

**ANNEX 10 EVALUATION OF THE FOREST POLICY AND ECONOMICS EDUCATION
AND RESEARCH (FOPER) I AND II PROJECT**

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

B&H	Bosnia and Herzegovina
BOKU	University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences (Austria)
CCO	Cross-cutting Objective
COST	European Cooperation in Science and Technology
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EAALS	European Accreditation Agency for Life Sciences
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
EFI	European Forest Institute
EU	European Union
FOPER	Forest Policy and Economics Education and Research
FPE	Forest Policy and Economics
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus infection/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
MDP	Master's Degree Programme
MFA	Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
MSc	Master of Science
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECD/DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
SAP	Stabilisation and Association Process
SC	Supervisory Committee
SEE	South-East Europe
UN	United Nations

SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide a final appraisal of the project, its effectiveness in achieving its expected outcomes and its wider impact. This evaluation fits into the framework of a wider evaluation of the entirety of the Finnish development interventions in the Western Balkans, which is an integral part of the Evaluation of Peace and Development in Finland's Development Cooperation, a study that also covers Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Palestine.

Evaluation background

The Forest Policy and Economics Education and Research project (FOPER) is a human and institutional capacity building programme implemented in the Western Balkan countries of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H), Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), and Serbia. The project was implemented by the European Forest Institute (EFI) in partnership with five faculties of forestry and four forest research institutes from the region. FOPER took place between 2004 and 2013 in two phases (2004–09 and 2009–13) and was funded by Finland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to a total of €6 million (€3,1 + €2,9 million).

The purpose of the project is “to strengthen the capacity of modern forest policy and economics education, training, and research in the Western Balkans”. Its overall objective is “an increased contribution of the forest sector in the Western Balkans countries to national economies, to the reduction of poverty and inequalities, to environmental sustainability and to cultural development”. The project consisted of four main components: (a) the development of an international master's degree programme (MDP) in forest policy and economics (FPE); (b) the development of a regional capability to undertake FPE research to internationally accepted standards; (c) the delivery of professional short-course training in FPE and sustainable forest management to forestry practitioners (FOPER I only); and (d) the creation of a graduate college for doctoral students of FPE (FOPER II).

The project employed an integrated approach to academic teaching and research, in which all four components were interrelated and interdependent. To develop capacities it followed the principles of on-the-job training, learning by doing, interactive teaching methods, and maximising opportunities for practical experience.

Key findings

Relevance

The formal presentation of the project design, as set out in the logframe is poorly specified. It does not adequately reflect the project's ambition, nor does it establish a rational theory of cause and effect.

FOPER is fully aligned with the goals and principles of Finnish development policy and Finland's *Western Balkans Development Policy Framework Programme 2009–13*. It is also consistent with and complementary to the national forestry and environmental policies, as well as the process of European Union (EU) integration to which all the region's countries have signed up.

The project has addressed the need in the region's forest sector for specialist knowledge of economics and sustainable development, as well as the methodologies required to provide evidence upon which to formulate effective revised policy, laws and regulations as part of the ongoing reforms in the forest sector.

The project did a good job in ensuring gender equality and relatively even participation of men and women in project activities in a sector which is traditionally male-dominated. There is no evidence, that the project made any effort to encourage the participation of ethnic minorities and other groups likely to be excluded.

No risk assessment was carried out and no risk management plan put in place. Positive assumptions regarding the sustainability of project results ignored the risks of the project failing to secure future funding from within the region posed by the global economic crisis. The project does not have an agreed and clearly articulated exit strategy.

Efficiency

The project has delivered its expected results in terms of increased teacher capacities, a supply of Master of Science (MSc) graduates and trained forest professionals, increased capacities of researchers, and the establishment of a graduate college for doctoral students, with a high degree of success. Results have been delivered almost exactly to budget.

Coordination of activities across the region and facilitation of international travel and the input of international expertise are costly. However, administration costs of 14% are higher than accepted standards and an estimated cost per direct beneficiary of €58 000 is high. Understanding how project funds have been spent within the budget is extremely difficult as financial reporting has not been carried out on the same basis as the project and annual budgeting.

The project was highly successful in fostering local ownership of activities and results. The forestry faculties in Sarajevo and Belgrade have taken full responsibility for the administration and coordination of the Master's Degree Programme (MDP), while all other faculty partners have made commitments to provide further teaching resources. All partner organisations have taken the lead in undertaking research and the FOPER team, as a network, is actively pursuing new research projects independently of the project.

Effectiveness

The project has largely achieved its expected outcomes. These include:

- The greater majority of students from FOPER I and II have found relevant employment.
- FOPER I & II has significantly raised the quantity and quality of research in FPE in the region.
- An informal network of FPE experts, including senior academic teachers and researchers, young professionals, PhD students and former MSc students has been established.
- The MDP has been institutionalised in the region's forest faculties by means of the consolidation of teaching capacity, a formal agreement of further cooperation between the forest faculties, and the integration of the course into the administrative structures of the host faculties in Sarajevo and Belgrade.

Impact

Intended impact in terms of a contribution to sustainable development in the region is not in evidence. Knowledge and understanding of FPE in the region beyond the project, even within partner organisations, remains very limited. There is so far no evidence of forest or environmental policy in the region being influenced by FPE or FOPER's research outputs.

By bringing participants together across geopolitical and cultural boundaries and establishing real understanding and cooperation, the project had a deeper impact in breaking down barriers between previously mistrusting peoples, and showing the way towards the wider re-establishment of dialogue and cooperation across the region.

Sustainability

Research and teaching skills, and the formal and informal networks of cooperation through which these skills are put into practice are likely to prove sustainable. Partner organisations have developed the institutional capacities required to continue to deliver both the MDP and further policy research. These include the contacts and networks with researchers, FPE experts and funding agencies that are essential for continued research.

The immediate financial sustainability of the MDP remains low. Although the majority of costs of running the course have been internalised in the participating faculties, a solution to finding the finance required to cover the costs of further, but greatly reduced, international support over the next two or three years has not been found.

Conclusions

Inconsistencies in the specification of results and the linkages between them in the project documents, as well as the accompanying indicators, render effective monitoring and evaluation of the project very difficult. If the logframe is to be used as the basis of an assessment of the project's achievements, a large number of the project outcomes would be missed.

The project has been highly relevant to the need of the region's forestry sector for expert knowledge of economics and sustainable development to support ongoing forestry reform and the implementation of national development strategies.

Gender balance in the project in a traditionally male-dominated sector is a significant achievement. Otherwise, treatment of Finland's cross-cutting objectives (CCO) in the project was inadequate owing to the lack of attention to include minority groups likely to be excluded.

The project's high administration costs and high estimated costs per beneficiary suggest that the project has not delivered value for money. Although the project has been delivered almost exactly to budget, the efficiency of the project cannot be confirmed as poor financial reporting and an incomplete record of Supervisory Committee (SC) decisions make it very difficult to understand how money has been spent during the project.

A high level of local ownership of project processes and results have been made possible by the project's integrated and participatory approach, which conferred responsibility for implementation to partner organisations and focused on on-the-job training and learning by doing.

The project effectiveness in achieving its expected outcomes is high. The delivery of outcomes has been made possible by the project's participatory and action-oriented approach to training and capacity development, and the continuity of support over nine years to the project's partner organisations.

The project was overambitious in expecting its outputs and outcomes to have a visible, positive impact on the promotion of sustainable development in the region. The lack of impact in the region so far on the wider understanding of FPE and demand for FPE expertise in policymaking is attributable to resistance to change by the region's decision makers and insufficient efforts by the project to promote FPE in ministries and state forest companies.

The FOPER team will continue to identify and carry out FPE research projects, mobilising expertise from both within and outside the region, just as long as there are funding opportunities with international organisations.

The MDP is unlikely to continue in the shorter term. With continuing weakness in government finances across the region and the low priority given to forestry and the environment within government spending plans, the MDP's future will only be secured with financial contributions from an external, probably international, donor.

Recommendations

- Ensure that future projects are planned and implemented according to results-based management.
- Continue to base project design in thorough context analysis and needs assessment.
- Insist that implementing partners address Finland's CCOs in project design and implementation by establishing practicable means for raising the participation of socially excluded groups.
- Make certain that implementing partners conduct a proper risk assessment at the planning stage and develop a risk management plan. Develop exit strategies for all projects that are oriented towards maximising sustainability of project results and confirming local ownership.
- Carry out a cost-benefit analysis at the time of project design to establish the most efficient way to deliver outputs.
- Strengthen financial management in future interventions by aligning bookkeeping and financial reporting with project budgets.
- Ensure that project management has sufficient human resources, making adequate allowance in particular for accounting and financial management.
- Develop future interventions around the fullest possible participation of local partners in design, implementation and monitoring, making full use of participatory methodologies for capacity development.
- In future projects addressing regional instability develop cooperation around integrated participation within institutional frameworks that are based on mutual interests.
- Consider financing EFI to conduct a third and final FOPER project whose objective would be to provide the limited finance required for ensuring the continuation of the MDP in the short term with reduced international support and ensuring that faculty teaching staff are fully equipped to lead the MSC without further external support.

Summary of key findings, conclusions and recommendations

Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
Relevance		
Formal presentation of project design in the logframe is poorly specified: not all outcomes are identified; intervention logic is inconsistent; indicators often not relevant.	Effective monitoring of the project has not taken place. Evaluation is difficult.	1 Use results-based management in future planning and implementation.
FOPER addressed the need in the forest sector for specialist knowledge of economics and sustainable development demanded by reform process. It is also consistent with and complementary to the process of EU integration and support from the EU Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA).	The project is highly relevant to the needs of the forestry sector in the region and the context of national development strategies and international development assistance.	2 Continue to base project design in thorough context analysis and needs assessment.
There was a high level of gender equality in all areas of the project. There is no evidence that the project encouraged the participation of minorities and socially excluded groups.	In a traditionally male-dominated sector, gender equality is an important achievement. Treatment of Finland's CCOs was partial.	3 Establish practicable means in all projects for raising the participation of socially excluded groups.
No risk assessment and management plan has been carried out. Assumptions with regard to project sustainability are incorrect. No exit strategy in place.	If corrected, the project would have addressed the financial sustainability of the MDP and also developed an exit strategy based upon a third project phase (FOPER III).	4 Include proper risk assessments at the planning stage and develop a risk management plan. Develop exit strategies for all projects early on during implementation.
Efficiency		
Projected outputs were delivered to planned budget.	The project was well coordinated and adequately financed overall.	
The costs of project administration were higher than normal. The estimated cost per beneficiary appears to be high. Financial reporting was not consistent with project budgeting, so it is extremely difficult to understand how money has been spent.	The project did not represent good value for money. It is not possible to assess whether project activities have been delivered efficiently.	5 Undertake a cost-benefit analysis at time of project design. 6 Integrate budgets and accounting systems, and align reporting with budgets.
Project management team was very small. There was no specialist financial officer.	Project management was under-resourced and overburdened.	7 Make allowance for sufficient human resources in project management, especially for bookkeeping and financial management.
Partner organisations and project participants felt a high level of responsibility for and ownership of results.	Ownership has been achieved by the project's integrated and participatory approach: implementation by partner organisations; on-the-job training; learning by doing.	8 Develop future interventions with the fullest possible participation of local partners in design, implementation and monitoring.

