



# ADAPT: Nature-based Solutions for Resilient Societies in the Western Balkans

Mid-Term Review

Final Report

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### List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADAPT	Nature-based Solutions for Resilient Societies in the Western Balkans
CCA	Climate Change Adaptation
COVID 19	CoronaVirus Disease 2019
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ECARO	Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FLR	Forest Land Restoration
GIZ	(Deutsche) Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
JIKA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LSG	Local-Self Government
MEL	Monitoring Evaluation and Learning
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NbS	Nature-based Solution
PAG	Project Advisory Group
PCS	Project Steering Committee
PMT	Project Management Team
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
ROAM	Restoration Opportunities Assessment Methodology
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
URI	Urban Research Institute
WWF	World Wide Fund For Nature

## Executive Summary

The purpose of this MTR is to conduct an independent review of the “[ADAPT: Nature-based Solutions for Resilient Societies in the Western Balkans](#)”, at the halfway point of its implementation for the purpose of assessing best practices, and results to date, and proposing recommendations for further stages of implementation. **ADAPT** is a three-year regional project funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and implemented by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), through the Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ECARO).

The findings and recommendations of the MTR aim to help the identification of any required course corrections in the ADAPT approach and activities, and to bring in valuable external reflections at the midterm point of implementation in order to help strengthen and complement the ADAPT project and the ADAPT Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system through an adaptive management modality.

The MTR focuses on assessing the progress achieved toward the overall objective and specific objectives of ADAPT, as well as highlighting the specific achievements and lesson learnt in the mid-term period. MTR findings are structured according to the evaluation criteria: coherence, effectiveness, achievements and challenges in moving towards objectives and outcomes, efficiency, and coherence. Within each criteria a set of predefined key evaluation questions is presented, and addressed, within the results of the MTR.

In conducting this MTR an evidence-based approach has been applied, in order to collect relevant data and produce conclusions on ADAPT performance. The initial step in the MTR has consisted of conducting consultations with key IUCN staff directly engaged in the implementation of ADAPT. This step was conducted with the objective of determining the scope of the MTR, and that of the document analysis, to serve as the basis for the further consultative process. At this stage, a comprehensive document analysis was performed, and all of the project documents relevant for implementation and evaluation of the achieved outputs to date, were identified, and reviewed. The project documentation reviewed includes ADAPT action plans, intervention logics, implementation reports, other relevant evaluations or reports, auditing documents and financials. Once an initial document analysis was performed, a consultation process was initiated and conducted with all relevant project partners, and stakeholders. A total of 18 interviews was conducted, in addition to regular communication with IUCN key staff.

ADAPT has been found to have **high relevance** in meeting local needs when assessed against the project objectives and outcomes. Even though ADAPT’s implementation was limited due to the constraining factors in place as a result of COVID 19, most participants noted that ADAPT is very much fit for purpose with respect to local needs. ADAPT is found especially relevant for improving regional knowledge on NbS, CCA, and DRR, as capacities within the participating economies on these themes are rather limited. The implementation of NbS, as envisaged in the third specific objective of ADAPT, was assessed as highly relevant, yet given that in the mid-term period only few activities were undertaken within this objective, the conclusion both from the document analysis and consultation process is that the relevance of this aspect could be recognised mostly by economies who in their scope of actions have planned pilot projects.

The **effectiveness** of the ADAPT project, according to the analysis of the available documents, has been moderately achieved in regard to the three main objectives of the project. While the activities within the three objectives were implemented in parallel, the greatest effects have been achieved within the first specific objective. This finding is to be expected, given that a significant number of the activities under Objective 1 were planned for, and implemented in, year one of the ADAPT project. In terms of Objective 2, some effects were produced, mainly through the design of the Comparative Policy Study and scoping studies for all participating economies, which provide valuable data for baseline NbS analyses and insights on policies to be implemented at national level of the participating economies.

Given the complex structure of the project with numerous interlinking outcomes, outputs, performance indicators, and economy specific deliverables, it was concluded that monitoring is rather complex and requires a systematised approach, one outlined in the comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation

Framework. In this regard, during the consultation process, most participants reported issues in assessing the effectiveness of ADAPT, hence even while a significant number of activities have been conducted, the overall perception of the participating project partners is that those activities gave less effect than expected. This observation may be mitigated with the implementation of the MEL, resulting in more comparable monitoring techniques, and setting objectives against a longer time frame of targets, thereby enabling project participants to observe and track effects on a regular basis while receiving specific output information that might be relevant for their activities within the ADAPT.

The COVID 19 pandemic has stressed ADAPT implementation and caused various delays, yet valuable **achievements** were identified, including the partial establishment of the Project Advisory Group (PAG), development of 6 draft scoping studies, translation of the NbS standards into Albanian, Serbian and Macedonian, and the development of a comprehensive communication strategy. Furthermore, the project has influenced the negotiation of the EU Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, which includes reference to NbS in its climate change and biodiversity chapters, something assessed as a valuable step towards incorporating NbS standards in national legislation and policy. Contrary to this, insufficient advocacy for the integration of NbS principles in national strategic and regulatory frameworks has been made to date. In part exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is assessed that a lack of effective communication with the project partners and inconsistency of the PMT performance (due to staff procurement issues), have resulted in missed opportunities for early markers of success.

Insufficient evidence has been identified to date on the achievements in building regional networks. This conclusion is mainly based on the pretence that ADAPT has had its kick-off at the onset of the COVID 19 outbreak, hence virtual communication has been a dominant form of cooperation and is seen as unfit for efficiently supporting experience and knowledge sharing. Due to the identified language barriers, being the lack of understanding of English as a working language, and a lack of personal contact with other beneficiaries of ADAPT, most participants who took part in the consultations stated that the possibilities for broadening cooperation was highly limited.

**Efficiency** analysis of the ADAPT organisation has shown that the governance and management structure of ADAPT are found to be fairly complex. Since the kick-off of the project, the IUCN has had problems with establishing a fully functioning PMT, mostly due to COVID 19 which has had a significant impact on the availability of international hiring options, and an evident lack of local experts with relevant knowledge in NbS. During the consultation process, participants highlighted that the PMT has been operating on a satisfactory level. However, it has been noted that the continuous changes of key staff have influenced delays and non-consistency in ADAPT performance, often appearing inefficient and non-coherent in communication.

The ADAPT project has proven to be highly **coherent** with the priorities and needs of the six Western Balkan economies. At this same time, no overlaps with other initiatives were identified as the ADAPT objectives and activities are complementary with the economy specific approaches to climate change and disaster risk reduction initiatives, as well as strategic planning.

The ADAPT project has invested a significant amount of effort in coordinating activities and communicating objectives with other regional initiatives. IUCN has intense cooperation with a number of international organisations and international Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), including FAO, GIZ, RCC, CIMA Research Foundation, UNDP, UNEP, UNECE, and WWF. This all provides substantial opportunity for the continuation of NbS reforms after ADAPT.

The recommendations of the MTR are based on inputs provided by the participants during the consultation phase, document analysis, and developed through expert opinion of the core evaluation team on the best practices that may further improve the implementation of ADAPT.

The first recommendation is for ADAPT to **adopt new Work Plan and accompanied budget**. Given that there are significant delays in the implementation of multiple activities within the project, this

recommendation encourages the adoption of a new Work Plan for the remainder of the duration of ADAPT and proposed changes to the budget accordingly. The new Work Plan should be approved by the donor and presented to the project partners and other stakeholders for discussion. This new Work Plan should also consider the **inclusion of additional activities**. The recommendation is for the PMT to organise an opportunity for project partners and other stakeholders to nominate additional activities. This can be organised in an open forum, through focus groups, or via individual consultations.

In order to improve the efficiency of the ADAPT project, one recommendation is to **reinforce the PMT** with additional programme staff, given that the evidence shows that the existing staff cannot perform all of the envisaged activities efficiently, while ensuring the effective achievement of ADAPT objectives. Furthermore, adoption of a comprehensive **Monitoring and Evaluation framework** is recommended in order for performance management to be organised in a more systematic fashion, while it may provide sufficient, adequate, and timely data and information to assess progress against the ADAPT objectives as outlined in the ADAPT programme document and its Logical Framework – overall objectives, outcomes and outputs, as well as economy specific deliverables.

Various communication issues have been identified which have resulted in a limited understanding of ADAPT objectives, actions, and outcomes by the project partners and other stakeholders. In this regard, the recommendation is for ADAPT to delegate more effort to **direct communication** with project partners and other stakeholders who are directly involved in the implementation of ADAPT. The **reassessment of scoping studies** further is recommended in order to enhance the efficiency of ADAPT results. This recommendation centres on ADAPT to reassessing its project activities with respect to the scoping studies and envisaging further actions that are necessary for the scoping studies to be validated by national authorities, via consultation processes, field experts, or other consultants' engagement.

## Introduction

**"ADAPT: Nature-based Solutions for Resilient Societies in the Western Balkans"** (ADAPT) is a three-year regional project funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and implemented by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), through the Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ECARO). The project has started in November 2019 and is presently scheduled for completion in October 2022.

The **overall objective** of the project is to increase ecosystem and community resilience to climate change and environmental degradation in the Western Balkans. The project focuses on Nature-based Solution (NbS) knowledge, policy and planning, implementation and scale-up. In more detail, ADAPT is pursuing the following **specific objectives** across the Western Balkans:

- (1) Increase knowledge and awareness of nature-based disaster risk reduction solutions among decision makers, natural resource managers and local communities;
- (2) Integrate NbS and equitable climate-smart planning into adaptation and disaster reduction policy;
- (3) Implement NbS for disaster risk reduction through pilot projects and their scale-up.

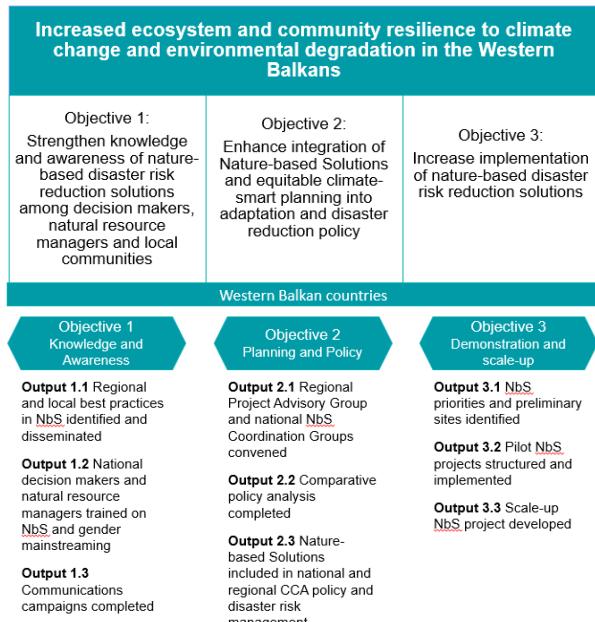
The ADAPT project works with 6 economies – Albania, Bosnia And Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. Nature-based solutions (NbS) interventions are directly implemented in the field through two pilot projects in Albania and Serbia. The Western Balkan economies are among the most vulnerable to climate change impacts affecting numerous sectors and domains. The value derived from deploying Nature-based Solutions in response to societal challenges remains underexplored and the application of approaches that integrate natural infrastructure remain insufficient and fragmented.

Given the differences in socio-economic, political, and other aspects of each economy, ADAPT implements a tailor-made approach for each economy with regard to the NbS solutions. Figure one above summarises the ADAPT structure and objectives. For each economy a list of economy specific outcomes, activities, indicators, and deliverables are also envisaged within the project documents, being in direct correlation with achieving the overall ADAPT objectives.

### 1. Purpose of the MTR

The ADAPT project has passed its mid-point milestone of project implementation, being operational for 20 months, prior to the Mid-Term Review (MTR). The cut-off date that the MTR observes is 31<sup>st</sup> July 2021. The delay in conducting the MTR can be attributed to the circumstances regarding the Covid-19 pandemic, which has caused overall delays in project implementation. Still, an independent review must be conducted in order to review progress and determine its effectiveness to date in achieving the expected project objectives and outputs.

