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July 9, 2025

Mr. Alok Tiwari
Joint Secretary
Department of Economic affairs
Ministry of Finance
Government of India
North Block
New Delhi 110001

Dear Mr. Tiwari:

India: Meghalaya Community- Led Landscapes Management Project
IBRD 8828-IN
Independent Evaluation Group's Implementation Completion and Results (ICR) Report Review

I am pleased to share with you the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) review of the ICR Report for the above project. The IEG, an independent unit within the World Bank Group reporting directly to the Board of Executive Directors, rated the Overall Outcome of the Project and the Bank Performance as Satisfactory. The quality of the ICRR was rated as High. This is for your information and records.

Alongside the review report from the IEG, please also see attached the ICR Report published following the closure of the project on June 30, 2024.

Please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Pyush Dogra (pdogra@worldbank.org), Task Team Leader for the project, if you require further information or clarification

Yours sincerely,

Santhakumar Sundaram
Acting Operations Manager, India

Enclosure:
ICR Review by IEG
ICR

cc:
Mr. Parameswaran Iyer, Executive Director (India), The World Bank
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Government of India
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Government of Meghalaya
Mr. P Sampath Kumar, Principal Secretary, Community and Rural Development Department
Dr. Vijay Kumar D. Commissioner and Secretary (Finance)
Mr. Gunanka D.B., Executive Director, MBDA and Additional Secretary, Department of the Planning Investment Promotion & Sustainable Development

Report Number: ICRR0024441

1. Project Data

Project ID	Project Name
P157836	Meghalaya Community- Led Landscapes Mgm
Country	**Practice Area(Lead)**
India	Environment, Natural Resources & the Blue Economy

L/C/TF Number(s)	Closing Date (Original)	Total Project Cost (USD)
		42,999,079.02
Bank Approval Date	**Closing Date (Actual)**	
13-Mar-2018		

	IBRD/IDA (USD)	Grants (USD)
Original Commitment	48,000,000.00	0.00
Revised Commitment	43,000,000.00	0.00
Actual	42,999,079.02	0.00

Prepared by	Reviewed by	ICR Review Coordinator	Group
Maria Shkaratan	Avjeet Singh	Avjeet Singh	IEGSD (Unit 4)

2. Project Objectives and Components

a. Objectives

The Original Project Development Objective (PDO) was “to strengthen community-led landscapes management in selected landscapes in the state of Meghalaya.” (Loan Agreement, page 5). The PDO was stated identically in the Project Appraisal Document (PAD, page ii).

The PDO was not revised.

For the purposes of this ICR review, the objective will not be broken into parts but will be assessed as one PDO.

b. Were the project objectives/key associated outcome targets revised during implementation?

No

c. Will a split evaluation be undertaken?

No

d. Components

1. Original components

Component 1: *Strengthening Knowledge and Capacity for Natural Resource Management (NRM)* (cost at appraisal US$18.0 million; actual cost: US$8.36 million) aimed to enhance capacity for landscape management in the state of Meghalaya. It consisted of the following sub-components:

Sub-component 1.A *Promotion of traditional knowledge, grass-root innovations, and communication* aimed to support: (i) workshops on NRM practices, involving climate change adaptation and conservation; (ii) the development of a knowledge management strategy and an online platform for sharing NRM knowledge and build knowledge networks; (iii) innovation grants to support sustainable NRM products and services, including low cost options and climate resilient approaches; (iv) activities to encourage Community-led NRM (CNRM).

Sub-component 1.B *Training and capacity building* aimed to support: (i) stakeholder capacity building on community leadership and management of natural resources; (ii) development of training facilities at the block level Bharat Nirman Rajiv Gandhi Seva Kendra (BNRGSK)/Enterprise Facilitation Centers, and (iii) exposure visits for the stakeholders.

Sub-component 1.C *Preparation of strategies, research, and development* aimed to finance consultancy services for the development of plans, strategies, and studies to support Project implementation.

Sub-component 1.D *Monitoring, learning, and reporting* aimed to support a management information system (MIS) to track the implementation progress of the Project, designed for potential scaling-up up in the future.

Component 2 *Community-led Landscape Planning and Implementation* (cost at appraisal: US$34.0 million; actual cost: US$35.37 million) aimed to support community-led landscape planning in selected high priority areas. It consisted of the following sub-components:

Subcomponent 2A *Preparation of community landscape plans* aimed to support communities selected through Expressions of Interest (EOIs), providing funding for the preparation of their landscape plans. Communities would receive assistance from Project facilitating teams (subject matter specialists) at the block and village levels.