Findings	Conclusions	Recommendations
Effectiveness		
Expected outcomes have been largely achieved.	The project has been very effective. The project's participatory and action-oriented approach to capacity development was appropriate. The extended length of the FOPER project has been important for achieving capacity outcomes.	9 Base future capacity development projects on participatory, learning-by-doing methodologies. Provide support over a long enough period to ensure consolidation of skills and knowledge.
Impact		
Intended impact regarding sustainable development, forest policies, and wider knowledge and understanding of FPE is limited.	The project was overambitious in expecting impact on sustainable development. Project design did not establish a means for outcomes to influence policy- and decision makers. Impact on policy will emerge in the longer term.	10 Establish logical pathways to achieve impact during project design. (See #1 and #4.)
Project has broken down barriers between previously mistrusting people and has established effective cross-border cooperation.	The project has contributed positively to the trend of increased social and political stability in the region and across borders. Participatory cross-border projects are an appropriate means of addressing regional instability.	11 Continue to address regional instability by promoting cooperation by integrated participation within institutional frameworks that are based on mutual interests.
Sustainability		
Research and teaching skills developed in FOPER are likely to prove sustainable. Partner organisations have the institutional capacities required to continue to deliver the MDP and further policy research. The financial sustainability of the MDP is low. The project has not secured the finance necessary to cover shorter-term employment of international experts.	The FOPER team as a network or as experts in their organisations will continue to identify and carry out FPE research projects. The MDP is unlikely to continue in the shorter term. With continuing weakness in government finances across the region and the low priority given to forestry and the environment within government spending plans, the MDP's future will only be secured with financial contributions from an external, probably international, donor.	12 Finance a third and final FOPER project with the main objective: FOPER teachers able to work completely free of external assistance.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project description

The Forest Policy and Economics Education and Research project (FOPER) is a human and institutional capacity building programme implemented in the Western Balkan countries of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H), Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and Serbia, which combined Forest Policy and Forest Economics graduate education and research. The project had two phases: (a) FOPER I, or “Strengthening Capacities of Education and Training for Forest Policy and Economics Development in the Western Balkan Region”, which ran from 2004 to 2009; and (b) FOPER II, or “Consolidation of the Human Capacities in Forest Policy and Economics Education and Research in South-East Europe”, running from 2009 to 2013.

Both projects were financed by Finland’s Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA). FOPER I’s execution costs totalled €3,9 million, of which €3,1 million was provided by the MFA, the remainder being covered mainly by the European Forest Institute (EFI), with small contributions from partners the United Nations University and the University of Joensuu. FOPER II was delivered to a cost of €2,9 million, funded in its entirety by the MFA.

The purpose of FOPER I and II is “to strengthen the capacity of modern forest policy and economics education, training, and research in the Western Balkans region, specifically within the countries of Croatia, B&H, Serbia, FYROM, and Albania”.

The overall or long-term objective of the project is an “increased contribution of the forest sector in the Western Balkan countries to national economies, to the reduction of poverty and inequalities, to environmental sustainability and to cultural development”.¹

The project was coordinated by the EFI in partnership with five faculties of forestry and four forest research institutes in Albania, B&H, Croatia, FYROM, and Serbia, all of whom have shared responsibilities for implementation.² During FOPER I, EFI also worked in cooperation with the United Nations University in Tokyo, the University of Joensuu in Finland, the Silva Network, and the University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences (BOKU) in Vienna, Austria.

FOPER I proceeded from a comprehensive training and education needs assessment and context analysis, which provided the basis for the design and implementation of the project’s capacity development activities, carried out with the full participation of the project’s partner organisations in the Western Balkans.

The main focus of FOPER I was the development of an international Master’s Degree Programme (MDP) in FPE consistent with the Bologna Principles and basic international standards. This was situated in the faculties of forestry at Sarajevo and Belgrade Universities, but included the contribution of lecturers from all five participating faculties. Courses were taught by senior university professors from Europe and the USA working alongside the university lecturers from the Western Balkans, to whom they gave instruction and guidance in content and methodology. A total of 24 students drawn from all participating countries were enrolled in the first generation of the MDP in FOPER I. All courses were taught in English as a means to ensure that Balkan participants could engage professionally with their peers internationally.

¹ This is the development objective as expressed in FOPER I project document. It is worded differently in FOPER II but its meaning is essentially the same.

² Faculty of Forestry, University of Belgrade, Serbia; Faculty of Forestry, University of Zagreb, Croatia (2004–06); Faculty of Forestry, University of Sarajevo, B&H; Faculty of Forestry, University of Banja Luka, B&H; Faculty of Forestry Sciences, Agricultural University of Tirana, Albania; Faculty of Forestry, St. Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje, FYROM; and Croatian Forest Research Institute, Jastrebarsko, Croatia; Institute of Forestry, Belgrade, Serbia; Forest and Pasture Research Institute, Tirana, Albania (2004–11); Institute for Lowland Forestry and Environment, Novi Sad, Serbia (2009–13).

In addition to receiving training in forest policy and economics (FPE) content and teaching methodology, regional academics also learnt through a teacher twinning approach that connected them with distinguished international teachers from the same field.

FOPER I also provided an extensive programme of professional (in-service, continuous) short-course training to forestry practitioners, mainly employees of the public forestry companies in the participating countries. This was achieved by first developing a team of trainers of trainers in FPE and sustainable forest management and then establishing a pool of 95 regional trainers. Training of professionals was then carried out in the last two years of FOPER I.

The first project also promoted FPE research and its interface with policy by training 15 researchers in modern research methodologies, arranging international research events at which regional researchers met with international counterparts, as well as regional policymakers, and carrying out five research projects on forest-related conflicts in the region, the results of which were published.

FOPER II was launched to consolidate the results of FOPER I by supporting teachers, researchers and students to increase their individual capacities further and to support universities and research institutes to strengthen the programmes established under FOPER I. The aim was to establish a sustainable regional institutional framework for teaching and research with the capacity to develop sustainable funding for these activities in the future.

Professional training was discontinued in FOPER II in favour of greater concentration of resources on the MDP and the development of research capacity in the region, while also encouraging doctoral studies as a means to provide further opportunities for students to receive advanced education that would qualify them to be university lecturers and scientific researchers. FOPER II consisted of three components:

Continuation of the FOPER MDP

A second generation of MSc students were educated in FPE. The training of university teachers was strengthened by (a) expanding the teacher twinning approach to include mid-career international teachers in order to ensure long-term teaching capacity and lasting international links between FOPER and European universities; (b) increasing the number of regional teachers per course; and (c) introducing teacher-trainees drawn from young researchers to the course.

Training of researchers through practice

Six regional research teams of up to 30 researchers, university teachers, Master of Science (MSc) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) students were established in six of the project's partner organisations, with the brief to carry out original research in FPE that would be funded by the project and would be published in the international academic and professional press. Each team was given thorough training in all steps of the research process, including identification of research subject, research design and methodology, proposal writing, conducting research, analysis and producing research outputs. At each stage the research teams put their new learning into practice, with the assistance of an international "backstopper". The project applied international standards of quality control and assessment to each step in the research process.

Creation of a graduate college for doctoral studies in FPE

FOPER established an "institutional space" for PhD students in FPE, generally those MSc graduates from FOPER I who had chosen to continue on to doctoral studies. The college linked PhD students to one another and external experts for peer reviews and mutual learning. It also linked students to external universities outside the region where they had the opportunity to spend at least six months. To facilitate this, the project provided mobility grants of €3 000. In addition, it organised workshops, seminars, and colloquia around subjects taught on the MDP, with the participation of international experts.

The integrated approach to FOPER II regarding academic teaching and research, in which all four components are interrelated and interdependent, is based upon the recognition "that teaching and research skills are interdependent and must be built simultaneously because research skills are an integral part of teaching skills. [At the same time] professional researchers and research institutes need to have similar capacities, because they too can provide funding for and advice to students as part of their research work" (EFI 2009c, 5).

Methodologically, FOPER II continued and intensified the principle of on-the-job training and learning by doing. Teaching methodologies were interactive, demanding high levels of practical engagement by students. A range of opportunities were provided to increase students' direct participation and practical experience, such as summer schools, internships, field work, visits to public forestry companies, inclusion in FOPER's research teams, responsibility for promoting FOPER and its approach, and participatory monitoring and evaluation of the MSc course and its modules.

In order to attain the institutional sustainability of the MSc course, which remained the pivotal component of the project, FOPER II combined activities to build teaching capacities with the development of mutually supporting professional relations, both between the region's universities and research institutes and between the region and a wide range of international teachers, researchers and forestry professionals.

1.2 Background to the project

At the time of the inception of FOPER I in 2004, all the region's countries continued to face the considerable challenges of social reconstruction, economic and political transition, and the establishment of sustainable development, following the collapse of the region's communist regimes and the wars of succession to the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and early 2000s. Owing to internal institutional weaknesses of states, and persistent ethnic and political tensions, coupled with low levels of social and economic integration between states and their national communities, the region remained volatile and politically fragmented (International Commission on the Balkans 2005).

At the same time, the region's states were all following similar transitions towards establishing market economies within the broader political framework of integration into Europe and progress towards eventual membership of the EU by dint of their inclusion in the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) (International Commission on the Balkans 2005; EFI 2006a, 11).

The region is rich in forest resources of varying types and quality reflecting the region's geographic and ecological diversity. They are a repository for what has been described as an exceptional fund of biodiversity. In mountainous areas forestry plays an important watershed protection function in the region of significance in particular to sustainable agricultural production. Export of timber and timber-based products were of importance to national economies before markets collapsed during the wars of the 1990s. All countries possess forests with considerable potential for the development of tourism, while hunting has always been a noteworthy economic and recreational activity throughout the region. Forests are also of vital importance as they are often the only source of winter fuel in the region's many rural communities. The utilisation of forest resources has become the cornerstone of many rural livelihoods and social systems in the region's local economies, while the shift towards market economy has undermined sustainable forest management in many places and also contributed to rising rural unemployment (EFI 2006a, 12–15).

State-owned forests in all countries continue to outnumber those held in private hands, ranging from around 90% of all forests in FYROM to approximately 50% in Serbia. In 2004, all countries were at different stages in processes of wholesale reorganisation and reform of state forestry institutions and the development of policies to guide forest management, environmental protection and the regulations governing the use of forests by private owners, in response to the weakening of forest institutions and industries through rapid political change and conflicts and the aspiration to align policies and standards with those of the EU (EFI 2006a, 15–20; 2011a, 12).

The above processes included either the establishment of centralised state forestry enterprises or the decentralisation of control to lower levels of government administration, the initiation in some areas of the privatisation of forests or the restitution of forests to pre-communist private owners. The approaches have differed, but the aim of promoting sustainable management and conservation of all types of forests at the country level, while also developing the economic potential of forests, has been shared by all across the region. In developing national forest programmes, revising legislation, certification and developing national action plans in areas such as curbing illegal logging, the region's countries require a new approach to forestry policymaking and economic planning that is based upon participation, intersectoral cooperation, interdisciplinary expertise, and

holistic thinking that is in marked contrast to the basic natural science approach to forest management established in region's previous communist regimes (EFI 2006a, 16–18).

At the time of project design (FOPER I), it was assessed that there was an almost total absence of forest policy and economics expertise in the region that would facilitate the effective reform of forestry institutions. There was also a distinct lack of experience and know-how in sustainable forest management practices and the timber trade among professionals working for state forestry institutions and among private forest owners (EFI 2006a, 22–27).

On the basis of a training needs assessment carried out in 2005, FOPER identified “the need to concentrate on capacity creation in forestry education and research in those areas that provide tools for national and regional forest sector planning and policy development in support of sustainable development” (EFI 2006a, 27). Academic courses leading to employment in management and policymaking in the forestry sector (and by extension all areas of natural resource management) focused almost exclusively on the technical aspects of forestry, such as entomology or forest technology, while excluding issues of social and environmental sustainability, governance of forest resources, and forest economics, which were established components of forestry education in universities elsewhere in Europe and the USA.