Figure 1: The ADAPT structure and objectives



Source: RfP, 2021

This Mid-Term Review fulfils the requirements of both SIDA and the IUCN Monitoring and Evaluation Policy, of conducting an independent review at the halfway point of project implementation, for the purpose of learning and reflection on project management and on the early results. It is expected that the findings and recommendations of the MTR will help to identify any needed course corrections in the ADAPT approach and activities, and bring valuable external reflections to help strengthen the project and complement the ADAPT Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system through an adaptive management modality.

As per the Terms of Reference (ToR), The MTR will inform SIDA, IUCN, implementing partners, and other stakeholders about ADAPT effectiveness in achieving expected project objectives and outputs. In particular, the MTR is expected to:

- ▶ Determine progress being made toward the achievement of outcomes in all its three key intervention areas;
- ▶ Highlight achievements and lessons learned derived from the ADAPT design, implementation, and management so far – including in terms of design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of the two pilot projects;
- ▶ Specific attention will be given to how the project contributed so far to the EU integration process, especially to chapter 27 on Environment and Climate Change and to how can the project further strengthen its support to EU Integration Process;
- ▶ Identification of the key beneficiaries of the project along with the results and experiences of methods employed in the project to map beneficiaries and stakeholders;
- ▶ Success in integrating gender equality in the project and ways to strengthen integration;
- ▶ Guide the identification of any issues requiring decisions and remedial actions, suggesting any mid-course corrections and/or adjustments to the ADAPT strategy, approach management and activities as necessary;
- ▶ Identify any lessons learnt so far to inform the design of NbS focused projects with similar scope and for the scaling up of NbS interventions.

## 2. Evaluation Issues and Questions

During the first stages of the evaluation process, there have been no issues that influenced the quality of the MTR findings. The document analysis was performed according to the work plan, whereas IUCN key staff were very diligent in providing any documents that were required with complete transparency. However, during the consultation phase of the MTR, delays were recorded due to the lack of availability of several stakeholders that were highly relevant for the evaluation of economy specific results. The unavailability of stakeholders was recorded to occur mainly because of the holiday season during August 2021, hence the consultation process was prolonged by two weeks to ensure that all of the most relevant stakeholders could be included. This has pushed the date for the submission of the final MTR report by approximately one and a half weeks, than was envisaged in the Inception Report.

During the MTR process a set of evaluation questions was used, categorised according to the evaluation criteria. Both the evaluation criteria and the key evaluation questions were predefined in the ToR, whereas additional sub-questions were designed by the core evaluation team according to the needs of the MTR and agreed upon in the Inception Report. A detailed list of all evaluation questions and sub-questions is presented in the **Findings** chapter of this Report, together with the corresponding answers which are basis for the final conclusions and recommendations.

### 3. Methodology

In order to perform the Mid-Term Review of ADAPT, an evidence-based approach was applied, focusing on obtaining and analysing data on the ADAPT objectives and outputs, in line with the evaluation criteria and key evaluation questions. The approach also examines economy specific outcomes, indicators, and deliverables in order to inform on specific progress that is documented in all of the 6 participating economies. The evidence informs SIDA, IUCN, implementing partners and other stakeholders (both public and private) on the mid-term results of the project, with a strong focus on key evaluation questions and sub-questions testing overall relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness and achievements of ADAPT. The methodological steps conducted in order to perform the tasks of this assignment are succinctly presented below and subsequently further detailed along with the presentation of the main data collection tool to be applied in this MTR.

First, a document analysis was performed in order to gather relevant data available via desk research. Following this, a consultative process with the representatives of the IUCN key staff was undertaken as a means of scoping and framing the MTR scope, hence gathering appropriate data on the logic model as well as the performance indicators and objectives of the ADAPT project. Following this, once the initial scoping has been performed, a consultative process with key stakeholders was undertaken. This consultative process implies the application of a systematic data collection tool, which enables the presentation of findings based on relevance, effectiveness, coherence, achievements and challenges, and efficiency. Overall, this necessitates a methodologically strict assessment of:

- ▶ The relevance of ADAPT in meeting local needs when compared to the ADAPT project goals and aims;
- ▶ The effectiveness, describing all observed effects, both direct and indirect,
- ▶ The achievements and challenges (in relation to the expected outcomes of each of ADAPT's key intervention areas);
- ▶ The efficiency of the ADAPT operational structure and interventions in contributing to overall achievements, and
- ▶ The coherence of the various aspects of the ADAPT projects (both internally between activities and externally in comparison to other similar initiatives in the six countries investigated).

As mentioned above, in the first methodological step, a comprehensive document analysis was performed. Through this step, all of the project documents relevant for the implementation of actions and measures for achieving outputs, were identified, and reviewed. This project documentation includes ADAPT action plans, intervention logics, implementation reports, other relevant evaluations or reports, auditing documents and financials.

The documents that have been assessed are presented in the Appendices – Documents Reviewed. During the consultative process and review phase of the MTR, the documents were continually reassessed in-depth and additional information was extracted in order to complement and validate interview findings.

These documents have formed the basis for the proposed MTR, and have served to establish a systematic framework for addressing the evaluation criteria. Apart from quantitative data, the document analysis provides valuable qualitative information on the rationale behind each of the specific actions performed, and therefore a basis for the assessment of the effectiveness of the actions performed in correlation with the key evaluation questions, and sub-questions. Aside from project documents, the document analysis phase focused on identifying reports and documents prepared by implementing partners and other stakeholders, as they would provide a comparative value and additional data on the results of project activities from the perspective of the beneficiaries.

An integral part of the MTR is a consultative process with the representatives of the IUCN, and their affiliated staff who have significant insights on implementation process of ADAPT. This was performed as the second methodological step. This step has been highly relevant for gathering data on the lessons learned

and issues that have been occurring during the implementation phase. This step also ensured the proper identification of the specific ADAPT processes, organisation traits, and other important features of the project which are of great significance for the implementing staff, hence detailed assessment of ADAPT management was conducted in the mid-term period. The consultative process ensures that the recommendations reflect the specific framework of ADAPT and provide valuable conclusions on how implementation can be improved in the continuation of the project.

The MTR envisaged additional comprehensive consultation processes that were undertaken with project partners, the project donor, and other relevant stakeholders. For this purpose, a preliminary list of interviewees has been compiled according to a document analysis and initial consultations with IUCN key staff, and are presented in the Inception Report – Annex IV. Preliminary Interview List. A list of conducted interviews is presented in Appendices, A.4. List of people met/interviewed.

The consultation phase consisted of a comprehensive consultation process with key stakeholders, as per the requirements of the ToR. A total of 18 interviews with key stakeholders across 6 Western Balkan economies was conducted, with an addition of further interviews with the key IUCN staff, for comparative reasons. The number of interviews conducted has surpassed the requirements of the ToR, since for some economies it was proven than more detailed insights were needed across different stakeholders in order to obtain validated data on economy specific issues.

The methods for conducting the interviews with stakeholders differed depending on the interviewee's availability (in terms of time, expertise, and knowledge) and the scope of the data expected to be received (Access to data, Clearance levels, Accountability, etc). Yet, in order for the process to be coherent and to maximise the amount of comparative data relevant for the specific key evaluation questions, a two-pronged approach was conducted, applying a semi-structured interview and follow-up validation. Most of the interviews were performed online, using the ZOOM platform, while those with the representatives located in the area of the IUCN regional office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, including the IUCN key staff, were conducted in person.

In order to maintain the uniformity of the interviews, a questionnaire was prepared and made available to all participants prior to the interview. The questionnaire consisted of key questions measured in Likert scale, and additional open-ended questions deriving directly from the key evaluation questions and sub-questions. Participants were not asked to fill in the answers in the questionnaire prior to the interview. Rather, it was designed in order to inform the participants of the requirements of the interview, thus providing them with sufficient time to obtain useful documents and insights. The interviewer was tasked with note-taking during the interviews and summarising the final conclusions of the interviews.

According to the objectives, outputs, and in context of answering the key evaluation questions, publicly available data was used in cases where such data can help to further elaborate the findings of the MTR. This data was collected via national statistics, open data, and other relevant sources.

In cases where further input was needed to refine the recommendations or findings which are relevant for the specific key evaluation question, other consultation methods were applied. In this process, the MTR core team made follow-up contact directly with the interviewees via e-mail and telephone, and in person with the IUCN staff.

The last step in conducting MTR was to systematise the obtained data from document analysis and consultative processes, thus using the inputs in delivering conclusions on the implementation of ADAPT, with regard to the evaluation criteria. These findings provided the material and basis for constructing a narrative which emphasizes positive and negative practices and results, and recommendations on what actions should be undertaken in order to improve ADAPT performance in the future course of the project's implementation.

#### 4. Findings – organized according to the key evaluation questions

The findings are organised according to the evaluation criteria and the key evaluation questions, as per the ToR. Additional findings will be provided for sub-questions that were defined in the MTR inception phase. For each of the questions, economy specific insights will be provided, if available, in order to validate the responses and to highlight the individual experiences of the project partners, NbS field experts, representative of the donor, and other stakeholders.

Criteria: Relevance
<p>Key evaluation question: How appropriate and relevant is the ADAPT approach and intervention logic in terms of its objectives, and within the context of the six targeted economies and the Western Balkans Region?</p>
<p>Sub-Question: What are the specifics of the participating economies (political, environmental, rule of law, etc.), and have they have been addressed by ADAPT in a way that key issues, actions, outcomes, and deliverables have been identified?</p> <p>ADAPT objectives and outcomes have been set in an appropriate way, and each are fitting for the intended purpose for each of the participating Western Balkan economies, is the overall conclusion deriving from document analysis and stakeholder interviews.</p> <p>According to the analysed documents, the scope of intervention is different for each economy, yet it has been for most part agreed to have been suitable in context of the specific needs of local beneficiaries, according to the conclusions of the consultations process. Some participants, primarily those from Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, had emphasised that the intervention in their economies should have been planned more with a practical application of the NbS in order to enhance visibility of the concept and establish best practices models, yet it was concluded that due to a complicated governance system in their economies, a lot of preparatory work on the policy side of the intervention would have been needed prior to NbS implementation on local sites. For instance, in Bosnia and Herzegovina there are three levels of governance (plus District Brcko), within which a complex ethnical structure is in place, according to the Constitution. In that sense, in order for a legislation to be adopted within the entity or on a state level, a lot of time is needed for decision makers to decide on the matter. In that regard, in order for NbS to be implemented into local or national legislation, a lengthy procedure needs to be conducted.</p>
<p>Key evaluation question: To what extent is the ADAPT fit-for-purpose to promote increased knowledge, capacities and awareness on Nature-based disaster risk reduction solutions among decision makers, natural resource managers and local communities?</p> <p>Knowledge about NbS standards is considered to be low across the Western Balkan region. This has been deduced through the consultation process and by observing literature. The lack of knowledge is somewhat understandable given that the NbS concept has been in use only since 2020. On an expert level, capacities for CCA and DRR vary across the region, and it has been concluded that the economies who had prior to ADAPT had participated in other projects in the field, or who had established expert bodies on a national level, have much larger human capacity for implementing ADAPT and introduce NbS standards in domestic legislation and practices.</p> <p>Good examples of best practices are the economies which have had significant experience with the implementation of projects supported by JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency). Through these consultations it has been concluded that the experience gained from these projects was crucial in building capacities of national authorities in the field of DRR in North Macedonia and Albania. Representatives from these institutions have stated that the ADAPT is a logical step forward when it comes to building knowledge and capacity, as NbS is a new concept that is completely in line with the lesson learned from previous DRR projects. However, little evidence was provided on the existing capacity and knowledge of local communities. The overall conclusion is that the local communities have little understanding of NbS concept and that ADAPT, to date, has not invested enough efforts in promoting or training of local actors. Naturally, local communities have less access to projects implemented on a national or regional level, hence the conclusion from the consultation process is that the local capacity is existent only in local communities where previous actions were implemented, hence that the suitable way for ADAPT to build local expertise and knowledge is to perform actions on local sites. A valuable example is the City of Kraljevo, a pilot project site of ADAPT in Serbia, where significant local capacities have been built since 2014 with support from the PIMO and where it had been concluded that there is a considerable understanding of the NbS concept, which has even been implemented in local strategic documents to a certain degree.</p> <p>Given the constraints with which ADAPT has been implemented, considerably because of COVID 19 and virtual communication as a sole means of conversing, ADAPT has not had much impact in terms of building awareness of NbS, even though multiple actions were undertaken, including the establishment of a strong media presence. Among other activities undertaken, it is relevant to note that the ADAPT project has established a webpage where all major new calls for proposals and other relevant material is being published. Through this site, many project documents are free for access and can be downloaded. The ADAPT leaflet and NbS infographic poster has been translated in 5 local languages and has been distributed among all project partners, while the ADAPT Facebook, Linkedin and Twitter pages have a strong following. Additionally, there has been 26 news releases so far, all contributing to the</p>

visibility of ADAPT. All evidence shows that ADAPT is very active in promotional activities in order to raise awareness of the NbS in the 6 economies, but still in consultations with the stakeholders across Western Balkans it had been concluded that virtual communication has a limited reach, especially given that the population and local administration are more prone to absorbing messages delivered via traditional media and on-site happenings.