Subcomponent 2B *Implementation of community landscape plans and implementation support* aimed to support communities in implementing their NRM plans in a phased manner. Upon approval of a plan, communities would implement the first-phase activities. If they met the agreed criteria, they would progress to the next phase of financing.

Subcomponent 2C *Implementation Support to Community Landscape Planning and Implementation* aimed to provide geo-spatial data and analysis to inform the planning process in each village and to monitor the implementation of landscape plans.

Component 3: *Project Management and Governance* (cost at appraisal: US$8.0 million; actual cost: US$8.0 million) aimed to support Project implementation, including capacity strengthening and knowledge management of the project implementing entity, the Meghalaya Basin Management Agency (MBMA).

Revised Components:

The components were not revised.

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

Project Cost: The appraisal estimate was US$60.0 million, and the actual disbursement was US$51.7 million. The difference of US$8.3 million is attributed to: (i) a cancellation of US$5.0 million from the IBRD loan during Restructuring 1 of July 2020 due to exchange rate fluctuations; and (ii) a reduction in the Borrower's contribution as measured in US dollars, due to exchange rate fluctuations.

Project Financing: The Project was financed by an IBRD loan. The amount approved at appraisal was US$48.0 million; and the actual disbursement at closure was US$43.0 million.

Borrower/Recipient contribution: The Borrower's contribution was estimated at US$12.0 million at appraisal, and the actual disbursement was U$8.7 million.

Project Dates: The Project was approved on March 13, 2018, and became effective about three months later, on June 5, 2018. Mid-term review (MTR) was planned for December 22, 2020, and it was completed on January 14, 2021. The Project was restructured twice: (i) on July 22, 2020; and (ii) on May 11, 2023. The original closing date was June 30, 2023. The Project was extended once, for the total of 12 months (one year), to June 30, 2024, which was needed to finalize the community-based activities delayed due to the impact of COVID-19.

Restructurings:

The Project underwent two restructurings:

Restructuring 1 of July 2020 was needed to cancel US$5 million from the IBRD loan, which resulted from savings accrued due to exchange rate fluctuations. The cancellation did not affect the Project's cost in local currency, nor did it affect the Project's scope, ambition, or activities. The RF indicators and targets remained unchanged. (Restructuring Paper, pages 4-5)

Restructuring 2 of May 2023 was needed to extend the Project's closing date by one year, from June 30, 2023, to June 30, 2024, to complete activities delayed by the impact of COVID-19, particularly community

engagement, which was critical for the implementation of sustainable land management (SLM) activities. The restructuring also involved a reallocation of funds across disbursement categories, with no change in the overall costs.

Split evaluation. A split evaluation is not required because there were no changes in the Project's PDO or outcome targets, nor was there any reduction in the Project's scope or ambition.

3. Relevance of Objectives

Rationale

Country and Sector Context. At Project appraisal, 22 percent of Meghalaya's land was degraded, primarily due to vegetation loss and erosion. Key drivers were population growth, mining, shifting cultivation practices, rapid infrastructure development, agricultural expansion, and fuelwood collection. Natural springs supplied 80 percent of drinking water, but over 54 percent of them had dried up or halved in discharge. The state had a unique community-based NRM system, with nearly 90 percent of forests managed under customary law by tribes, the majority population of the state. Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) were established to facilitate tribal societies' way of life and serve as a link between state structures and traditional tribal institutions, but they lacked the resources to manage forests and waterbodies, or expertise to rehabilitate lands degraded by artisanal mining. The situation was further complicated by a lack of trust between communities and the state. The Meghalaya state government needed to transform natural resource management by adopting an approach tailored to the state's unique sociopolitical context, shifting from single sector programs to integrated community-led management, with village-level planning and approval and district-level funding convergence. (PAD, pages 2-3; ICR, page 1)

Relevance to Government Strategies at closure. The Project aligned with the Government of India's vision and priorities, as outlined in the following documents: (i) the Nationally Determined Contributions (2022), which include targets for sequestering 2.5 billion to 3.0 billion tons of carbon through forestry activities; (ii) the National Action Plan on Climate Change (2008); (iii) the Long-Term Low-Carbon Development Strategy (2022), which incorporates adaptation and mitigation measures, such as springshed management, nursery development, and the rehabilitation of degraded landscapes; and (iv) India's Land Degradation Neutrality targets (Bonn Challenge, 2011), which focus on addressing the root cause of land degradation and involve forest-dependent communities in identifying degraded lands and empowering them throughout the process, from planning to implementation. (ICR, page 5)