In 2009, when the decision was made to extend FOPER into a second phase, the need in the region for FPE expertise was assessed to be “far greater” (EFI 2009a, 8; 2009b, 8) than previously, as the continuing economic and political transition that the region's countries were undergoing had gathered pace, creating pressures in the forestry sector for further reform in national forest programmes, forest legislation, and adaptations in the sector to the market economy and European integration (EFI 2009a, 8; 2009b, 8).

Forest Policy and Economics as a subject was now represented in six of the region's faculties of forestry to some degree, but the number of experts in FPE for the whole region had risen to no more than 20. Most of these, as graduates of FOPER I's MSc course were in the early stages of their career (EFI 2009a, 8; 2009b, 8). The human and institutional capacities for teaching and research in FPE in FOPER's partner organisations, while established, were also assessed to be “deficient in many different aspects, including substance knowledge, research experience, teaching skills, research methodology skills, language skills, limited contacts and attitude towards communicating internationally, and management skills” (EFI 2009a, 9; 2009b, 10).

1.3 Purpose of the evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is twofold. Firstly, it is to provide a final appraisal of the project according to the standard criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD/DAC) evaluation criteria, assessing in particular its effectiveness in achieving its expected outcomes and identifying its wider impact in the project locations and the Western Balkans more generally.

Secondly, the evaluation contributes to a wider evaluation of the entirety of the Finnish development interventions in the Western Balkans, which is an integral part of the Evaluation of Peace and Development in Finland's Development Cooperation, a study that covers Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Palestine. Specifically, the Western Balkans component is to provide an assessment on the overall results and lessons learnt of the Finnish development interventions in the region in order to provide information to support decision makers at different departments at the MFA when considering future aid to peace and development elsewhere.

1.4 Methodology

The evaluation methodology is based on ratings of each of the five OECD/DAC-established evaluation criteria: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. The evaluation applies mixed methods and includes qualitative and quantitative methods and instruments, such as semi-structured interviews, as well as document review, and meetings with project staff.

The evaluation was carried out in three phases:

The inception phase and the document review. The document review and the analysis of the project intervention were used for design of the research methods to be applied in the main assessment stage. This process also clarified the approach and the sample stakeholders and implementing partners to be consulted during fieldwork.

The field work phase. This was carried out in Croatia, B&H and Serbia over two weeks in early February 2014. In addition to holding in-depth discussions with EFI's project coordination team, semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of the project's partner organisations who had sat on the project steering committee, project focal points in their place of work, FOPER teaching staff in forestry faculties, researchers in forest institutes, and a range of MSc students, including some from FOPER I, in the faculties, ministries, state institutions and private consultancies where they had found employment or were continuing their studies.

Analysis and report writing phase. This phase included follow up by email of field trip interviews in order to seek clarifications from the project coordination team and the presentation of a draft report and its finalisation based on comments and inputs from MFA.

1.5 Constraints

An important evaluation constraint was that the evaluation team could not visit project participants in FYROM, Albania and Banja Luka in Bosnia. This made it very difficult to gauge the engagement of the partner organisations from these locations.

A lack of consistency in the logframe's logic and poorly developed indicators limited the ability of the evaluation team to assess the achievements of the project and to link them to a higher-level intervention logic. In addition, project progress reports, or monitoring reports, were not oriented around the logframe and its indicators and quantitative results were not reported on coherently and consistently. During the evaluation, verbal confirmation during interviews and post-fieldtrip emails were used in order to gather quantitative data.

2 EVALUATION FINDINGS

2.1 Relevance

Relevance relates broadly to the quality of project design, concerning, in particular, the extent to which the objectives of a development intervention are consistent with beneficiaries' requirements, country needs, global priorities and partners' and donors' policies. This also includes an assessment of whether the project has a clearly worked out means of exit which will ensure impact and sustainability of project gains. In a second sense, relevance may refer also to the project's continuing validity at any point during the project. Has the project logic retained its validity? Has the project managed to change and adapt in response to already achieved results or shortfalls in implementation identified by monitoring or interim evaluations?

2.1.1 Coherence of project design and evaluability

The formal presentation of the project design, as set out in the logframe contained within the project document (EFI 2009b), is technically weak and does not adequately reflect the project's ambition, nor does it posit a rational theory of cause and effect. This creates problems evaluating project effectiveness. If the logframe is to be used as the basis of an assessment of the project's achievements, a large number of the project's outcomes would be missed.

There are three areas of concern:³

Project purpose: Increased capacities of forest policy and economics experts in the South-East Europe region

While the project document identifies limited human capacities in FPE for research and higher education (that is, limited numbers of qualified FPE teachers and researchers) as the core challenge to be addressed, the project approach implies that the real purpose is to strengthen regional *institutional capacity* in FPE. This capacity is expected to reside in integrated systems of education and career development (vertical integration of academic study and research); in sustainable institutional partnerships for research and education between the region's faculties and research institutes; and in formal and informal networks of researchers, teachers and young FPE professionals in the region and internationally that would facilitate the implementation of FPE projects and influence forest policy nationally and regionally.

Expected results and their linkage to the project purpose

As three of the four key results or outputs aim to maintain results already achieved in FOPER I (consolidation of skills and knowledge related to 1 teaching, 2 research and 3 continuation of the MDP), their contribution to outcomes at the project purpose level is not established logically. Results 1 and 2, concerning skills and knowledge, overlap with the project purpose (increased capacities), therefore collapsing the logic of cause and effect. In addition, result 3, continuation of the MDP, is not strictly a result, although if the objective here is to ensure sustainability (continuation and secured), this might be conceived as an overall project outcome.

Indicators and their specification

In general, indicators are very poorly specified. Very many are not relevant, such as the level of student satisfaction to indicate teaching skills and knowledge, or macroeconomic data sets to indicate project impact. Others, such as “the level of involvement of regional policy and economics experts in international research” against the project purpose are set at a higher level than the thing they are indicating, while almost all indicators suffer from vague wording (lack of specificity) and/or a lack of target values.

2.1.2 Alignment with Finnish development policy

The overall objective and project purpose of FOPER (I and II) are fully aligned with the main goal of Finland's *Development Policy Programme 2007*, “to eradicate poverty and to promote sustainable development in accordance with the UN Millennium Development Goals” (MFA 2007, 15). The link in the project to eventual eradication of poverty is perhaps theoretical, considering that expected project results have no direct impact or influence on economic activity. However, the holistic and interdisciplinary approach taken by the project to generating FPE knowledge and skills firmly supports Finland's policy principle of linking poverty reduction to the implementation of economically, socially and ecologically sustainable development (MFA 2007, 5). In addition, the 2007 Development Policy specifically identifies the development of forestry as a means to “eliminate poverty directly and at the same time, generate sustainable economic development” (MFA 2007, 19). FOPER II broadened the focus on sustainable forestry to include natural resource management more generally and also environmental governance, strengthening the attention given to ecological and social sustainability. Conceptually, this was carried out as forests are simply one component of larger, more complex ecosystems, and also in recognition that it is important to link FPE to wider processes of policy, management and governance of all natural resources in order to achieve eventual social and economic outcomes (EFI 2013a).

FOPER (I and II) is also fully aligned with the 2007 Development Policy in adopting both a regional and sector-based approach to promoting sustainable development that is cross-border and aims at regional integration of actors and institutions (MFA 2007, 32).

Lastly, FOPER's specific contribution to higher education supports Finland's identification of good education, including higher education, as the cornerstone of sustainable development (MFA 2007, 14).

³ A detailed assessment of the logframe is provided in Annex 3.

2.1.3 FOPER's support to the objectives and approach of Finland's Western Balkans development policy framework programme 2009–13

The priority area of Finland's aid to regional projects in the Western Balkans is “cooperation and communication in concrete environmental issues”, including forestry, as a means of “bring[ing] countries closer to each other and build[ing] confidence between them, thus contributing to regional stability” (MFA 2009, 8, 17, 18). FOPER's design and approach are directly aligned here with the Finland's Framework Programme. Although generating stabilising affects in the region is not identified explicitly as a project objective in the FOPER documentation, FOPER I (EFI 2006a) implies that the project will contribute to addressing the continuing instability of the region and continuing latent conflicts that threaten to re-emerge (EFI 2006a, 11). FOPER II's situation analysis (2009) points to the region's “high ethnic and religious diversity” that contributes to its “volatility”, which is also considered a “strong asset for future development” (EFI 2009a, 3).

FOPER is also coherent with the Framework Programme's principle of complementarity to the process of EU integration and EU IPA support (MFA 2009, 9) in particular, as well as promoting the principle that partner countries should have ownership of their own development (MFA 2009, 10). FOPER I's project document notes how the project should be considered within the framework of European integration offered by the EU that is assisting the region's transition towards market economy and state modernisation, and that the forest sector has the potential to be a significant contributory factor towards furthering this transition (EFI 2006a, 11). In addition, FOPER's approach is based upon maximising the participation in and ownership of project activities by partner faculties and research institutes.

2.1.4 Coherence with forestry sector needs and priorities and national development policy and strategies

From the beginning of the first decade of the century all countries in the region embarked on producing national development strategies or poverty reduction papers which were based on the principles of sustainable development and the ongoing transition to market economy. Reform of the forest sector in each country has also been ongoing as both part of this transition and the strengthening of state institutions. However, the required knowledge of economics and sustainable development, as well as relevant expertise in research methodologies necessary to provide evidence upon which to formulate effective policy, revise laws and regulations, and to provide appropriate extension for ecologically and economically sustainable forest management, was almost completely lacking in the region at the time of FOPER's design. Thus FOPER's concentration on building the capacities and upgrading the knowledge of relevant academic institutions in FPE has been highly relevant. This was confirmed in field trip interviews with FOPER participants from forest faculties and research institutes in Croatia, B&H and Serbia.

Interviews also confirmed that the project's emphasis on knowledge sharing and cross-border exchange, both within the region and between the region and Europe and beyond was important to tackling recent introversion of the region's forestry faculties and institutes that had led to their relative isolation from European and global scientific cooperation and entrenched often out-of-date scientific methodologies and theoretical understanding.

There was concern in some quarters that the decision in FOPER II to discontinue with the programme of professional trainings established in FOPER I in favour of greater concentration of academic teaching and research, had lowered the project's relevance. Professional trainings were a means of making the project's information and knowledge available to forest managers for implementation in practice. Perhaps more important with regard to FOPER's purpose is that professional trainings, insofar that they mainly reached employees of public forestry companies, were considered to have potential for raising demand for FOPER-educated forest experts and for FOPER's research, with longer-term implications for policymaking, the wider uptake of forest management according to the principles of sustainable development, and possible support to new FOPER MSc students through sponsorship schemes or even direct funding.⁴

⁴ *FOPER I Project Completion Report* (EFI undated a), makes it clear that the decision to drop professional training was taken by FOPER I project team on the basis that (a) the region was not ready for a large-scale programme of life-long learning and (b) professional training was not a core competence of any of the project's core competences.

2.1.5 The extent to which FOPER has maintained its validity throughout its two phases

All evaluation interviews confirmed the opinion of project participants and stakeholders that FOPER had maintained its validity, or relevance, over time. Regardless of the project's achievements, there is consensus that the approach and the activities of FOPER II continue to be relevant.