Activities which were planned and not implemented, such as Analysis of existing NbS training programmes and development of three new interactive NbS training modules, and Organisation of one study tour to an EU Member State and expert learning visits, would have significantly increased the potential for knowledge increase. In that sense, the ADAPT was planned in a way that it is fit-for-purpose to increase knowledge, capacities and awareness on Nature-based disaster risk reduction solutions, yet due to COVID19 restrictions and other circumstances, the key activities were not implemented.

**Key evaluation question:** To what extent is the ADAPT fit-for-purpose to promote increased awareness on and commitment to gender equality, gender mainstreaming and gender-sensitive interventions, and linkages with NbS;

ADAPT has demonstrated limited capacity in increasing awareness on gender equality in connection with the NbS. Throughout the consultation process no participant has had any valuable input on these issues, except by the ROAM expert in charge of conducting the pilot project in Kraljevo who had elaborated in great detail how gender analysis is crucial in the process of analysing the pilot site characteristics. In consultations with the PMT key staff, further inputs were received on tasks performed in this area, highlighting the specific actions that are oriented to promoting gender equality and linkages with NbS. In that regard, in the further implementation of the ADAPT, considerable results could be expected. Document analysis, on the other hand, has shown that the ADAPT programming timeline is such that most results in this field should be expected at the end of the project. This is supported by the "Narrative Report for Year One" where little result in the field of gender equality, gender mainstreaming and gender-sensitive interventions, and linkages with NbS had yet been highlighted. The first tangible result that should occur in the short-term is the before-mentioned gender analysis being conducted on the pilot site in Kraljevo. This analysis should provide inputs when assessing Forest Land Restoration options, hence ensuring that gender transformative actions are taken into consideration when choosing the best NbS option.

**Key evaluation question:** To what extent is the ADAPT fit-for-purpose to promote the successful implementation of on-the-ground NbS for DRR through the ADAPT pilots and scale up

ADAPT is considered to be fit for purpose in promoting on the ground NbS for DRR, with limitations to the scope of the project. Namely, ADAPT on the ground activities are envisaged in a bigger scale for Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia, while for other participating economies these activities are foreseen more seldom. In that regard, the pilot projects being implemented in Serbia and Albania, as well as preparation of the tender dossier in North Macedonia, are highly relevant for promoting good practices of NbS in regard to the DRR, while other economies are mostly dependent on comparative experiences. The success of ADAPT regarding this key evaluation question is highly influenced by the management capacities of the PMT and its capacity to coordinate field experts and other consultants. Through interviews, this was confirmed to be a challenge as field experts were on occasion indecisive about their role in regard to communication and organisation of cooperation with project partners on the ground. In that regard, additional effort was invested from the PMT and IUCN in order to delegate tasks and responsibilities more clearly i.e. the ToRs of 3 out of 4 field experts were renegotiated and roles and responsibilities were clearly defined as well the ToR of the Climate Expert. The success of these interventions is yet to be assessed, and final conclusion on this matter can be given in the final evaluation of the ADAPT.

Due to a very high degree of complexity of the governance systems in the participating economies, and numerous project activities to be implemented as per work plan, one of the recommendations of the MTR is to reinforce the ADAPT PMT by adding additional programme staff. This recommendation will be elaborated in more detail in the Recommendations section of this report.

**Key evaluation question:** To what extent is the ADAPT fit-for-purpose to promote increased capacity in targeted economies to design NbS projects for submission to global funding facilities

During the review, insufficient evidence was obtained to support the notion that ADAPT is fit for purpose to increase capacity for design of NbS projects for submission to global funding facilities. However, many participants in the consultation process emphasised good cooperation with the IUCN, and that it has resulted in access to the designing and the funding of different CCA and DRR projects. This shows that the IUCN as an organisation has been very active in supporting the design of NbS projects across the Western Balkans, yet ADAPT, as a project had limited influence in this field.

**Key evaluation question:** Has there been any change since the project was formulated that might have affected its relevance? If so, what are these changes and to what extent the project has managed to adapt to ensure it remains relevant?

**Sub-question:** Has there been any economy specific changes (except the Covid-19 outbreak) that have impeded the relevance of ADAPT in either economy?

The COVID 19 outbreak is an obvious change that had occurred at the onset of ADAPT implementation and has had a substantial influence on the dynamics of the project and overall performance. This occurrence has greatly

influenced communication lines with project partners and other stakeholders, thus stressing the completion of actions that require direct contact, including training.

The other significant change, or rather unforeseen risk, that has occurred is the worsening of the bilateral relationship between Serbian and Kosovo. This occurred due to the political process of negotiations between Serbian and Kosovo governments on implementation of the Brussels agreement which should have resulted in socio-economic agreements and normalisation of relations, yet had failed due to ongoing political issues. On an expert level there have been no negative impacts reported and observed, yet the functioning of working bodies foreseen for attendance of highest political representatives from the two economies have been suspended with no clear solution to move forward, contributing to delays. This has also influenced the implementation of regional activities as no functioning modus operandi was possible given the instructions from the governments of Serbia and Kosovo. In that regard, joint meetings are knowledge sharing panels could not be organised with political and non-political representatives from either economy.

During the consultation process significant changes in governance have been noted in specific economies, as many countries have gone through the process of elections on the national level. According to the interviews this occurrence has not influenced the ADAPT implementation to a great extent, yet at the status quo period (during and after electoral process), the civil servant sector within the project partners was not able to ensure decision-making within their institution. This was most evident in Kosovo where four different Governments were established during the course of the ADAPT implementation. Additionally, this kind of changes may prove to be a risk for further implementation of ADAPT as numerous local elections are scheduled until the ending of ADAPT, meaning that local administration will be unable to answer to data needs and other requests during the electoral process. The economy with the greatest risks of this kind is North Macedonia where local elections in all municipalities will be conducted in the fourth quarter of 2021 (at the same time when the site will be selected for the tender dossier); Albania, where Parliament elections will be concluded in September and Ministry of Tourism and Environment is expected to go through organisations change (in the midst of pilot project introductory stages); and also in Serbia where presidential and parliamentary elections will be held in the first half of 2021.

**Key evaluation question:** In what ways has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted the ADAPT progress (delays, cancellation, etc.)?

The COVID 19 pandemic has impacted the ADAPT progress in many ways. Firstly, the quality of networking and communication activities have been challenged as most of the communication has been led with the application of virtual tools. In the opinion of most of the participants in the consultation process, this way of communication has largely affected the effectiveness of the conducted actions and has also led to a degree of communication fatigue due to the vast number of online meetings, lengthy emails and documents exchanged. In addition, many planned field visits had been cancelled accordingly.

Secondly, the pandemic has postponed the design and implementation of the pilot NbS projects in Albania and Serbia, initially scheduled to begin in year One. In Serbia the pilot project has started in the second year, whereas in Albania, commencement is expected in October 2021, almost at the beginning of the third year of implementation. The preparation of a full tender dossier for a pilot NbS project in North Macedonia has shared the same fate, with delays documented of several months.

Thirdly, the consultation process envisaged for the scoping studies in Kosovo, North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have not yet been conducted in their full capacity, leading to these scoping studies not being validated by the national authorities. In this regard, all adjoining activities that should be based on baseline analyses (scoping studies) have also been postponed. According to the interviews with the PMT, it has been concluded that such activities will be conducted as part of a 2<sup>nd</sup> round of consultation in the above-mentioned economies in order to mitigate these identified impacts..

**Key evaluation question:** How did the pandemic impacted the ADAPT knowledge products, capacity building activities, policy and planning processes as well as pilot activities? Are these impacts still ongoing?

In regard to the answer to the previous key evaluation question, the pandemic has strongly influenced the overall communication between the PMT and the project partners and caused delays throughout the ADAPT work plan. These effects are still ongoing, as few field visits and on-site meetings have been organised. While some participants in the consultation process, especially those from Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia, have noted that the slowing down of the COVID 19 pandemic during the end of spring and throughout summer of 2021 could have been used better in order to build momentum for the implementation of delayed and forthcoming activities.

Participants from Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina also noted that due to the pandemic and partially due to the lack of programme staff in the PMT during the winter/spring 2021 , ADAPT had failed to be engaged in the policy making processes. They noted that there were missed opportunities where ADAPT could have provided technical assistance or other forms of support to the working groups engaged in the design of policies closely connected to the CCA and the DRR, hence promoting the inclusion of NbS standards into policies and regulations. These missed opportunities had occurred mostly due to limited communication tools and overburdened civil sector. In Serbia such an opportunity was identified for the process of preparing the Changes and Amendments to the Law on Nature Protection, which got adopted in the late spring of 2021. On the other hand, a highly positive practise had been identified in Montenegro, where ADAPT is supporting the development of Law on Changes and Amendments to the Law on Protection

Against Negative Impacts of Climate Change, by providing expertise (technical support) to the working group that is developing the law.

The pilot projects were also delayed, as already stated, and their implementation is expected in the final year of the ADAPT implementation.

**Key evaluation question:** What adaptive measures were taken and/or should be taken going forward to address and mitigate the impact of Covid-19?

**Sub-question:** Did the adaptive measures due to Covid-19 and other circumstances implemented by ADAPT cause any administrative burdens (renegotiations, production of new strategic documents, etc.) for economies, and were these relevant enough to delay the implementation of ADAPT objectives?

PMT has made an early effort to address the situation by reviewing the work plan and budget and submitting a continuity plan to Sida in April 2020. ECARO has also updated the office and project risk registers and added the COVID19 pandemic as an important risk with a high impact.

One of the obvious mitigation measures was to move numerous consultation meetings to a virtual space while others had to be postponed or moved to Year 2 and Year 3. Despite Sida's and the partners' full understanding for the situation with COVID19, the inability to travel and meet partners and undertake field visits on the part of PMT remains a major issue and hindrance for smooth project implementation. The PMT had started to travel only since June 2021 (stakeholder workshop in Kraljevo and other field visits performed by short term experts, field visit to Tirana and Elbasan in Albania, travel to IUCN Congress in Marseille, France).

Even though the operational modality of ADAPT was significantly changed due to COVID 19, the economies had not reported any significant administrative burdens that occurred due to these changes. One participant from Bosnia and Herzegovina noted that due to mitigation to the virtual space, she had experienced some minor administrative burdens as her office did not have the necessary equipment for video conferencing, and also that for the same reason some of her other colleagues were unable to participate in ADAPT and other projects, losing valuable knowledge in the process. Additionally, representatives from North Macedonia noted that virtual conferencing caused some burden in follow-up clarification activities which required document preparation.

**Key evaluation question:** Given impacts from Covid-19, at this point in time, will all project activities be successfully completed by the current project end date, or will there be a need for adjustments (in timeframe and/or targets)?

During the consultation process, the participants from all participating economies were optimistic when it came to implementation of all of the activities envisaged by ADAPT, yet they have stated that in contingency planning the focus should be mostly on activities envisaged within the scope of the Objective 3, being the implementation of the NbS solutions or preparatory work for such implementation in later stages. On the other hand, both the consultation participants and the representatives of the PMT noted that the effects would be maximised in case of project extension of a minimum of six months, given the risk and effects of the COVID 19 pandemic.