Relevance to the WBG's Assistance Strategies at closure. The Project aligned with the WBG's Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for FY2018-22, which was extended to FY2025, particularly Focus Area 1 *Resource-Efficient Growth*, Objective 1.1 *Promote more resource-efficient, inclusive, and diversified growth in the rural sector*. This objective focused on improving rural welfare, enhancing water and land use efficiency in agriculture, boosting climate resilience, and improving natural resource management through infrastructure investments, changes in agricultural approaches, and crop diversification (CPF, pages 14-15).

Previous sector experience. Project design incorporated lessons from community-driven development (CDD) and local institutional strengthening projects in India, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Brazil, focusing on fiduciary and project management training for communities and village-level institutions; performance

standards for state agencies; and inclusion, transparency, and accountability for communities and state agencies (PAD, page 8).

The Project's PDO was aligned with the objectives of the government of Meghalaya and the WBG's CPF. The objectives were also appropriately set, considering their alignment with the mandate of the implementing agency (MBMA) and its capacity to execute the Project. Accordingly, relevance of objectives is rated as High.

Rating
High

4. Achievement of Objectives (Efficacy)

OBJECTIVE 1

Objective
To strengthen community-led landscapes management in selected landscapes in the state of Meghalaya.

Rationale
The theory of change (ToC) for the Project was not included in the PAD but was prepared for the ICR (ICR, page 2). It outlined the causal links from Project activities to outputs, short-term outcomes, medium-term/PDO outcomes, and long-term outcomes. To achieve the PDO, the Project supported activities such as: (i) expanding traditional NRM knowledge, mobilizing communities for community-led landscape management (CLLM), and preparing strategies for NRM, forest-fire, and mine areas' rehabilitation; (ii) preparing community plans and supporting VNRM plans and climate resilience activities; and (iii) strengthening NRM and CLLM capacity and developing a knowledge management strategy and online platform. Expected outputs included: (i) operational VNRMCs, prepared VNRM plans, trained community members on NRM and CLLM, demonstrated community-led NRM approaches and technologies, and developed GIS-based and knowledge management platforms; and (ii) stabilized slopes, controlled erosion, improved forests, reclaimed mines' areas, and improved agriculture on reclaimed land. Expected short-term outcomes of these activities were: (i) strengthened knowledge and capacity for NRM; and (ii) improved community capacity for landscape planning and implementation. The medium term/PDO outcome was strengthened community-led landscape management in selected areas. Critical assumptions included: retained capacity built in communities, no adverse impact from climate change, and alignment of government policy and institutions with CLLM.

The ICR's ToC comprehensively and clearly outlined the Project's logic, with short-term outcomes illustrating how, through what processes, the outputs would help achieve the PDO. The causal links were clear, and the critical assumptions meaningful.

IRI results:

1. “Share of villages supported with capacity building package in NRM (percentage)”. The achievement at closure was 100 percent, against the target of 100 percent. The target was reached.

2. “Forest area brought under management plans (hectares (Ha))”. The achievement at closure was 15,444 hectares, against the target of 12,585 hectares. The target was exceeded.

3. “Meghalaya Basin Management Agency functional as Agency of Excellence in community-led NRM (yes/no)”. The target was achieved.

4. “Community NRM plans (CNRMPs) prepared and approved by Village CNRM Committees and the District Project Management Unit (DPMU) of the Meghalaya Basin Management Agency (MBMA) that include financing from other central and state government sources available for NRM (number)”. The achievement at closure was 15,444 hectares, against the target of 12,585 hectares. The target was exceeded.

5. “Share of Village NRM Committees (VNRMC) with equal or more representation of women among 9 members of the Executive Committee (ECs) (percentage of villages)”. The achievement at closure was 26 percent of villages with 50 percent or more women in the ECs, against the target of 100 percent. The ICR commented that while only 26 percent of the village NRMC committees had 50 percent or more women in their ECs, the remaining 74 percent of the committees had 44 percent of female representation in their ECs, which equates to four women out of a total of nine members. This target was substantially achieved, as female representation was very close to 50 percent in all committees. However, it is worth noting that the measurement of this indicator was overly complicated and therefore unclear.

