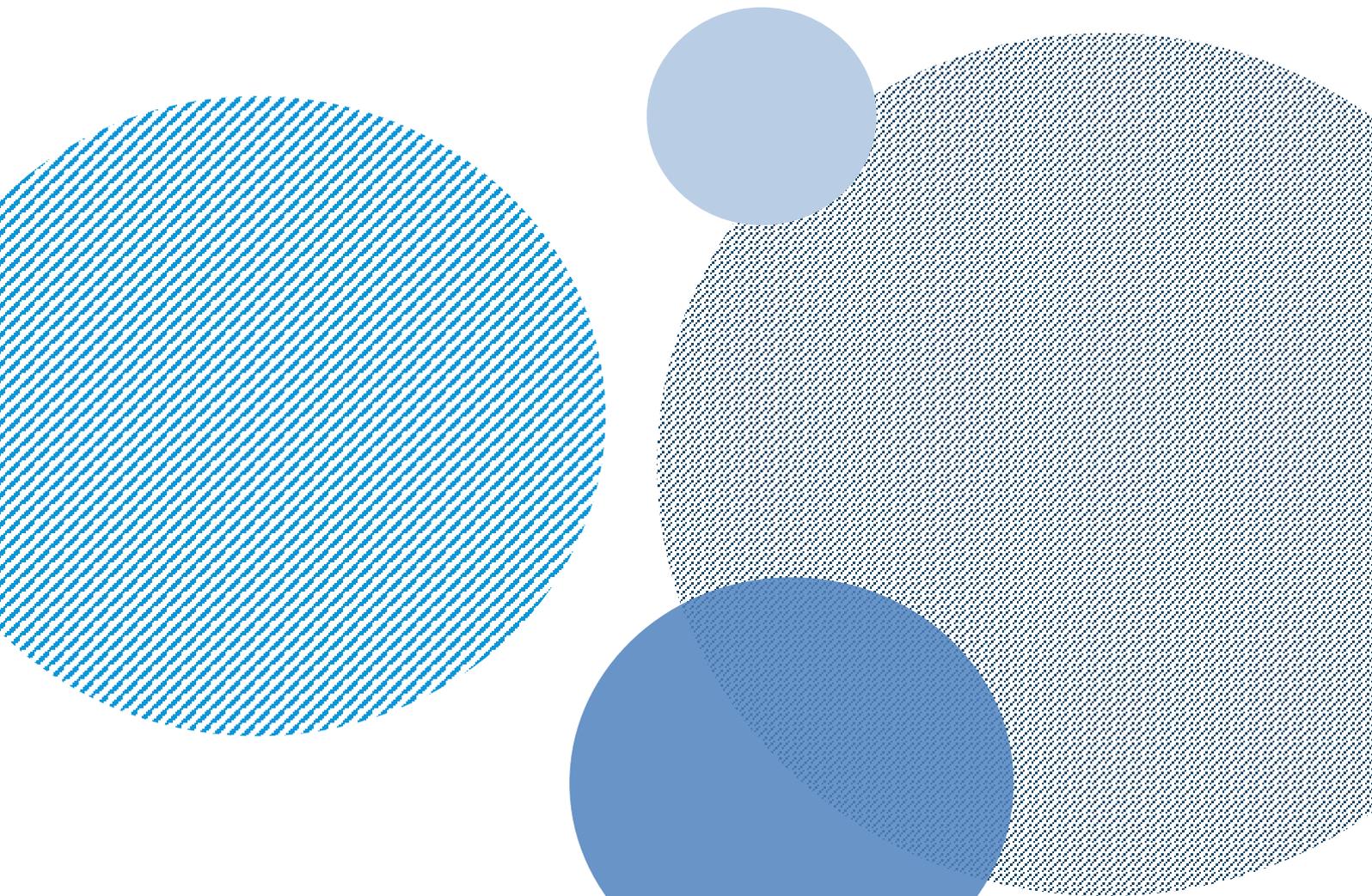


Evaluation of the project on Transboundary cooperation on the conservation of Amur tigers, Amur leopards and Snow leopards in North-East Asia



Evaluation report | November 2023





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Evaluation report
July 2023

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Commissioned by
ESCAP

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the many people who provided their invaluable input into this report. In particular, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the team of ESCAP Bangkok and North-East Asia office in Incheon, Republic of Korea, namely Edgar Dante, Clement Wu, Xiaohui Hou, Sangmin Nam, Sung Eun Kim, and Mi-Jin Lee for their support during the entire study. Similarly, my special appreciation and gratitude go to Rakov Ivan – Land of the Leopard National Park, Russian Federation, Aleksei Kostyria - WWF Russia (Amur Branch), Alexander Karnaukhov - WWF Russia (Altay-Sayan Branch), Guangshun Jiang and Jiayin Gu - College of Wildlife and Protected Area, NEFU/ Feline Research Center of NFGA, China, Bariushaa Munkhtsog - Irbis Mongolia Center who have provided thoughtful insights during consultation. I would like to express my special thanks to the entire project team of the “Transboundary Cooperation on the Conservation of Amur Tigers, Amur Leopards and Snow Leopards in North-East Asia” who directly or indirectly contributed to this evaluation process.

This study aims to inform both the government and international communities about the significance of this project in promoting transboundary cooperation between neighbouring countries' protected areas by sharing information and enhancing collaboration to protect these endangered animals. The findings are expected to facilitate the integration of information and results, along with lessons learned, to inform both the programme design and implementation of relevant ESCAP capacity development work in the future. I hope that the findings and recommendations will prove useful for ESCAP, SOENEA, participating countries and implementing partners as well as other countries and organizations working in a similar context.

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November, 2023

List of acronyms

ATLA	Amur Tiger and Leopard Alliance
CA TS	Conservation Assured Tiger Standards
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
FRC	Feline Research Center
FSBI	Federal State Budgetary Institution
HNR	Hunchun Nature Reserve (China)
LLNP	Land of the Leopard National Park (Russian Federation)
MAS	Mongolian Academy of Sciences
MNRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (Russian Federation)
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NEASPEC	North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation
NFGA	National Forestry and Grassland Administration (China)
NGO	Non-Government Organization
SECR	Spatially Explicit Capture-Recapture
SOENEA	ESCAP Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia
TBPA	Transboundary Protected Area
TLNP	Northeast China Tiger and Leopard National Park
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

Executive summary

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia (SOENEA) implemented the project on Transboundary cooperation on the conservation of Amur tigers, Amur leopards and Snow leopards in North-East Asia from January 2020 to December 2022 in the transborder regions in China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation. The main objective of the project was to establish a coordinated cooperation mechanism in the transboundary areas through research, field study and capacity-building for the conservation of big feline species.

The project's components included transboundary cooperation between the Northeast Tiger and Leopard National Park (TLNP) of China and the Land of the Leopard National Park (LLNP) of the Russian Federation, collaboration between neighbouring protected areas in the Lesser Khingan Mountains to conserve Amur tigers, and an assessment of the current status of two snow leopard subpopulations in the transboundary area between Mongolia and the Russian Federation.

The project was approved in December 2019 with a total budget of USD 377,081. This evaluation covered all activities implemented and outputs produced and delivered by implementing partners in that period upon the Letter of Agreement (LOA) signed between the parties. The main target groups of the project included Government officials, research institutes, non-government organizations, academia, local stakeholders, and communities in China, Mongolia, and the Russian Federation.

This evaluation was carried out to support accountability for results achieved and organizational learning for ESCAP, especially SOENEA. The evaluation aimed to generate information on the results achieved and lessons learned to inform future programme design and implementation of relevant ESCAP capacity development work. The evaluation assesses the project performance against the evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, human rights and gender mainstreaming, and other cross-cutting issues. The evaluation tried to explore and analyse the level of achievement of projects' expected results, implementation processes and factors that affected the achievement of the results during the implementation process in line with ESCAP Monitoring and Evaluation Policy and Guidelines and the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards for evaluation.

Both secondary and primary data were collected using a methodological design that incorporated a feedback loop, combining deductive and inductive approaches to analyze intended and unintended outcomes.

The major findings of the evaluation are highlighted below:

Promoted enabling environment to facilitate policy discussions and dialogue:

The project effectively established an enabling environment to facilitate policy discussions and dialogue among participating countries, fostering transboundary cooperation. This led to a policy recommendation and consensus for the establishment of a Sino-Russian Transboundary National Park. The park aims to protect Amur tigers and Amur leopards, featuring a bilateral monitoring and patrolling mechanism, along with the creation of free migration corridors along the Russian-Chinese border. This achievement resulted from virtual meetings and extensive consultations facilitated by ESCAP with TLNP and LLNP regarding planned activities coordination in China and the Russian Federation.

Activities such as analyzing the national legislations of China and the Russian Federation for transboundary protected areas (TBPAs), developing a unified classification of habitats, and creating a basic unified geographical map of the projected TBPA contributed to promoting transboundary

cooperation. The 2nd International Tiger Forum in Vladivostok in September 2022 elevated this agenda globally, discussing Amur tigers and leopards in the Sino-Russian border during a high-level meeting. Scientific data exchange on the Amur leopard and the Amur tiger populations marked a milestone for legal obligations toward rare cat preservation in the region.

Similarly, during the UN Climate Change Conference (COP-27) in Egypt on November 16, 2022, the Ministers of natural resources of both countries announced the Russian proposal to sign an intergovernmental agreement for the creation of a transboundary reserve, "Land of Big Cats." Knowledge exchange and capacity-building activities further enhanced project effectiveness.

Enhanced understanding for transboundary cooperation:

The project contributed to generating evidence related to national policies and environmental conservation across three countries through feasibility studies. These studies included an assessment of national legislation and protection regimes, an environmental and socio-economic analysis of target areas, and an exploration of existing national nature reserves (China) and a projected protected area (Russian Federation) for Amur tigers.

Enhanced scientific evidence with the use of unified, modern monitoring system for the conservation and protection of rare species:

Given the vulnerability of snow leopards, the adoption of a scientific monitoring system through the use of camera trapping technology in Mongolia and the Russian Federation provided scientific evidence and assessment of the rare animals for making informed policy decisions for promoting conservation of the rare animals. The exchange of data between Mongolia and the Russian Federation allowed both countries to monitor tiger mobility and their habitats. Modern methods like automatic photo-registration were employed to understand snow leopards' mobility and support the creation of a transboundary park.

Created a platform to strengthen transboundary cooperation for the conservation of rare cats:

ESCAP played a crucial role in providing a platform for the concerned parties to strengthen transboundary cooperation for the conservation of rare cats in line with the Nature Conservation Strategy of NEASPEC. The project addressed the need of the member States to tackle transboundary issues and acknowledge the need for the identification of cross-border conservation issues and capacity building of the various stakeholders involved in the monitoring and conservation efforts. The most significant result of this project is forming the political will and commitment to establish a Sino-Russian Transboundary National Park.

The project further contributed through the engagement of the parties in the feasibility study that estimated the condition of the environment in order to determine the restoration of the tiger population within the historical range. Several capacity building activities of the national park staff including the use of camera traps and the GIS electronic survey enabled the proper use of camera traps for snow leopard population surveys and monitoring of the mobility and other dynamics of the species.

Promoting partnership and synergy:

Project implementation through stakeholder engagement and collaboration maximized outcomes, generating scientific data on demography and mobility of target species. China and the Russian Federation explored innovative management methods based on mutual trust. The project highlighted the need for international cooperation to protect endangered large predators and set an example of transnational cooperation. Joint efforts between Chinese and Russian management and scientific research departments contributed to the ecological restoration project.

Knowledge transformation and capacity building as a basis of sustainability:

The project's focus on transboundary cooperation, research, monitoring, capacity building, and technology contributes to its sustainability. Local partnerships, such as the Siberian Wellness program, local tourism promotion, and agreements with organizations like FRC-NFGA, WWF, and Irbis Mongolia Center, enhance project sustainability.

In summary, the evaluation found that the project was based on the national demands and contributed to fulfilling the demands through various actions in bringing the range countries to dialogue and deliberation towards their mutual interest. It successfully established a coordinated cooperation mechanism among range countries and protected areas for the conservation of big feline species. However, it needs to better showcase the greater visibility of stakeholders' engagement, research and evidence generation and update as well as greater involvement of local communities through the workshops, educational information. For continuity and sustainability of the project outcomes in the long run, exploring other resources and funding sources will be essential with concentrated efforts from all concerned parties. The gender and human rights aspects also need to be integrated and implemented in the project.

Based on these findings, the evaluation offers three recommendations:

Enhance engagement with local authorities and communities to elevate the impact of the initiative

Recognizing the pivotal role of local communities as a pillar for achieving sustainable outcomes in conserving Amur tigers, Amur leopards, and Snow leopards, it is imperative to elevate their involvement in all phases of the project activities. Similarly, the engagement, leadership and ownership of local governments and authorities must be ensured for sustainable results and continuity.

Prioritize capacity building and scientific research efforts for cross-learning in upcoming projects

A well-designed follow-up of project's result is recommended, focusing on building individual and institutional capacity, knowledge transfer, technology promotion and foster public and private financing mechanisms for biodiversity restoration. Equally important will be to consider elements such as implementing early warning systems, undertaking risk management, and addressing human-wildlife conflict. It is also necessary to address the cross-cutting areas such as climate change, gender and social inclusion with socio-eco-environmental co-existence.

Make concerted efforts to scale up this initiative

It is essential to design the programme with wider coverage and adequate budget to roll out its lessons and achievements from policy to practice in the future for effective management of these endangered species and their habitat. Furthermore, engaging key sector stakeholders such as Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Phoenix Fund, Amur Tiger and Leopard Alliance (ATLA) as well as the government will help to multiply the investment and impact.

1. Introduction

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is one of the five regional commissions under the jurisdiction of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). ESCAP Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia (SOENEA) serves as the Secretariat of the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC), which is the first intergovernmental mechanism created by China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation in 1993. NEASPEC has supported member States in implementing five programmatic areas jointly identified by member States as subregional priorities, including Air pollution, Biodiversity and Nature conservation, Marine protected areas, Low carbon cities, and Desertification and land degradation. Among them, Biodiversity and Nature Conservation follows the NEASPEC Nature Conservation Strategy¹ which was adopted at the twelfth Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-12) in 2007 and identified six flagship species for prioritized and concerted action in North-East Asia². The overall goal is to contribute to biodiversity conservation strategy in promoting transboundary and intergovernmental cooperation on and enhancing coordinated mechanisms for the target species and their habitats. Key activities include joint scientific research, field study, capacity building and knowledge-sharing meetings.

The operations of NEASPEC include a number of studies, expert and member government consultations, and scientific research initiatives focusing on transnational habitat areas. For instance, the study on the "Transborder Movement of Amur Tigers and Leopards Using Camera Trapping and Molecular Genetic Analysis" (2014-2016) successfully facilitated field research and joint analysis between China and the Russian Federation on the quantity and behavioural patterns of Amur tigers and leopards crossing the national border, improving knowledge of ecological connectivity across the border.

This end-of-the-project evaluation serves the purpose of accountability and learning. It aims to inform future project design and provide lessons learned for possible future programming for relevant ESCAP capacity development work.

¹ https://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files/Publication_SavingNatureConservation_2.pdf

² Three feline species (Amur tiger, Amur leopard and Snow leopard) and three migratory bird species (Black-faced spoonbill, White-naped crane and Hooded crane)

2. Description of the Project

2.1 Background

By maintaining the balance of healthy ecosystems and controlling prey numbers at the top of the food chain, big cats play a significant role in ecosystems. However, due to poaching, habitat degradation, a decrease in available prey, and other environmental issues, their dangers to survival have been growing. Since 2000s, NEASPEC has supported big cat conservation in North-East Asia by designating Amur tigers, Amur leopards, and Snow leopards as NEASPEC flagship species.

The SOENEA implemented the project on the “Transborder Movement of Amur Tigers and Leopards Using Camera Trapping and Molecular Genetic Analysis” during 2014-2016 and publicized the scientific study focusing on two feline species (Amur tiger and Amur leopard) and their habitats in the Sino-Russian border areas³. The project was followed by further discussions including the International Forum on Tiger and Leopard Transboundary Conservation (July 2019, Harbin, China), where three proposals were presented. The Russian Federation pledged financial support for these proposals during the twenty-third NEASPEC Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-23) in October 2019⁴. These proposals were integrated into the present project to support cross-border cooperation, especially on scientific assessment, which is essential for the effective conservation and transboundary management of the protected species.

This specific project was implemented from January 2020 to December 2022 in the transborder regions in China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation with the objective to establish a coordinated cooperation mechanism in the transboundary areas of China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation through research, field study and capacity-building for the conservation of big feline species.