#### Criteria: Effectiveness

**Key evaluation question:** How effective has been the ADAPT project so far?

**Sub-question:** What were the reasons for not adopting a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework for ADAPT? Has this resulted in any negative impacts, e.g. non-systematic data gathering, reporting issues, etc.

The effectiveness of the ADAPT project, according to the analysis of the available documents, has been moderately achieved in regard to three main objectives of the project. Activities within three objectives were implemented in parallel, while the greatest amount of effects have been achieved for Objective 1. Strengthen knowledge and awareness of nature-based disaster risk reduction solutions among decision makers, natural resource managers and local communities. This was observed given that a significant number of activities under Objective 1 were planned for implementation in year one. Unfortunately, due to obvious reasons, training modules had not been implemented, hence limiting the effectiveness of this objective.

For Objective 2: Enhance integration of nature-based solutions and climate-smart planning into adaptation and disaster risk reduction policy and planning, some effects were produced. These effects were seen mainly through the design of the Comparative Policy Study and the draft scoping studies which provide valuable data for baseline NbS analysis and insights on the policies to be implemented on the national levels of participating economies. Delays have postponed the implementation of several activities planned within this objective, hence greater effects are expected in year 3 of the ADAPT implementation cycle.

For Objective 3: Increase implementation of nature-based disaster risk reduction solutions, least effects were identified as feasibility studies, the pilot projects and a tender dossier are in the early stages of development.

ADAPT has not yet adopted a comprehensive performance management tool in the form of a Monitoring and Evaluation framework. Given the complex structure of the project with numerous interlinking outcomes, outputs, performance indicators, and economy specific deliverables, it was concluded that monitoring is rather complex and requires systematised approach. Without a Monitoring and Evaluation framework that sets up internal project milestones and key performance indicators, the evaluation of effectiveness of ADAPT can provide conclusions that are

hard to validate and may be prone to subjectivity. At the same time, this lack of a Monitoring and Evaluation framework may lead to a non-effective reporting process towards the project partners and donor.

During the consultation process of the MTR it had been concluded that some participants are not fully aware of the ADAPT activities, plans, and results, hence had difficulties in assessing the overall effectiveness of ADAPT. The reasons stated varied, yet the most prominent one was that there is a lack of communication with the PMT. The other is that often there is a language barrier in communication, justified by poor knowledge of English within the respected national institutions.

#### Key evaluation question: What has and has not worked so far and why?

Under Component 1. deriving from the first objective, many activities were performed, including the partial establishment of PAG, development of draft scoping studies, translation of the NbS standards into local languages, and development of a comprehensive communication strategy. These results imply that for the first objective significant effects had been achieved, yet due to inability to organise live events, training modules are still pending, hence undermining the overall effects of achieved results. For the same reason the scoping studies failed to be finalised and validated by national authorities (with exception for Albania and Montenegro), while field visits had to be cancelled.

Under the Component 2. the project influenced the negotiation of the EU Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, which includes reference to NbS in the climate change and biodiversity chapters. This strengthens links between climate and biodiversity and prepares the ground for implementation of NbS at regional and national levels. On the other hand, little advocacy for the integration of NbS principles in national strategic and regulatory frameworks had been made. This occurred due to lack of effective communication with the project partners, lack of consistency of the PMT (due to staff issues), and had resulted in missed opportunities for early markers of success.

Under the Component 3. most of the activities were delayed due to COVID 19 pandemic, hence effects of implementing NbS pilot projects, conducting feasibility studies and preparing a full tender dossier for North Macedonia, will have to be assessed in the later stages of ADAPT implementation.

#### Key evaluation question: How effectively has the ADAPT project engaged with national policy makers and natural resource managers in the six targeted economies to raise interest in and understanding of NbS?

Sub-question: Is there an effective solution in which local policy makers can be further engaged in ADAPT implementation? Would this prove to be effective in achieving ADAPT objectives in a greater extent?

ADAPT has conducted various promotional activities within the project scope, oriented to raising the understanding of NbS for all interested parties. Due to COVID 19 limitations for physical interactions, ADAPT had to lean on digital platforms when engaging national policy makers and natural resource managers, whilst that kind of communication proved to be less effective. Mid-term results show that whenever there were possibilities for a more direct line of communication, the ADAPT managed to raise interest of NbS within the national level of governance. NbS as a concept is applicable on the local levels of governance, hence efforts should be made to engage local partners in ADAPT. Apart from activities related to the pilot projects, insufficient evidence was identified on additional such efforts. Interviews had also confirmed that due to COVID 19 the communication with local decision makers was strained, hence preferable way for engaging them is by performing on-site activities was not possible. In economies where NbS field experts are procured, there is a possibility for further actions towards closer cooperation with local actors, yet for economies who do not have a field expert in place, the possibility for ADAPT to expend its initiatives to local authorities may prove to be limited.

#### Key evaluation question: How effectively has the ADAPT project been to position NbS as effective solutions to address climate risks, increase resilience and enhance compliance with EU policies such as EU Acquis and other international frameworks?

Sub-question: Were ADAPT actions complimentary to ongoing economy specific policy actions?

The scope of ADAPT is limited by its budget and a work plan when it comes to possibilities of advocating for NbS, yet it has been concluded that most actors find NbS as effective solution for addressing climate risks and increase resilience, especially because from their perspective the NbS, as an alternative approach, requires less funding compared to more traditional approach to CCA and DRR.

Due to ADAPT's efforts, the NbS standards are included into the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. This had ensured that the notions for the NbS will be transposed into national legislation, hence achieving compliance with EU policies.

#### Key evaluation question: How effective has the ADAPT project been in identifying the pilot sites and engaging targeted communities – especially women and vulnerable groups – to participate in the design and development of pilot NbS interventions?

Sub-question: What were the standards in place to ensure that the pilot site selection was effective?

The pilot NbS projects were designed for sites in Serbia and Albania. Due to COVID 19 outbreak that resulted in multiple delays, the implementation of pilot projects is in early stages. In Serbia, some progress has been made since the

implementation started in June 2021, whilst in Albania the pilot is at its earliest stage given that the pilot municipality had been selected as late as August 2021, while the procurement of experts is expected in October.

The pilot region in Serbia is the area comprising within the City of Kraljevo jurisdiction. According to the document analysis, and validated during the consultation process, no specific criteria was used for selection of Kraljevo as a pilot region. It was promoted as a valuable site by the project partners in Serbia mostly because it is historical vulnerability to disasters, mostly floods, and a fact that it was at the time of ADAPT programming the only Local Self-Government in Serbia that had a completely established and functioning Civil Protection Unit, within the local administration of the City of Kraljevo. These factors were crucial to decide on Kraljevo as it was deduced that the NbS implementation towards disaster reduction would be significant for the region, while at the same time the local capacities for implementing such solution were adequate. During the consultation phase, this region is also confirmed to be the largest one in Serbia, with diverse biodiversity, ranging from mountain ranges to the north and south of the region, and flat lands in the central part of the region, thus considered to be a quality pilot region as it represents the landscape most usual for central and eastern regions of Serbia.

The pilot began with forming of a Project Team, comprised of a ROAM expert (team lead), GIS specialist, Biodiversity expert, Gender expert, and Socio-Economics expert. They were tasked with preparing the comparative analysis of different Forest Land Restoration (FLR) options and different sites in which the FLRs could be implemented. According to the stakeholder consultation process with the representatives of the local administration and local communities, that took place during two field visits, while an analysis was performed for four different sites – Goc Mountain foothill, Studenica region, Lojanik and Gledic. For the purposes of selecting the site a multi-criteria analysis was performed and Gledic was proved to be the most suitable site. According to the analysis of the project document containing the multi-criteria analysis, it has been deducted that a vast number of criteria were used for the assessment, whilst the document shows lack of evidence-based approach as only publicly assessable data was used, and only for a number of criteria that were analysed. In that sense, more effort should be invested in identifying relevant data available from administrative sources including GIS maps, local tax authority data, civil protection department data, local forest authority data, etc. During the consultation process it had been confirmed that there is an obvious lack of data on a regional level, hence additional field trips and data collection activities will have to be conducted in order to obtain data, hence confirming Gledic as a pilot site. According to the interviews with the PMT key staff it had been confirmed that additional visits were conducted after the conclusion of this report, and that the validation workshop will be held in early October.

The lack of data is a factor also to be considered for other aspects of a pilot, given that the quality of the socio-economic and gender analysis are in direct correlation with the availability of highly specific data. In that regard, the final analysis in which FLR actions are assessed from a stand point of cost and benefits, may be difficult to perform according to the IUCN Cost-Benefit Framework for Analysing Forest Landscape Restoration Decisions. Having said that, the PMT and pilot project team will have to invest significant resources in on-site data collection or alternatively choose an approach with excessive use of comparative data.

Document analysis has shown that for the implementation of the pilot sites, no action plans, or other sort of operational planning document, had been envisaged and adopted. In that sense, the pilots are being implemented with little understanding from the beneficiaries on stages and actions to be taken in order to fully implement pilot projects. In perspective this can impose additional resources for communication towards beneficiaries who are not directly involved in the implementation of the pilot projects.

In Albania, a total of 12 sites were considered for a pilot project. The comparative analysis was conducted by the Urban Research Institute (URI) based upon ten distinctive criteria, such as sustainability, adaptive management, and others. Each option was weighed against the criteria and ranked; hence four different sites were proposed to national authorities (Water Resources Management Agency Albania and Albanian Ministry of Tourism and Environment). In the due process, Elbasan was chosen as the most suitable pilot site by the Water Resources Management Agency. In the later stages of the project implementation a location within the project site will be selected, where the pilot NbS will be implemented. The ranking of each region was still done with an arbitrary approach, yet there is enough clarification for selecting Elbasan. The implementation of the pilot project will be commenced in October/November 2021 when project team will be procured, on similar basis as one for the Serbian pilot project.

**Key evaluation question:** How effective has the ADAPT approach been so far to support learning and knowledge sharing within and across the 6 economies and more broadly in the Western Balkan regions, to create synergies and to underpin and scale up local and national achievements?

**Sub-question:** How effective is ADAPT in promoting networking between 6 economies, and has closer cooperation between the Western Balkan economies created additional value when it comes to achieving ADAPT objectives? Has it helped to achieve economy specific objectives as well?

The consultation process with the project partners and other stakeholders had provided insufficient evidence on effects that were achieved in building regional networks, or rather that in the mid-term period ADAPT project has not conducted significant actions towards networking between 6 participating economies. This conclusion is mainly based on a pretence that the ADAPT had its kick-off basically in the onset of COVID 19 outbreak, hence virtual communication has been a dominant form of cooperation and seen as unfit for efficiently supporting experience and knowledge sharing. Due to the identified language barriers, being the lack of understanding of English as

a working language, and a lack of personal contact with other beneficiaries of ADAPT, most participant who participated in the consultations stated that the possibilities for broadening cooperation was highly limited.

Some of the participants, from North Macedonia and Kosovo especially, mentioned that late spring and summer of 2021 may be considered as a lost time in which such cooperation could be achieved. There had been initiatives for field visits to Kraljevo, Serbia that had not been met by the PMT for organisational reasons, yet had been considered as a perfect opportunity for regional cooperation towards which ADAPT has been aiming for and a loss opportunity for other economies to familiarise themselves with the progress that had been made on the pilot site.

The representative from Bosnia and Herzegovina has emphasized that without the so-called "social component" of the project, being the opportunity for all representatives to share their experiences in an open forum with translators provided, no significant effect of the ADAPT would be achieved. This supports the notion that Western Balkan economies and their national authority representatives are traditionally used to a more direct approach where through discussion the main points can get across, whereas extensive document sharing has little impact.

It is important to mention that Serbia and Kosovo, due to political circumstances, have cooperated in limited capacity in the working bodies envisaged by the ADAPT, hence straining the overall cooperation efforts made by the IUCN.

The positive aspect is that it has been concluded, according to the interviews with various representatives from national authorities and NbS field experts, that long-term cooperation on an expert level has been ongoing for years back, and that in fact there is a decent amount of knowledge sharing between regional actors in the fields of DRR and CCA, hence the conclusion is that the good practices of NbS standards implementation through ADAPT will eventually build capacity within the whole region.