PDO outcomes:

1. “Committees functioning with adequate fiduciary capacities, and capable of monitoring capacities to lead on landscapes management (number)”. The achievement at closure was 400 committees, against the original target of 400. The target was reached.

In relation to this PDO outcome, the ICR noted that the Project’s support for capacity development of the Village Natural Resource Management Committees (VNRMCs) in 400 villages resulted in the following: (i) village boundaries were mapped in 4,327 villages; (ii) communities and Village Community Facilitators (VCFs) gained improved technical capacity in NRM and water quality monitoring; (iii) effective governance was established in each village, ensuring community involvement in mapping, monitoring, and natural resource protection. By Project closure, the 400 VNRMCs demonstrated strong fiduciary operations, including effective bookkeeping and financial discipline. Audits confirmed that record-keeping was accurate and aligned with the Community Operations Manual (COM). Purchase committees were formed to carry out procurement in a competitive and transparent manner, and relevant training was provided. By Project closure, the costs of purchases and activities were displayed on information boards at each site. Essential female representation was mandated in all aspects of community-led activities to ensure broader acceptance. A parallel capacity for NRM was created statewide. (ICR, pages 5-6)

2. "Share of village-level NRM Plans under implementation according to agreed criteria (percentage)". The achievement at closure was 100 percent, against the original target of 100 percent. The target was achieved.

The ICR noted that the community NRM plans (CNRMPs) were developed and implemented, contributing significantly to the preservation of the state’s biodiversity. As a result, 310 new People’s Biodiversity Registers were established, up from 15 at the Project's start. Additionally, the Project leveraged significant

government funding for NRM initiatives, fostering collaboration between the community and state actors. The Center of Excellence (CoE) for Sustainable NRM and Livelihoods, a dedicated knowledge hub established by the Project within the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBDA), now plays a key role in supporting the adoption of NRM practices across the state. (ICR, page 6)

3. "Percentage of beneficiaries 'Satisfied' with Project interventions, disaggregated by sex (percentage)". The achievement at closure was 88 percent, against the original target of 70 percent. The target was exceeded.

The ICR highlighted that the Impact Assessment Report at Project completion found that 88 percent of respondents across five districts were highly satisfied with Project outcomes, and 78.5 percent felt that the activities met community needs and provided benefits. Independent reports by the Meghalaya Society for Social Audit & Transparency (2022–23) revealed that over 90 percent of village residents reported benefiting from the Project, with 97 percent rating the quality of the work as high. (ICR, page 7)

4. "Land area under sustainable landscape management practices (hectares (Ha)". The achievement at closure was 46,704 hectares, against the original target of 31,510 hectares. The target was exceeded.

The ICR noted that the achievement of this PDO indicator resulted from the application of techniques such as afforestation, agroforestry, soil moisture conservation, and the rehabilitation of mining-affected areas. The Project funded labor and materials for practices like contour trenching, forest enrichment, and soil and water conservation measures, leading to outcomes of enhanced green cover, reduced soil erosion, and improved biodiversity. A total of 10,940 hectares were brought under these practices in villages beyond the original 400. The Earth Observation data analysis, conducted for the ICR, confirmed the positive impact of these activities on areas with degraded land. (ICR, page 7)

Rating. The Project nearly fully achieved its objectives, strengthening community-led landscapes management in Meghalaya, leveraging additional funding for the demonstrated sustainable NRM activities, and incentivizing NRM efforts state-wide. Almost all RF targets were met, with the exception of the target for female participation in the Village NRM Committees, which was substantially reached when measured correctly. Accordingly, the efficacy rating is Substantial.

Rating
Substantial

OVERALL EFFICACY

Rationale
The rating for efficacy is Substantial. The Project accomplished its intended outcome of strengthening community-led landscapes management in Meghalaya, leveraged additional funding for sustainable NRM activities, and incentivized NRM efforts statewide. The Project achieved or exceeded all targets, except for one, which was substantially achieved.

Overall Efficacy Rating

Substantial

5. Efficiency

a. Economic analysis

Economic analysis was conducted both at appraisal and closure, using comparable approaches. In both cases, the discount rate was six percent, with a 10 percent in the sensitivity analysis at closure; and the time horizon was 10 years, a conservative estimate. A 10-percent productivity increase was assumed as a result of the SLM activities. The calculations included the GHG emission mitigation potential.