The evaluation has identified two key changes in project design that demonstrate the ability of project management to adapt to the context and the situation in the field. Firstly, in response to the initial reluctance and lack of interest on the part of the Croatian Faculty of Forestry to host the MDP in FOPER I, the decision was made to organise the course only in the faculties of Sarajevo and Belgrade, while allowing Croatian faculty staff and students to participate in the programme. Despite this appropriate adjustment, it appears that the lack of institutional support from Zagreb has impacted negatively on the overall coherence of the regional academic network established in FOPER, and also discouraged wider participation from Croatian students (interview 3 & 11 February 2014).

The inclusion of a graduate college in FOPER II was not only a popular decision among project participants (EFI 2009d), it was also a logical change to project design in order to strengthen vertical integration of FPE study and career paths, increase professional exchange internationally, and complement the project's increased focus on research in phase II. In addition, FOPER II attempted to strengthen local research capacity and ownership by assigning the project's focal points as both leaders and coordinators of the project's phase II research projects.

Another important change that project management undertook to increase project efficiency and effectiveness, and responding to the need to be closer to partner organisations, was to place the project management of FOPER II in the region, whereas previously it had been located at EFI's main office in Joensuu, Finland. The establishment of the FOPER House at EFI's newly established regional office in Varaždin in Croatia created a "home" (the FOPER House) for a variety of meetings and capacity building activities that had the merit of being independent from any vested interests that might be attached to the partner organisations. However, the choice of placing the FOPER House in Croatia *was* questioned by a number of interviewees on the basis that the relative distance of Croatia institutionally and geographically from the focal points of FOPER II's implementation, Sarajevo and Belgrade, probably diminished project relevance and efficiency somewhat (interview 11 & 14 February 2014). This decision, though, was clearly linked to EFI's decision to establish its regional office in Varaždin, which in turn appears to have been driven by the offer of finance from the Croatian Ministries of Agriculture, and Education, Science and Sport, as well as EU regional funds for Varaždin (interviews 3 & 11 February 2014).

2.1.6 Addressing Finland's development policy cross-cutting objectives

The project documents (FOPER I and II) discuss briefly the promotion of gender equality and the promotion of rights of those easily excluded, including ethnic minorities. Specifically, FOPER states that it will address the issue of equal opportunities for both men and women in all its activities, particularly in the selection of students for the MSc and training of researchers and teachers, and that the cultural and ethnic diversity of the Western Balkans (implying continuing underlying mistrust, division and conflict) will require cultural sensitivity and conflict resolution skills.

The absence of reporting on these issues in project documentation shows, however, they were not prioritised during implementation. The project did a good job in ensuring relatively equal participation of men and women students. In FOPER I, 12 male and 7 female students completed their study, while in FOPER II, 10 male and 14 female students were enrolled. Students that were interviewed confirmed that gender issues were included in the course content to some extent in all relevant MSc subjects. At the same time, students agreed that "forestry is not really popular among women in the Western Balkans", so that the project's success in attracting so many women students to MSc should be considered as an achievement.

With regard to minorities, the lack of reflection on how to achieve even participation is not considered so important bearing in mind the regional scope of the project and the fact that in the Western Balkans all nationalities are minorities in one or more of the neighbouring countries. However, there is no evidence to suggest

that the project reached out to and supported minority groups within any of the participating countries. Apart from obvious cases of disadvantage, such as the Roma, it remains the case that ethnic minorities in all Western Balkans countries continue to face institutional and cultural discrimination.

The project recognised the specificity of the Bosnian context, in which so-called constituent nationalities (Bošnjak, Bosnian Croat, and Bosnian Serb) have differential access to education and jobs depending on where they live, by recognising the need to include students from both entities.

The cross-cutting objective of combating HIV/AIDS as a health problem is not considered relevant to FOPER.

2.1.7 Risk assessment

No risk assessment and management plan appears to have been carried out. FOPER II's project document contains a brief narrative outlining key risks to implementation and also important assumptions (also contained in the logframe) upon which the achievement of results will depend. Comparison of FOPER II's project document with FOPER I's project document shows that all of the above risks and assumptions are inherited directly from FOPER I.

FOPER II makes the following two assumptions:

- In order to reach increased capacities, state budgets are expected to allow the faculties and research institutes to recruit more personnel to the field of forest policy and economics.
- It is assumed that university funding in the region will be developed and will not decline.

Both these assumptions, given the overall weakness of state revenues and inadequate funding of education in all the region's countries, are highly questionable. More importantly, they actually ignore the main risk to the project's longer-term sustainability posed by the global economic crisis which had begun to impact heavily on all the region's economies in the final quarter of 2008 (World Bank 2013). In this light, one might have identified the possibility of *reduced* support from FOPER's partner organisations as a risk to sustainability.

FOPER correctly identifies the possible risk of "brain drain", that is, the loss of FOPER-educated teachers and students to other countries, but does not specify any mitigating measures.

A further risk, not identified by the project but perhaps indicated by the earlier dropping out from the project of the Faculty of Forestry in Zagreb, was disruption to implementation and regional coordination owing to local institutional instability and politics. In the event, a reorganisation of the forestry sector in Albania led to partner organisation the Agency for Environment and Forestry in Tirana losing responsibility for forests, which in turn led to the cancellation of the research project under its leadership and coordination (EFI 2013b; interview 11 February 2014). It is not clear, however, if FOPER would have been able to mitigate this outcome if it had identified the risk at time of project design.

2.1.8 Exit strategy for FOPER II

The project does not have a clearly articulated exit strategy. FOPER II project documents contain scattered references as to how project activities will be continued without EFI coordination and Finland's financial support, which do not amount to a coherent plan of action.

Regarding the continuation of MDP, it is envisaged that this will be achieved through the signing of a formal agreement for further cooperation between the participating universities, the increased teaching capacities expected to be achieved during FOPER II, and the further employment by faculties of teaching staff (EFI 2009c). This will involve recurrent costs which, it is assumed (as noted in the above section), will be provided by expanding state budgets.

Continuation of research, including graduate theses, is to be assured by increasing the capacities of researchers in faculties and research institutes to develop successfully funded research projects (EFI 2009c). In order to establish support to PhD students in FOPER II's graduate college, the intention is to complement FOP-

ER II assistance with externally sought funds. This activity is expected to affect project exit by “establishing the linkages to external funding that will enable “developing ongoing funding for new students in the future” (EFI 2009c, 7).

The absence of a clear, practicable exit strategy, however, is apparent from the minutes of the Supervisory Committee (SC)⁵ meeting in November 2011 at which project management established a case for further funding for scholarships, professional training, and PhD students’ support under a projected FOPER III project.

Currently, a few months after project end, continuation of FOPER activities independently of external funding is clearly not assured. While there is consensus among project participants of the desirability of this outcome, initiatives to access the required funding seem to depend upon the individual efforts and motivation of the project coordinator alone, while one gets the sense that there is little compulsion (or perhaps capacity) among partner organisations either individually or collectively to work towards this end.

2.2 Efficiency

Efficiency relates to the linkage from the project inputs in terms of any financial, material and human resources expended to the delivery of activities and the subsequent results outputs. In other words, efficiency examines what was done and whether it was carried out in a rational way with sufficient resources.

2.2.1 Delivery of project results/outputs

The logframe is not particularly helpful for identifying the project’s outputs and the indicators by which outputs may be assessed. In addition, progress reports have not made use of the logframe when reporting on results. We have made a selective interpretation of the logframe to identify the following four result areas: increased capacities of teachers of FPE; supply of MSc graduates and trained forestry professionals; increased capacities of researchers of FPE and; establishment in the region of a high-quality graduate college for doctoral students.

Arriving at quantifiable information for stakeholder participation, events and activities organised and other outputs is extremely difficult, as this kind of information has not been reported on consistently or in any discernible format. Despite this, by gleaning relevant quantifiable information scattered with the project documents and combining this with more freely available qualitative monitoring information and testimony from interviews conducted in the field, it can be concluded that the project has delivered its projected results to a high degree of success.

Increased capacities of teachers of FPE

The MDP has been delivered by a total of 15 regional teachers, 40 teacher-trainees drawn from FOPER PhD and MSc students, with the inclusion of 60 other regional professionals for the delivery of specific specialist subjects, all of whom have benefited from the mentoring and coaching of a total of 40 international experts (interview 11 February 2014). This represents a considerable broadening of the regional pool of expertise in teaching FPE.

The interviews indicated that the faculties of forestry in Zagreb and Sarajevo had increased the number of employed staff qualified to teach FPE. In Zagreb there is now one professor and one teaching assistant, while in Sarajevo the project focal point has now been joined by three former MSc students (interviews 31 January 2014, 10 February 2014).

In 2011, the MDP received European Accreditation Agency for Life Sciences (EAALS) accreditation, the first such international recognition for a master’s course in the Western Balkans. Although the MDP has clearly depended on the considerable input from international experts, the accreditation should be taken as an indicator of the capacity of the whole MDP teaching staff, including the regional teachers.

⁵ These minutes are labelled Steering Committee Minutes. In the project documentation both “supervisory committee” and “steering committee” are used to describe the same body.

FOPER's internal end-of-project evaluation indicated that teachers (with researchers) assigned high values to the extent of the contribution of the project to their personal knowledge of a range of subjects, including theory, methodology, English language, soft skills and project management (EFI 2013a, 17).

There was agreement among MSc students interviewed that while the success of the MDP had been built upon the input of international experts, any future continuation of the MDP would now require significantly reduced external assistance, possibly restricted to non-technical subjects, such as communication, governance or public relations. This is a clear indication of increased teaching capacity in the region. Students also noted how teachers from the region had mastered participatory teaching methodologies, as well as content, which they compared favourably with the *ex-cathedra*, learning-by-rote methods they had experienced in their undergraduate studies. The project coordinator, while acknowledging that some continued input from international teachers would be preferable (perhaps four in total), expressed her confidence that teaching capacity in FPE was of sufficient capacity for the MDP to be run using only regional resources.

Supply of MSc graduates and trained forestry professionals

At project start in 2004 there was negligible academic expertise in FPE in the region and no higher-level education available to forestry students in FPE. There was also no in-service training available to forestry professionals in the practical application of FPE content in forest and environmental resource management.

FOPER I enrolled 24 MSc students, of which 19 graduated. This represents a highly respectable pass rate of 79% that is comparable to similar MSc courses elsewhere outside the region.

FOPER II originally enrolled 24 MSc students (EFI 2010), but it appears that the group consolidated early on in the course to a total of 21 (interview 14 February 2014). Of these it was reported 18 had graduated with the remaining three expected to defend their theses in the very near future (email communication, 10 March 2014). In sum, it can be concluded that FOPER has made a significant contribution to increasing the supply of young experts in the region qualified in FPE. There are concerns, however, over the uneven distribution of graduates around the region and the apparent low level of enrolment for the MDP from Croatia and Albania. Over the whole project, only three students have graduated from Croatia, with only one in FOPER II. In FOPER II only two students from Albania were enrolled. This is in stark contrast to the 10 FOPER II students reported to have come from B&H and the more even participation from Serbia and FYROM (email communication 10 March 2014). The differences are of potential importance as ultimately it is expected that most MDP graduates will work in their own countries. It is logical to conclude, therefore, that Croatia and Albania are at a disadvantage with regard to the pool of FPE experts available to influence national policy and professional practice. Interviews in Croatia confirmed the relevance of the MDP and FPE in general to forestry in the country, but also suggested that low MSc enrolment had been influenced by the lack of formal support and participation in the MDP by the Faculty of Forestry in Zagreb, and by the attitude prevalent among Croatian institutions that Croatia is more a part of Western Europe than the Western Balkans, both politically and geographically. There is no comparable information regarding Albania, but a reasonable assumption might be that differences of language and culture, as well as political history outside of the former Yugoslavia, might deter greater Albanian participation.