**Key evaluation question:** To what extent are the ADAPT MEL strategy and tools adequate and effective to keep track of progress in view of i) understanding the results and, ultimately, the impact of the ADAPT project and ii) detect any needed implementation adjustments for better progress towards results? What adjustments to the MEL system are recommended?

**Sub-question:** What are the lessons learned on how to improve the communication lines between ADAPT and stakeholders, namely national policy makers? What are the best practices in effective communication of the ADAPT objective and NbS?

The ADAPT MEL strategy is found to be fairly adequate and effective. The reporting of results to the stakeholders is mostly done via email and online conferencing. In regard to the absence of an adopted Monitoring and Evaluation framework, the MEL strategy requires more systematic approach in order to ensure that the data is collected in an organised fashioned and used for assessing the results directly in correlation with the desired outputs and outcomes. This should be further supported by building the PMT's capacity to perform data management. The PMT is very active on continuous assessment of day-to-day activities and is performing adjustments according to the identified needs. By adopting a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation framework, the performance management would be more organised, and would provide sufficient, adequate and timely data and information to assess progress against the ADAPT objectives as outlined in the ADAPT programme document and its Logical Framework – overall objectives, outcomes and outputs, as well as economy specific deliverables.

#### Criteria: Achievements and challenges in moving towards objectives and outcomes

**Key evaluation question:** To what extent has the ADAPT progressed in achieving the expected outcomes in each of its key intervention areas?

**Sub-question:** Have any policy documents (strategies, regulations, etc.) been adopted as a direct result of ADAPT? Have any policy documents been adopted containing NbS standards? Were those documents adopted according to the existing plans and dynamics or had ADAPT influenced their inclusion and prioritisation, and if so, how?

Outcomes of the project are set according three different components, being three objectives of the ADAPT. The achievement of some outcomes is valuable for the MTR, while for the larger number of outcomes, their achievement can be assessed solely at the end of the project as no additional milestones or key performance indicators are set, hence their evaluations is based on qualitative data. The qualitative data is highly valuable in assessing the achievement of outcomes, yet quantitate data would be used for validation of results.

Under Component 1., for the sake of this MTR, it is valuable to note that draft versions of 6 scoping studies had been prepared and that the translation of NbS in local languages is underway. The NbS standards are translated in Serbian, Albanian and Macedonian, hence making the standards more accessible to all participating economies.

Under this component there are few results in reaching national decision makers and natural resource managers (48 planned in total) and increasing capacity of stakeholders (120 stakeholders planned in total).

Under Component 2. all outcomes are still pending realisation. Comparative policy review had been prepared, yet the work on national policies and natural resource and disaster management plans are still pending, hence it is not possible to assess their alignment with the EU acquis.

Under Component 3, the outcomes had not been achieved, mostly due to the delay of pilot project implementations in Albania and Serbia. The outreach to 600 people via the implementation of the Communication Strategy is assessed to be progressing well, while other outcomes can be evaluated in the later stages of ADAPT.

<p><b>Key evaluation question:</b> What are the early markers of changes among decision/policy makers and other relevant partners that demonstrate that the ADAPT is on its way to enhance integration of NbS into national policies for CCA and DRR and national resource management plans?</p>
<p>The integration of NbS into national policies for CRA and DRR is still in early stages, hence there had been little evidence to support the changes among decision/policy makers and other relevant partners. Local administration in Kraljevo is in process of adopting the Development Plan for the City of Kraljevo, which is the umbrella strategic document for this Local Self-Government. A whole section on NbS is included in said Development Plan, hence it can be considered a good practice. The interviews with the participants in Serbia conclude that this inclusion into a local policy is a result of higher understanding of the NbS by the senior staff within the Civil Protection unit in Kraljevo and with additional promotional activities and networking, this good practice can be applied in other LSGs in Serbia.</p>
<p><b>Key evaluation question:</b> What are the enabling/constraining factors influencing the achievement and non-achievements of the outcomes?</p>
<p><b>Sub-question:</b> Has the lack of project (action) plans for pilot project implementation had any impact, e.g. delays, overlaps, and such? Would it be useful to adopt such plans at this stage of the ADAPT implementation process?</p>
<p>As stated in numerous occasions throughout this review, COVID 19 had caused many adjustments of the operations side of the ADAPT, including significant changes in communication with the project partners and other stakeholders. This has influenced in great length the work of the PMT and also the communication lines between national coordinators and other participating institutions within the respective economies.</p>
<p>ADAPT planning, monitoring and evaluation is considered to be limited due to a fact that no M&amp;E Framework is in place, while the pilot projects are being implemented without the support of unified planning (action) documents. This can constrain the performance of the project, as by monitoring different stages of the project activities, early warning system would be established, as well as efficient reporting on results, bottlenecks and mitigating actions. Interviews with the IUCN core staff in the PMT had concluded that pilot projects would be implemented in three distinctive stages (Analysis, Operational Planning, and Implementation of NbS), yet no operational document has been prepared in which actions within the stages are described and for which performance indicators are set. This may produce delays and lack of management tools for monitoring consultants. These potential effects can be evaluated in the later stages of the pilot projects implementation.</p>
<p><b>Key evaluation question:</b> What are the early markers of the ADAPT project being on track to achieve its overall objective of increased ecosystem and community resilience (in pilot sites and more broadly at the national level)?</p>
<p><b>Sub-question:</b> Which economy specific deliverables have been achieved? Are there some deliverables that will not be achieved, and what are the reasons behind this? Have some new deliverables occurred during the implementation that could be included as those which are economy specific?</p>
<p>Given that this MTR is limited to a timeframe in which outcomes leading to the achievement of an overall objective of ADAPT are scarce, the conclusion on whether the impact indicator will be achieved cannot be made with great certainty. The start of the implementation of the pilot projects in Albania and Serbia, as well as the development of the scoping studies and Comparative Policy Study, together with an effective implementation of the Communication Strategy, all imply that the ADAPT is on track of achieving its overall objective. However, there is insufficient evidence that these outcomes will increase ecosystem and community resilience as the interviews had confirmed that the effects of these outcomes can be assessed in later stages of the project.</p>
<p>During the consultation phase of the MTR, much emphasis was on identifying economy specific deliverables that had been achieved, and that may had influenced the achievement of overall and specific objectives of the ADAPT, yet aside from already mentioned outcomes (pilot sites, scoping studies, comparative policy study, etc.), participants had not identified additional deliverables to be considered relevant.</p>
<p><b>Key evaluation question:</b> Are there any unintended consequences as a result of the ADAPT interventions?</p>
<p><b>Sub-question:</b> Were there any indirect positive or negative impacts in the 6 economies, as a result of ADAPT?</p>
<p>There is insufficient evidence that significant unintended consequences had occurred as a result of the ADAPT intervention. Some additional administrative burden has been identified during the course of the project, mainly due to constant changes to the PMT organisational structure, yet they have been concluded not to be significant comparing to other projects being implemented across the region.</p>
<p><b>Key evaluation question:</b> What efforts are being made to ensure sustainability of the ADAPT results in the longer term?</p>
<p>During the ADAPT implementation covered by this MTR, recovery management due to COVID 19 pandemic was in focus of ADAPT. In that regard, the actions that should ensure sustainability of the ADAPT results are expected to take place in the later stages of the ADAPT when the project had produced more relevant results, especially in the implementation of the NbS and inclusion of NbS standards into national policies and regulations.</p>

**Criteria: Efficiency**

**Key evaluation question:** To what extent are the current ADAPT operational modality and governance/management structure efficient in contributing to its overall achievements?

**Sub-question:** Were there any staffing or procurement issues, and how have they influenced ADAPT implementation?

The governance and management structure of ADAPT is found to be fairly complex. Day to day management, reporting, communication and other regular operations lay with Project Management Team (PMT). At the same time, PMT is a focal point for coordination between different project components and units, including Project Steering Committee (PCS) tasked with oversight and strategic planning, and Project Advisory Group (PAG) responsible for technical assistance and expert advice. The PMT is also responsible for coordination and cooperation with the IUCN Commissions and IUCN Thematic Programmes, as well as with national coordinators and various project partners and stakeholders. In that regard, the efficiency of the project in whole is highly dependent on well-staffed and managed PMT.

Since the kick off of the project, due to various factors, the IUCN has had problems with establishing a fully functioning PMT, mostly due to COVID 19 which had an impact on less international hiring options, and an evident lack of local profiles with relevant knowledge in NbS.

During the consultation process, participants highlighted that the PMT had been operating on a satisfactory level. However, it has been noted that the continuous changes of the key staff had influenced delays and non-consistency in ADAPT performance, often appearing inefficient and non-coherent in communication. The main input received from the field experts on this note is that they were at times unsure of their role when it comes to stakeholder management in a respected economy, and often felt as if the PMT was not efficient in bringing together the project partners with other relevant actors.

The procurement process of the team leader (P2 position according to the IUCN classification) has had issues from the onset of the ADAPT. In the later stages, due to an inability to hire appropriate expert for the role of the team leader, it was decided in cooperation with the donor Sida that that position would not be filled, yet instead the A3 class employee will be procured, as an assistant to the NbS project officer (P1 position). The issues for hiring a P2 position, according to the interviews with the IUCN staff, were:

- The hiring procedures of IUCN are fairly complex and lengthy, and typically last two to three months from the moment of the call for proposals. Additional constraint is that no call can be published until the donor contract is signed, hence the call published after the initial kick-off of ADAPT and implemented when COVID 19 pandemic has already started,
- International hiring was hard to obtain as in multiple occasions the selected candidate rejected the job offer in the final stages due to COVID 19 and circumstantial personal reasons,
- In the region, there is little expertise on NbS, hence local experts who applied for the position had limited experience needed for the position of the team lead. On one occasion, local expert with experience from the public sector was hired, yet it proved soon that he felt inadequate to perform such role, hence he left the position after a short period of time,
- IUCN has an elaborate procedure in establishing the pay scale for the regional office in Serbia. The salary for the P2 position is considered to be highly competitive in the region, yet internationally it is far less competitive, hence international experts who have vast experience in NbS were not prone to change countries for below-average monetary compensation.

However, through consultations it was also concluded that the most recent changes in the PMT, mostly due to employment of the latest NbS Project Officer, had reflected positively on ADAPT visibility and overall performance. Additionally, the procurement process for employing a project assistant has also been concluded and it is expected for the position to be filled in the last quarter of 2021, thus further strengthening the core team implementing and coordinating ADAPT. The project assistant should lighten the burden of the NbS Project Officer when it comes to administrative work, providing the NbS Project Officer with more resources to perform essential tasks.

**Key evaluation question:** To what extent are the ADAPT outputs in balance with the level of effort, time and resources spent?

**Sub-question:** Has the ADAPT budget been used according to the programming or was there a need for budget adjustments, and why? Has the programmed budget proved to be adequate in accordance to the mid-term needs?

The conclusion based on document analysis is that the outputs are being achieved with the planned level of resources, while the level of effort and time is bigger than anticipated, all due to the changes that occurred at the onset of the project. In that regard, the ADAPT outputs are mostly considered to be fit for purpose.

In the consultation process, many participants questioned the efficiency of the invested level of resources when it comes to the design of the scoping studies, an outcome under the Component 1. It had been noted that significant resources were invested in the development of the draft scoping studies, yet there are issues with validation and finalisations. In the period covered by the MTR, not all scoping studies were validated by the national authorities, and hence had not been finalised. As these studies are meant to provide baseline inputs and ex post analysis relevant for the NbS and its inclusion into the national policies, it is necessary that all actors agree on its conclusions

and for the studies to be disseminated and communicated to all relevant national stakeholders. In case of North Macedonia, the project partner representatives had raised concern about the quality of their scoping study, noting how it was based solely on literature review and how the final draft has little use for the next steps of ADAPT and generally for policy making and NbS implementation in North Macedonia. In that regard, additional efforts and resources will have to be invested, both from the NbS field expert, the PMT, and national authorities in order for the scoping study to be applicable. Participants from Bosnia and Herzegovina emphasised that in order for the scoping study to be validated and in any way used in future actions, it would have to be translated in all official languages of BiH and disseminated throughout all governance levels and multiple institutions. This process can be very lengthy and would impose additional resources, hence the participants have raised concern about the overall efficiency of the scoping study, even though all interviews concluded that from the standpoint of their profession, the scoping study has high quality inputs that can be used both in policy making and NbS implementation. These examples challenge the overall balance between this output and invested effort, time and resources, and should be reassessed in the final evaluation of ADAPT.