The expected outputs of the project were:

- Strengthened institutional capacity of Northeast China Tiger and Leopard National Park (TLNP) and Land of the Leopard National Park (LLNP) of the Russian Federation for joint monitoring activities and management plans of transboundary protected areas.
- Improved availability and quality of demographic statistics of Amur tigers, and their environmental and socio-economic analysis data in Lesser Khingan Mountains.
- Improved availability and quality of demographic statistics of the snow leopard inhabiting in the transboundary area of Mongolia and the Russian Federation.

The project aimed to achieve its goal through the following three components (see Figure 1):

Component 1: Transboundary cooperation between the Northeast Tiger and Leopard National Park (TLNP) of China and the Land of the Leopard National Park (LLNP) of the Russian Federation to conserve Amur tigers and leopards: Upon the recommendations from the previous NEASPEC project conducted in 2014-2016, component 1 aims to enhance the collaboration between two national parks (TLNP and LLNP) and create the condition for the establishment of a Sino-Russian Transboundary National Park (tentatively named “Land of Big Cats”). Planned activities are also supporting the Memorandum of Understanding between TLNP and LLNP (2019) and the “Harbin Consensus on Strengthening Cooperation in Transboundary Conservation of Tigers and Leopards” endorsed by both sides at the International Forum in July 2019.

It was originally envisioned that both TLNP and LLNP would sign the LOA with SOENEA, respectively, for activities in each national park. However, TLNP declined to sign the agreement due to

³ https://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files/2018_12_17_UNESCAP_%ED%98%B8%EB%9E%91%EC%9D%B4.pdf

⁴ https://neaspec.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/NEASPEC%20SOM-23%20Meeting%20Report_Final.pdf

administrative issues stating that it was very early stage of TLNP's establishment and has no specific rules for cooperation with international organizations including financial support. This process caused delay in Component 1 project implementation by almost two years. After the consultations, LLNP signed the LOA on 30 December 2021 to conduct all planned activities for both national parts, by ensuring close collaboration with TLNP upon the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between LLNP and TLNP which was signed in 2019.

Component 2: Transboundary cooperation between neighbouring protected areas in Lesser Khingan Mountains to conserve the Amur tigers: Lesser Khingan Mountains represent the North-western limits of Amur tiger distribution and serve as one of the key ecological corridors between China and the Russian Federation for Amur tigers. The main activity of this component is to conduct feasibility studies along the borders to support the need for the establishment of a new National Park in the Russian Federation and the expansion of the neighbouring protected areas in China to conserve habitats for Amur tigers in target areas.

Component 3: Assessment of the current status of two snow leopard subpopulations in transboundary area between Mongolia and the Russian Federation: The snow leopard is one of the rarest and most poorly studied species among the big cats. Inhabiting in 12 Central Asian countries, including Mongolia and the Russian Federation, this component aims to assess the latest status of the Snow leopards and identify all individuals along the Mongolia-Russian border by applying modern survey methodologies.

2.2 Link to the Sustainable Development Goals

The project aimed to contribute to SDG 15 (Life on Land) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) and their Target as follows:

- Target 15.5: "Take urgent and significant actions to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species."
- Target 15.7: "Take urgent action to end poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna and address both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products."
- Target 15.C "Enhance global support for efforts to combat poaching and trafficking of protected species, including by increasing the capacity of local communities to pursue sustainable livelihood opportunities."
- Target 17.14. "Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development."

2.3 Project theory of change

The actual Theory of Change (TOC) model was not designed during the project preparation phase. It is reconstructed as below which provided guidance for the entire evaluation process. The reason for the selection of the TOC design is that it comprehensively describes and illustrates the intended change process and possible reasons for change in a particular context. This examined in detail within the general guidance developed for evaluations by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG)⁵ and the OECD-DAC.

The reconstruction of the Theory of Change (TOC) allowed the evaluator to gain an overall perspective about the interventions and to understand the overall logic underpinning the project. In-depth virtual consultation/meeting with key project team members, partners and stakeholders as well as a broad analysis of documentation were used to analyse the context of the evolution of project progress as well as achievements made by the project.

⁵ <http://www.uneval.org/document/guidance-documents>

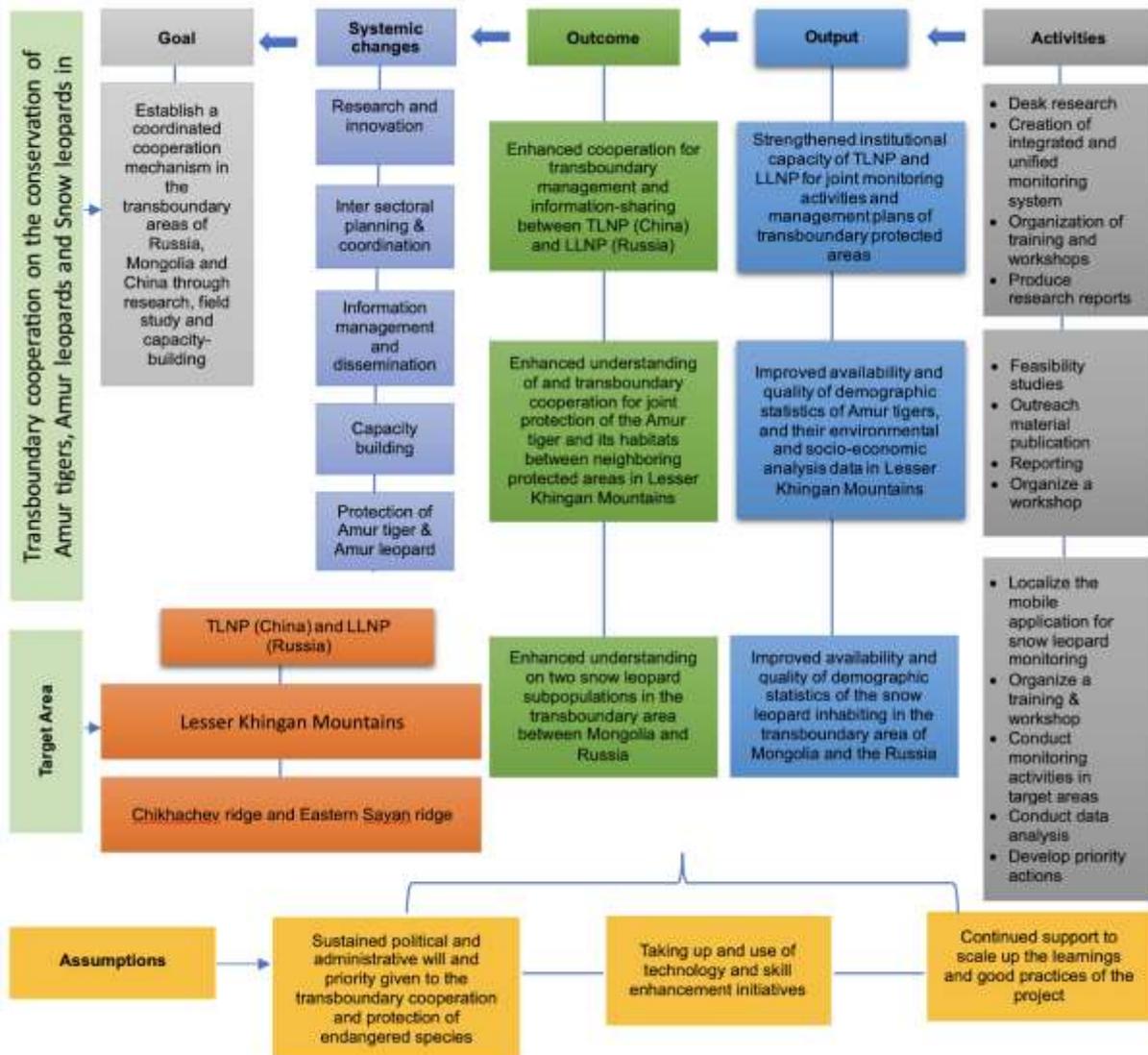


Figure 1, Transboundary cooperation on the conservation of Amur tigers, Amur leopards and Snow leopards in North-East Asia - Theory of Change (TOC)

2.4 Project strategies

The overall objective of the project is to establish a coordinated cooperation mechanism among range countries and protected areas in the transborder regions for the conservation of big feline species in the China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation. This project was developed based on the precursor NEASPEC project in 2014-2016, which concluded that cross-border cooperation among range countries, especially on scientific assessment, is essential for the effective conservation and transboundary management of the protected species.

The outcomes that the project envisioned are as below:

- Outcome 1: Enhanced cooperation for transboundary management and information sharing between TLNP (China) and LLNP (the Russian Federation);
- Outcome 2: Enhanced understanding of the transboundary cooperation on joint projection of the Amur tiger and its habitats between the neighbouring protected areas in Lesser Khingan Mountains; and
- Outcome 3: Enhanced understating in two snow leopards' sub-population in the transboundary area between Mongolia and the Russian Federation.

The main strategy of the component 1 is to ensure the integrity of diverse ecosystems in bordering protected areas and secure the viability of the globally significant biodiversity through strengthening the transboundary management. This component focused on capacity-building of the government agencies of two countries to collaborate on cross-border conservation, supporting local community-based conservation efforts and helping local communities develop and implement more sustainable management practices of these protected areas.

The strategy for the component 2 was to conduct feasibility studies on establishing a Sino-Russian TBPA in Lesser Khingan Mountains by collecting up-to-date information on the status of Amur tigers and conduct geospatial, environmental and socio-economic analyses in the target areas.

Similarly, the main strategy of the component 3 is to obtain the reliable data on the current status of the snow leopard in two transboundary sites between Mongolia and the Russian Federation - namely the Chikhachev ridge and the Eastern Sayan ridge - by using modern survey methodologies, such as unified survey design and specially designed mobile applications developed in 2018. This up-to-date survey methodology aimed to automatically process field data into the Geographic information system (GIS) layers and store it online for further statistical and spatial analysis of the snow leopard distribution and mapping it in the transboundary zone between Mongolia and the Russian Federation. Priority action plans to conserve transboundary subpopulations of snow leopards in Chikhachev and Eastern Sayan ridges were expected to be developed based on the data and information collected.

2.5 Innovative elements

The project was designed to contribute to the synergetic means of implementation and partnership. The technology as well as approach for creating collaboration opportunities for subregional cooperation and linking them to address the subregional needs and experience of international, subregional and national organizations is an innovative approach of this project. This project also acted as a bridge to facilitate conservation cooperation for access to technology and enhance know-how and joint action to collect and share information that also contributed to policy coherence, sharing of lessons, promoting scaling up of best practices and international and regional partnerships for the management of natural resources including conserving the endangered species and their habitats, protecting biodiversity and enhancing the welfare of the community.

2.6 Beneficiaries, target countries and key partners

The main target groups of the project included the Government officials, research institutes, non-government organizations, academia, local stakeholders and communities in China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation.

Key partners included:

- China: Feline Research Center of National Forestry and Grassland Administration, and Northeast China Tiger and Leopard National Park Administration
- Mongolia: Irbis Mongolia Center
- Russian Federation: Land of the Leopard National Park, WWF-Russia Amur Branch, WWF-Russia Altai Branch, and Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment

Similarly, the relevant local governments, administrations of protected areas and national parks and research institutes are included as the major collaborators and partners in the project.

2.7 Resources

The project was approved in December 2019 for the period from January 2020 to September 2022 with a total budget of USD 377,081 which is extended August 2023. The evaluation covered all activities implemented and outputs produced and delivered by implementing partners in that period upon the Letter of Agreement.

3. Evaluation objectives, scope and methodology

3.1 Purpose and objectives

The purpose of this evaluation is to support accountability for results and to enable learning to ESCAP, especially SOENEA. The evaluation aimed to generate information on the results achieved and lessons learned to inform future programme design and implementation of relevant ESCAP capacity development work. The main user of the evaluation results is ESCAP, particularly the implementing office (SOENEA), project beneficiary countries and implementing partners.

Based on the project's results framework, the evaluation tried to explore and analyse the level of achievement of projects' expected results, implementation processes and factors that affected to achieve the results during the implementation process. The evaluation also established possible causal linkages focusing on the criteria-based evaluation questions. The evaluation was conducted in line with ESCAP Monitoring and Evaluation Policy and Guidelines⁶ and the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards for evaluation.

The objectives of the evaluation are:

- 1) To assess the project performance against the evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, human rights and gender mainstreaming, and any other cross-cutting issues, as deemed relevant.
- 2) To formulate lessons learned and action-oriented recommendations to inform management decision-making and improve future project design and implementation.

3.2 Evaluation scope

The evaluation covers the project's design, strategy and implementation throughout its entire duration from January 2020 to December 2022 in all three participating countries. The evaluation looked at all modes of implementation including national and regional workshops, training and activities based on consultations with project countries. The detailed TOR is attached in **Annex 1**.

3.3 Methodology

The evaluation is framed according to the evaluation criteria and evaluation questions in the TOR.

During the consultation, some anecdotal evidence on lesson learned and best practices were collected that allowed a representative scenario of each component of the project to be appraised within their context with a longitudinal balance of activities from the early stage to the latter.

The project team provided the details of beneficiaries disaggregated by gender, region, country, etc. The gender representation was also duly considered while selecting participants.

To define the evaluation boundaries, the following evaluation parameters were used:

- **Relevance** was assessed at the level of outcomes in terms of the extent to which they meet the criteria and priorities set out in the programme objectives, modality, target beneficiaries, project activities along with the impact of COVID-19 situations in the project.
- **Effectiveness** was assessed at the level of outcomes to intermediate impact - how the programme's specific planned objectives were achieved.

⁶ ESCAP, ESCAP Monitoring and Evaluation Policy and Guidelines, 2017

- **Efficiency** was measured at the level of inputs, and outputs, and how these have led to outcomes; and the extent to which activities are complemented by other stakeholders' initiatives.
- **Sustainability** was assessed at the level of intermediate impact and overall impact. The evaluation also assessed the permanence or likelihood of outcome and impacts continuing beyond the project cycle.
- **Human rights and gender mainstreaming** was assessed based on the gender and human rights aspect integrated into the design and implementation of the project to encourage gender balance. Since the Gender Equity Marker (GEM) of the project is "0", there is no expectation to contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment from this project.

3.3.1 Evaluation Questions

The following evaluation criteria and questions to assess the project performance were considered and further refined following consultations with project management and other stakeholders during the evaluation inception period. The results have been assessed at the outcome level. Outcome level results are the likely or achieved effects of an intervention's outputs which was measured accordingly using rating scale. The collective actions through ESCAP development partners were also identified to see the actions taken and their influence on the projects' result.

Evaluation criteria	Evaluation questions
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the project activities/outputs that lead to the results and present evidence of project's contribution to the results/outcomes? • What were the most significant results⁷ at the sub-regional and national levels achieved or contributed by the project? • How did adjustments (if any) made to the project due to the COVID-19 pandemic affect the achievement of the project's results?
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent was the project designed based on demand from the target beneficiaries in the member States? • What adjustments (if any) were made to the project activities and modality, as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 situation, or in response to the new priorities of member States?
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent and how did the project achieve efficiency in implementation through the combination of project stakeholders involved, making use of comparative advantages and the creation of synergy? • To what extent and how has partnering with other organizations enabled or enhanced reaching of results?

⁷ In the context of this evaluation, results are assessed at the outcome level. Outcome level results are the likely or achieved effects of an intervention's outputs. They reflect the changes in the behaviour or practices of the target group(s)/countries that ESCAP intends to influence, including through actions taken collectively with its development partners. They also reflect that benefits and actions taken by the target groups/countries through the project interventions (source: ESCAP Monitoring and Evaluation Policy and Guidelines). Examples of outcome level results include: (1) Five pilot countries adopted and implemented national strategies and programmes with assistance from the project; (2) Several countries put in place a new system or procedures with support from the project; (3) Countries organised national workshops as a follow-up to the project training activities.

Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent can results of the project be continued without ESCAP's further involvement?
Human rights and gender mainstreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent were gender and human rights integrated into the design and implementation of the project, informed by relevant and tailored human rights and gender analysis?

NB: The gender marker of the project is GEM 0, with no expectation to contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment.

3.3.2 Evaluation Approach

The evaluation is based on a mixed methods approach through a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis to inform findings. Given the multi-country nature of the project and remote administration nature, the methodological approach has been adapted accordingly. The evaluation used participatory approach collaborating with both stakeholders and reference groups to inform the findings.

Both secondary and primary data were collected to evidence the findings. The methodological design is intended to ensure that the data collection and analysis is informed by a feedback loop. A deductive approach is applied to predefine analytical categories and inductive approach leaves space for unforeseen issues or lines of inquiry that had not been identified at the inception stage. This approach served to analyse unintended outcomes of ESCAP cooperation.