FOPER I expended considerable effort in establishing a pool of coordinators and trainers of forestry professionals. By the end of the project 215 forestry professionals, mainly those working for public forestry companies, had received short-course training in up-to-date methods of sustainable forest management and the application of FPE. The project had also developed a pool of over 90 expert coordinators and trainers, evenly distributed within the five project countries. While FOPER I, therefore, established a pool of trained professionals, this result should be placed in the context of the size of the forestry sector in the region, which covers many thousands of professionals who would benefit from the professional training.⁶ Unfortunately, it appears that demand from the sector for professional training remains very low and that without the continuation of financial support in FOPER II, the trainers that were trained in FOPER I have not been in a position to carry out further trainings to any meaningful extent (interview 3 February 2014).

⁶ In 2011 there were 3 858 people employed in the state forestry sector in the Federation of B&H (interview, University of Sarajevo, 7 February 2014).

Increased capacities of researchers of FPE

There are no clear figures available for the numbers of researchers who have benefited from training and other capacity building inputs from FOPER. However, research outputs suggest that research capacities, both in terms of individual capabilities and numbers of researchers available have been enhanced considerably.

FOPER I resulted in five small research projects being carried out on forestry conflicts in the region, led by international researchers. Not only did the research lead to several MSc theses and the publication by FOPER researchers of articles in peer-reviewed journals, it also established FPE as a basis for forest research in the region. An indication of FOPER I's contribution to research capacities is the commissioning of FOPER I regional experts and MSc students, under the auspices of EFI, by the Austrian Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to carry out a study of private forest ownership in the Western Balkans, over the period 2007–09 (EFI 2011).

In FOPER I, while regional experts implemented the research, all projects were designed and led by international researchers. Gains in regional research capacity, therefore, remained somewhat limited. FOPER II instigated a process of training-by-doing within self-organised Collaborative Regional Research Teams with limited direct input from international experts. Each team was tasked with responsibility for the whole research process from identification and research design, through implementation, to analysis and presentation of results. The approach emphasised self-reliance, the sharing of information and skills by peers across the region in large regionally representative teams, and the vertical integration of senior researchers, doctoral students and MSc students in the learning and research process.

While the results of the six completed research projects have not yet been published the key indicator of success is that the projects have been carried out with a very high degree of independence from FOPER and its international experts. This was made possible by passing full responsibility for research to project participants. FOPER sought to enhance research capacity by applying international standards for quality control, such as making funding of each project conditional on each team fulfilling internationally accepted standards for research funding, or subjecting all research products to rigorous peer review.

Senior researchers and MSc students interviewed all perceived that they had attained higher research capabilities and they all expressed confidence in their ability to undertake FPE research. In addition, many interviewed drew attention to the fact that FOPER had established a regional network or community of researchers which in itself represents a resource and strengthened capacity. Some more concrete indicators of increased research capacity include the following:

- Three MSc students have been employed as researchers at the Faculty of Forestry in Sarajevo. They are actively involved in applying for IPA research grants and also working on a research project concerning the EU acquis, funded by the faculty (interviews 7 & 10 February 2014).
- At least one MSc student working outside academia is working on FPE research in her new employment (interview 10 February 2014).
- EFI sub-contracted FOPER MSc students to carry out data collection for a report to the European Environment Agency on biodiversity in the Western Balkans.
- FOPER researchers at the Croatian Forest Institute, Faculty of Forestry in Sarajevo and Faculty of Forest Science in Tirana are involved in the EU-funded Adriatic Model Forest project, involving ten partners from seven neighbouring countries.
- The FOPER network was invited in 2012 to apply for a European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) targeted network grant, indicating international recognition for FOPER's research and network capacities (EFI 2013b).
- FOPER has submitted an abstract for the international conference of the International Symposium on Society and Resource Management to be held in June this year (interview 11 February 2014).

Establishment in the region of a high-quality graduate college for doctoral students

During the project a system of providing PhD students in FPE with the necessary knowledge related to research design, theory and methodology, as well as external support and opportunities for study abroad, was established as a graduate college. From the project documentation it appears that the main components of this graduate college were (a) four- to five-day workshops on specific topics in the above areas, attendance at which merited European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits from the European institutions

running the courses; (b) seminars, run jointly with the MDP, on topics taught within the MSc in FPE, which also qualified the student for ECTS credits; and (c) biannual doctoral colloquia where students presented their research proposals and progress to one another for the purposes of exchange and mutual learning. Regional supervisors also attended these colloquia to provide detailed guidance. In addition, students were linked directly with a European university at which they could study with a resident mentor for up to six months. To facilitate this, students were able to apply for mobility grants of up to €3 000. Nine PhD students studied abroad and took up mobility grants. Students enrolled at European universities and who had no means of earning through employment were eligible to apply for scholarships. Two students fulfilled the criteria for these scholarships. In addition, 13 PhD students were provided opportunities to participate in international summer schools, while 14 were supported to present papers at international conferences (EFI 2013b).

As a conceptual “wrapper” for support to FOPER PhD students and as a means of delivering outputs, the graduate college was achieved as projected. However, the project proposal appears to suggest that the graduate college should have some kind of organisational reality, with “an institutional home, governance structure, and operational modalities” (EFI 2009b, 14). This has clearly not been achieved. The project documents indicate that the connections upon which the college depended were mediated almost entirely by the project coordinator, and there is no evidence that the project took any steps to establish a more permanent, regionally owned structure of human and material resources through which to continue delivery of the college’s benefits in the future.

2.2.2 Use of financial resources

According to the latest available financial report, dated 13 November 2013, FOPER II has been delivered almost exactly to budget. The budget for the project as originally conceived was €2 888 000, plus €102 000 carried over from FOPER I. By October 2013, FOPER II had used €2 854 839 of the MFA grant, with something over €105 000 remaining. The remainder has been set aside for publishing all MSc and PhD theses, as well as the results of all the research carried out (interview 11 February 2014).

While it appears that all planned activities and outputs have been delivered within the overall budget, the project has been delivered over four-and-a-half years, rather than the originally conceived two-and-a-half years. It is not clear from the financial reports and the minutes of the steering committee meetings whether the two no-cost extensions were approved⁷ because the project management made an early decision to adjust the timescale for project delivery to increase project effectiveness, or because of over optimistic and/or poor budgeting at the design state, or even because of inefficiencies in budget execution and project delivery.

Understanding how money has been spent during the project is extremely difficult, as financial reporting has not been carried out on the same basis as the project and annual budgeting. Thus, to give one example, the project budget gives a projected figure for sub-contracting MSc services to the faculties of forestry in Sarajevo and Belgrade of €496 972 for the original project period. The financial report dated 13 November 2013 indicates total expenditure on sub-contracting over the project period of €1 112 009. Similar confusions for other budget lines make it too difficult to assess whether the project activities have been delivered efficiently.

In light of the considerable costs attached to coordinating project activities across the region, to facilitating the travel and subsistence of students when attending training workshops, conferences and education outside the region, and to mobilising the input of 40 international experts in the MDP course, the overall cost of FOPER II over its eventual 4,5 years’ duration is reasonable. On the other hand, the cost per direct beneficiary of approximately €58 000 (worked out on the basis of a total of 50 senior researchers, MSc and PhD students – with the addition of 60 forestry professional included in the MDP teaching) is high. This is particularly so when there is no evidence so far of wider impact on the region’s forestry sectors.

Administration costs of 14% charged by EFI in FOPER II are high, and in excess of the amount normally charged by implementing partners. Interim financial reports indicate underspending on administration against budgeted costs, year on year, but this has presumably been worked out as a percentage of ongoing executed budget, so that the total at project end will still amount to 14%.

⁷ There is no record of the approval to extend the project duration from the end of 2011 to 2012. Minutes of the 3rd supervisory/steering committee, November 2011, approved extension of project management and focal points’ contracts on reduced hours, as well as a formal request for a no-cost extension from end of 2012 to end of 2013.

2.2.3 Decision making, governance and project management

The project management team in FOPER II, however, has been surprisingly small for such a large and complex project, comprised essentially of the project coordinator and the project officer. It is assumed that this has had the advantage of more modest operational costs than would normally be expected, and more direct communication with partner organisations. However, such a lean structure comes with the risk of overburdening the management team, with consequent lowering of efficiency. This is particularly so with FOPER II as the project management members, particularly the project coordinator, both had teaching responsibilities, and the centralisation of bookkeeping and financial management in the FOPER Office (see below regarding ownership) created very high demands on the project officer's time.

There was a very high level of satisfaction with project management among stakeholders in terms of facilitating planned activities and delivering results. The evaluators gained the impression though that the implementation period had been stressful and exhausting for the management team, and that they have succeeded largely because of their unwavering commitment to the project and in spite of the constraints they have worked under. A recommendation would be that future projects provide greater human resources for project management, making allowance in particular for accounting and financial management.

It was noted that in FOPER I project management was headed by an experienced project manager, while in FOPER II it was headed by a renowned academic and researcher. Despite the very high regard for the project management team in FOPER II, it was also suggested in some interviews that the inclusion of a professional manager in the management team might have enabled greater overall internal integration of partner organisations and participants, as well as having maximised the potential linkages between the project's research and academic expertise with policymaking bodies and forestry professionals (interviews 10 & 15 February 2014). The evaluators inferred, rather than had direct evidence, that Albanian and Macedonian partner organisations were significantly less involved in the project, while there was an absence of proactive networking and advocacy with policymaking bodies in the region, by which project effect and impact could be extended beyond the project's academic focus.

Only one set of FOPER II minutes of the four SC meetings held were available to this evaluation. On this rather thin evidence, it appears that the SC undertook its formal duties of providing overall oversight of project management and accountability to the donor adequately. The SC was clearly the correct forum for project management to gain approval for alterations to planned implementation as well to raise questions with Finland's MFA regarding any proposed alterations to the funding agreement (such as no-cost extension).

Interviews with SC members suggested general satisfaction with both the functioning of the SC and also the oversight over project management it allowed representatives of partner organisations, while also intimating that the most important decisions concerning the cooperation between partners were made outside the SC in a more informal way through the facilitation of the project management.

2.2.4 Local ownership of project results

In a formal sense ownership of project processes and results has possibly decreased over time. This is because in FOPER I the project was established on the basis of the sub-contracting of services to the partner organisations. In FOPER II, the decision was made early on to sub-contract only the management and administration of the MDP (to the forestry faculties at Sarajevo and Belgrade). This decision was taken to avoid partner organisations having to pay between 20 and 30% tax on costs incurred for support of travel and study of students and researchers from outside their own countries. In this way, an estimated total loss to the project of over €100 000 was avoided (EFI 2009b, 24). Thus, of a total budget of €2,9 million for FOPER II, project management directly processed €2,4 million of payments.

However, in practice, FOPER II's participatory approach, centred on passing on responsibility for the administration of the MDP to the forestry faculties in Sarajevo and Belgrade, and all stages of FOPER II's research projects to all partner organisations, has ensured a very high degree of ownership of both the project processes and the results. Interviews with the senior researchers and former students all indicated that project participants and partner organisations felt responsibility for and ownership of results. It was pointed out in Sarajevo

how the MSc course has been included in the University of Sarajevo's prospectus as a "constituent element of the university", even if the university does not (yet) have the financial resources to ensure the MDP's immediate continuation (interview 7 February 2014). While none of the partner faculties have translated their sense of ownership for the academic courses into a clear responsibility to take meaningful steps to contribute to, or to access financial support for, the MDP's continuation, they have all signed an agreement to contribute teaching resources to this end.