An external audit was procured for the ADAPT project, which reported no issues in budget expenditure. Additionally, interviews had confirmed that the ADAPT budget, although relatively limited in scope, is adequate for the envisaged activities. In case of project extension, the budget should be rebalanced in order to meet the financial planning requirements.

**Key evaluation question:** How efficient is the ADAPT in ensuring inputs (money, human resources, activities) are converted into the desired outputs according to the planned schedule?

**Sub-question:** Given the complexity of the organisational and management structure of ADAPT, have there been any negative impacts that have occurred as a direct result of such a structure? Were there any communication bottlenecks? Is there an economy specific organisational problem?

PMT is very diligent in reporting on used inputs (money, human resources, activities) and their correlation with outputs according to the planned schedule. The inputs are well planned, while the efficiency in the MTR timeframe was concluded to be adequate. The efficiency of resources invested in the development of scoping studies, implementation of pilot projects, tender dossier development in North Macedonia, and feasibility studies can be assessed in the later stages of the ADAPT implementation.

No negative effects derived from the complex management structure of ADAPT, yet the interviews confirmed that constant changes in the PMT had caused some inefficiency and loss of time.

**Key evaluation question:** To what extent are the roles, responsibilities and relations among the PMT, National NbS Coordination group, national field experts, Project Steering Committee (PSC) and the Project Advisory Group (PAG).

**Sub-question:** In the absence of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, how were M&E activities performed? Were they performed in a systematised fashion, and apart from yearly reporting, did the stakeholders have regular access to project results?

The roles, responsibilities, and relations among the PMT, NbS Coordination group and other actors and bodies are found to be efficiently delegated. In the early stages of ADAPT implementation, some issues were reported regarding the management of the NbS field experts and result expectation of their engagement. Due to understaffed PMT, an expert assistance from the IUCN was provided in order to achieve better coordination with the NbS field experts in regard to development of the scoping studies, and the interviews had confirmed that it influenced better understanding of individual roles and responsibilities. Since there have been sporadic issues where NbS field experts were unsure of their role in coordinating activities locally, and it had been noted that in those cases more involvement of the PMT was needed. These occurrences had resulted in occasional delays and lack of understanding of the ADAPT progress from the standpoint of the project partners and other stakeholders. During the consultation process many participants highlighted that they feel as if ADAPT had just started with their operations, thus proving that there were significant communication issues.

Reporting is done efficiently, even though there is no M&E Framework in place. The project partners are regularly informed on activities, results and other relevant facts about ADAPT via email and occasional webinars (online meetings), as well as through participation in working bodies of ADAPT. The interviews confirmed that this way of reporting is comprehensive, yet causes information overflow, hence significant time is needed to assess all information provided by ADAPT.

**Key evaluation question:** PSC and PAG working effectively to guarantee an efficient management of the ADAPT and its good governance?

The MTR collected insufficient evidence on efficiency on the work of the PSC. It has been concluded that the PSC meetings were organised according to the work plans.

The Project Advisory Group (PAG) was supposed to be established in Year one of ADAPT, yet its establishment has been postponed for Year two due to needs of recovery management. According to the Implementation report for Year One, the establishment of the Project Advisory Group (PAG) was successful on the part of international experts while nominations from the region are still due. The three international experts cover a wide range of expertise, including NbS policy and capacity building, NbS implementation, climate financing and youth engagement. A

PAG membership agreement was signed by each of the experts. The remaining members of PAG (1 from each of the 6 economies) have not yet been appointed, as it was envisaged that NbS Coordination Groups would agree and nominate the representative.

In this regard, the overall efficiency of the PSC and the PAG will have to be assessed in the later stages of ADAPT.

**Key evaluation question:** How efficient is the collaboration between PMT, IUCN Commissions and IUCN Thematic Programmes?

Collaboration between the PMT, IUCN Commissions and IUCN Thematic Programmes has been concluded to be highly efficient. Interviews with the IUCN staff had confirmed that the collaboration between different bodies had resulted in building knowledge within all IUCN structures. The PMT emphasised the role of Thematic Programmes as highly efficient as expertise was provided in various stages of the ADAPT implementation, especially in the design of the project. On numerous occasions support was provided in the development of consultants' Terms of Reference, while the PMT is feeding IUCN Commissions and Thematic Programmes with valuable insights on regional experiences in regard to the implementation of the NbS Standards

#### Criteria: Coherence

**Key evaluation question:** To what extent is the ADAPT project coherent with country priorities and needs and in supporting mainstreaming of NbS approaches and interventions that meet NbS Standard?

**Sub-question:** Were there any coherences identified between ADAPT and other projects in the same field, financed by international donor organisations, EU funds, or others? Has there been a need for adjustments in order to minimise overlaps or excessive administrative burden of national policy makers and other stakeholders?

ADAPT project has proven to be highly coherent with priorities and needs of 6 Western Balkan economies. At the same time, no overlaps with other initiatives were identified as the ADAPT objectives and activities are complementary with economy specific approaches to climate change and disaster management initiatives and strategic planning. During the consultation process, the participant noted that ADAPT was in most cases a logical next step in supporting initiatives that were already in progress or had just ended. For instance, Kosovo representative had noted that although ADAPT in its scope is considered to have limited impact, it still was a perfect continuation of a much larger GIZ project (Open Regional Fund for South East Europe – Implementation of Biodiversity Agreements) that was implemented from 2015 till 2021, hence continually streamlining good practices and including NbS as a baseline standard for overall reforms in the fields of battling climate change and disaster risk management.

The scope of ADAPT is found to be such that no significant additional administrative burden was needed in order to fit ADAPT activities into the existing framework comprised by national authorities. However, it has been concluded that economies with a more complex governance systems, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia, had to invest more effort in coordinating ADAPT activities due to much need for internal coordination between different departments within national authorities.

**Key evaluation question:** How coherent and complementary are the ADAPT activities vis-à-vis other policies and initiatives undertaken by country Governments and other regional and international partners engaged in promoting resilience to climate change in the Western Balkans?

**Sub-question:** Is ADAPT coherent with national action plans for EU assessment chapters?

ADAPT project had invested a lot of effort in coordinating activities and communicating objectives with other regional initiatives. IUCN has intense cooperation with a number of international organisations and international CSOs, including FAO, GIZ, RCC, CIMA Research Foundation, UNDP, UNEP, UNECE, and WWF.

The ADAPT project team was able to provide inputs on NbS into the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans that was adopted in November during the Berlin Process Summit in Sofia. The Green Agenda translates the ambitions of the EU Green Deal to the context of the Western Balkans. By engaging with the Regional Cooperation Council as well as the Biodiversity Task Force for South-Eastern Europe, the ADAPT team was able to incorporate NbS into the chapter on climate, energy, mobility and the chapter on biodiversity, hence achieving great success in enabling long-term implementation of the NbS standards.

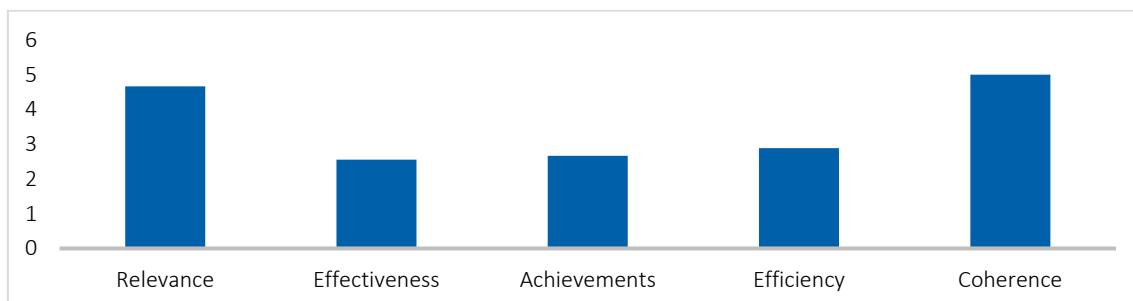
The approach to EU assessment, namely chapter 27, differs across the Western Balkans, whereas some economies, such as Serbia and Montenegro, had adopted specific actions plans depicting actions to harmonise domestic legislation with the EU acquis communautaire, whilst others had decided on a more ad hoc approach to legislative planning, envisaging actions through different national strategic documents. ADAPT had published a study on a Regional Comparative Policy Analysis in the Western Balkans, presenting a detailed overview on climate hazard and disaster risk context, policies relevant to CCA and DRR, gaps and opportunities for integrating Nature-based Solutions into CCA/DRR, for each participating economy. In that regard, comparative study is a valuable ex post analysis for all economies when designing future strategic and legislative documents, oriented towards EU assessment. However, the consultation process has shown that the visibility and appliance of this document is limited as few policy documents containing NbS standards had been adopted across participating economies. Advocacy for the integration of NbS principles in three national CCA policies and sectoral programmes has been planned as an activity in the ADAPT work plan for the year two of the implementation, yet no significant influence has been made so far.

## 5. Conclusions and Lessons Learnt

The MTR of the ADAPT was conducted through a three-stage assessment, including document analysis, consultation processes, and assessment of the collected data. The purpose of the MTR was to determine the progress being made toward the achievement of outcomes in all its three key intervention areas, highlight the achievement and challenges of ADAPT, as well as to bring to light best practices. The MTR conclusions are presented according to the evaluation criteria and are based on the answers to the key evaluation questions.

According to the answers to the questions with Likert scale multiple options (1-5, 5 being the highest rank), the ADAPT is found to be most relevant and coherent, while the effectiveness of ADAPT is perceived as moderate.

Figure 2: Interview results according to criteria



Source: MTR

### 5.1 Relevance

The MTR has concluded that ADAPT is highly relevant in meeting local needs when compared to the project objectives and outcomes. Even though ADAPT's implementation was limited because of the constraining factors in place (COVID 19), most of the participants in the consultation process noted that ADAPT is very much fit for purpose with respect to local needs. Objective 1. was proven to be relevant as local capacities for CCA and DRR are limited, hence with an introduction of the new NbS concept the needs for capacity building and improving local knowledge are essential. On the other hand, it has been concluded that ADAPT, so far, has limited capacity in increasing awareness on gender equality in link with the NbS. Objective 2. of ADAPT is found relevant as all participating economies are in the process of EU accession, hence by ADAPT providing assistance in the inclusion of NbS standards in the national strategic and legislative framework, it is found to be relevant in streamlining the EU integration process, as well as a good solution in policy making. Finally, Objective 3. is found most relevant by most participating economies since a practical use of the cost-efficient approach of NbS is foreseen as a suitable method for battling climate change and enhancing disaster risk reduction. The economies who have had less activities in the practical implementation of NbS, such as Montenegro and Kosovo, have found Objective 3. less relevant for their economies.

### 5.2 Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the ADAPT project, according to the analysis of the available documents, has been moderately achieved in regard to three main objectives of the project. Activities within the three objectives were implemented in parallel, while the greatest effects have been achieved within Objective 1. This is as expected, given that a significant number of the activities of Objective 1. were planned and implemented in Year one of ADAPT implementation. In terms of Objective 2. some effects were produced, mainly through the design of the Comparative Policy Study and the draft scoping studies which provide valuable

data for baseline NbS analyses and insights on policies to be implemented on the national levels of participating economies. The least effects were identified for Objective 3. as feasibility studies, pilot projects in Albania and Serbia, and a tender dossier in North Macedonia are in the early stages of development.

Given the complex structure of the project with numerous interlinking outcomes, outputs, performance indicators, and economy specific deliverables, it was concluded that monitoring is rather complex and requires a systematised approach. In that regard, during the consultation process, most participants had issues in assessing the effectiveness of ADAPT, hence resulted that even though a significant amount of activities was conducted, the overall perception of the participating project partners is that those activities gave little effect.