The evaluation process begun from the desk review of project documents, review of project related progress reports, training reports (results of the training), and other documents as needed. To capture first-hand information, an online survey/interview was conducted with the project team, partners and stakeholders in China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation. Similarly, e-consultations with the project team, ESCAP and reference group were conducted to understand their perspective towards the achievements of the project results.

3.3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

For generating information, data was collected through a mix of primary and secondary sources with different techniques including desk review, structured/semi-structured interviews, and surveys. Systematic data triangulation across diverse sources and methods were carried out to validate findings and avoid bias in the evaluative judgement. Given the multi-country nature of the project and in light of current travel restrictions, the methodological approach included methods that could be administered remotely.

Desk review

The evaluation begun with a systematic review of relevant literature and project related documents from ESCAP and covered the period from January 2020 to December 2022. Secondary data have been drawn through a comprehensive review of relevant documents and reports. Project document, result matrix, periodic reports, training contents and post training assessment reports have been reviewed during the desk review. This endeavour helped to understand the context, project activities and expected results.

Online survey

A Likert Scale Survey was used to scaling up the responses from project team, partners and stakeholders (Key Informants) based on the stakeholders mapping. The response rate of the online survey was 69%. The list of stakeholders selected for the online survey is provided in **Annex: 2**.

A structured questionnaire set was used for the online survey to collect information based on the evaluation criteria. Each participant was asked to rate his/her response with a statement on a 1 – 5 - point scale from low to high ratings which allowed to capture intensity of agreement from the project

team and stakeholders followed by their views and perspectives on each evaluation questions. The list of participants of the online survey is provided in **Annex: 3a**.

3.3.3.3 Virtual consultation

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with selected survey respondents representing each component and country to understand the project's scenario at broader level to complement the survey findings and to capture best practices and lessons of the project. The information has been captured either directly from the interviews or emails to the respondents depending on the internet connectivity and English language proficiency. The details of survey protocol and list of participants is given in **Annex: 3b**

3.3.3.4 Reference group consultation

Reference group was consulted using structured questionnaire set to capture their views and perspectives on the project, including its achievements and way forward. This helped to validate information from other sources and provided institutional memories to complement the evaluation. The structured/semi-structured interview questionnaire was used to capture their view on lessons learned and best practices during the project period. The interview protocol and list of participants is given in **Annex: 3c**.

Additionally, the reference group has provided their inputs and feedback on the evaluation report.

3.3.3.5 Document sharing and feedback

Draft report is shared with the ESCAP team for their review and feedback. This provided an opportunity to validated data and information and finetune the report. Final feedback and comments will be incorporated in the final report.

3.3.4 Data analysis

The desk review findings were generated in a matrix to fit into the evaluation criteria. The Likert Scale Survey data have been analyzed using MS Excel and presented in the report along with the findings from desk review. Best practices and lessons learned are presented as anecdotal evidence.

3.4 Sampling and Representation

The evaluation employed purposive sampling to select sites and respondents based on the stakeholder mapping. All the three participating countries and stakeholders were represented in both survey and virtual consultation/interview process. The online survey form was sent to all the partners and stakeholders who engaged in the project process. Gender aspect was also taken into consideration while selecting respondents for interview. Among the respondents, 33% were female and 67% were male as shown in figure 2.

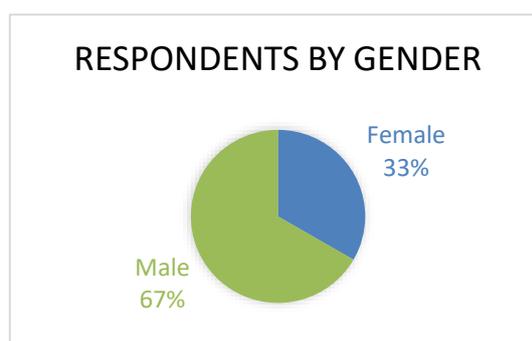


Figure 2, Gender of the respondents

The details of key stakeholders and agenda of discussions is given in **Annex: 2** and list of individuals interviewed in **Annex: 4**.

3.5 Ethical consideration

A human rights-based and gender-sensitive approach has been considered for the evaluation design⁸. The UNEG Handbook for Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality Perspectives in Evaluations in the UN System, the UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation, the ESCAP Evaluation Guideline, Monitoring and Evaluation System, Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct, OECD Evaluation Criteria, etc. was followed for the Evaluation of the project. The evaluation followed a consultative approach by consulting with project team, and project executors who are directly involved in the implementation of the project.

3.6 Limitations

Within the given budget and the COVID-19 situation, the evaluator was not able to physically visit the project countries and agencies for data collection and validation. To mitigate this limitation, the evaluation process was designed to ensure the inclusion of all partners and stakeholders in the consultation and survey to generate evidence from the broader constituency of the stakeholders, thereby reducing the information gap and enhancing the overall reliability of the findings.

⁸The gender marker of the project is GEMO, with no expectation for the project outcome to contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment. However, SOENEA is mindful of encouraging gender balance and continue keep track of female participation in the project activities - Annual Progress Report 2021

4. Evaluation findings

This section outlines the primary findings of the independent evaluation by answering the evaluation questions:

4.1 Effectiveness

EQ 1. What are the project activities/outputs that lead to the results and present evidence of project’s contribution to the results/outcomes?

EQ 2. What were the most significant results at the sub-regional and national levels achieved or contributed by the project?

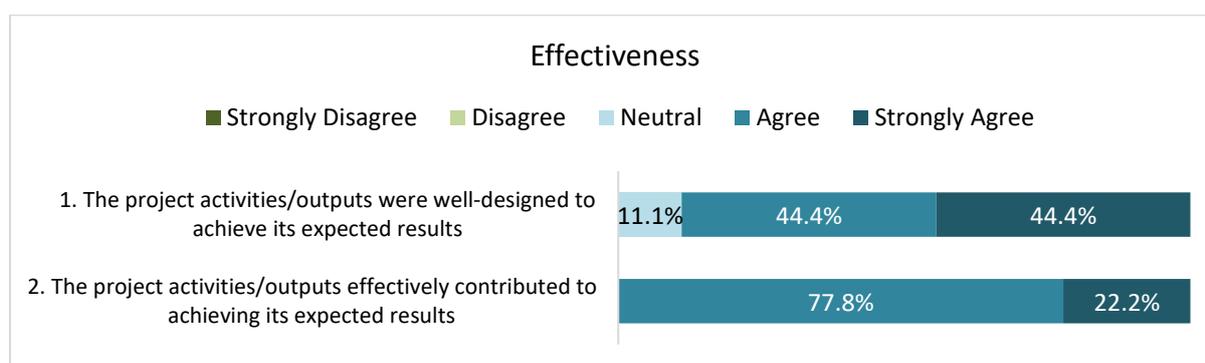
EQ 3. How did adjustments (if any) made to the project due to the COVID-19 pandemic affect the achievement of the project’s results?

The evaluation finds evidence of ESCAP’s role in coordinating and supporting the implementation of policies and programmes for conserving Amur tigers, Amur leopards and Snow leopards in North-East Asia, which led to enhanced cooperation for transboundary management and information-sharing between TLNP (China) and LLNP (Russian Federation). The most significant result of the project is that a Sino-Russian Transboundary National Park amongst the programme countries was announced during the 2nd International Tiger Forum in September 2022. The key intermediate-level findings are discussed below:

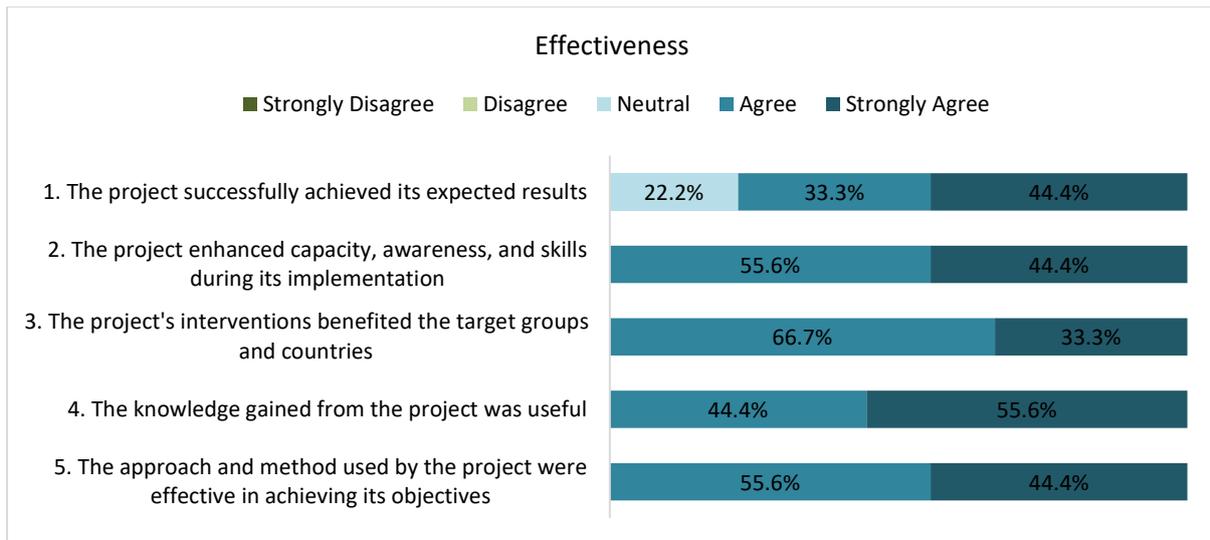
Finding 1. Promoting enabling environment to facilitate policy discussions and dialogue

Results from the KIIs, online survey and literature review shows that the project was effective in providing an enabling environment to facilitate policy discussions and dialogue amongst the participating countries to strengthen transboundary cooperation leading to a policy recommendation and consensus for the establishment of a Sino-Russian Transboundary National Park for the protection of Amur tigers and Amur leopards, bilateral monitoring and patrolling, and the creation of free migration corridors along the Russian-Chinese border. This was done through virtual meetings and prolonged consultations facilitated by ESCAP with TLNP and LLNP regarding the coordination of planned activities in China and the Russian Federation.

In terms of the effectiveness of well-designed activities that contributed to achieving the expected results, most of the respondents positively responded that the project activities were well designed to achieve expected results (agree or strongly agree), as shown in Graphic 1 as derived from the respondents’ survey.

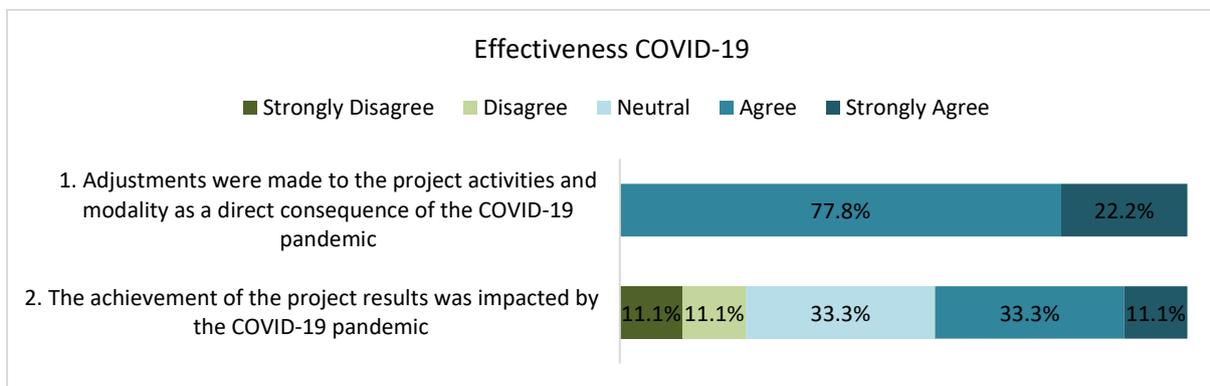


Graphic 1 – Effectiveness 1



Graphic 2 – Effectiveness 2

Based on the survey results (Graph 7), 77.7% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the project was successful to achieve the expected results. Similarly, 100% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the project contributed to their country's/organisations strengthened transboundary cooperation through trainings, capacity building and awareness raising activities to build the necessary skills set for promoting the conservation of Amur tigers, Amur leopards and Snow leopards in North-East Asia. Likewise, 100% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the knowledge gained from the project related to conservation and protection of the rare species was useful to advance further policy dialogues and conservation activities.



Graphic 3 – Effectiveness 3

Regarding the effectiveness of the project in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, the answers show that yes, changes and adjustments were necessary for the proposed activities in each component, as indicated by the analysis of the documentation. Total 44.4% agreed that the results achieved were impacted by COVID-19 indicating that COVID-19 provided opportunities to rearrange the planned activities and did not negatively impact the achievement of the project results, while 33.3% of the respondents remained neutral and 22.2% disagreed that the pandemic negatively affected the results achieved (Graphic 8) as necessary adjustments were made in the planned activities in anticipation of the intended outcomes.

The details of findings on project effectiveness by component is presented below:

Component 1: Transboundary cooperation between the Northeast Tiger and Leopard National Park (TLNP) of China and the Land of the Leopard National Park (LLNP) of the Russian Federation to conserve Amur tigers and leopards:

The actions such as analysis of national legislations of China and the Russian Federation for transboundary protected areas (TBPAs), developing unified classification of habitats and preparing basic unified geographical map of the projected TBPA and its adjacent territories, as well as information sharing and capacity building activities for experts and field staff contributed to promote transboundary cooperation. The key findings and progress of the Component 1 were especially brought to international attention at the 2nd International Tiger Forum held in Vladivostok in September 2022 during the special session for Amur tigers and leopards in the Sino-Russian border as well as the high-level meeting where the creation of the projected Land of Big Cats TBPA was announced⁹.

The Land of the Leopard National Park near the Chinese border is the primary habitat for the Amur leopard and the southwestern Amur tiger populations. The establishment of a transboundary national park would entail the preservation of the borders of the regions included in it, as well as independent protection with improved cooperation. A vast expanse of around 1.8 million hectares may support hundreds of tigers and 200 leopards.

In line with the expected project outcome of enhancing the cooperation for transboundary management and information-sharing between TLNP (China) and LLNP (Russian Federation), in 2019, the parties agreed to deepen cooperation in conservation areas, especially on the conservation of the population of Amur tigers and Amur leopards in transboundary reserves.

To protect rare species of big cats, the countries realised the need to work together and started joint monitoring and patrolling of the conservation areas. The first part of the desk research resulted in an analytic report including policy recommendations to establish the "Land of Big Cats". For example, the assessment of the national legislation of China and the Russian Federation helped to understand the provision for PAs and TBPAs. Similarly, this endeavour also paved the way to prepare the unified geographical map of projected TBPA and its adjacent territories as well as formal coordination structure and mechanism through Coordination Council of the Transborder Region along with the proposals on areas of cooperation between TLNP (China) and LLNP (Russian Federation)¹⁰.

During the 2nd International Tiger Forum held in Vladivostok on September 5, 2022, that took place as the opening event of the Eastern Economic Forum, the creation of the projected Land of Big Cats TBPA was publicly announced, and a decision was made to sign a corresponding agreement by representatives of the governments of the two countries. In the forum, Mr. Alexander Kozlov, Minister of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation, announced that the Land of Big Cat TBPA would become the first transboundary reserve protecting two rare cats.

During the meeting, participants also exchanged relevant scientific data on the current state of the populations of the Amur leopard and the Amur tiger. This was a milestone achievement for the project to ensure legal obligations of the states towards the preservation of rare cats in the region.

Finally, on the sidelines of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP-27) in Egypt on November 16, 2022 which was attended by the Ministers of natural resources of the two countries, the proposal of the Russian side to sign an intergovernmental agreement on the creation of a transboundary reserve "Land of Big Cats" was announced. The vision of establishing a transboundary reserve "Land of Big

⁹ Project Completion Note - ANNEX II, Transboundary cooperation on the conservation of Amur tigers, Amur leopards and Snow leopards in North-East Asia, NEASPEC Secretariat

¹⁰ Technical Report NEASPEC, 2020

Cats" was supported by ongoing field activities that included the existence of a network of various camera trap stations.

There is also evidence of the existence of an integrated and unifying monitoring system in China and the Russian Federation that allows effective exchange of operational information on the movement of poachers, smugglers and the occurrence of fires on the state border of the two countries along with the exchange of scientific information. Well-established new channels of operational communication between LLNP, TLNP employees, as well as the border services of the two countries, allows the parties to conduct joint monitoring in the border areas. As a result of long-term and continuous scientific monitoring between China and the Russian Federation, it has been found that the tiger and leopard population is growing rapidly on both sides of the border¹¹.