The benefits were also estimated using a comparable approach, limiting the analysis to the interventions under Component 2 *Community-led Landscape Planning and Implementation* activities, to focus on more tangible and immediate expected results. At appraisal, the benefits included in the analysis were: (a) improving crop productivity, (b) improving cropping intensity and horticulture productivity due to improved water regime, (c) increasing crown density through conversion of open forests, and (d) converting of cultivable wasteland into agroforestry and horticulture with improved agronomic practices. At closure, a mapping exercise was undertaken to plot the total area under sustainable landscape management to the area categories and productivity estimates used at appraisal. For forestry and agroforestry, the ex-ante EA categories remained unchanged. For mining-affected areas, a new category was added. For land brought under agriculture and for horticulture, the crop areas were estimated by prorating the proportions identified at appraisal.

The results of the analysis were as follows. At appraisal, the economic internal rate of return (EIRR) was estimated at 38.1 percent; and the net present value (NPV) at US$46.12 million. At closure, the EIRR was 54.1 percent, while the NPV was US$64.84 million. The sensitivity analysis applied a ten-percent discount rate, yielding an NPV of US$46.25 million.

The EIRRs were above the discount rate both at appraisal and closure, making the Project economically viable. Also, both the EIRR and NPV were higher at closure than at appraisal, reflecting that the targets for areas added under forests, horticulture, agroforestry, and for the restoration of mine-affected areas were significantly exceeded.

b. Administrative efficiency

The Project was implemented within the original financing envelope, with no changes to the original PDO, component design, RF indicators, or targets. The ICR highlighted cost reductions achieved by eliminating the Project Management Unit (PMU) at the block level and replacing in-person meetings with cost-effective weekly Zoom-based Guided Mentoring Sessions. These sessions improved implementation efficiency by enabling Village Community Facilitators (VCFs) and Village Natural Resources Management Committees (VNRMCs) to share experiences, troubleshoot, and resolve administrative issues. As a result, field activities covered 149 percent more area than targeted, and capacity building, innovation, and institutional development exceeded expectations at a lower cost than planned. Implementation efficiency was further enhanced through technology, including GIS-based Composite Landscape Assessment and Restoration Tool (CLART app), water tracers to assess spring's water quality, and a Personal Digital Attestation (PDA) app for training VCFs and VNRMC members. Additionally, the State GIS and Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Lab, housed in MBDA, captured aerial

images, compiled digital maps, and analyzed data related to community natural resources and infrastructure. (ICR, pages 8, 12)

However, there were some implementation shortcomings. The Project experienced a one-year delay, primarily due to the COVID-19 impact on the community-led activities (an external factor), although the ICR noted that the original timeline would have sufficed without the pandemic. Other delays stemmed from a weak procurement at the village level, where challenges in obtaining valid price information for materials and services led to repeated bidding and implementation delays. This was addressed through briefing suppliers on the competitive process, although capacity remained low. Staffing was also a challenge, with difficulty finding qualified senior specialists, such as a financial manager, for the State Project Management Unit, requiring close supervision by senior management. A significant turnover in District Project Management Unit staff in 2019 was mitigated by redistributing staff across districts. The Project also struggled with a lack of qualified financial management and environmental and social safeguards specialists at the district and village levels. (ICR, pages 8, 11)

Given the EIRRs above the discount rate at both appraisal and closure, improved economic efficiency at closure compared to appraisal, and high administrative efficiency despite some shortcomings, the Project's efficiency is rated as Substantial.

Efficiency Rating

Substantial

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

	Rate Available?	Point value (%)	*Coverage/Scope (%)
Appraisal	✓	38.10	56.70 ☐ Not Applicable
ICR Estimate	✓	54.10	57.60 ☐ Not Applicable

* Refers to percent of total project cost for which ERR/FRR was calculated.

6. Outcome

Relevance of objectives is rated as High, while both efficacy and efficiency are rated as Substantial. Thus, the overall outcome is rated as Satisfactory*.