### 5.3 Achievements and challenges in moving towards objectives and outcomes

Even though COVID 19 had stressed the ADAPT implementation and caused various delays, valuable achievements were identified. In Component 1. many activities were performed, including the partial establishment of PAG, development of draft scoping studies, translation of the NbS standards into local languages, and development of a comprehensive communication strategy. Under Component 2. the project influenced the negotiation of the EU Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, which includes reference to NbS in the climate change and biodiversity chapters. This strengthens links between climate and biodiversity and prepares the ground for the implementation of NbS at the regional and national levels. On the other hand, little advocacy for the integration of NbS principles in national strategic and regulatory frameworks had been made. This occurred due to a lack of effective communication with the project partners, lack of consistency of the PMT due to staff procurement issues and had resulted in missed opportunities for early markers of success. Under the Component 3. the biggest achievement is the start of the Serbia pilot project implementation. The progress of this pilot project will need to be monitored closely as its successful completion is dependent on effective cooperation between the PMT and the implementing team, as no planning document had been prepared and concerns were risen, especially for the project in Albania where PMT does not have a resource on-site.

The consultation process with the project partners and other stakeholders has concluded that little effects have been achieved to date in building regional networks, or rather that in the mid-term period the ADAPT project has not conducted significant actions towards networking between the 6 participating economies. This conclusion is mainly based on a pretence that ADAPT has had its kick-off basically in the onset of the COVID 19 outbreak, hence virtual communication has been a dominant form of cooperation and seen as unfit for efficiently supporting experience and knowledge sharing. Due to the identified language barriers, being the lack of understanding of English as a working language, and a lack of personal contact with other beneficiaries of ADAPT, most participant who participated in the consultations stated that the possibilities for broadening cooperation was highly limited.

### 5.4 Efficiency

The governance and management structure of ADAPT is found to be fairly complex. Day to day management, reporting, communication and other regular operations lay with the Project Management Team (PMT). At the same time, PMT is a focal point for coordination between different project components and units, including Project Steering Committee (PCS) tasked with oversight and strategic planning and Project Advisory Group (PAG) responsible for technical assistance and expert advice. PMT is also responsible for coordination and cooperation with the IUCN Commissions and IUCN Thematic Programmes, as well as with national coordinators and various project partners and stakeholders. In that regard, the efficiency of the project in whole is highly dependent on well-staffed and managed PMT.

Since the kick off of the project, due to various factors, the IUCN has had problems with establishing a fully functioning PMT, mostly due to COVID 19 which had an impact on less international hiring options, and an

evident lack of profiles with relevant knowledge in NbS. During the consultation process, participants highlighted that the PMT has been operating on a satisfactory level. However, it has been noted that the continuous changes of the key staff have influenced delays and non-consistency in ADAPT performance, often appearing inefficient and non-coherent in communication.

The conclusion based on document analysis is that the outputs are being achieved with the planned level of resources, while the level of effort and time is bigger than anticipated, all due to the changes that occurred at the onset of the project. In that regard, the ADAPT outputs are mostly considered to be fit for purpose. In the consultation process, many participants questioned the efficiency of the invested level of resources when it comes to the design of the scoping studies, an outcome under the Component 1. and one that was most visible to the project partners in the implementation so far. It had been noted that significant resources were invested in the development of the draft scoping studies, yet there are issues with validation and finalisations.

## 5.5 Coherence

ADAPT project has proven to be highly coherent with priorities and needs of 6 Western Balkan economies. At the same time, no overlaps with other initiatives were identified as the ADAPT objectives and activities are complementary with economy specific approaches to climate change and disaster risk reduction initiatives and strategic planning.

ADAPT project had invested a lot of effort in coordinating activities and communicating objectives with other regional initiatives. IUCN has intense cooperation with a number of international organisations and international CSOs, including FAO, GIZ, RCC, CIMA Research Foundation, UNDP, UNEP, UNECE, and WWF. This all provides significant opportunity for continuation of NbS reforms after ADAPT.

## 6. Recommendations

The recommendations of the MTR are based on inputs provided by the participants during the consultation phase and through expert opinion on best practices that may further improve the implementation of ADAPT.

### ► Adoption of a new work plan and budget

Given that there are significant delays in the implementation of multiple activities, the recommendation is to adopt a new work plan for the remainder of the duration of ADAPT and make changes to the budget accordingly. The new work plan should be approved by the donor and presented to the project partners and other stakeholders for discussion.

Given the current realisation of the work plan and insights gained through the interviews with the PMT staff, it is evident that ADAPT will seek project extension. In this case, the new work plan should reflect on the extension and assess the implementability of currently envisaged activities or inclusion of other activities.

According to the follow-up interview with the representatives from the PMT, it has been concluded that this recommendation has been implemented after the MTR period, as on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September the PMT submitted a new Work Plan and Budget to the donor, Sida. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of September Sida approved the new Work Plan that included a no-cost extension of 8 months so that a high majority of project activities can be delivered by the end of the project (30 June 2023). The interview confirmed that in new Work Plan, the timeline for many activities had been adjusted to reflect the adjustment, while two activities were merged (study tour of selected project partners to one European country and exchange visits), in order for an additional activity to be introduced (upgrading of the national North Macedonian platform for Risk Assessment by adding NbS-related modules).

The PMT will communicate with the project partners and other relevant stakeholders on the changes in the Work Plan, whilst the changes are also applicable to other recommendations stated in this report.

### ► Reinforcement of the ADAPT PMT

The governance and management structure of ADAPT is found to have a high degree of complexity. Day to day management, reporting, communication and other regular operations lay with Project Management Team (PMT). At the same time, PMT is a focal point in making the liaison with the Project Steering Committee (PCS) and the Project Advisory Group (PAG) responsible for technical assistance and expert advice. PMT is also responsible for coordination and cooperation with the IUCN Commissions and IUCN Thematic Programmes, as well as with national coordinators and various project partners and stakeholders. In that regard, the efficiency of the project in whole is highly dependent on well-staffed and managed PMT.

Considering the accumulated delays and the fact that from the first of October the PMT programme staff will include 2 team members as per initial project design but at lower grades since instead of a P2 there will be an AST 3 that will join the team, the recommendation is to additionally reinforce the PMT by adding additional programme staff (1 full time position or at least part time – min. 50%).

### ► Adoption of the comprehensive MEL strategy

By adopting a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation framework, the performance management would be organised in a more systematic fashion, and would provide sufficient, adequate and timely data and information to assess progress against the ADAPT objectives as outlined in the ADAPT programme document and its Logical Framework – overall objectives, outcomes and outputs, as well as economy specific deliverables.

The recommendation is to revisit the draft ADAPT M&E Framework Guidance Note, and to reassess the effectiveness of Annual cycle of M&E activities/reporting, and change it according to the specific economy needs for reporting, given that economy specific deliverables and actions that are planned for implementation require specific data needs for effective monitoring. The M&E Framework should be adopted with regard to the newly adopted Work Plan. This recommendation is also to reassess the applicability of the output indicators that were set according to expected outcomes, and to redefine targets according to the circumstances to date. Some of the indicators also require a closer analysis with respect to the measurement approach, ensuring that all approaches are clear to understand and realistic when it comes to the data sources relied on, and their availability. The draft ADAPT M&E Framework Guidance Note also lacks information regarding the accountability for monitoring and evaluation, as often the responsibility is set on the PMT, while it is dependent on inputs from other partners. This approach may further stress the PMT limited resources due to data uncertainty, hence the recommendation is for the M&E framework to more clearly define the accountability of the externally engaged experts, such as NbS field experts, so far as it is possible.

With regard to the implementation of pilot projects, it is also advised that the M&E frameworks are established with distinctive sets of milestones and key performance indicators, in order for the PMT to be able to regularly assess the implementation stages, and hence make adjustments if needed. The M&E for the pilot projects can be implemented as part of a single comprehensive M&E framework on the level of the whole ADAPT.

### ► Improved planning and management of pilot projects

As previously stated in the Findings chapter, the pilot projects in Albania and Serbia are being conducted without an action plan, or other form of a planning document. In the first stage of the implementation of the project in Serbia, already some delays have been noted, as well as potential methodological discrepancies that have occurred due to a lack of access to data.

In that regard, the recommendation is for ADAPT to prepare operational documents for the pilot projects, with clearly presented activities, performance indicators, responsibilities, implementation partners, budgets and timelines. Impact and result indicators should be added in regard to the impact/result indicators stated in the logical framework and other project documents. In that way, the PMT would have a better overview on the project implementation and stronger expectations management in different stages.

The adoption of such document could also be considered a knowledge product, as it could be used as a benchmark document for the implementation of NbS of a similar scope in the Western Balkans.

#### ► Improved communication

During the MTR, various communication issues have been identified which have resulted in a low understanding of ADAPT objectives, actions and outcomes by the project partners and other stakeholders.

The recommendation is for ADAPT to delegate more effort to direct communication with the project partners and other stakeholders who are directly involved in the implementation of ADAPT. This can be achieved through field visits or by arranging more networking opportunities in the region. If COVID 19 restrictions are still in place throughout the implementation of the project, the recommendation is for the PMT to focus on individual meetings with project partners, preferably with usage of local languages as a working language.

The recommendation is also for ADAPT to allocate more resources to translation of working documents to local languages. As stated in the Finding chapter, there is a low capacity of national representatives to operate in English, hence the use of local language is preferable in every possible occasion. This may impose more costs, yet the benefit is predicted to be highly significant.

#### ► Reassessment of scoping studies

Scoping studies had been highlighted as the most visible result of ADAPT in the mid-term period, yet they have not been validated or finalised, except in Albania and Montenegro. This challenges the efficiency of ADAPT and its potential to produce good quality knowledge products.

The recommendation is for ADAPT to reassess the project activities regarding scoping studies and to envisage further actions necessary for the scoping studies to be validated by the national authorities, via consultation process and field expert/other consultants' engagements. After the validation process ADAPT is recommended to engage in promotional activities in order to establish the scoping studies as baseline analysis to be used in the process of policy making and NbS implementation. In Albania, the follow up is also needed after the new Government is elected as there are assumptions that the leading ministry in environment protection will undergo organisational changes.

The recommendation is also for ADAPT to provide national authorities with translated versions of scoping studies or alternatively produce a broader executive summary in a local language in order for the validation process to be conducted in shorter period of time.

#### ► Inclusion of additional activities

Given that the project has been operational since November 2019, various national representatives have gained significant knowledge on NbS and its applicability in their economy. During the interviews various stakeholders had presented valuable ideas on introducing economy specific activities that would have an impact on the overall objective of ADAPT. For instance, there were notions for ADAPT to provide more hand-on technical assistance in the process of policy design, and also some notions were made on improvement of existing IT platforms for DRR with NbS approach.

In this regard, the recommendation is for the PMT to organise an opportunity, prior to the design of the new work plan, for project partners and other stakeholders to nominate additional activities. This can be organised in an open forum, through focus groups, or via individual consultations. After that process the PMT would be responsible for assessing the significance of the nominations, hence provide recommendations for inclusion of activities based on ADAPT budget and organisational structure or provide an elaborated response with justification for exclusion.

This recommendation has been adopted in part by the adoption of the new work plan and inclusion of one valuable activity, and merging of two similar activities. In that regard, this recommendation can apply for activities which in scope do not necessarily require changes in the work plan, and budget, yet may be suggested by the project partners as significant.