Few adjustments were made to the project due to the COVID-19 pandemic, slight delays in implementation and the changes from physical to online meetings were reported and was further validated by the survey. The joint analysis of tiger and leopard numbers between China and the Russian Federation was temporarily delayed due to changes in monitoring methods and the impact of the pandemic.

Exchange of knowledge and capacity building activities were considered to contribute to project effectiveness and achievement of expected results. Some innovative activities like field competition for rangers of protected areas were planned, which however could not be held due to the closed borders owing to COVID-19 restrictions. Nevertheless, a number of other large-scale events were held in the fields and online to exchange experience, strengthen cooperation with representatives of the Chinese and Russian governments and environmental authorities of the two countries. Building plans for future work on the creation of a projected Land of Big Cats TBPA and exchange of up-to-date information on the state of the Amur leopard and the Amur tiger populations in the territories of China and the Russian Federation were other activities that contributed to strengthen cooperation and monitoring systems across the countries.

Component 2: Enhance understanding of and transboundary cooperation on joint protection of the Amur tigers and its habitats between neighbouring protected areas in Lesser Khingan Mountains:

Finding 2. Enhanced understanding for transboundary cooperation

Under component 2, the project aimed to achieve the outcome of enhanced understanding of and transboundary cooperation on joint protection of the Amur tiger and its habitats between neighbouring protected areas in the Lesser Khingan Mountains. The agreements between ESCAP and the Feline Research Center of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration (FRC), as well as WWF Russia (Amur branch) as an implementing agency were signed in July 2020 and August 2020, respectively. As a first step towards establishing Sino-Russian transboundary protected areas in the Lesser Khingan Mountains, Project Component 2 focused on feasibility studies to check conditions for the expansion of the bordering Protected Areas in China and the establishment of a new National Park in the Russian Federation to conserve Amur tigers in the Lesser Khingan Mountains. It was expected to be achieved through strengthening transboundary cooperation and management between two neighbouring countries.

The project contributed in generating several evidence related to the national policies and environmental conservation aspects across the three countries through feasibility studies (activity 2.1.1) including (1) assessment of national legislation and protection regime, (2) environmental and socio-economic analysis on the target areas, and (3) existing national nature reserves (China) and a projected protected area (Russian Federation) for Amur tigers across the Lesser Khingan Mountains. These studies provided extensive data on the degree of the target area's economic development and its population, and further provided a glimpse of the socio-economic impacts that would be generated

¹¹ Project Interim Report, 2022

by the establishment of the proposed nature reserve. Findings include that the study areas meet the majority requirements for national parks and support the plan of international cooperation among China and the Russian Federation.

The respondents confirmed that the positive social effect of establishing the proposed national park in the Russian Federation would lead to the preservation of game animals used in adjacent territories. The nature reserve will prevent the degradation of the natural environment in adjacent territories, taking on the role of “donor” of renewable natural resources, and participating in compensating for the disturbing impact of anthropogenic factors on the natural environment, increasing the stability (preventing the simplification) of ecosystems in territories adjacent to the special protected nature areas and involved in the current use of natural resources. The establishment of a natural reserve in this territory would also allow for permanent study of the state of species populations, to improve the protection of the commercial species inhabiting there and listed in the Red Data Books of the Russian Federation and the Jewish Autonomous Region, and to protect the densely populated winter habitats of ungulates. The establishment of the national park would also set the stage for the restoration of the historical range of the Amur tiger involving those reintroduced in 2014 such as Svetlaya and Kuzya. It is promising to restore the population of the Amur goral and, possibly, the leopard in semi-free conditions¹².

The respondents cited that amongst others, creation of a scientific regional cooperation at inter-governmental level and producing data for ecological corridor coordination to be a highly effective intervention of the project. As part of the project output, a peer reviewed paper was published that affirms the recovery of the Amur tiger in habitats of China’s Lesser Khingan¹³.

Component 3: Assessment of the current status of two snow leopard subpopulations in transboundary area between Mongolia and the Russian Federation:

Finding 3. Enhanced scientific evidence with the use of unified, modern monitoring system for the conservation and protection of rare species

As Snow leopards are one of the rarest species on the verge of extinction, they are often targeted by poachers and hunters and improvement in the monitoring system would enable the conservation and protection of these rare animals.

The respondents cited that the adoption of a scientific monitoring system through the use of camera trapping technology in Mongolia and the Russian Federation provided scientific evidence and assessment of the rare animals for making informed policy decisions for promoting conservation of the rare animals. Exchange of data between Mongolia and the Russian Federation allowed both countries to monitor mobility of Snow leopards and their habitat. This was validated with the final report dated June 2021, that presents that as a result of the field camera trap survey, a total of 32,456 images and videos of Snow leopards were obtained. Snow leopard events were captured next to and in border areas of Mongolia and the Russian Federation, and strong cooperation between the countries would help further conservation of the endangered snow leopards in the transboundary areas.

With the help of the project, the countries started the use of modern methods of automatic photo-registration that helped to understand Snow leopards’ mobility, its habitats, and the transboundary movement to determine the creation of a transboundary park across the two countries.

¹² Environmental and Economic Feasibility Study Pompeyevsky National Park, 2021

¹³ Yachmennikova, et.al., Is the Lesser Khingan Suitable for the Amur Tiger Restoration Perspectives with the Current State of the Habitat and Prey Base, 2023 (source: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani13010155>)

4.2 Relevance

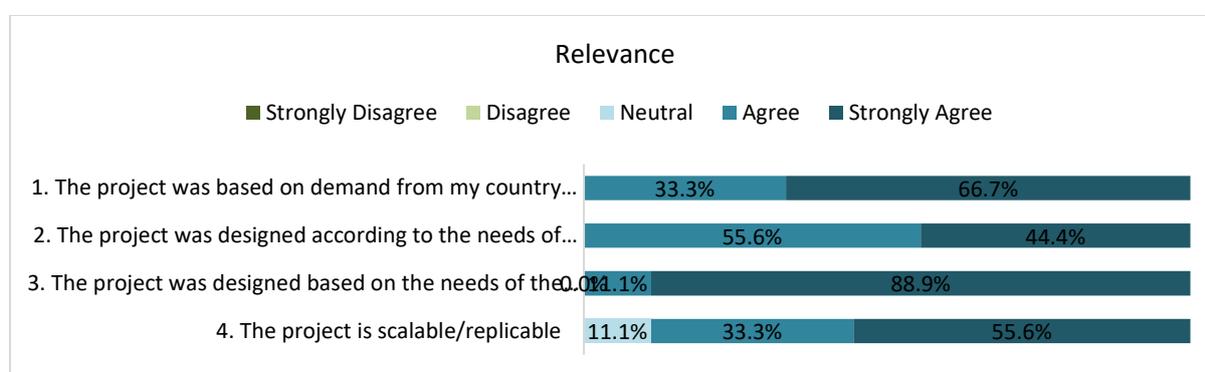
EQ 1. To what extent was the project designed based on demand from the target beneficiaries in the member States?

EQ 2. What adjustments (if any) were made to the project activities and modality, as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 situation, or in response to the new priorities of member States?

The evaluation finds that the project is relevant and is addressing the recommendations from the previous phases in generating scientific data and evidence of the tiger and leopard population and their habitats using modern integrated monitoring systems. However, some member States reported that the project did not adequately address coordination with multiple partners including the local communities and their capacity building for promoting conservation of rare species. The relevance of the project is discussed below.

Finding 4. Created a platform to strengthen transboundary cooperation for the conservation of rare big cats

ESCAP as the leading intergovernmental body in the Asia Pacific region, provided necessary facilitation and platform for the concerned parties to strengthen transboundary cooperation for the conservation of rare big cats in line with the Nature Conservation Strategy of NEASPEC¹⁴. The protection activities are being implemented across the range countries with the engagement of most trained employees. The project addressed the need of the member States to tackle transboundary issues and acknowledge the need for the identification of cross-border conservation issues and the need for capacity building of the various stakeholders involved in the monitoring and conservation efforts. The project contributed to strengthen the transboundary cooperation by organizing online conferences, exchange relevant scientific data on the current state of the Amur leopard and the Amur tiger populations, organizing international workshop entitled "Modern problems of countering the illegal extraction, poaching and trafficking of biological resources in the Far East region" that helped to create platform to exchange information about their experiences. The Participation of Russian President Vladimir Putin amongst other dignitaries at the 2nd International Tiger Forum paved the way for political engagement and priority of tiger and snow leopard conservation across the bordering countries. The most significant result of this project is forming the political will and commitment to establish a Sino-Russian Transboundary National Park.



Graphic 4 – Relevance

¹⁴ Publication_SavingNatureConservation_2.pdf (neaspec.org)

Relevance broadly related to the responsiveness of the project to the needs of the beneficiaries and the target group. From the survey respondents regarding the project relevance in terms, of the extent to which the project was designed based on demand from the country and the target beneficiaries in the member States, 100 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the project was based on their demand. Similarly, 100 per cent of the respondent's confirmed (strongly agree and agree) that the project was designed according to the needs of the country and 100 per cent of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that the project was based on their needs in terms of the region (transboundary context of China, Mongolia, and the Russian Federation).

Component 1: Transboundary cooperation between the Northeast Tiger and Leopard National Park (TLNP) of China and the Land of the Leopard National Park (LLNP) of the Russian Federation to conserve Amur tigers and leopards:

From the desk review, it is clear that the project was based on the demand and need of the member States to address transboundary issues and acknowledge the need for the identification of cross-border conservation issues and the need for capacity building of the various stakeholders involved in the monitoring and conservation efforts. This is evident from the series of meetings and workshops that were held at international levels including the following forums which reflected the relevance of the project as well as higher-level commitment to the issue.

The relevance of the project lies in its emphasis on transboundary cooperation, international engagement, comprehensive conservation strategies, protection measures, establishment of transboundary corridors, and capacity building. The capacity building and knowledge exchange events together contributed to the conservation of target species and address the challenges of protecting these endangered species in their habitats through global cooperation.

- i) An online conference organized on the matter of the protection of transboundary big cat populations that was attended by the Government of Jilin Province of the People's Republic of China, representatives of authorities and specialists from China and the Russian Federation, and the leadership of the LLNP allowed exchange relevant scientific data on the current state of the Amur leopard and the Amur tiger populations.
- ii) At the international workshop entitled "Modern problems of countering the illegal extraction, poaching and trafficking of biological resources in the Far East region" was held in Vladivostok on October 19, 2022 that was attended by the staff and leadership of the LLNP, the representative of China, academia and other stakeholders discussed about key environmental issues in the Sino-Russian borderlands and exchanged information about their experiences. Rangers of the LLNP shared relevant statistics on the fight against poaching, their experience of working with Amur leopards and Amur tigers and highlighted how the project had helped them in developing various tools and techniques for developing a reliable monitoring and information management system.
- iii) The Participation of Russian President Vladimir Putin amongst other dignitaries at the 2nd International Tiger Forum was held in Vladivostok on September 5, 2022 demonstrated political engagement and highlighted the importance of tiger and snow leopard conservation across the bordering countries. The participants highlighted the importance of the initiative taken by the ESCAP with the Vladivostok Declaration on Tiger Conservation as the main outcome of the 2nd International Tiger Forum that was signed by all tiger range countries¹⁵.

There is also strong evidence of how protection activities are being implemented across the range counties. The LLNP protection effort is carried out by 107 state inspectors and the main security

¹⁵ <https://tigerforum2022.com/en/news/ii-mezhdunarodnyy-forum-po-sokhraneniyyu-tigra-itogi-raboty/>

measures are performed by 5 operational groups (28 inspectors)¹⁶, who are the most trained employees, all with higher special education, trained in the possession of weapons and the use of special means to detain violators. The work of the LLNP on environmental education promoted environmental knowledge among the local population, involving them in the activities of the national park, supporting employment through local crafts, and developing the service sector. For the TLNP, the tasks of the national park's activities included improving the management system, harmonizing nature management and conservation of tigers, intensifying education, training, and engaging in cooperation with national and international organizations to bringing the regulatory and management system to international standards. The planned activities include firefighting programmes, ecotourism planning programmes, waste disposal and recycling programmes in the implementation of tourism activities, compensation programmes to compensate for damage to the livestock of domestic animals caused by tigers and leopards, training programmes for reserve personnel in the field of territory control, monitoring programmes, and capacity building programmes such as exhibitions, seminars and educational tours.

Component 2: Transboundary cooperation between neighbouring protected areas in Lesser Khingan Mountains to conserve Amur tigers:

The relevance of the project is further evident by the engagement of the parties in the feasibility study that estimated the condition of the environment in order to determine the restoration of the tiger population within the historical range.

The involvement of various structures and owners including the authorities and management, agricultural producers and local residents employed in the service of visitors, travel companies and investors funding the tourism infrastructure of a protected natural area, etc. provides a testimony to the relevance of the project.

Component 3: Assessment of the status of two snow leopard subpopulations in transboundary area between Mongolia and the Russian Federation:

The review of literature and the project reports provide evidence on the adoption, operationalisation and the institutionalisation of a single survey methodology that was used by both countries in each side of the border. Several capacity building activities of the national park administration staff including the use of camera traps and the GIS electronic survey enabled the proper use of camera traps for Snow leopard population surveys and monitoring of the mobility and other dynamics of the species.

The discussion around the single survey methodology and the details of project implementation and plans for the field trip and camera trapping of the snow leopard population allowed the exchange of information amongst the member States towards the preservation and conservation of Snow leopards in the transboundary areas between Mongolia and the Russian Federation.

4.3 Efficiency

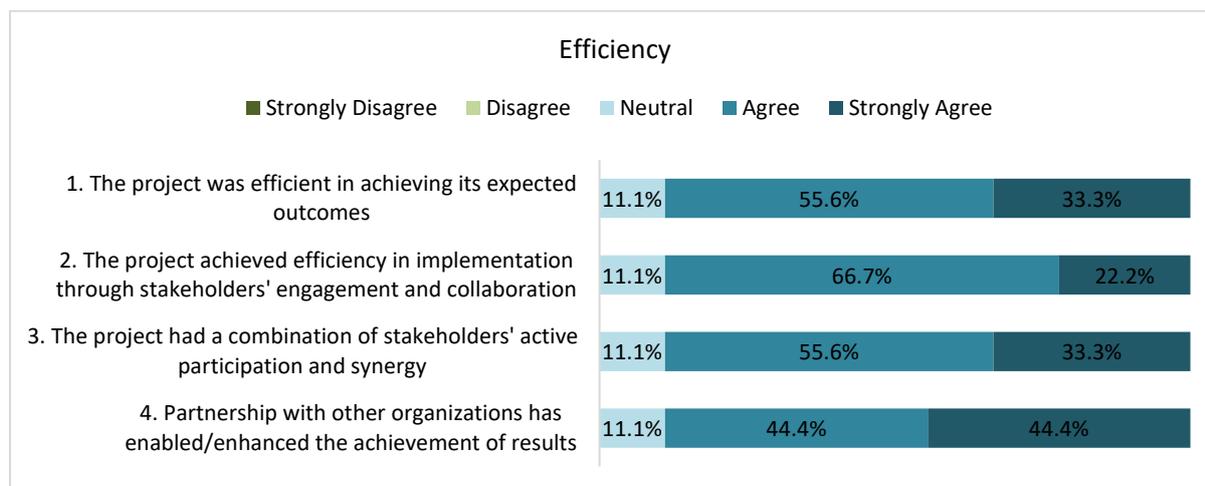
EQ 1. To what extent and how did the project achieve efficiency in implementation through the combination of project stakeholders involved, making use of comparative advantages and the creation of synergy?

EQ 2. To what extent and how has partnering with other organizations enabled or enhanced reaching of results?

Despite COVID-19 related delays and circumstances, the project appeared to have delivered efficiency. By combining transboundary cooperation, critical stakeholder engagement, high level government support, funding, state-of-the art monitoring tools and technology, scientific research, habitat restoration, and international collaboration, the project maximized its efficiency and effectiveness in conserving target big feline species.

¹⁶ The technical report of NEASPEC Project (2020)

Efficiency was measured in terms of stakeholder engagement and partnerships in bringing synergy leading to achieve the project outcomes.