* Based on a six-point scale, where: 1 = Highly Unsatisfactory, 2 = Unsatisfactory, 3 = Moderately Unsatisfactory, 4 = Moderately Satisfactory, 5 = Satisfactory, and 6 = Highly Satisfactory.

a. Outcome Rating

Satisfactory

7. Risk to Development Outcome

Ownership. Community ownership of the Project-supported landscape management practices is critical for their sustainability. To promote ownership, the Project's supported the following initiatives: over 6,000 villages were sensitized to NRM, and more than 13,000 VCFs were trained to bridge the gap between government and village institutions. Additionally, 2,000 Village Data Volunteer (a new term for VCF) posts were advertised in July 2024. A separate apprenticeship program under MBDA is being implemented to enhance technical capacity for NRM.

Institutional. To mitigate the risk of poor institutional sustainability, the Project supported the adoption of the state's 2022 NRM Policy, which mandates the establishment of VNRMCs as part of the community governance structure in every village across the state.

Financial. Financial resources are critical for the sustainability of Project outcomes, and they remain insufficient at the community level. However, the national Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) program mandates that 60 percent of its annual expenditure be allocated to water harvesting, conservation, afforestation, plantation, land and soil development, and other NRM-related works. VNRMCs are aware that a MGNREGA working scheme for NRM is now recognized by state institutions. Communities are well-equipped to develop and implement Community Natural Resources Management Plans (CNRMPs), with the assurance that MGNREGA will cover labor costs. Additionally, the Project's initiatives are attracting international carbon finance. (ICR, page 16)

8. Assessment of Bank Performance

a. Quality-at-Entry

The Project's design was based on a well-thought through approach to sustainable landscape management, combining traditional governance with modern science, technical support, and community leadership. The objectives were clear and achievable, with outcomes that were easy to monitor. Project preparation was thorough, involving experts with high-level technical skills. The design incorporated lessons from community-driven development (CDD) and local institutional strengthening projects in India, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Brazil, as stated in section 3. The implementation arrangements were robust, with strong commitment from the implementing agency (MBDA), which had a mandate similar to the Project's PDO and the capacity to implement the Project. Potential for scaling up and leveraging additional financing was bult into the design, and the center-and-district model of Project management was suitable for the diverse ethnographic zones. The budget was adequate, with effective cost controls in place; and the RF and M&E were well-designed. The Substantial risk rating was addressed through well-identified mitigation measures for procurement, financial management, and potential conflicts over land governance between traditional institutions and government bodies, as well as risks of low female participation due to societal norms. (ICR, pages 10-11, 15)

Quality-at-Entry Rating
Satisfactory

b. Quality of supervision
Based on the information provided by the ICR, the supervision was effective and adequate. A total of 12 semi-annual in-person and virtual missions were conducted over six years and four months of implementation period to conduct technical discussions, field visits, and adjust Project implementation as needed. The World Bank supervision was hands-on, and support provided to the MBDA consistent. Fiduciary training ensured compliance with procurement standards and quality. The restructurings were well-informed and timely. Additionally, the Bank helped MBDA develop an exit strategy, including the handover to the community, ensuring continued community support through the CoE. As discussed in section 5.b, the implementation was supported by the Zoom-based Guided Mentoring Sessions, enabling VCFs and VNRMCs to discuss and resolve arising issues efficiently, as well as by modern technology, including GIS-based CLART app for landscape assessment and restoration, water tracers for water quality assessments, PDA app for training VCFs and VNRMC members, and the tools at the State GIS and Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Lab, which compiled digital maps and analyzed community natural resources and infrastructure data.

Several challenges, as well as shortcomings, arose during implementation but were addressed efficiently. The one-year delay in the Project's closure was due to COVID-19, an external factor. However, some delays occurred due to internal factors, such as a low procurement capacity at the village level, resulting in high biddings and re-bidding, causing delays. While this was mitigated through information sessions with suppliers, capacity remained low. Challenges in finding qualified technical specialists also created some inefficiencies at the state, district, and village levels. Additionally, there was low uptake of agroforestry measures due to farmers' resistance to the long gestation period of agroforestry crops and difficulties in implementing horticulture practices due to soil variations across regions. However, these issues did not affect Project outcomes, as the structure of activities was adjusted, with a greater focus on soil and water conservation practices. (ICR, pages 8, 11-12, 15-16)

Considering the overall sound design and implementation but also considering the minor shortcomings of the implementation, the overall Bank performance is rated as Satisfactory.