It was additionally noted that participation and ownership in the project had been encouraged by the use of focal points within each partner organisation to coordinate activities, dedication to good communications with and between partner organisations and project participants (interviews 7 & 11 February 2014), as well as flexibility towards meeting the different needs and working practices of partner organisations, particularly with regard to the implementation of research (interview 2 February 2014).

2.2.5 Project monitoring

The project did not establish a coherent, institutionalised monitoring system, which gives evidence that the project has reached its beneficiaries and whose results were used to make routine operational decisions to amend or update the project design. The logframe and its indicators, regardless of their observed shortfalls, have not been used as a means of monitoring and reporting. Project reporting, by means of progress reports, has not tracked project progress and the delivery of results clearly in a consistent manner. The difficulties the evaluation team has experienced in accessing and collating relevant data suggests that project management and the project organisations themselves have probably not "captured" the totality of project results and the lessons to be learnt from project implementation.

2.3 Effectiveness

Effectiveness is a measure of the progress towards the achievement of project purpose or objectives. This is essentially a qualitative measure of immediate and observable change in the target groups as a direct result of project activities and the delivery of outputs.

There is considerable overlap between the project's stated purpose of "increased capacities of FPE experts in the SEE [South-East Europe] region", and its expected results or outputs, the delivery of which is assessed above under efficiency. Based upon a logical reading of the indicators of the project purpose and the approach to capacity building that focuses on building cooperation and coordination between individuals, faculties and research institutes, as a means to raising research and teaching capabilities, we interpret the project purpose to refer to increased *institutional* capacity in FPE (as outlined above under Relevance: Coherence of project design), rather than individual human capacities. In this light, indicators of success might be expected to include the employment of newly-qualified MSc students in the forest sector or academic institutions, an increase in the quantity and quality of research in FPE being carried out in the region, the establishment of networks of regional and international FPE experts contributing to research in FPE, the institutionalisation of the MDP through formal agreements for cooperation of the region's faculties and integration of the course in the host universities. According to these criteria, the effectiveness of the project is assessed to be highly satisfactory.

2.3.1 Employment of students

FOPER has been highly effective in equipping FOPER graduates to find employment or to further their careers by means of more advanced study. From FOPER I, 85% of MSc students are reported to have either found employment or are continuing their studies as PhD students (EFI undated b). The evaluation consulted with a total of nine former MSc students (eight from FOPER II, and one from FOPER I), all of whom have found employment in the forestry or environment sectors upon graduating. Places of employment range from the region's forestry faculties, to independent or private research and policy organisations, to state institutions such as ministries of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, or public bodies for environmental protection. For a majority, their employment is short term, attached to research or project funding, or conditional on annual budget reviews. All but one student expressed confidence that their MSc studies had been instrumental in their securing employment, but a number of them, principally those working for state institutions, noted they had been placed in positions where there were few opportunities to put their knowledge of FPE

into practice. Most of them, regardless of where they have found employment, have enrolled or are intending to enrol in PhD study.

This outcome should be placed in the overall context of continuing limited job opportunities in the region for graduates not only of FPE, but also of more traditional forestry disciplines. FOPER has clearly increased demand for both teachers and researchers of FPE within research institutes and faculties of forestry, but this demand is a function of the ability of the region to access external (international) finance for new research projects. On the other hand, within the region's ministries and state forest companies, pressures to rationalise budgets and staff structures as countries struggle with weak government finances, combined with continuing very low recognition and understanding of FPE, mean that employment opportunities for FPE graduates are likely to remain highly limited for the foreseeable future.

2.3.2 Increase in the quantity and quality of research in FPE being carried out in the region

The delivery of FOPER's planned research outputs over both its phases, as detailed above under efficiency, indicates the project's effectiveness in raising both the quantity and quality of FPE being carried out in the region. The five small research projects on forest conflicts carried out by FOPER I, including their publication internationally, introduced FPE as a research discipline in the region. Although the published results of FOPER II's six research projects in various aspects of forest governance and sustainable economic exploitation of forests are not yet available, these activities represent both an increase in the volume of research being undertaken and a strengthening of its quality. FOPER II research teams were broadened to include MSc and PhD students, so that each research study succeeded in not only producing regional- and country-specific professional research findings, but also original masters and doctoral research papers. By passing over full responsibility to FOPER's participants for all stages of the research, from design to publication, and by applying international standards and procedures of quality control to each stage of the research process, the project will have raised the quality of FPE research in the region. It is reported that all published papers to be delivered by FOPER II's research projects will have been subjected to peer reviews according to accepted international standards.

Project effectiveness is further indicated by increasing levels of involvement of FOPER researchers and research institutes in international research, as well as the initiation of further FPE research from within the region. An important outcome of FOPER I was the Austrian-led and funded study of private forest ownership in the Western Balkans (EFI 2011) for which FOPER researchers and MSc and PhD students contributed the individual papers. Notable outcomes of FOPER II include the participation of FOPER partner organisations and researchers in:

- the ongoing seven-country Adriatic Model Forest project in applied research;
- the report to the European Environment Agency of biodiversity in the Western Balkans under the management of EFI;
- the inclusion of 10 FOPER participants in the largest COST action in the region. Increasing participation by other regional forestry experts, as well as FOPER participants in other COST actions is assessed to have been influenced by the wider influence of FOPER activities (interview 15 February 2014).

In addition, in 2010, FOPER partner organisations from former Yugoslavia, in cooperation with the Hungarian Forest Research Institute, founded *South-East European Forestry*, a biannual, professional, peer-reviewed journal of international forestry, which continues to offer a space for the publication of research papers from the region.

Those interviewed also drew attention to the way that FOPER has established the institutional basis, confidence and skills sets, to enable partner organisations to continue to cooperate in developing new research proposals in FPE, as well as to carry out smaller-scale, more country-specific research, such as the current research at the Forestry Faculty of Sarajevo on the EU acquis in relation to legislation regarding forestry in B&H.

2.3.3 The establishment of networks of regional and international forest policy and economics experts contributing to research

The FOPER project and its approach have centred on the exchange of information, expertise and practical cooperation through a range of networks, formal and informal, regionally and internationally. In a sense, the project itself has been one large international network, coordinated by the project management, within which the MDP, the graduate college, and the individual FOPER II research teams have operated as more-or-less self-organising sub-networks.

During the field work, FOPER participants, including senior researchers, teachers and former students, identified the establishment of a regional-wide network of FPE experts as the most significant project outcome. As described, this network embraces all project participants, including international experts who have contributed to the MDP and to research activities, in particular. The network is highly informal; its purpose is undefined, it is not coordinated, it is not mediated through any single means of communication, and FOPER members communicate with one another selectively, bilaterally or in smaller groups, on the basis of the need to exchange information of relevance to their employment, or to simply maintain contact with one another. Only one interviewee, an ex-student, considered herself excluded from the network, on the basis that there was no reason for her in her current employment to exchange information.

One senior researcher described the network as representing an ongoing “discourse on FPE”, but most others appeared to suggest that communication within the network usually arose from some more specific and instrumental interest, such as receiving practical advice on a point of methodology, informing one another of funding opportunities, or for establishing active cooperation in developing and implementing research proposals.

A number of participants remarked how the project had enabled FOPER participants to come together within larger international research projects, such as the Adriatic Model Forest, or COST actions. In this light, the evaluators got the sense that participation in the network remained highly relevant for its members, as it maintains the potential to bring FOPER participants and partner organisations together again in more formal ways to undertake further collaborative and coordinated actions, especially with regard to regional and international FPE research. All those interviewed expressed their conviction that the network, however informal, would prove sustainable.

2.3.4 Institutionalisation of the master's degree programme

This projected outcome is also a function of project sustainability, entailing four factors: the establishment of teaching capacity in the region to run an MSc course, the formal agreement of cooperation between the region's forestry faculties to continue to teach the course, the integration of the course into the administrative structures of the host faculties in Sarajevo and Belgrade, and the securing of finance to run the course in the future.

FOPER II has made considerable progress towards achieving this outcome. EAALS accreditation of the MSc indicates the quality of the course overall. Most important, though, is the agreement among teaching staff and ex-students, expressed during field work and indicated also in the FOPER Internal Evaluation, that collectively the regional teachers now possess the methodological skills and understanding of FPE content to deliver the MSc course with only modest direct support from international experts. In addition, the integration into the on-the-job process of teacher training of teaching assistants taken from both MSc and PhD students, working under the mentorship of senior teachers from the region, has established a pathway for a strengthening of MSc teaching resources in the future.

At the project end, all partner organisations signed an agreement to continue cooperation on both research and teaching. Most importantly this includes the agreement of the five participating faculties to continue to provide teachers for any continuation of the MSc. The teachers would contribute to the MSc under the terms of their employment in their own faculty and without supplementary remuneration from the MSc course itself.

During FOPER, Belgrade and Sarajevo faculties were sub-contracted by the project to administer the MSc. The successful completion of cycles of the MDP suggests that not only do the faculties possess the capacities

to continue the course in full independence of an externally-managed project, but also that the course is fully integrated into the faculties' administrative and management structures. In the case of Sarajevo this was emphasised by the vice-rector of Sarajevo University and former dean of the forestry faculty by drawing attention to the fact that the MSc in FPE has been fully recognised by the university as a core course in its teaching prospectus.

Securing the finance necessary to run the MSc course in the future has not been achieved. The progress made in institutionalising the MDP as described above means that the majority of costs of running the programme have been internalised within the participating faculties. However, significant finance will have to be secured in the shorter term for continued international support to the regional teachers, and there will be a longer-term need for the funding of study visits to and cooperation with universities outside the region, if the MDP is to continue beyond a third generation.

Interviews suggested that the partner organisations are making little concerted effort to secure the required funding from their respective universities and line ministries. The project coordinator has taken it upon herself to seek funding opportunities elsewhere from bilateral donors and multi-donor education and development funds. It is difficult to assess the prospects of these efforts, but prevailing opinion among project participants regarding a third MDP is that there is perhaps no more than a 50% chance that it will be continued in the next two years.

2.4 Impact

Impact measures the success of the project in realising the overall objective of the project: that is, the overall long-term and sustainable changes brought about by the project, in short, the lasting difference to the original situation. Although it is increasingly common to ask for assessments of impact in final evaluations, logically one would not expect impact to become apparent until considerably later, at which time it might be measured with an ex-post evaluation.

2.4.1 Progress towards the overall objective

The project's overall objective is that the "forest sector in the SEE region is able to better contribute to the sustainable development in all its different aspects (economic, environmental, social)". Indicators of impact specified in the logframe are essentially measurements of macroeconomic change, which FOPER's results can be expected to influence only indirectly over a very long time scale. Formally, therefore, FOPER has had no impact.

The situation analysis and justification for the project of both FOPER I and II project documents suggest that project results are actually expected to contribute to sustainable development by creating demand for FPE expertise and research in the forest sector impacting on forest policymaking and the practice of forest management. In this light, impact to date is assessed to be very limited, but there are some encouraging indications that any continuation of FPE education and research is likely to lead to impact, particularly on forest policy.

Knowledge of FPE in the region remains very low, and its value for informing policymaking remains largely unrecognised. There is no evidence of forest or environmental policy in the region being influenced by FPE, or FOPER's research outputs. A serious obstacle to influencing forest policy in the region, identified in the project document and also during the evaluation field trip, is the continued domination of decision making in ministries and state institutions by senior civil servants educated in previous times who are particularly resistant to change, even under the pressure created by the region's increasing momentum towards aligning itself with EU policy and regulations.