Graphic 5 – Efficiency

Finding 5. Promoting partnership and synergy

Implementation of the project through stakeholders' engagement and collaboration helped to maximise outcomes of the project. The cross-country collaboration facilitated in generating scientific data on demography and mobility of target species. Both China and the Russian Federation explored innovative management methods based on political mutual trust to solve the international problem of transnational protection of endangered large predators and to become a model for transnational cooperation of wild and endangered animals. Both China and the Russian Federation have effectively promoted the ecological restoration of habitats. The establishment of the Pompeyevsky National Park and Taipinggou Nature Reserve and the proposed special protected nature area will form a cross-border nature conservation system together which will contribute to the development of international relations between China and the Russian Federation.

In terms of the responses to the questionnaire on the efficiency of the project on various criterion in achieving its expected outcomes, implementation through stakeholders' engagement and collaboration, combination of stakeholders' active participation and synergy and partnership with other organizations enabling achievement of results, 88.9 per cent of the responded as agree or strongly agree, while only 11.1 per cent remained neutral. This response is validated with the desk review and KII findings as discussed below:

Component 1: Transboundary cooperation between the Northeast Tiger and Leopard National Park (TLNP) of China and the Land of the Leopard National Park (LLNP) of the Russian Federation to conserve Amur tigers and leopards:

Scientific research and engagement of a large range of stakeholders largely contributed to the efficiency of the project in maximising the project outcomes. As confirmed from the survey, majority of the experts interviewed also acknowledge that the cross-country collaboration helped in generating scientific data on demography and mobility of Amur tigers, Amur leopards and Snow leopards. Main stakeholders within the project included the following:

By combining transboundary cooperation, stakeholder engagement, government support, funding, technology, scientific research, habitat restoration, and international collaboration, the project maximizes its efficiency and effectiveness in conserving Amur tigers and leopards.

- **TLNP and LLNP staff:** The staffing table of the FSBI "Land of the Leopard" as of 2021 includes 202 persons, including the director and 4 deputies, the Legal department (4 people), the Finance department (8), Human Resources sector (3), Support staff (49, including watchmen and drivers). The Security department consists of 107 inspectors, including 12 Forestry Service employees. The Research and Monitoring department consists of 10 specialists, including 4 engineers. 8 employees are engaged in Environmental education and public relations, and 8 people are engaged in Ecotourism development¹⁷. The TLNP is managed by the State Forestry and Grassland Administration. It is divided into 4 functional zones according to their importance for tigers and leopards' conservation and restoration and the severity of the protection regime. The "core area" includes the following protected areas: all 4 national natural reserves - "Jilin Hunchun", "Jilin Wangqing", "Heilongjiang Laoyeling", and "Jilin of the Minjiang River", Jilin Lanjia National Forest Park and Jilin Songrong Provincial Nature Reserve. In addition to those listed above, the "core area" also includes a number of other territories such as forestry. The Park totally includes 12 protected areas of different types.
- **World Wildlife Fund (WWF):** WWF Russia is the project partner for components 2 and 3. Since 2017, WWF Russia and its strategic partner NCTLNPA have been working closely on conservation cooperation in Amur Tiger and Leopard monitoring and habitat conservation, anti-poaching capacity building, human-wildlife conflict mitigation, cross-border cooperation and campaign for public awareness raising. The two parties carried out in-depth cooperation in monitoring, anti-poaching capacity building, and public engagement¹⁸.
- **Government agencies:** Chinese National Forestry and Grassland Administration (NFGA) is a project partner for comp 1 and 2 and Russian Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) has partnered for all components.
 - **Russian Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE):** On approval of the Regulations about the State Natural Biosphere Reserve "Kedrovaya Pad" (2012), the following tasks were assigned to the reserve:
 - implementation of the protection of natural areas in order to preserve biological diversity and maintain protected natural complexes and objects in their natural state;
 - organization and conduct of scientific research, including the maintenance of the Chronicle of Nature;
 - implementation of state environmental monitoring (state monitoring of the environment);
 - environmental education and development of educational tourism; and
 - assistance in the training of scientific personnel and specialists in the field of environmental protection.
 - **Chinese National Forestry and Grassland Administration (NFGA):** In February 2018, the Northeast China Tiger and Leopard Monitoring and Research Center of the NFGA was inaugurated at Beijing Normal University. Since then, a comprehensive system that integrates air, space, and land has been tested within 500 square kilometres of the park for the real-time monitoring of information and dynamics of wild animals and human activities, using modern communication, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and other high-tech means, according to the website of the Jilin provincial government¹⁹.

¹⁷ <https://leopard-land.ru/about/staff>

¹⁸ <https://amurinfocenter.org/en/about/news/ecoregion-news/wwfs-strategic-partner-northeast-china-tiger-leopard-national-park-administration-nctlnpa-officially/>

¹⁹ <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202302/1285554.shtml>

- **Local communities:** The work of the FSBI "Land of the Leopard" on environmental education aimed at promoting environmental knowledge among the local population, involving them in the activities of the national park, supporting employment through local crafts, and the development of the service sector. The FSBI annually conducted a few environmental actions and festivals and is actively working to attract attention on the problem of conservation of the Amur tiger and Far Eastern leopard in the media and social networks. The same was reported about the administration of the TLNP which strives to present to visitors the beauty and diversity of forests, wetlands, and wildlife of China, to talk about the evolution and history of the development of this territory, about the adaptation of nature to the modern environment, to demonstrate efforts to preserve threatened species and to show the relationship between man and nature²⁰. The engagement of local community, especially in the survey process indirectly contributed to raising awareness about snow leopard protection and conservation.
- **Other Conservation organizations:** Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Phoenix Fund, and Amur Tiger and Leopard Alliance (ATLA) were involved indirectly in the project that contributed significantly in strengthening cross-border cooperation, awareness raising and media mobilisation through an informal coalition. ALTA members cooperate closely with the WWF, Russian NGOs and authorities, and local institutes of the Russian Academy of Science²¹.

Component 2: Transboundary cooperation between neighbouring protected areas in Lesser Khingan Mountains to conserve Amur tigers:

According to the report prepared by FRC-NFGA for component 2 in 2021, it is necessary for China and the Russian Federation to innovate the management methods of social, economic, cultural, and military aspects in the border area based on political mutual trust. The reprint affirms that it is necessary to join hands to solve the international problem of transnational protection of endangered large predators and become a model of transnational cooperation of wild and endangered animals.

This report recommended to establish an information sharing platform on cross-border areas, promote the construction and development of a transboundary protected areas and the ecological restoration project of habitat, unify technical standards, joint scientific research and build the capacity of long-term monitoring of Amur tigers and their habitats to promote transboundary cooperation in the area.

Similarly, the establishment of the Pompeyevsky National Park has been included in the Action Plan for the implementation of the strategy for the conservation of rare and endangered animal, plant, and mushroom species in the Russian Federation for the period up to 2030²². The proposed special protected nature area in the Pompeyevka R. drainage basin is included in the plan of international cooperation with China. Taipinggou Nature Reserve was set up on the right bank of Amur River and the proposed special protected nature area will form a cross-border nature conservation system together with it. This will lead to promote tourism and research activities of the proposed national park will contribute to the development of international relations between China and the Russian Federation.

Component 3: Assessment of the current status of two snow leopard subpopulations in transboundary area between Mongolia and the Russian Federation:

WWF-Russia and the Mongolian team agreed to use a unified mobile application (NextGIS Collector) and the unified survey approach. Russian experts used the initial survey forms developed in the Russian language while the Mongolian team had to translate the survey forms into Mongolian and English.

²⁰ NEASPEC Technical Report, 2020

²¹ <https://www.chnet.com/8352/amur-leopard-and-tiger-alliance.html>

²² Ministry of Natural Resources of Russia, No. 33-r dd. December 1, 2014

The collected data was shared between the parties, for the identification of the Snow leopards. Irbis Mongolia Center received video and photos of Snow leopards from partners at WWF Russia and Ulaan taiga SPA discovered during the surveys conducted in 2020, funded by WWF Mongolia country office. Total 2 individual snow leopards were discovered in Eastern Sayan mountain range at the Russian Mongolian border areas. Most of the Snow leopard events were captured next to and in border areas of Mongolia and the Russian Federation, so it is very important to cooperate two countries to conserve endangered Snow leopards at the region in transboundary areas²³.

The final project report of WWF Russia (2021) presented that the exchange of data with Mongolian colleagues and primary analysis of the field data occurred in October of 2020 and a second exchange of data with Mongolian colleagues happened on April of 2021, which also resulted in the achievement presented as a Case of Success in terms of Effectiveness.

For the first time, WWF-Russia obtained photo evidence of the presence in Mongolia of the Snow leopards which were first captured in the Russian Federation: 2 snow leopards males previously registered in the Russian part of the Eastern Sayan ridge in the Republic of Buryatia in 2020 were captured by cameras in Mongolian slope of Eastern Sayan for the first time. The Snow leopards are called Munko and Champion²⁴.

WWF Russia and WWF-Mongolia received the first-ever video and photo confirmation that two Snow leopards inhabit the Mongolian side of the Ikh Soyon ridge in Khuvsgul Aimag (province). Both individuals were confirmed by WWF Russia and WWF-Mongolia experts as well-known males that WWF has been following for ages on the Russian side of the ridge²⁵.

- **Irbis Mongolia Center:** It is a Non-Government Organization (NGO) dedicated for research and conservation of endangered Snow leopards and its habitats in Mongolia, which has been carrying out extensive research and conservation projects in Mongolia for 20 years, and created various platforms for collaboration between government agencies and non-governmental organization.
- **WWF Russia:** WWF Russia has carried out extensive conservation projects in the Altay-Sayan Region of the Russian Federation where Snow leopards inhabits and created various platforms for collaboration between government agencies and non-governmental organizations. It also developed a standardized Snow leopard monitoring programme which was presented at the International Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Forum in Bishkek in 2017.

It was clear that both of the parties developed the fieldwork, monitoring, and exchange of results for the comparative studies to identify the Snow leopard individuals at the study sites and the transboundary movement in the Russian-Mongolia borders.

The activities were also implemented within the Nationwide Snow leopard population assessment in Mongolia funded by WWF-Netherlands, WWF-Germany and WWF-US.

4.4 Sustainability

EQ 1. To what extent can results of the project be continued without ESCAP's further involvement?

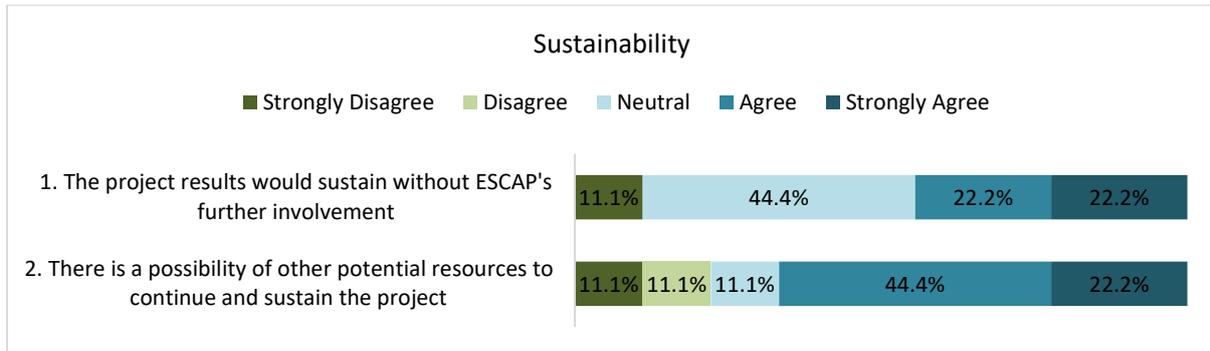
In terms of the likelihood of the project's benefits continuity and sustainability beyond the project, the evaluation finds mixed evidence. The support from ESCAP and the activities implemented on the ground is seen as effective in terms of establishing a coordinated cooperation mechanism

²³ Irbis Mongolia Center Report, 2021

²⁴ Final Report of WWF Russia, 2021

²⁵ <https://www.neaspec.org/content/wwf-russia-proved-snow-leopard-migration-long-distances-across-border-russia-and-mongolia>

among range countries and protected areas along transborder areas for the conservation of Amur tiger, Amur leopard and Snow leopard. The agreement to create a new conservation area amongst the range countries has provided an effective avenue for the sustainability of the project and its achieved results. However, lack of adequate and effective policy level interventions, funding arrangement, project exit strategy with a robust sustainability plan may impact the continuity of the projects' achievements.



Graphic 6 – Sustainability

From the obtained responses, 66.6% agreed that there is a possibility of other potential resources to continue and sustain the project, while 22.2% disagreed and 11.1% took a neutral position. Regarding the possibility of sustaining the project's results without ESCAP's further involvement, 44.4% agreed that it could, another 44.4% remained neutral, and only 11.1% disagreed with the possibility.

Finding 6. Knowledge transformation and capacity building as a basis of sustainability

The project's focus on transboundary cooperation, research, monitoring, capacity building, information sharing, and on-the-ground conservation activities as well as exploration of new partnership opportunities and technology contributed to its sustainability and effectiveness in conserving target big feline species. The support from local companies through the Siberian Wellness programme enabled a local public private partnership to promote the conservation and preservation of the leopards and help promote local tourism. Similarly, the agreement signed between ESCAP and FRC-NFGA, WWF and Irbis Mongolia Center further helped to enhance the sustainability of the project.

The component-wise findings are discussed below:

Component 1: Transboundary cooperation between the Northeast Tiger and Leopard National Park (TLNP) of China and the Land of the Leopard National Park (LLNP) of the Russian Federation to conserve Amur tigers and leopards:

The Russian team is exploring support from local companies through the Siberian Wellness programme for extended coverage to cover the long boarder area. This will enable a local public private partnership to promote the conservation and preservation of the big cats and help promote local tourism.

Component 2: Transboundary cooperation between neighbouring protected areas in Lesser Khingan Mountains to conserve Amur tigers:

As per the agreement signed between ESCAP and FRC-NFGA, and the agreement between ESCAP and WWF Russia, ESCAP as entrusted by its donors, allocated resources for programmes and projects.

As per the agreement, the countries completed an assessment of the current protected areas and the legislations, collected environmental and human disturbance data across the Lesser Khingan Mountains and completed environmental and socio-economic analysis on the target areas, and finally

conducted a survey on Amur tigers and their prey across the Lesser Khingan Mountains and winter census of Amur tigers and their prey in the target areas with the analysis, maps, and recommendations. The outcomes of these activities have paved the way for national authorities to act upon the findings and recommendations for ensuring sustainability of the project.

Component 3: Assessment of the status of two snow leopard subpopulations in transboundary area between Mongolia and the Russian Federation:

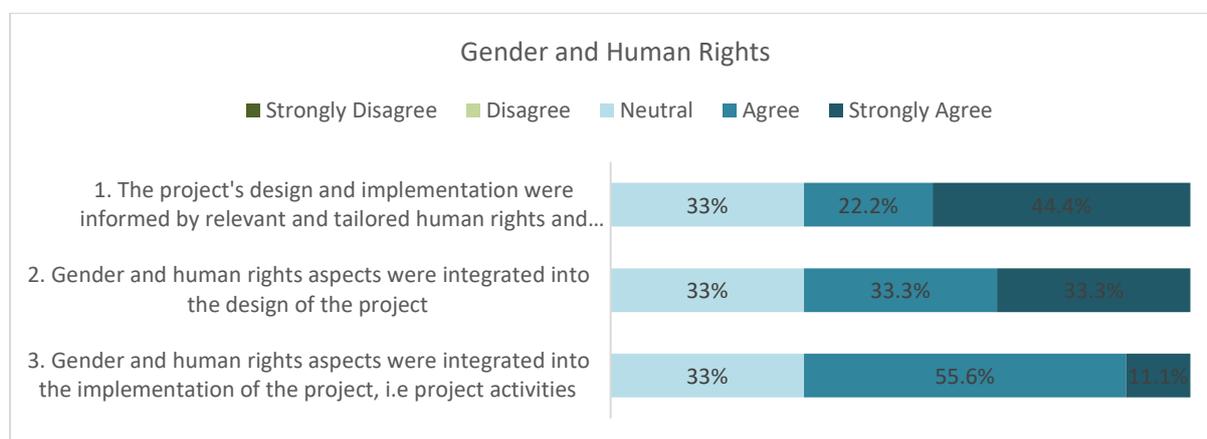
As per the agreement signed between ESCAP and WWF Russia and the agreement between ESCAP and Irbis Mongolia Center, set-up of camera traps, fieldwork for collecting the data, compilation of data, and comparative study to identify Snow leopard individuals at study sites to identify their transboundary movement in the Mongolian-Russian border were completed.

In Mongolia, respondents stated that the Ministry of National Park can finance local conservation initiatives. The local conservation committee is promoting eco-tourism that can generate funds for sustaining conservation efforts. As the organisations like WWF and UNDP are active in Mongolia in the field of conservation, they can also prioritize funding to sustain and scale the project goals.