Quality of Supervision Rating
Satisfactory

Overall Bank Performance Rating
Satisfactory

9. M&E Design, Implementation, & Utilization

a. M&E Design
The RF reflected the logic of the Project's interventions outlined in the PAD and was sufficiently linked to the PDO and the ToC. The ToC provided a comprehensive description of the inputs, outputs, short-term

outcomes, and medium-term/PDO outcomes. The RF indicators effectively measured objective results and were quantitative (except for one IRI), time-bound, measurable, specific, and attributable to the Project. Intermediate indicators were linked to the PDO indicators. The RF design was robust, and no changes to the RF indicators were needed or made throughout the implementation. The ICR highlighted that the M&E arrangements were adequate, with an M&E Manager at the State PMU and deputies at each District PMU, and a sophisticated MIS was developed (although with a delay) and employed to track Project performance. Quarterly progress reports, along with mid-term and completion reports, were submitted to the World Bank. The ICR noted a minor shortcoming in the absence of a specific target for gender disaggregation in the PDO indicator on beneficiary satisfaction. (ICR, page 12)

b. M&E Implementation

The ICR noted that M&E efforts were highly focused throughout the implementation. The State PMU manager played a central role in monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on Project performance quarterly, using data provided by the District PMUs, which was submitted on time. Although the MIS was not fully operational until late 2020 - two years after the Project became effective - primarily due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the unavailability of local expertise, alternative arrangements were made, and M&E data were stored in GIS, Excel, and other formats. Once the MIS system was in place, data collection and processing became more effective and efficient. In October 2023, the MIS was updated to align with a governmental M&E platform, and it continued to serve as a reliable, user-friendly resource for state institutions and externally funded projects. (ICR, page 13)

c. M&E Utilization

The ICR reported that the M&E information was utilized by the government and the World Bank to identify implementation challenges and take corrective actions. For example, in 2022, M&E data revealed that funds for catalytic activities and innovation grants were undisbursed, leading to a reallocation for piloting Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES). Additionally, currency exchange savings were redirected to scale up successful activities. After the COVID-19 pandemic, monitoring results highlighted the need to extend the Project's closing date to ensure that key objectives would be met. (ICR, page 13)

The M&E quality is rated as Substantial, reflecting the robust RF design, reliable M&E arrangements, and effective M&E reporting and utilization, with the minor shortcoming of the delayed MIS delivery taken into account.

M&E Quality Rating

Substantial

10. Other Issues

a. Safeguards

Environmental and Social Safeguards. The ICR reported that at appraisal, the Project was classified as Environmental Category B - Partial Assessment, triggering the following policies: OP 4.01 Environment Assessment, OP 4.04 Natural Habitats, OP 4.36 Forests, OP/BP 4.11 Physical Cultural Resources, and OP 4.10 Indigenous People. An Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF), including a community engagement strategy, was prepared. During implementation, environmental screening was integrated into the preparation of all 400 CNRMPs, with Environmental Management Frameworks developed, disclosed, and applied to physical interventions. People's Biodiversity Registers (PBRs) and Forest Management Plans (FMPs) were created for each village, and physical cultural resources were safeguarded through community training on the value of living root bridges, traditional NRM and agroecological knowledge, and conservation of sacred groves.

A grievance redress mechanism (GRM) was created, combining traditional and technology-based approaches for easy access and prompt resolution of complaints. A total of 22 complaints, primarily related to VNRMC-implemented village-level procurement activities, were received and resolved amicably within the required timeframe.

The Project remained in compliance with all the triggered safeguard policies and legal covenants, with Safeguards ratings consistently Satisfactory from December 2021 to Project closure. (ICR, pages 13-14)

b. Fiduciary Compliance

Financial management (FM). The ICR reported that Project's FM was adequate. The FM functions at District and State PMUs were performed by finance consultants and overseen by the MBDA's Chief Financial Officer. Villages' compliance was confirmed in annual audits of the VNRMC bank accounts and supported by trainings on bookkeeping, provided to 1,885 VNRMC members and VCFs. Lessons from each mission were used for adjustments, for instance, the format of the Village Grant Agreement was updated for tighter financial oversight and to keep better track of the disbursement rate. Interim Unaudited Financial Reports were submitted to the World Bank on time. Internal and external Project audits were conducted annually, with no serious issues found. The FM rating was Moderately Satisfactory from December 2021 to December 2023 and Satisfactory at Project closure. (ICR, pages 14-15)