Regardless of this, a criticism expressed on a number of occasions during the field trip was that, while the project talked about strengthening the interface between research and policy, very little was done in terms of contact, dialogue, awareness raising, advocacy, or lobbying with key decision makers within ministries and state forest companies. One senior researcher, expressing his doubts as to how FOPER's research results would be used, described the project as a "closed circle", implying that, as it was currently conceived, FOPER would struggle to achieve impact.

However, the success of the project in promoting FPE and its *potential* to influence policy circles appear to be contingent on the national institutional environment. In Croatia, policymakers appear to have been particularly impervious to FOPER and its results and there remain very few points of contact between research and policymakers.

In Serbia, the project has benefited from having a focal point situated in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, as the head of the Department for Forests and Wildlife. The ministry has also benefited from its involvement in previous forest policy projects, funded by Finland and Norway. The result is that while there continues to be no demand for FPE expertise from decision makers, the majority of the Department of Forests and Wildlife's small staff are conversant with FPE, speak English, and have policymaking skills. The assessment here was that it would be many years yet before FPE would become an important influence on forest policy.

In B&H, while the project is reported to have had no impact on policy, those interviewed asserted that a certain interest in FOPER's expertise from both the Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry and the cantonal public forest companies had been generated, with both institutions having submitted requests to FOPER experts for technical expertise and advice.

Insufficient engagement by the project of state forest companies was also cited by some as a contributory factor to the lack of perceived impact in changing forestry practice. Since the professional training was discontinued at the end of FOPER I in 2009, the project has had no structured contact with the forest companies and no effective means of influencing professional forestry practice. It was noted in the field work that the pool of professional trainers established in FOPER I had since become effectively redundant for lack of demand for their services from within the sector.

2.4.2 Other impacts the project has contributed to

Many of those interviewed highlighted the project's success in bringing FOPER participants together across geopolitical and cultural boundaries and establishing real understanding and cooperation within what was labelled "the FOPER team". For many this has had a wider impact among colleagues, friends and the organisations with which FOPER participants have worked, in breaking down barriers between previously mistrusting peoples, promoting greater cultural tolerance and understanding, and showing the way towards the re-establishment of dialogue and cooperation within and across the region.

The project has also created direct impact in more specific and delimited areas, which are nonetheless noteworthy.

- In Serbia, FOPER MSc students have been involved in founding two independent non-governmental organisations (NGOs) related to forestry and sustainable development: *For Tri* is an advocacy NGO with a community orientation, dedicated to influencing policy for forestry and rural development, while *Serbo*, the National Association for Biomass, is an association of professionals dedicated to promoting renewable energy solutions.
- On the basis of its successful trialling in this project, EFI is now seeking to apply the FOPER methodology to FPE in Russia.

2.5 Sustainability

Sustainability relates to whether and how the outcomes at the project objective level will continue over time after the end-of-project support. It also refers to whether project's longer-term impact on the situation will be maintained in the wider community.

2.5.1 Sustainability of human capacities

The pool of expertise in FPE developed by the project is likely to prove a sustainable resource. Although there are some concerns about the short-term contracts being offered to ex-FOPER students, it is likely that the majority of MSc and PhD students will continue to find opportunities to put their knowledge into practice and further advance their learning, whether through employment or further academic study. The ability of FOP-

ER researchers to write quality research proposals, their ability and disposition towards collaboration, and their growing contacts with and integration into international research networks, all suggest that research capacities will prove sustainable; these abilities will provide opportunities for researchers to continue working and to further develop their research expertise. There remains some doubt regarding the sustainability of the project's pool of FPE teachers; teaching capacity will decline if the MDP is not renewed in the short to medium term.

2.5.2 Institutional sustainability

As outlined above under effectiveness, the evaluation's view is that partner organisations have developed sufficient institutional capacity to continue to deliver both the MDP and policy research. The integration of MSc and PhD students in both the MDP, as teaching assistants, and research projects, as research assistants, has also provided a mechanism for the sustainable reproduction over time of teaching and research capability in the region.

The FOPER team has demonstrated that in all areas of planning and implementing the MDP and policy research it can act independently from FOPER management, with the exception of the highly important question of developing a funding strategy, especially for the MDP, and identifying sources of financial support within the region.

2.5.3 Financial sustainability

The financial sustainability of the MDP is low, owing to the failure of the project so far to secure the immediate finance necessary to cover immediate costs of international support. The partner organisations have identified possible ways to access support for students with insufficient resources to pay their living expenses, such as sponsorships from public forest companies, or service learning, by which students might be placed within a company or organisation for a period of time as an employee or paid intern, in return for which they would provide a professional service of value to the organisation. These ideas, however, do not address the expenses attached to international expertise.

In the longer term, financial sustainability of the MDP is more likely, as it is expected that, in the course of a third MDP course, regional teaching capacity will be strengthened to a point at which external assistance will no longer be necessary. However, there is a serious risk if a third MDP does not take place that the institutional relations upon which the course is founded will atrophy and it will effectively die.

There is currently no prospect of FPE research receiving the required finance from either government or private sector sources in the region. Government finances across the region are weak. Forestry and the environment are low down on the list of government spending priorities in comparison to education, health, welfare and, to some extent, agriculture. The potential importance of FPE to forest economics remains unrecognised throughout the region's public and private sectors, and the demand for FPE research within the region continues to be very weak.

However, FOPER's research activities appear likely to prove sustainable, at least in the short to medium term, owing to the availability of research funding from various multi-lateral sources outside the region, to which FOPER researchers are equipped to apply, and because of the continuing opportunities for cooperation in larger regional and broader international research projects being initiated elsewhere.

3 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Conclusions

3.1.1 Relevance

Inconsistencies in the specification of results and the linkages between them in the project documents, as well as the accompanying indicators, render effective monitoring and evaluation of the project very difficult. If the logframe were to be used as the basis of an assessment of the project's achievements, a large number of the project outcomes would be missed.

The project has been highly relevant to the needs of the forestry sector in the region. In particular, it has addressed the almost complete lack of expert knowledge of economics and sustainable development required to support ongoing reform of the forest sector in each country, so that it would contribute to the effective implementation of national development strategies and the introduction of sustainable forest management.

Gender balance in the project in a traditionally male-dominated sector is a significant achievement. Otherwise, treatment of Finland's cross-cutting objectives in the project was inadequate owing to the lack of attention to include minority groups likely to be excluded.

If a risk assessment had been carried out and a practicable exit strategy agreed by the project partners, more attention might have been paid to building the financial sustainability of the MDP, or to the planning of a third project phase (FOPER III) of reduced scope and external support by which to address remaining capacity shortfalls.

3.1.2 Efficiency

As the project has delivered its expected outputs with a high degree of success, the project has been well coordinated and adequately financed overall.

The project's high administration costs and high estimated costs per beneficiary suggest that the project has not delivered value for money. Although the project has been delivered almost exactly to budget, the efficiency of the project cannot be confirmed as poor financial reporting and an incomplete record of SC decisions make it very difficult to understand how money has been spent during the project.

Project management, on the other hand, has been under-resourced and the team of two, responsible for both coordination and financial management and the major part of bookkeeping, has been overburdened. This, together with the employment of researchers rather than project managers, has probably contributed to a lower than optimal level of integration of all partner organisations and an absence of proactive networking and advocacy by the project with policymaking bodies in the region.

A high level of local ownership of project processes and results have been achieved by the project's integrated and participatory approach which conferred responsibility for implementation on partner organisations and focused on on-the-job training and learning by doing.

3.1.3 Effectiveness

Overall effectiveness of the project is highly satisfactory. FOPER has achieved the following outcomes:

- The greater majority of students from FOPER I and II have found employment relevant to their qualifications, or are continuing studies as PhD students.
- Over the time of FOPER I and II the quantity and quality of research in FPE in the region has increased. The project has produced a body of FPE research according to international standards, integrating the efforts of senior, post-doctoral researchers and PhD and MSc students.
- An informal network of FPE experts, including senior academic teachers and researchers, young professionals, PhD students and former MSc students has been established. This network functions as a col-

lective resource for the identification and cooperative planning of new research, and for exchanging information and providing mutual advice in conducting research.

- The MDP has been institutionalised in the region's forest faculties by means of the consolidation of teaching capacity, a formal agreement of further cooperation between the forest faculties, and the integration of the course into the administrative structures of the host faculties in Sarajevo and Belgrade.

The delivery of outcomes has been made possible by the project's participatory and action-oriented approach to training and capacity development, and the continuity of support over nine years to the project's partner organisations.

3.1.4 Impact

The project was overambitious in expecting its outputs and outcomes to have a visible, positive impact on the promotion of sustainable development in the region.

The lack of impact in the region so far on the wider understanding of FPE and demand for FPE expertise in policymaking is attributable to two factors: (a) resistance to change by decision makers and within the region's ministries and state institutions, and (b) the failure of FOPER II to actively promote FPE within ministries and state forest companies by means of dialogue, awareness raising, advocacy or lobbying.

The impact among and beyond the project participants of breaking down cultural barriers and mistrust has contributed to the recent trend of increased social and political stability in the region and across borders. Participatory cross-border projects that facilitate cooperation on the basis of mutual interest are an appropriate means of addressing regional instability and latent conflict between communities.

3.1.5 Sustainability

The FOPER team will continue to identify and carry out FPE research projects, mobilising expertise from both within and outside the region, just as long as there are funding opportunities with international organisations.

The MDP is unlikely to continue in the shorter term. With continuing weakness in government finances across the region and the low priority given to forestry and the environment within government spending plans, the MDP's future will only be secured with financial contributions from an external, probably international, donor.

3.2 Recommendations to the MFA

- Ensure that future projects are planned and implemented according to results-based management in order to establish an intervention logic and facilitate systematic monitoring and effective evaluation, the results of which are to be used to generate learning for further project identification and design.
- Continue to base project design in thorough context analysis and needs assessment.
- Insist that implementing partners address Finland's cross-cutting objectives in project proposals and implementation by establishing practicable means for raising the participation of socially excluded groups, and disaggregating monitoring data according to gender and indicators of social exclusion.
- Insist that implementing partners conduct a proper risk assessment at the planning stage and develop a risk management plan. Ensure also that the assumptions upon which projects are founded are tested in terms of risk at the planning stage and are also monitored during implementation.
- Ensure that implementing partners develop an exit strategy early on in the project that is oriented towards maximising sustainability of project results and confirming local ownership.
- Carry out a cost-benefit analysis at the time of project design to establish the most efficient way to deliver outputs.
- Strengthen financial management in future interventions by aligning bookkeeping and financial reporting with project budgets.
- Ensure that project management has sufficient human resources, making adequate allowance in particular for accounting and financial management.

- Develop future interventions around the fullest possible participation of local partners in design, implementation and monitoring, making full use of participatory methodologies for capacity development.
- When seeking to promote cross-border cooperation in unstable regions, or addressing intercommunity tensions in fragile states, develop cooperation around integrated participation within institutional frameworks that are based on mutual interests.
- Consider financing EFI to conduct a third and final FOPER project whose objective would be to provide the limited finance required for ensuring the continuation of the MDP in the short term with reduced international support and ensuring that faculty teaching staff are fully equipped to lead the MSc without further external support. If possible, FOPER III would also be oriented to developing relations with policymaking bodies and decision makers in order to raise understanding of and demand for FPE research and education.