4.5 Cross-cutting Issues

EQ 1. To what extent were gender and human rights integrated into the design and implementation of the project, informed by relevant and tailored human rights and gender analysis?

In terms of human rights and gender mainstreaming, although gender marker of the project is considered as GEM 0, gender equality appears to have been addressed to some extent in the design of project. However, integration of human rights and gender equality in the project implementation appear to be limited and future integration should ensure particular emphasis in terms of equal representation, capacity building and disaggregated data in the reports and cases.



Graphic 7 – Gender and Human Rights

Although not much information was found on the topic of Gender and Human Rights in the available documentation, according to the obtained responses, only 33% took a neutral position, while the others agreed that gender and human rights aspects were integrated and implemented in the project. Based on the gender marker of the project which is considered as GEM 0 with no expectation to contribute to gender equality and women’s empowerment the achievement of the project is fair enough to achieve the goal of the gender equality and human rights considerations.

Component 1: Transboundary cooperation between the Northeast Tiger and Leopard National Park (TLNP) of China and the Land of the Leopard National Park (LLNP) of the Russian Federation to conserve Amur tigers and leopards:

The agreement presents that the Partner Institution has agreed to implement the activities set forth in this Agreement to support the implementation of the project as described in the Terms of Reference, without discrimination, direct or indirect, because of race, ethnicity, religion or creed, nationality or political belief, gender, disability or any circumstances²⁶. No further documentation was found related to this topic.

From the consultation it was found that in the Russian Federation, potential human-wildlife conflict was identified, and compensation was designed to provide reimbursement for the loss of the damages incurred by the conflict. WWF Russia has already started this initiative.

Component 2: Transboundary cooperation between neighbouring protected areas in Lesser Khingan Mountains to conserve Amur tigers:

Although, the Partner Institutions have agreed to implement the activities without discrimination, direct or indirect, because of race, ethnicity, religion or creed, nationality or political belief, gender, disability or any circumstances, there was limited evidence of the intentional effort made to embed human rights and gender equality considerations in the project implementation.

In China, consideration was provided on gender equality and female experts were included in the project activities. Local partners, in fact had 40% female staff in their team for leading and supporting conservation activities. With regards to addressing potential human-wildlife-conflict, China provided guidelines and regulations on the behaviour of local community, for e.g., working at daytime and not at night so as not to disturb the wildlife and also to ensure safety of local community.

Component 3: Assessment of the current status of two snow leopard subpopulations in transboundary area between Mongolia and the Russian Federation:

Gender equality was accorded due consideration in the local agreements that would be established for the implementation of project activities. No further information related to gender and human rights was found under component 3, but the Mongolia Report presents more detailed tables of the participants with gender disaggregated data in the staff training and workshops.

In Mongolia, gender equality was given due considerations in terms of representation of women and ethnic groups in the conservation committees. Ethnic groups were also duly included in the various conservation activities implemented under the project.

²⁶ Letter of Agreement, No. 2021-0027

5. Conclusions

The evaluation showed that the project was successful in establishing a coordinated cooperation mechanism among range countries and protected areas in the transborder regions for the conservation of big feline species amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. The project was designed based on the national demands and contributed to fulfilling the demands through various actions in bringing the range countries to dialogue and deliberation towards their mutual interest. The analysis of national legislations of three project countries, developing unified classification of habitats and preparing basic unified geographical map of the projected TBPA and its adjacent territories, as well as information collection, analysis and sharing along with capacity building activities for experts and field staff contributed to promote transboundary cooperation to protect endangered species. The project was efficient and effective to the extent that it was successful in generating the highest level of political commitment towards establishing a coordinated cooperation mechanism among range countries and protected areas in the transborder regions for the conservation of big feline species in, China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation. In terms of the scalability/replication, the political will to create a transboundary park demonstrates the commitment, seriousness and continued interest of the member States in the preservation and promotion of these rare species for ensuring the balance in biodiversity preservation. There is a possibility of other potential resources to continue and sustain the project, but greater visibility of stakeholders' engagement, research and evidence generation and update needs to be better showcased through the workshops, educational information, and the involvement of local communities. Optimizing the synergy with various sector stakeholders in line with the NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2021-2025 as well as national policy and planning frameworks will help to sustain the results of this project.

6. Lessons learned/good practices/challenges

Lessons learned:

- 1) This project emphasized on the importance of transborder cooperation for three big cat species, which are migratory species, through joint scientific research, monitoring, data analysis and data sharing. If there is a high-level government commitment, willingness and support to cooperate with the neighbouring countries to jointly conserve target species and their habitats, it will make positive impact for conservation effort which is further complemented by the long-term and continuous scientific monitoring. The public announcement on the creation of the projected Land of Big Cats TBPA by the Government of China and the Russian Federation demonstrates the commitment and accountability of the member states towards sustaining the project results.

Good practices:

- 1) Component 1: The monitoring system that showed effectiveness, through the exchange of operational information on the movement of poachers, smugglers, and the occurrence of fires on the state border of the two countries, additionally to the exchange of scientific information, e.g., from the first-ever video recording of a grey wolf (*Canis lupus*) in the southern part of the projected TBPA in the autumn of 2022, an employee of the Russian Federation identified the predator and quickly shared the information with staff members in China, enabling the identification of the animal. Similarly, the rapid communication between the countries, regarding the movement of a male Amur leopard, circulating on the border, from the Russian Federation to China can be considered as another good practice example.
- 2) Component 2: The construction of cross-border ecological corridors and the establishment of cross-border national parks would be the necessary step to protect the safety of cross-border activities of Amur tigers and ensure the basic conditions for their cross-border survival. For instance, the project report prepared by FRC-NFGA proposes to establish a cross-border protected area for the Amur tiger with a total area of 20,515 km², including the China-Russian border.
- 3) Component 3: The successful exchange of data between the Parties of Mongolia and the Russian Federation, for analyzing the Snow leopards showed that an important finding was obtained by WWF-Russia after the Mongolian colleagues shared the camera-trapping data from the Mongolian side of the transboundary project area.

Challenges:

- 1) Lack of information about the local community involvement and educational programmes is a major challenge for this project. The biggest challenges faced by the project was due to lack of real interaction between the departments of the two countries responsible for wildlife conservation issues. However, both countries planned for cooperation in the field of scientific research, including the proposal to create a joint group that would constantly keep in touch; hold an online conference once every four months; and exchange visits at least once a year provides evidence for addressing this challenge.
- 2) Another major challenge faced by the target species is the obstruction of their suitable habitats with the diffusion of corridors. The habitat area is narrow and degraded, and this poses a risk of limiting population recovery and the heightening risk of inbreeding in some areas. Human-wildlife interference such as poaching in most habitats is still a challenge due to the lack of scientific control. Lack of effective cooperation mechanism in the construction and management of the target species between neighbouring countries hinders the construction of an international ecological corridor for cross-border migration of the species.

- 3) Transboundary Protected Areas (TBPAs) was announced, while the agreement has not yet been signed. Despite the progress made between TLNP and LLNP to conserve Amur tigers and leopards and their habitats, the implementing partner indicated several difficulties and problems that still hinder effective cooperation and conservation efforts along the border area. Lack of interaction between the relevant departments of both countries, insufficient funding, language barriers, departmental fragmentation and inconsistent monitoring and inventory methodologies are some of the key challenges.

7. Recommendations

The evaluation indicates that the achievements made by all three countries at sub-regional and national levels should continue to reflect the projects' results. However, there is a need for continued awareness raising across the broader communities and capacity building for more specialized groups, and overall, efforts towards scaling up the initiative through multi-donor funding mechanisms. The detailed recommendation as listed below will be an effective instrument to sustain the momentum created by the project:

1. Enhance engagement with local authorities and communities to elevate the impact of the initiative (Based on Finding 1):

Recognizing the pivotal role of local communities as a pillar for achieving sustainable outcomes in conserving Amur tigers, Amur leopards, and Snow leopards, it is imperative to elevate their involvement in all phases of the project activities. Similarly, the engagement, leadership and ownership of local governments and authorities must be ensured for sustainable results and continuity. It is essential to make intentional efforts in adding local conservation communities' participation and capacity building efforts in protected areas as a new component in upcoming initiatives, ensuring a comprehensive, inclusive, and engaged approach.

2. Prioritize capacity building and scientific research efforts, such as, joint international workshop, conferences, as well as knowledge management and/or publication of articles for cross-learning in upcoming projects (Based on Finding 6):

Given the cross-border distribution of monitored Amur tigers and leopards among China, Mongolia, and the Russian Federation, it is essential to continue joint monitoring, analysis, and data exchange among these countries. Such efforts will support transboundary international biosphere reserves for conserving these species and preserving biodiversity in the area. Data update and information sharing is a major challenge which should be addressed effectively.

A well-designed follow-up of project's result is recommended, focusing on building individual and institutional capacity, knowledge transfer, technology promotion and foster public and private financing mechanisms for biodiversity restoration. Equally important will be to consider elements such as implementing early warning systems, undertaking risk management, and addressing human-wildlife conflict. It is also necessary to address the cross-cutting areas such as climate change, gender and social inclusion with socio-eco-environmental co-existence.

3. Make concerted efforts to scale up this initiative (Based on Finding 5)

Though the creation of a Sino-Russian Transboundary National Park was announced during the 2nd International Tiger Forum in September 2022, the agreement remains unsigned. This will hinder the upscaling effort of the good practices of the project. Considering the large area of the habitat of these animals across multiple countries in the region, it is essential to design the programme with wider coverage and adequate budget to roll out its lessons and achievements from policy to practice in the future for effective management of these endangered species and their habitat. Furthermore, engaging key sector stakeholders such as Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Phoenix Fund, Amur Tiger and Leopard Alliance (ATLA) as well as the government will help to multiply the investment and impact.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Evaluation TORs

Terms of Reference

Evaluation of Extrabudgetary-funded Project

Transboundary cooperation on the conservation of Amur tigers, Amur leopards and Snow leopards in North-East Asia

November 2022

Subregional Offices for East and North-East Asia, ESCAP

1. INTRODUCTION

ESCAP Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia (SOENEA), serving as the Secretariat of the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC), has worked with member States and other stakeholders to promote subregional environmental cooperation and sustainable development efforts for the enhancement of the quality of life and well-being through forging common policy dialogue and coordinated actions.

Under the framework of NEASPEC, SOENEA has supported member Governments in implementing the NEASPEC Nature Conservation Strategy²⁷ adopted at the twelfth Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-12) in 2007. The Strategy identified six flagship species for prioritized and concerted action in North-East Asia.²⁸ Its overall goals include contributing to biodiversity conservation strategy of, promoting transboundary and intergovernmental cooperation on and enhancing coordinated mechanisms for the target species and their habitats.

Against this background, SOENEA implemented the project on the “Transborder Movement of Amur Tigers and Leopards Using Camera Trapping and Molecular Genetic Analysis” in 2014-2016 and publicized the scientific study focusing on two feline species and their habitats in the Sino-Russian border areas.²⁹ The project concluded that cross-border cooperation, especially on scientific assessment, is essential for the effective conservation and transboundary management of the protected species. Based on the conclusion and recommendations of this project, as well as a further discussion at the International Forum on Tiger and Leopard Transboundary Conservation (July 2019, Harbin, China), three proposals were presented and the Russian Federation announced to provide financial support for those proposals during the twenty-third NEASPEC Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-23) in October 2019.³⁰ These proposals were integrated into one project document upon discussion with the donor government and approved in December 2019, with a total budget of USD 377,081.

²⁷ See https://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files/Publication_SavingNatureConservation_2.pdf

²⁸ Three feline species (Amur tiger, Amur leopard and Snow leopard) and three migratory bird species (Black-faced spoonbill, White-naped crane and Hooded crane)

²⁹ See NEASPEC project report: *Saving the Amur Tiger and Amur Leopard* at:

https://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files/2018_12_17_UNESCAP_%ED%98%B8%EB%9E%91%EC%9D%B4.pdf

³⁰ See the Report of SOM-23 of NEASPEC at https://neaspec.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/NEASPEC%20SOM-23%20Meeting%20Report_Final.pdf

The project comprises three main components as follows:

- 1) Transboundary cooperation between the Northeast Tiger and Leopard National Park (TLNP) of China and the Land of the Leopard National Park (LLNP) of the Russian Federation to conserve Amur tigers and leopards;
- 2) Transboundary cooperation between neighboring protected areas in Lesser Khingan Mountains to conserve Amur tigers; and
- 3) Assessment of the current status of two snow leopard subpopulations in the transboundary area between Mongolia and the Russian Federation.

Evaluation at ESCAP is an important function that seeks to determine as systematically and objectively as possible the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of its subprogrammes, projects or initiatives. Recognizing the value of an independent evaluation in guiding efforts to improve ESCAP's overall performance and effectiveness, the Commission adopted resolution 66/15 on "Strengthening of the evaluation function of the secretariat of the Commission", which requested the secretariat to ensure that its programmatic work, including the work of divisions, subregional offices and regional institutions, is evaluated periodically.

The evaluation is expected to begin in December 2022 and be completed by June 2023.

2. EVALUATION PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

2.1 Evaluation Purpose

The purpose of the evaluation is to support accountability for results and to enable learning. It will generate information on the results achieved and lessons learned to inform future programme design and implementation of relevant ESCAP capacity development work. The main users of the evaluation results will be ESCAP, particularly the implementing division(s). Other expected users include the project participating countries and implementing partners.

2.2 Evaluation objectives

The objectives of the evaluation are to:

- 3) Assess the project performance against the evaluation criteria: effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, sustainability, gender and human rights mainstreaming, and any other cross-cutting issues, as deemed relevant.
- 4) Formulate lessons learned and action-oriented recommendations to inform management decision-making and improve future project design and implementation.

The evaluation analyses the level of achievement of project results, making use of the project's results framework, implementation processes and contextual factors, establishing as many as possible causal linkages guided by the evaluation criteria and questions. The evaluation will be conducted in line with ESCAP Monitoring and Evaluation Policy and Guidelines³¹ and the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards for evaluation.

2.3 Evaluation Scope

The evaluation includes the design, strategy and implementation of the project over the entire period of its implementation. The evaluation covers the implementation and results of the project in the participating countries. The assessment covers all modes of implementation of the project, including national and regional workshops, training and additional activities as agreed upon based on consultations with project countries.

³¹ ESCAP, ESCAP Monitoring and Evaluation Policy and Guidelines, 2017, available on the ESCAP webpage at <http://www.unescap.org/partners/monitoring-and-evaluation/evaluation>.

The evaluation will cover the period from January 2020 to December 2022 (present), being the time frame of the project. It will focus on all activities implemented and outputs produced and delivered by implementing partners in that period upon the Letter of Agreement.

2.4 Evaluation Criteria and Questions

The following evaluation criteria and questions to assess the project performance will be considered and further refined following consultations with project management and other stakeholders during the evaluation inception period.

Evaluation criteria	Evaluation questions
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the most significant results³² at the subregional and national levels achieved or contributed by the project? Describe the project activities/outputs that lead to the results and present evidence of project's contribution to the results. • How did adjustments made to the project due to the COVID-19 pandemic affect the achievement of the project's results?
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent was the project designed based on demand from the target beneficiaries? • What adjustments, if any, were made to the project activities and modality, as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 situation, or in response to the new priorities of member States?
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent did the project achieve efficiency in implementation through the combination of project stakeholders involved, making use of comparative advantages and the creation of synergy? • To what extent has partnering with other organizations enabled or enhanced reaching of results?
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent can results of the project be continued without ESCAP's further involvement?
Gender and human rights mainstreaming.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent were gender and human rights integrated into the design and implementation of the project, informed by relevant and tailored human rights and gender analysis?

3. PROJECT OVERVIEW

With the overall objective to establish a coordinated cooperation mechanism in the transboundary areas to conserve big feline species in China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation, the project was designed to conduct desk research, field study and capacity-building activities. More detailed information per each component is as follows:

³² In the context of this evaluation, results are assessed at the outcome level. Outcome level results are the likely or achieved effects of an intervention's outputs. They reflect the changes in the behaviour or practices of the target group(s)/countries that ESCAP intends to influence, including through actions taken collectively with its development partners. They also reflect that benefits and actions taken by the target groups/countries through the project interventions (source: ESCAP Monitoring and Evaluation Policy and Guidelines). Examples of outcome level results include: (1) Five pilot countries adopted and implemented national strategies and programmes with assistance from the project; (2) Several countries put in place a new system or procedures with support from the project; (3) Countries organised national workshops as a follow-up to the project training activities.