Procurement. The ICR reported that overall, procurement management was strong, supported by the adequate capacity of the State and District PMUs and continuous World Bank guidance. The Bank and State PMU procurement specialists worked together to analyze failed bids, review technical specifications, and learn from past projects to improve procurement and contract management. However, there were challenges, including the village-level issues (detailed in sections 5.b and 8.b), leading to repeated bidding and some implementation delays. Additionally, there were some contract management issues, including time overruns, varying contract amounts, expired or invalid contracts, and business closures, which were all resolved. The absence of a procurement-complaint handling protocol (until March 2021) caused delays in recording complaints in an Open National Competitive Procurement, but this issue was later rectified. The Project complied with World Bank procurement policies and procedures, with procurement ratings of Moderately Satisfactory from December 2021 to December 2023, and Satisfactory at Project closure. (ICR, page 15)

c. Unintended impacts (Positive or Negative)

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d. Other

Gender.

The ICR noted that the Project prioritized gender equality by increasing female representation in decision-making at village level. Following the Project, the 33 percent female participation rate in the VCF workforce became a statewide requirement, making significant progress. The Project's gender focus was also evident in training, with 44 percent of training time dedicated to female participants, covering traditional agroecology and organic food cultivation across 100 villages. (ICR, page 9)

Institutional strengthening.

The Project made significant efforts to strengthen state capacity for implementation and facilitating landscape management works, providing training to staff from various state agencies, including the Soil and Water Conservation Department, Watershed and Wasteland Development Authority, Rural Employment Society, MBDA, and the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation. It also institutionalized community-led NRM by establishing the CoE for Sustainable NRM and Livelihood at the MBDA to support state-level initiatives and informed decision-making on landscape management focusing on rural development and natural resource conservation. Another key achievement was the training of 13,000 VCFs, creating a vital interface between the state and communities. (ICR, page 9)

11. Ratings

Ratings	ICR	IEG	Reason for Disagreements/Comment
Outcome	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	
Bank Performance	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	
Quality of M&E	High	Substantial	There is no disagreement, as the quality of M&E was rated as Substantial in the ICR.
Quality of ICR	---	High	

12. Lessons

The following lessons were derived from the ICR (based on ICR, pages 16-17):

1. Landscape management approaches are most effective when designed as an extension of traditional governance, incorporating relevant science, technical support, and broad community participation. The Project successfully implemented this approach in a replicable way.

Key design elements that supported the outcomes included: (i) the selection of a Project implementing body (MBDA) with a mandate similar to the PDO, committed to supporting Project objectives, enabling adaptative decision making, empowering officials, reducing bureaucracy, and unlocking additional funding; (ii) a decentralized approach with robust fiduciary and other safeguard measures, accommodating community-led implementation and promoting participatory SLM; (iii) continuous, extensive, and structured stakeholder engagement, which built trust and reassured communities; (iv) female representation in all community-led or landscape-based projects, promoting acceptance and accelerating implementation; (v) youth participation in project implementation, fostering future leaders and ensuring long-term success; and (vi) involvement of community leaders in the selection of facilitators, strengthening local engagement and trust.

2. Strong government commitment and a willingness to empower local communities are essential for successful landscape management projects. A key outcome of the Project was the state government's commitment to mainstreaming community-led landscape management. This was demonstrated through the adoption of the Project-supported NRM policy by the state in 2022, the expansion of village community facilitator positions with an additional 2,000 such posts advertised in 2024, and the scaling up of the Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) scheme. These actions ensure the sustainability of the approach.

3. Landscape and NRM projects are enhanced by incorporating value chain development. The Project's overlap with the Meghalaya Livelihoods and Access to Markets Project (Megh-LAMP), focused on livelihood development, highlighted that integrating livelihood and value chain development into landscape projects maximized community economic benefits from sustainable natural resource management. In Meghalaya, the MBDA's dual mandate of livelihood development and landscape management made this approach particularly effective. Although the Project could not scale up these efforts beyond its scope, they remain essential for successful community-led initiatives, and future projects could integrate these components for even greater impact.

13. Assessment Recommended?

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14. Comments on Quality of ICR

The ICR provides sufficient technical details to understand the approach the Project undertook, along with the multi-faceted outcomes and impact. It offers a strong justification of the PDO relevance; a comprehensive and robust evidence on most aspects of the Project's evaluation; and clearly links evidence to findings. The ICR is technical, analytical, and internally consistent. The lessons learned are well connected to the analysis and ratings and are formulated to benefit future landscape management operations. The ICR report satisfies the OPCS requirements.

a. Quality of ICR Rating

High