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ANNEX 1 PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

Name	Current organisation	Role in FOPER
Croatia		
Stjepan Posavec	Faculty of Forestry, Zagreb	Focal Point (2004–06)
Konrad Kiš	Faculty of Forestry, Zagreb	MSc student FOPER I
Dijana Vuletić	Croatian Forest Research Institute, Director	FOPER II Supervisory Committee FOPER I project Focal Point
Sylvija Krajler Ostrić	Croatian Forest Research Institute, Assistant Researcher	FOPER II project Focal Point, PhD student FOPER I MSc student
Miroslav Benko	EFI South-East Europe	FOPER I Supervisory Committee
Marta Curman	Public Institute for the Management of Protected Areas in Krapina-zagorje county	FOPER II MSc student
Bosnia and Herzegovina		
Faruk Mekić	University of Sarajevo, Vice-Rector for Scientific/Artistic Research	FOPER I and II Supervisory Committee 2004–12
Senka Mutabdžija	Faculty of Forestry, Sarajevo, Researcher/lecturer	FOPER II MSc student
Džemal Bečirović	Faculty of Forestry, Sarajevo, Researcher	FOPER II MSc student
Bruno Marić	Faculty of Forestry, Sarajevo, Researcher/lecturer	FOPER II MSc student
Ajla Mehmedović	Private environmental consulting org, strategist	FOPER II MSc student
Mirza Dautbašić	Faculty of Forestry, Sarajevo, Dean	FOPER II Supervisory Committee
Mersudin Avdibegović	Faculty of Forestry, Sarajevo, Associate Professor	FOPER I and II Focal Point
Serbia		
Margaret Shannon	EFI	FOPER II Project Coordinator
Doni Blagojević	EFI	FOPER II Project Assistant
Alexandar Radosavljević	Directorate for Forests, Min. of Agric., Forestry and Water Management, Head of Dept for Protection and Promotion of Forestry and Hunting	FOPER I Supervisory Committee FOPER II PhD student
Maja Srndović	Directorate for Forests, Min. of Agric., Forestry and Water Management	FOPER II MSc student
Marija Vukotić	Directorate for Forests, Min. of Agric., Forestry and Water Management	FOPER II MSc student
Nenad Petrović	Faculty of Forestry, Belgrade, Docent	FOPER I and II Focal Point
Vladimir Nikolić	Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia	FOPER II MSc student
Radovan Nevenić	Institute of Forest Research, Belgrade, Researcher	FOPER I and II Focal Point

ANNEX 2 EVALUATION OF FOPER II PROJECT LOGFRAME

Overall objective	Indicators for overall objective	Sources of verification for indicators of overall objective	Assumptions for project purpose
Forest sector in the SEE region is able to better contribute to the sustainable development in all its different aspects (economic, environmental, social).	<p>- GDP share of forest sector: share of forest products in the exports of the region; decreasing rate of migration from the rural areas to cities.</p> <p>Indicators are not relevant. They relate to achieved sustainable (economic) development, not the overall objective directly. They indicate high order development impact which is unlikely to be achieved in the short to medium term after project end.</p>	Official of national statistics.	
The difference between purpose and overall objective is too large to establish a logical link of cause and effect by means of monitoring.			
Project purpose = objective	Indicators for project purpose	Sources of verification for indicators of project purpose	Assumptions for project purpose
Increased capacities of forest policy and economics experts in the SEE region:	<p>- Number of peer-reviewed scientific publications and quality articles at national and regional level by SEE researchers on relevant forest policy and economics topics.</p> <p>No targets set.</p>	Scientific journals	<p>- Regional political situation continues at its current, stable path.</p> <p>In terms of interstate relations, this is probably a reasonable assumption. Internal instability in some countries continued to present possible risks to the project.</p> <p>- State budgets allow the faculties and research institutes to recruit more personnel to the field of forest policy and economics.</p>
	- Share of regional personnel as lead teachers in the MDP in Forest Policy and Economics.	- Records of the MDP/coordination team	This assumption is probably unfounded. All countries in the region remain aid dependent. Institutional systems remain largely unreformed, so increased funding to a new

	<p>This does not correspond to any discernible project process by which regional personnel take on greater responsibility as they increase capacity.</p> <p>No targets set.</p>		<p>field of study is unlikely. In 2009, at project start, all countries were beginning to feel the effects of the global economic crisis, which has impacted on state budgets considerably.</p>
	<p>- Level of involvement of regional forest policy and economics experts in international research.</p> <p>This indicator is itself set at a higher level than measuring capacity. In effect it suggests impact.</p>	<p>- Staff and partner lists of European research projects in the field of forest policy and economics (e.g. COST actions).</p>	<p>- Students find interest in the “new” branch of forest science and the second generation of MSc students can be selected from among determined pupils.</p>
	<p>- Number of guest lecturer invitations from Western Europe to the SEE-forest policy and economics experts.</p> <p>Not really relevant. It will probably happen anyway considering the way the project has been established and it does not measure increased capacities. As a proxy indicator, it is very weak.</p>	<p>- Faculty records and interviews with key people at faculties.</p>	<p>- Leakage of personnel to more lucrative sectors or abroad remains low.</p>
	<p>- Number of the MDP graduates employed in the relevant beneficiaries and stakeholder institutions one year after the graduation.</p> <p>This is more an outcome in its own right, rather than an indicator of increased capacities.</p>	<p>- Survey among the alumni.</p>	
	<p>- Level of involvement of regional forest policy and economics experts in national, regional and international forest policy processes.</p> <p>Again this is effect or impact – i.e. what the project aims for.</p> <p>No target values set.</p>	<p>Survey among the staff in partner institutions.</p>	

Overall, indicators for the purpose are too many, inconsistent, often not relevant, or applying to higher order of change than the thing they are measuring

Results = outputs	Indicators for results	Sources of verification for indicators of results	Assumptions for results
<p>1 Skills and knowledge related to teaching of forest policy and economics consolidated.</p> <p>Not really a result: no change takes place: “consolidated”.</p> <p>Great deal of overlap with project purpose.</p>	<p>- Ability of the teachers to provide individual guidance and coaching, as well as to apply modern pedagogical methods.</p> <p>Is this actually a more specific articulation of the result?</p> <p>- Level of student satisfaction with the substance of forest policy and economics taught by MDP teachers and teachers working at BSc level.</p> <p>Does not logically confirm or otherwise the skills and knowledge of teachers. Not relevant.</p> <p>- Degree of achievement of the learning objectives of the MDP.</p> <p>This is an effect of teaching. Higher order than the result. Not an indicator.</p>	<p>- Monitoring and assessment of the teachers’ work.</p> <p>- Student satisfaction surveys.</p> <p>- Student satisfaction surveys.</p> <p>- Number of applicants to consequent MSc courses.</p> <p>- Students’ grades.</p> <p>- Quality of the MSc thesis produced by the students.</p>	<p>- The teachers trained during FOPER I will continue to be employed at the faculties.</p> <p>- More potential FPE teachers can be identified from the region and find the topic interesting enough.</p>
<p>2 Skills and knowledge related to research on forest policy and economics consolidated.</p> <p>As above. No change takes place: consolidated.</p> <p>Great deal of overlap with project purpose.</p>	<p>- Level of independence from methodological support of forest policy and economics. researchers in conducting research.</p> <p>Yes, fine. How does one measure it?</p>	<p>- Number of quality proposals on FPE research produced by relevant staff.</p> <p>- Assessment by the trainers involved in this project.</p>	<p>- Research organisations are able to recruit more staff to FPE positions.</p> <p>- Applicants with suitable background and mindset can be found.</p> <p>- The researchers involved in FOPER I remain employed at the respective organisations.</p>
	<p>- Number of commissioned forest policy and economics research projects by national government agencies and other relevant bodies.</p>	<p>- Records in the faculties and research institutes by Ministries of forestry and State Forest Enterprises.</p>	

	<p>This is effect or impact – it is about the influence of FOPER on other institutions. Could be an indicator of project purpose or overall objective.</p>		
	<p>-Quality of the FPE research carried out in the SEE region.</p> <p>Problematic indicator – how does one measure it?</p>	<p>- Scientific assessment by EFI Scientific Advisory Board on relevance, methodological soundness and applicability of results.</p>	
	<p>- Degree of activity of the researchers in networking, both in home country and internationally.</p> <p>Not necessarily relevant to the result.</p>	<p>- Staff lists of research projects.</p> <p>- Author lists of publications.</p> <p>- Minutes of policy fora, number of comments by personnel involved in research.</p>	
<p>3 Continuation of the MDP in forest policy and economics secured.</p> <p>Not really a result. No change. If it refers to FOPER III, as suggested by the indicators, it is not something delivered by FOPER II. It is probably more about sustainability.</p> <p>What does secured mean? Established with national/regional institutional resources? Or does it allow for continued external (project-based) funding?</p>	<p>- Number of graduates from the second generation of MSc students.</p> <p>Not relevant to the continuation of MSc after FOPER II. In any case, the number is not strictly relevant to continuation.</p>	<p>- University records.</p>	<p>- University funding in the region will be developed and not decline.</p> <p>- The forest sector is capable of employing new forest policy experts and trained professionals can focus on forest policy issues.</p>
	<p>- Number of applicants to the third generation.</p>	<p>- University records.</p>	
	<p>- National funding to the Programme increasing indicator of sustainability.</p>	<p>- € secured for continuation from national sources.</p>	
	<p>- Number of regional lead teachers.</p>	<p>- University records.</p>	
<p>Within the logic of the logframe, this result should be placed at the objective/outcome level. It concerns the institutionalisation of the MSc course, which cannot be completely in the control of the project.</p>			

<p>4 A high-quality graduate college for doctoral students studying forest policy and economics established in the region.</p>	<p>- Institutional home, governance structure and operational modalities of the graduate college are clear and evident for the public.</p>	<p>- Websites University organisation and financial reports. -Interviews with university and research institution staff.</p>	<p>- Regional academic organisations are willing and able to adopt the modality of a graduate college and contribute funding and other resources to it now and in the future.</p>
	<p>- Number of international standard PhD theses successfully defended. This does not measure the establishment of the college. Given that PhDs take 3–4 years, this will not be relevant in the lifetime of the project.</p>	<p>- University records.</p>	<p>With regard to regional universities preparedness to contribute funding, this is probably a questionable assumption. - The academic career, particularly in social and economic forest sciences increases its appeal among forestry graduates.</p>
	<p>- Annual number of peer-reviewed publications in international scientific journals by the participants of the graduate college. Also does not measure the establishment of the college. As above, in the lifetime of the project there is likely to be limited number of such publications.</p>	<p>- International journals.</p>	<p>- Other disciplines get interested in the potential possibilities of FPE as an academic career.</p>
	<p>- Annual level of activities like seminars, discussions, scientific meetings and conferences organised by the CG. Fine. Number rather than level?</p>	<p>- Internet interviews with university and research institution staff</p>	
	<p>- Annual number of PhD students participating in the CG. No target set.</p>	<p>- University records</p>	
<p>The results level is problematic. There is little change suggested in the specification (results, 1, 2, 3), so their contribution to outcomes at the project purpose level is not established logically. Results 1 and 2 overlap considerably with the project purpose. Result 3, as a “continuation”, is not strictly a result. There are too many indicators for each result, but most of them are not relevant.</p>			

ANNEX 3 DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

EFI 2006 *FOPER International Master's Program (MSc) in Forest Policy and Economics (FPE) Course Concept and Curriculum*, available at http://www.efi.int/files/attachments/projects/foper_1/foper_joint_master_programme_fpe_finalsept2006.pdf (accessed 28 October 2013).

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