- 1) **Component1:** Upon the recommendations from the previous NEASPEC project conducted in 2014-2016, component 1 aims to enhance the collaboration between two national parks (TLNP and LLNP) and create the condition for the establishment of a Sino-Russian Transboundary National Park (tentatively named “Land of Big Cats”). Planned activities are also supporting the Memorandum of Understanding between TLNP and LLNP (2019) and the “Harbin Consensus on Strengthening Cooperation in Transboundary Conservation of Tigers and Leopards” endorsed by both sides at the International Forum in July 2019.^{33&34}
- 2) **Component2:** Lesser Khingan Mountains represent the north-western limits of Amur tiger distribution and serve as one of the key ecological corridors between China and the Russian Federation for Amur tigers. The main activity of this component is to conduct feasibility studies along the borders to support the need for the establishment of a new National Park in the Russian Federation and the expansion of the neighbouring protected areas in China to conserve habitats for Amur tigers in target areas.
- 3) **Component3:** The snow leopard is one of the rarest and most poorly studied species among the big cats. Inhabiting in 12 Central Asian countries, including Mongolia and the Russian Federation, this component aims to assess the latest status of the Snow leopards and identify all individuals along the Mongolia-Russian border by applying modern survey methodologies.

Project component	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3
Implementing period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jan 2020 – Sep 2022 (initial plan) • Jan 2022 – Dec 2022 (implementation, ongoing) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January - December 2020 (initial plan) • July 2020 – September 2021 (implementation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January - December 2020 (initial plan) • May 2020 – June 2021 (implementation)
Implementing partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TLNL and LLNP (initial plan) • LLNP (revised) 	Feline Research Center (FRC) of China and WWF Russia	Irbis Mongolia Center and WWF Russia
Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USD 112,000 (initial plan) • USD 96,000 (revised) 	USD 50,000	USD 50,000
Target areas	TLNP and LLNP	Lesser Khingan Mountains	Chikhachev ridge and Eastern Sayan ridge
Target species	Amur tiger & Amur leopard	Amur tiger	Snow leopard
Outcome	Enhanced cooperation for transboundary management and information-sharing between TLNP (China) and LLNP (Russian Federation)	Enhanced understanding of and transboundary cooperation on joint protection of the Amur tiger and its habitats between neighboring protected areas in Lesser Khingan Mountains	Enhanced understanding on two snow leopard subpopulations in the transboundary area between Mongolia and the Russian Federation
Output	Strengthened institutional capacity of TLNP and LLNP for joint monitoring activities and management plans of transboundary protected areas	Improved availability and quality of demographic statistics of Amur tigers, and their environmental and socio-economic analysis data in Lesser Khingan Mountains	Improved availability and quality of demographic statistics of the snow leopard inhabiting in the transboundary area of Mongolia and the Russian Federation

³³ See https://wwf.ru/upload/iblock/44c/memorandum-land-of-leopard-and-nectlnp-2019_eng.docx

³⁴ See http://neaspec.org/sites/default/files//2.%20SOM23%20NC_Annex%20II_Harbin%20Consensus_English.pdf

Key Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct desk research; • Create an integrated and unified monitoring system • Organize two training workshops for field staff • Produce research reports and recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct feasibility studies • Publish an outreach material • Publish a report • Organize a workshop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Localize the mobile application for snow leopard monitoring • Organize a training workshop • Conduct monitoring activities in target areas • Conduct data analysis • Develop priority action plans to conserve transboundary subpopulations
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4. OVERALL EVALUATION APPROACH

In assessing the results achieved, the evaluation will make use of a theory of change approach to understand the actual results achieved and the process of achieving results. The development of the theory of change should be guided by the results framework of the project and the actual implementation strategy and delivery of outputs.

The evaluation will apply a mixed-method approach through a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis to inform findings. Due to the ongoing travel restrictions and health concerns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the evaluation methodology will rely primarily on desk review and remote data collection methods. The evaluation will apply multiple methods, and cross-check information and data from different sources to ensure confidence in the findings.

The evaluation process will involve several phases as outlined below:

Phases
<p>a) Inception and scoping phase</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preliminary review of documentations • Interviews with members of the reference group and other project stakeholders to understand their expectations and requirements • Preparation of an evaluation inception report detailing the evaluation scope, questions, methodology and workplan • Meeting with the evaluation reference group to present the inception report and seek clearance to proceed • Preparation of surveys and interview guides
<p>b) A desk review of project documents. The following documentations will be provided to the consultant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name of the project team members and their respective roles • List of stakeholders to be interviewed • Project publications, research papers, training materials • Press releases • Project meeting information (e.g. attendance lists, minutes/reports, agenda, handouts, questionnaire results) • Mission reports • Project documents, including the work and monitoring plan, logical framework and budget • Relevant agreements (e.g. with the project partners)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project revisions (if applicable) • Progress reports, including documents referred to in the report • Project terminal report, including documents referred to in the report
<p>c) Surveys of project stakeholders (electronic)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An electronic survey will be administered targeting government officials and implementing partners • Development and administration of the survey by the consultant • Data analyses
<p>d) In-depth individual interviews (video/audio call)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governmental stakeholders • Development partners • Project management
<p>e) Focus group discussions (video conference)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If needed, the consultant may conduct in-depth discussions with selected stakeholders on certain specific topics or issues
<p>f) Observation (virtual)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The consultant will be given an opportunity to observe the proceedings of the final project meeting during the period of the evaluation.
<p>g) Preparation of the evaluation report and presentation of findings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of a brief note containing the preliminary findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation • Meeting with the reference group to present (using PowerPoint) and discuss the preliminary evaluation results • Preparation of a draft evaluation report and review of the draft report by the evaluation reference group • Finalization of the evaluation report along with an evaluation brief (3-page summary) following a standard format to be provided by ESCAP

Data will be disaggregated by sex and other relevant social categories. The evaluation will undertake a transparent and participatory evaluation process that will involve male and female stakeholders identified in the stakeholder analysis, including: the reference group, development partners and target beneficiaries in all key evaluation tasks.

In analyzing the data, the evaluation will use qualitative and quantitative approaches, and provide charts and direct quotations. Using the data to assess evaluation against the selected criteria. Gender and human rights mainstreaming are essential components of data analysis in all ESCAP evaluations and take place on three levels: 1) project design; 2) project implementations; 3) project outcomes. Data analysis will enable useful, evidence-based findings, conclusions and recommendations.

The evaluation methodology will also take into consideration the ethical principles in evaluation as detailed in the UNEG ethical guidelines for evaluation.

5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

5.1 Evaluation reference group

To support the independence of the evaluation, the Evaluation Unit, SPMD will manage and oversee the entire evaluation process. An evaluation reference group will be established to support the evaluation and will comprise the following members, the Director/Section Chief of the implementing division/office (Chair), Section Chief of the implementing division/office, project officer, evaluation officer from the Evaluation Unit, SPMD and additional members, including staff from partner ESCAP division/office (internal) or organization (external).

The reference group provides technical and methodological guidance to the evaluation process; reviews and approves the selection of the consultant, terms of reference and inception report; provides quality control of the evaluation report and validation of recommendations; and ensures adherence to ESCAP Evaluation Policy and Guidelines and the use of evaluation outputs, including the formulation of the evaluation management response and follow-up action plan.

5.2 Evaluator

The evaluator will assume overall responsibility for carrying out the evaluation. This includes, among other activities, managing the work, ensuring the quality of interviews and data collection, preparing the draft report, presenting the draft report and producing the final report after comments have been received in line with standard templates provided by ESCAP. The evaluator must have:

- Knowledge of the United Nations System; principles, values, goals and approaches, including human rights, gender equality, cultural values, the Sustainable Development Goals and results-based management.
- Professional and technical experience in evaluation (application of evaluation norms, standards and ethical guidelines and the relevant organizational evaluation policy and promotion of evaluation and evidence-based learning).³⁵
- Good technical knowledge in the Asia-Pacific region, including major development trends and issues, particularly in the areas of transboundary environmental cooperation. Working knowledge of Russian language is desirable.

6. OUTPUTS

The following outputs will be delivered to the project manager at ESCAP:

1. Updated TOR, work plan, project theory of change and evaluation matrix
2. First draft of evaluation report (see Annex 1 and Annex 2)
3. Presentation on findings, conclusions and recommendations
4. Final evaluation report

The draft evaluation report will be shared with key stakeholders prior to finalization. The final evaluation report will be posted on ESCAP's public website.

ESCAP adheres to the UNEG Ethical Guidelines and Code of Conduct in evaluation and all staff and consultants engaged in evaluation are required to uphold these standards. To this end, ESCAP has developed a Consultants Agreement form (see Annex 3) that evaluators are required to comply upon signing the consultancy contract.

7. WORKPLAN

³⁵ See Standard 3.1. Competencies, UNEG. 2016. Norms and standards for evaluation.

The evaluation will be undertaken from December 2022 to June 2023. The evaluation budget includes a consultancy fee to be determined based on professional qualifications and the duration of the contract.

Phase	Timelines
1. Inception <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review of documentations • Interviews with members of the reference group • Preparation of an inception report for the evaluation • Presentation of evaluation methodology and tools to the reference group • Preparation of surveys and interview guides 	TBD
2. Data collection and analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review of documentations • Administration of stakeholder survey • Interviews and focus group discussions with stakeholders • Attendance in the project final meeting • Data compilation and analysis 	TBD
3. Report preparation and conclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit a brief report containing the preliminary findings, conclusions and recommendations • Meet with the reference group to discuss the preliminary findings and recommendations • Prepare a first draft evaluation report • Prepare a revised draft evaluation report • Final evaluation report and summary note 	TBD

TOR Annex 1. Contents of the evaluation report

CONTENT	PAGES (estimate)	COMMENTS
Title page	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Title, date of publication • Names of the evaluators • Name of ESCAP or division that commissioned the evaluation
Table of contents	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of the contents of the report, including annexes, boxes, figures, and tables with page references
Acknowledgments	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledgement of the contribution of government and non-government stakeholder and development partners to the evaluation exercise as well as the support provided by ESCAP staff
List of acronyms	1-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In alphabetical order, these are to be written out in full the first time they are used in the report
Executive summary	2-4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A stand-alone section of maximum four pages that is able to inform decision-making

CONTENT	PAGES (estimate)	COMMENTS
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short overview of the project, the purpose, scope and objectives of the evaluation and the intended users • Key aspects of the methodology, its limitations, and ways in which these were mitigated • Summary of the key findings, conclusions, lessons learned/good practices and recommendations
1. Introduction	1-2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A brief overview of the project, including the start and end dates, the implementing division/office and other collaborating UN entities/agencies • Background of the evaluation, including the reason for the evaluation and the period of the evaluation • Purpose, objective and intended use of the evaluation, and the primary users/audiences
2. Description of the Project	3-4	<p>2.1 Background</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief description of the project context, including the issues addressed by the project and the relevant key social, political, economic, demographic, and institutional factors <p>2.2 Link to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The key SDG targets the project intended to address <p>2.3 Project theory of change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project’s theory of change (activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact) developed and described in consultation with the project team, based on the actual implementation of the project • Any deviation from the original results framework contained in the approved project document • Sufficient details on changes, if any, that were made to the project during implementation and the reasons for changes • If needed, a simplified theory of change can be presented here (a detailed one should be in the annex) <p>2.4 Project strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief description of the actual project strategies, including any significant changes made during the implementation and the reasons for those changes • Explanation of how the project was designed to contribute to gender equality and human rights mainstreaming <p>2.5 Innovative elements (if applicable)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the specific new methodology and/or theory that was applied in the project (where applicable)

CONTENT	PAGES (estimate)	COMMENTS	
		<p>2.6 Beneficiaries, target countries and key partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the project’s beneficiaries and target countries and/or regions • Key partners (implementing entities, other collaborating UN entities/agencies and non-UN organizations and national and/or local governments and their roles in the project) 	
		<p>2.7 Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of the project budget (approved funding), and other human, financial and/or in-kind contributions and other resources that were mobilized by the implementing entities to support the project 	
<p>3. Evaluation Objectives, scope and methodology</p>	<p>3-4</p>	<p>3.1 Purpose and objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the purpose and objectives of the evaluation, the intended users/audiences, and the expected use of its results by each user/audience • Emphasis on accountability for results and learning 	
		<p>3.2 Evaluation scope</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the evaluation scope, criteria, and questions • If the evaluation involved reduced scope and/or did not cover all the mandatory evaluation criteria, an explanation of the specific reasons behind this 	
		<p>3.3 Methodology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The methodological approach and rationale, including methods for data gathering and analysis and data sources • Sampling strategy for qualitative and quantitative data collection methods • If applicable, the criteria used to select countries for in-depth case studies or field visits • Ethical standards applied, and if applicable, ethical concerns and how they were handled • How gender and human rights perspectives were integrated in the data collection methods and tools, and the data analysis techniques • Limitations to the methodology and how they were addressed 	
<p>4. Evaluation Findings</p>	<p>10 (2-3 per criterion)</p>	<p>4.1 Effectiveness</p>	<p>Finding x: [one sentence description of the finding] An analysis based on evaluative evidence</p>
		<p>4.2 Relevance</p>	
		<p>4.3 Efficiency</p>	
		<p>4.4 Sustainability</p>	
		<p>4.5 Human rights and gender mainstreaming</p>	
<p>5. Conclusions</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General conclusions of the evaluation that follow logically from the findings and respond to evaluation questions, as well as potential use and applicability to broader audiences 	

CONTENT	PAGES (estimate)	COMMENTS
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To reflect the evaluator’s professional opinion in relation to the main evaluation questions to add value to the evaluation results • Ratings table with ratings for standard evaluation and additional criteria and a brief justification • Strengths and weaknesses of the object (policy, programmes, projects, or other intervention) being evaluated, based on the evidence presented and taking due account of the views of a diverse cross-section of stakeholders
6. Lessons learned/ good practices		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lessons learned based on findings and conclusions
7. Recommendations		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Precise, practical, and action-oriented recommendations (no more than seven) • Clearly linked with the findings and conclusion, and can be addresses to ESCAP management and staff • As some of the recommendations require additional funding for implementation while others do not, they should be presented in two sets
Annexes		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. Terms of reference II. Project’s theory of change III. Evaluation matrix IV. Data collection instruments V. List of individuals interviewed VI. List of documents reviewed • Other annexes as required

TOR Annex 2. Quality criteria used to review evaluation reports

Report content	The report is structured logically and is well written
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report follows the table of contents outlined in the TOR and includes the relevant annexes • The executive summary is 1-2 pages and highlights the key findings, conclusions and recommendations • The report uses consistent grammar and spelling in line with UN rules, written in good English and is easy to read. Main messages are clearly distinguished from the text
Purpose, objectives	The report meets the purpose, objectives and scope of the evaluation stated in the TOR
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report gives a clear description of the object of evaluation. The expected results chain is clearly outlined. Key stakeholders are listed. • The report clearly explains the evaluation’s purpose, objectives and scope, including main evaluation questions, and limitations • The report describes and explains the chosen evaluation criteria • Evaluation objectives and scope address gender and human rights
Evaluation method	The evaluation methodology and its application are explained clearly

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The methodology is clearly explained and applied throughout the evaluation process • The report describes data collection methods and analysis and consultation process • Methods are appropriate for effective gender and human rights analysis • Amendments to the methodology identified in the inception report are clearly explained • The limitations and their implications for the validity of the findings and conclusions have been explained
Findings	The findings and conclusions are credible
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Findings respond to the evaluation criteria and questions detailed in the scope and objectives section of the report • Findings are based on evidence gathered using methodology identified in the report • Findings are based on rigorous analysis, are evidence based and objective • Findings are adequately substantiated, balanced and reliable • The relative contributions of stakeholders to the results are explained
Conclusions	Conclusions are relevant, evidence based and insightful
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The conclusions derive from the findings and are evidence based • Conclusions relate to the purpose and key questions of the evaluation • Conclusions are logically connected to evaluation findings
Recommendations	The recommendations are useful
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recommendations are clear and follow logically from the findings and conclusions • Recommendations are realistic, concrete and actionable within a reasonable timeframe • Recommendations for ESCAP should be clearly within ESCAP's mandate
Gender human rights	Gender and human rights principles are mainstreamed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The report discusses the extent to which the project integrates gender equality and human rights perspectives in: project design, implementation and outcomes. • The evaluator collects and analyses data disaggregated by sex and other social groups. • Findings, recommendations and lessons learnt provide information on gender • The report uses gender sensitive and human rights based language.

TOR Annex 3: Evaluation Consultants Agreement Form

Evaluation Consultants Agreement Form

UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation

UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System

Upon signing the consultancy contract, the evaluator is an agreement to abide by the UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation³⁶ and the UNEG Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the UN System³⁷, specially to the following obligations, among others:

- **Independence.** Evaluators shall ensure that independence of judgement is maintained, and that evaluation findings and recommendations are independently presented.
- **Impartiality.** Evaluators shall operate in an impartial and unbiased manner and give a balanced presentation of strengths and weaknesses of the policy, programme, project or organizational unit being evaluated.
- **Conflict of Interest.** Evaluators are required to disclose in writing any past experience, of themselves, which may give rise to a potential conflict of interest.
- **Competence.** Evaluators shall accurately represent their level of skills and knowledge and work only within the limits of their professional training and abilities in evaluation.
- **Accountability.** Evaluators are accountable for the completion of the agreed evaluation deliverables within the timeframe and budget agreed.
- **Confidentiality.** Evaluators shall respect people's right to provide information in confidence and make participants aware of the scope and limits of confidentiality.

³⁶ <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914>

³⁷ <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/100>

Annex 2: Partners and stakeholders

SN	Name	Organization	Position	Country	Gender	Contact ID
Partner and stakeholders						
Component 1						
1	Yury Darman	WWF Russia	Honorable Advisor	Russia	M	ydarman@mail.ru ydarman@wwf.ru
2	Victor Bardyuk	Land of the Leopard National Park	Director	Russia	M	bardyuk@leopard-land.ru
3	Rakov Ivan	Land of the Leopard National Park	Head of PR	Russia	M	rakov@leopard-land.ru
Component 2						
4	Aleksei Kostyria	WWF Russia (Amur Branch)	Head, Rare Species Department	Russia	M	AKostyria@wwf.ru
5	Guangshun Jiang	College of Wildlife and Protected Area, NEFU/ Feline Research Center of NFGA	Executive Director	China	M	jgshun@126.com
6	Minghai Zhang	College of Wildlife and Protected Area, NEFU/ Feline Research Center of NFGA	Professor	China	M	zhangminghai2004@126.com
7	Jiayin Gu	College of Wildlife and Protected Area at NEFU/ Feline Research Center of NFGA	Lecturer	China	F	yin.blue@aliyun.com
8	Shibin Zhu	Ecology and Resource Institute of Academy of Heilongjiang Province	Professor	China	M	cpu3200@126.com
Component 3						
9	Bariushaa Munkhtsoog	Irbis Mongolia Center	Executive Director	Mongolia	M	mtsogb@gmail.com
10	D Ariuntuya	International cooperation department, Ministry of Environment and Tourism	Senior Officer	Mongolia	F	ariuntuya@met.gov.mn

11	T. Boldbaatar	Protected area's management department, Ministry of Environment and Tourism	Specialist	Mongolia	Gender (M?)	boldbaatar@mne.gov.mn
12	M. Bayaraa	Institute of Biology, Mongolian Academy of Sciences	Wildlife biologist, PhD student	Mongolia	M	bayaraam1106@gmail.com
13	Alexander Karnaukhov	WWF Russia (Altay-Sayan Branch)	Senior Project Coordinator	Russia	M	AKarnaukhov@wwf.ru
Project team						
14	Sangmin Nam	ESCAP (former Deputy Director, ENEA)	Director, Environment and Development Division	ROK	M	nams@un.org
15	SungEun Kim	ESCAP ENEA	Economic Affairs Officer	ROK	M	kim54@un.org
16	Qian Cheng	Green Climate Fund (former Associate Environmental Affairs Officer, ENEA)	Environmental and Social Safeguards specialist	China	F	qcheng@gcfund.org
17	Rouna A	ESCAP ENEA	Associate Environmental Affairs Officer	China	F	rouna.a@un.org
18	Mi-Jin Lee	ESCAP ENEA	Research Assistant	ROK	F	lee62@un.org

Annex 3: Data collection instruments

Annex 3a: Online survey protocol for project stakeholders

Evaluation of Transboundary cooperation on the conservation of Amur tigers, Amur leopards and Snow leopards in North-East Asia

Number of participants: 18

Proposed Date: 15 – 30 April, 2023

This online survey format is intended to collect information for the evaluation from partners and stakeholders that offers an opportunity for all the participants to reflect their views and perspectives on the project's major achievements as well as Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability, Gender and human rights mainstreaming situation delivered by the Transboundary cooperation on the conservation of Amur tigers, Amur leopards and Snow leopards in North-East Asia and its partners.

This information collected through this survey will be confidential and no information that identifies personally to the respondents will be collected and disclosed.

1. Respondent's details	
Respondent's country/ organization (Optional)	
Type of organization	[] Government institution [] NGO [] Academic [] Private sector [] Other, specify
How would you describe your gender?	Male [] Female [] Prefer not to say [] Prefer to self-describe as _____ (please specify)
Name of project involved?	

2. Relevance					
2.1. To what extent was the project designed based on demand from the target beneficiaries in the member States?					
Please rate your agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)	Lowest (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Highest (5)
1. The project was based on demand from my country and other target beneficiaries					
2. The project designed according to the needs of my country					
3. The project was designed based on the needs of the region (transboundary context of Russia, Mongolia and China)					
4. The project is scalable/replicable					
2.2. What adjustments (if any) were made to the project activities and modality, as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 situation, or in response to the new priorities of member States?					
Please rate your agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)	Lowest (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Highest (5)
1. COVID-19 had a significant impact on the project activities and modality					

3. Effectiveness					
3.1. What are the project activities/outputs that lead to the results and present evidence of project's contribution to the results?					
Please rate your agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)	Lowest (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Highest (5)
1. The project activities/outputs were well-designed to achieve its expected results					
2. The project activities/outputs effectively contributed to achieving its expected results					
3.2. What were the most significant results at the sub-regional and national levels achieved or contributed by the project?					
Please rate your agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)	Lowest (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Highest (5)
1. The project successfully achieved its expected results					
2. The project enhanced capacity, awareness, and skills during its implementation					
3. The project's interventions benefited the target groups and countries					
4. The knowledge gained from the project was useful					
5. The approach and method used by the project were effective in achieving its objectives					
3.3. How did adjustments made to the project due to the COVID-19 pandemic affect the achievement of the project's results?					
Please rate your agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)	Lowest (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Highest (5)
1. Adjustments were made to the project activities and modality as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic					
2. The achievement of the project results was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic					

4. Efficiency					
4.1. To what extent did the project achieve efficiency in implementation through the combination of project stakeholders involved, making use of comparative advantages and the creation of synergy?					
Please rate your agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)	Lowest (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Highest (5)
1. The project was efficient in achieving its expected outcomes					
2. The project achieved efficiency in implementation through stakeholders' engagement and collaboration					
3. The project had a combination of stakeholders' active participation and synergy					
4.2. To what extent has partnering with other organizations enabled or enhanced reaching of results?					

Please rate your agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)	Lowest (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Highest (5)
1. Partnership with other organizations has enabled/enhanced the achievement of results					

5. Sustainability					
5.1. To what extent can results of the project be continued without ESCAP's further involvement?					
Please rate your agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)	Lowest (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Highest (5)
1. The project results would sustain without ESCAP's further involvement					
2. There is a possibility of other potential resources to continue and sustain the project					

6. Gender and human rights mainstreaming					
6.1. To what extent were gender and human rights integrated into the design and implementation of the project, informed by relevant and tailored human rights and gender analysis?					
Please rate your agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest)	Lowest (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Highest (5)
1. The project's design and implementation were informed by relevant and tailored human rights and gender analysis					
2. Gender and human rights aspects were integrated into the design of the project					
3. Gender and human rights aspects were integrated into the implementation of the project, i.e project activities					

7. Comments and suggestions for improvement					
<p>7.1 Please feel free to add any feedback or comments you would like to provide regarding the project's overall impact or any recommendations/areas for improvement for potential future initiatives.</p>					

Annex 3b: Virtual interview protocol for project stakeholders

Evaluation of Transboundary cooperation on the conservation of Amur tigers, Amur leopards and Snow leopards in North-East Asia

Number of events: 7

Proposed Date: 15 – 30 April, 2023

Tentative time per session: 30 - 45 minutes

Proposed time 8:00 – 10:00 pm, Guyana Time

This online consultation and survey format is intended to collect information for the evaluation from project stakeholders that offers an opportunity for all the participants to reflect their views and perspectives on the project’s major achievements as well as Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability, Gender and human rights mainstreaming situation delivered by the Transboundary cooperation on the conservation of Amur tigers, Amur leopards and Snow leopards in North-East Asia and its partners.

This information collected through this consultation will be confidential and no information that identifies personally to the respondents will be collected and disclosed.

1. Respondent’s details	
Respondent’s country/ organization (Optional)	
Type of organization	[] Government [] NGO [] Academic institution [] Private sector [] Other, specify
How would you describe your gender?	Male [] Female [] Prefer not to say [] Prefer to self describe as _____ (please specify)
Name of project involved?	

2. Relevance
2.1. In your opinion, to what extent was the project designed based on demand from the target beneficiaries in the member States? How?
2.2. What adjustments in terms of project activities and modality were made as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 situation, or in response to the new priorities of member States?

2.3. What is your recommendation for the improvement in project design in the future in terms of relevance?

3. Effectiveness

3.1. What are the project activities/outputs that lead to the results and present evidence of project's contribution effectively?

3.2. What are the most significant results (Top 3) at the sub-regional and national levels achieved by the project?

a.

b.

c.

3.3. What are the most significant activities that enhanced cooperation amongst the member states on transboundary management and information sharing?

3.4. What are the major adjustments you had made to the project due to the COVID-19 pandemic that affect the achievement of the project's result?

3.5. What is your recommendation for the improvement of project activities/outputs in the future?

4. Efficiency

4.1. What are the major achievements of the projects that were achieved through stakeholders' engagement and synergy?

4.3. How do you assess the collaborative spirit that contributed the efficiency of the project?

4.4. *What is your recommendation for collaboration and synergy modality in achieving synergetic results in an efficient way?*

5. Sustainability

5.1. Do you see any potential strategic partner to continue and sustain this intervention without ESCAP's further involvement?

5.2. What are the potential sources (financial and human) to sustain this intervention?

6. Gender and human rights mainstreaming

6.1. To what extent were gender and human rights integrated into the design and implementation of the project, informed by relevant and tailored human rights and gender analysis?

6.2. How women and marginalized society of the area were substantially benefitted from the project?

6.3. How did you address the potential human-wildlife-conflict in this project?

6.4. What is your recommendation for further enhancement of gender and human rights aspect that need to be integrated into the design and implementation of the project?

7. Best practices and lessons learned

7.1. In your opinion, what is the most significant best practice you have carried out/achieved during the project? Please provide one example.

7. Lessons learned

7.1. In your opinion, what were the most significant lessons you have learned during the course of the project that can guide similar projects in the future? Please provide one example.

Annex 3c: Virtual consultation protocol for reference group (Virtual group meeting)

Evaluation of Transboundary cooperation on the conservation of Amur tigers, Amur leopards and Snow leopards in North-East Asia

Number of event: 1

Proposed Date: 15 – 30 April, 2023

Tentative time per session: 1 hour

Proposed time 8:00 – 10:00 pm, Guyana Time (EST)

This online consultation format is intended to collect information for the evaluation from reference group to reflect their views and perspectives on the project’s major achievements as well as Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Sustainability, Gender and human rights mainstreaming situation delivered by the Transboundary cooperation on the conservation of Amur tigers, Amur leopards and Snow leopards in North-East Asia and its partners.

This discussion and information collected through this consultation process will be confidential and no information that identifies personally to the respondents will be collected and disclosed.

1. Respondent’s details	
Respondent’s organization	
Position	
Role in the project	
How would you describe your gender?	Male [<input type="checkbox"/>] Female [<input type="checkbox"/>] Prefer not to say [<input type="checkbox"/>] Prefer to self describe as _____ (please specify)

2. Relevance
2.1. To what extent was the project designed based on demand from the target beneficiaries in the member States?
1. Can you please describe how the project was designed based on demand and need of the country and targeted beneficiaries?
Component 1
Component 2
Component 3

2. Is the project scalable/replicable?

3. What is your recommendation for the improvement in project design in the future?

2. Relevance

2.2. What adjustments (if any) were made to the project activities and modality, as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 situation, or in response to the new priorities of member States?

1. What adjustments in terms of project activities and modality were made as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 situation, or in response to the new priorities of member States?

2. What is your recommendation for the actions in response to the new priorities (including COVID-19 or similar situation) in the future (if any)?

3. Effectiveness

3.1. What are the project activities/outputs that lead to the results and present evidence of project's contribution to the results?

1. Are the project activities/outputs appropriate to contribution to the expected results? How?

Component 1

Component 2

Component 3

2. What is your recommendation for the improvement in the future?

3. Effectiveness

3.2. What were the most significant results at the sub-regional and national levels achieved or contributed by the project?

1. What are the most significant results (Top 3) at the sub-regional and national levels achieved by the project?

Component 1

Component 2

Component 3

2. What are the most significant activities that enhanced cooperation amongst the member states on transboundary management and information sharing?

3. What is your recommendation for the improvement to achieve the significant result in a more effective way in the future?

3. Effectiveness

3.3. How did adjustments (if any) made to the project due to the COVID-19 pandemic affect the achievement of the project's results?

1. What are the major adjustments you had made to the project due to the COVID-19 pandemic that affect the achievement of the project's result?

2. What is your recommendation for the adjustments to be considered in the future for the COVID-19 pandemic (or similar situation) that may affect the achievement of the project's results?

4. Efficiency

4.1. To what extent and how did the project achieve efficiency in implementation through the combination of project stakeholders involved, making use of comparative advantages and the creation of synergy?

1. What are the major area of collaboration?

Component 1

Component 2

Component 3

2. What is your recommendation for collaboration and synergy modality in achieving synergetic results in an efficient way?

4. Efficiency

4.2. To what extent and how has partnering with other organizations enabled or enhanced reaching of results?

1. Who are the potential partner organizations for collaboration in the sector to achieve better results?

2. What are the unintended outcomes/results of the project through this cooperation?

3. What is your recommendation for partnership with other organizations that will help to enable or enhance to reaching of results in a better manner?

5. Sustainability

5.1. To what extent can results of the project be continued without ESCAP's further involvement?

1. Do you see any potential strategic partner to continue and sustain this intervention? How?

2. What are the potential sources (financial and human) to sustain this intervention?

3. What is your recommendation to sustain the results of the project without ESCAP's further involvement?

6. Gender and human rights mainstreaming

6.1. To what extent were gender and human rights integrated into the design and implementation of the project, informed by relevant and tailored human rights and gender analysis?

1. How did you ensure the gender aspect during the design and implementation of the project?

2. How did you ensure the human rights aspect during the design and implementation of the project?

3. How did you address the potential human-wildlife-conflict in this project?

4. What is your recommendation for further enhancement of gender and human rights aspect that need to be integrated into the design and implementation of the project?

7. Best practices and lessons learned

7.1. In your opinion, what is the most significant best practice you have carried out/achieved during the project? Please provide one example.

7. Lessons learned

7.1. In your opinion, what were the most significant lessons you have learned during the course of the project that can guide similar projects in the future? Please provide one example.

Annex 4: List of individuals interviewed

SN	Name	Organization	Position	Country	Gender	Contact ID
Partner and stakeholders						
1	Rakov Ivan	Land of the Leopard National Park	Head of PR	Russia	M	rakov@leopard-land.ru
2	Aleksei Kostyria	WWF Russia (Amur Branch)	Head, Rare Species Department	Russia	M	AKostyria@wwf.ru
3	Guangshun Jiang	College of Wildlife and Protected Area, NEFU/ Feline Research Center of NFGA	Executive Director	China	M	kgshun@126.com
4	Jiayin Gu	College of Wildlife and Protected Area at NEFU/ Feline Research Center of NFGA	Lecturer	China	F	yin.blue@aliyun.com
5	Bariushaa Munkhtsog	Irbis Mongolia Center	Executive Director	Mongolia	M	mtsogb@gmail.com
6	Alexander Karnaukhov	WWF Russia (Altay-Sayan Branch)	Senior Project Coordinator	Russia	M	AKarnaukhov@wwf.ru
7	Sangmin Nam	ESCAP (former Deputy Director, ENEA)	Director, Environment and Development Division	ROK	M	nams@un.org
8	Edgar Dante	ESCAP	Evaluation Unit	Thailand	M	dante@un.org
9	Clement Wu	ESCAP	Evaluation Unit	Thailand	M	yichuan.wu@un.org
10	Mi-Jin Lee	ESCAP ENEA	Research Assistant	ROK	F	lee62@un.org

Annex 5: List of documents reviewed

Provided as Footnotes.