## Appendices

- A.1 Terms of Reference
- A.2 Data collection instruments
- A.3 MTR schedule/timetable
- A.4 List of people met/interviewed
- A.5 Documents consulted

## A.1 Terms of Reference

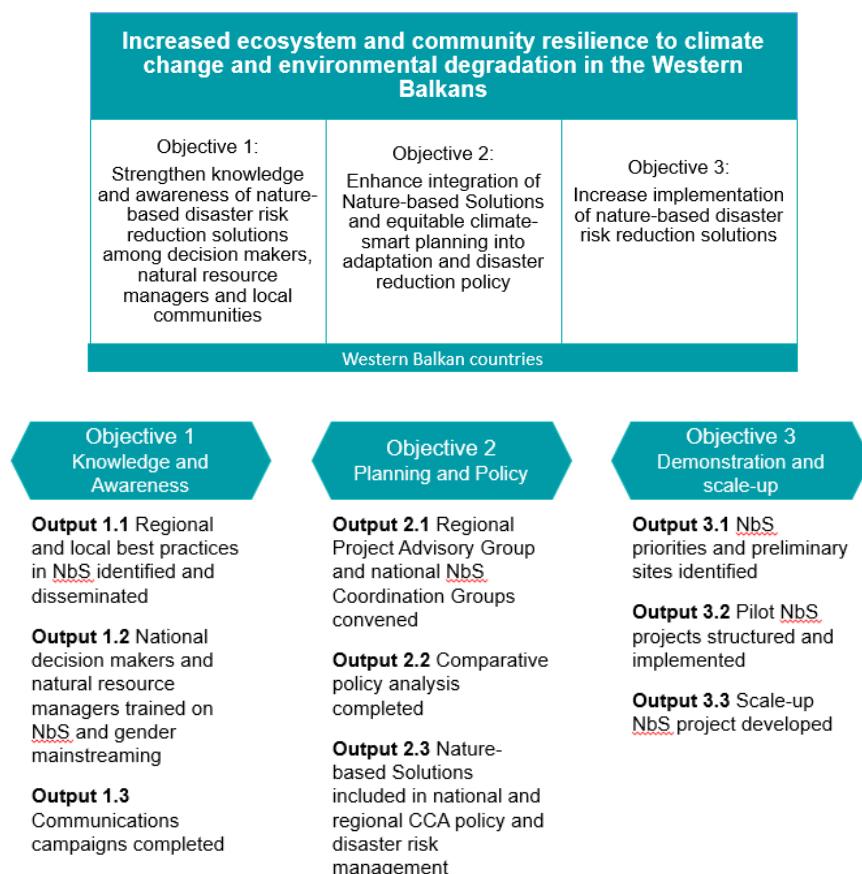
### 1. Introduction and Background

Climate change is increasing the frequency, intensity and magnitude of disasters, leading to a higher number of casualties, land degradation as well as property and economic losses. Nature can provide cost-effective, no-regret solutions, which help increase ecosystem and community resilience beyond their capacity to absorb and recover from a single disaster, such as a flood or drought. In particular, the Western Balkan economies are among the most vulnerable with respect to climate change impacts affecting numerous sectors and domains.

**"ADAPT: Nature-based Solutions for Resilient Societies in the Western Balkans"** (the ADAPT) is a three-year regional project funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and implemented by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), through the Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ECARO). The project started in November 2019 and will end in October 2022. The **overall objective** of the project is to increase ecosystem and community resilience to climate change and environmental degradation in the Western Balkans. The project focuses on Nature-based Solution (NbS) knowledge, policy and planning, implementation and scale-up. In more details, the ADAPT is pursuing the following **specific objectives** across the Western Balkans:

1. Increase knowledge and awareness of nature-based disaster risk reduction solutions among decision makers, natural resource managers and local communities;
2. Integrate NbS and equitable climate-smart planning into adaptation and disaster reduction policy;
3. Implement NbS for disaster risk reduction through pilot projects and their scale-up.

Figure 1 – the ADAPT structure and objectives



The ADAPT project focuses on 6 economies – Albania, Bosnia And Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. NbS interventions will be implemented in the field through two pilot projects in Albania and Serbia. Figure one above summarises the ADAPT structure and objectives.

The ADAPT project works with the six Western Balkan economies, regional and local partners, academia and research agencies, civil society organisations, international and national experts<sup>1</sup>. Internally, IUCN ECARO is supported by the IUCN Thematic Programmes on Ecosystem Management, Forest Conservation, Water, and Governance and Rights with a view to ensuring full compliance with the Global Standard for NbS and high-quality assurance of project results.

## 2. Rationale and Objectives for the Mid-Term Review

As the Adapt project is approaching the mid-point of project implementation, an independent review must be conducted that will look into progress and effectiveness in achieving expected project objectives and outputs.

This Mid-Term Review (MTR) fulfils the requirements of both SIDA and the IUCN Monitoring and Evaluation Policy to conduct an independent midterm review (MTR) for the purpose of learning and reflection on project management and early results. It is expected that the findings and recommendations of the MTR will help to identify any needed course corrections in the ADAPT approach and activities and bring valuable external reflections to help strengthen the project and complement the ADAPT Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system through an adaptive management modality.

The MTR will inform SIDA, IUCN, implementing partners other stakeholders about the ADAPT effectiveness in achieving expected project objectives and outputs. In particular, the MTR is expected to allow:

- ✓ Determine progress being made toward the achievement of outcomes in all its three key intervention areas;
- ✓ Highlight achievements and lessons learned derived from the ADAPT design, implementation, and management so far – including in terms of design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of the two pilot projects;
- ✓ Specific attention will be given to how the project contributed so far to the EU integration process, especially to chapter 27 on Environment and Climate Change and to how can the project further strengthen its support to EU Integration Process;
- ✓ Identification of the key beneficiaries of the project along with the results and experiences of methods employed in the project to map beneficiaries and stakeholders;
- ✓ Success in integrating gender equality in the project and ways to strengthen integration;
- ✓ Guide the identification of any issues requiring decisions and remedial actions, suggesting any mid-course corrections and/or adjustments to the ADAPT strategy, approach management and activities as necessary.
- ✓ Identify any lessons learnt so far to inform the design of NbS focused projects with similar scope and for the scaling up of NbS interventions.

In line with the globally recognised OECD evaluation criteria,<sup>2</sup> the MTR should organise findings and provide recommendations around the topics of relevance, effectiveness, achievements and challenges, efficiency and coherence in moving towards the project objectives and outputs. Please note that depending on project implementation levels more in depth analysis may occur on some of the criteria listed below while others will be less suitable for in-depth evaluation at this stage.

<sup>1</sup> the ADAPT is managed by an IUCN-ECARO based **Project Management Team (PMT)** which also includes **NbS Field Experts** in Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia. **NbS Coordination Groups (NbS CG)** – comprised of representatives of policy, planning and research institutions, natural resource managers, government and non-government organisations – have been established at national level to provide support to project management in strengthening national policy, planning and implementation, capacity development and awareness raising. The ADAPT **Project Steering Committee (PSC)** is tasked with ensuring oversight and general project direction. Finally, the **Project Advisory Group (PAG)**, comprised of key national and international experts on CCA and DRR, will serve as a regional expert body set up to generate and disseminate knowledge and advise the Project Management Team and national partners on a range of technical issues related to NbS.

<sup>2</sup> revised-evaluation-criteria-dec-2019.pdf (oecd.org)

The **key evaluation questions** for the MTR are:

**a) Relevance**

How appropriate and relevant is the ADAPT approach and intervention logic in terms of its objectives, and within the context of the six targeted economies and the Western Balkans Region? To what extent is the ADAPT fit-for-purpose to promote:

- ✓ Increased knowledge, capacities and awareness on Nature-based disaster risk reduction solutions among decision makers, natural resource managers and local communities;
- ✓ Increased awareness on and commitment to gender equality, gender mainstreaming and gender-sensitive interventions, and linkages with NbS;
- ✓ The successful implementation of on-the-ground NbS for DRR through the ADAPT pilots and scale up;
- ✓ Increased capacity in targeted economies to design NbS projects for submission to global funding facilities.

Has there been any change since the project was formulated that might have affected its relevance? If so, what are these changes and to what extent the project has managed to adapt to ensure it remains relevant? In particular, in what ways has the **Covid-19 pandemic** impacted the ADAPT progress (delays, cancellation, etc.)? How did the pandemic impacted the ADAPT knowledge products, capacity building activities, policy and planning processes as well as pilot activities? Are these impacts still ongoing? What adaptive measures were taken and/or should be taken going forward to address and mitigate the impact of Covid-19? Given impacts from Covid-19, at this point in time, will all project activities be successfully completed by the current project end date, or will there be a need for adjustments (in timeframe and/or targets)?

**b) Effectiveness**

How effective has been the ADAPT project so far? What has and has not worked so far and why? In particular:

- ✓ How effectively has the ADAPT project engaged with national policy makers and natural resource managers in the six targeted economies to raise interest in and understanding of NbS?
- ✓ How effectively has the ADAPT project been to position NbS as effective solutions to address climate risks, increase resilience and enhance compliance with EU policies such as EU Acquis and other international frameworks?
- ✓ How effective has the ADAPT project been in identifying the pilot sites and engaging targeted communities – especially women and vulnerable groups – to participate in the design and development of pilot NbS interventions?
- ✓ How effective has the ADAPT approach been so far to support learning and knowledge sharing within and across the 6 economies and more broadly in the Western Balkan regions, to create synergies and to underpin and scale up local and national achievements?
- ✓ To what extent are the ADAPT MEL strategy and tools adequate and effective to keep track of progress in view of i) understanding the results and, ultimately, the impact of the ADAPT project and ii) detect any needed implementation adjustments for better progress towards results? What adjustments to the MEL system are recommended?

**c) Achievements and challenges in moving towards objectives and outcomes**

To what extent has the ADAPT progressed in achieving the expected outcomes in each of its key intervention areas?

- ✓ What are the early markers of changes among decision/policy makers and other relevant partners that demonstrate that the ADAPT is on its way to enhance integration of NbS into national policies for CCA and DDR and national resource management plans?
- ✓ What are the enabling/constraining factors influencing the achievement and non-achievements of the outcomes?
- ✓ What are the early markers of the ADAPT project being on track to achieve its overall objective of increased ecosystem and community resilience (in pilot sites and more broadly at the national level)?
- ✓ Are there any unintended consequences as a result of the ADAPT interventions?
- ✓ What efforts are being made to ensure sustainability of the ADAPT results in the longer term?

#### d) Efficiency

To what extent are the current ADAPT operational modality and governance/management structure efficient in contributing to its overall achievements? To what extent are the ADAPT outputs in balance with the level of effort, time and resources spent?

- ✓ How efficient is the ADAPT in ensuring inputs (money, human resources, activities) are converted into the desired outputs according to the planned schedule?

To what extent are the roles, responsibilities and relations among the PMT, National NbS Coordination group, national field experts, Project Steering Committee (PSC) and the Project Advisory Group (PAG).

- ✓ PSC and PAG working effectively to guarantee an efficient management of the ADAPT and its good governance?
- ✓ How efficient is the collaboration between PMT, IUCN Commissions and IUCN Thematic Programmes?

In addition, it is strongly advised to review the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework of ADAPT and identify strengths and needs for improvements.

#### e) Coherence

To what extent is the ADAPT project coherent with country priorities and needs and in supporting mainstreaming of NbS approaches and interventions that meet NbS Standard? How coherent and complementary are the ADAPT activities vis-à-vis other policies and initiatives undertaken by country Governments and other regional and international partners engaged in promoting resilience to climate change in the Western Balkans?

### 3. Audience for the review

The primary audiences for the ADAPT MTR are:

- ✓ Sida (donor);
- ✓ IUCN ECARO, IUCN Senior Management and IUCN Thematic Programmes engaged in supporting the implementation of the ADAPT;

The review can also be of interest to other key stakeholders such as the field experts, the NbS Coordination Groups, the ADAPT Project Steering Committee and the Project Advisory Group.

The review will be available to the public on IUCN's website.

### 4. Methodology

The MTR will be designed and coordinated by the Consultant under the supervision of the ADAPT Project Management Team (PMT) in IUCN ECARO. The evaluation process shall start **by Monday, 12 July** and end by **Friday, 3 September 2021**. Given the current Covid-19 situation, little or no travel is envisaged.

The MTR should use mixed methods to gather necessary information and to seek the view of the range of stakeholders who have been engaged in the ADAPT to date. This will include:

- ✓ the review of project documents including annual reports produced to date, scoping studies, pilot project documents, the comparative policy analysis and communication strategy-related material;
- ✓ At least 12 interviews of key stakeholders across all 6 economies (list to be provided at inception);
- ✓ Other methods may be proposed as needed – e.g. surveys or focus group.

The Consultant is expected to develop a review framework based on the suggested key evaluation questions above but may suggest additional questions or modifications. The inception report will be prepared as the first deliverable of the MTR and will include an “evaluation matrix” presenting how the key issues will be addressed, the data sources and the data collection methods that will be used for the MTR and a set of criteria to rate the strength of the evidence collected. Adequately addressing the key evaluation questions will be the basis for IUCN to sign off on the completeness of the MTR report.

All data collection tools should be included as annexes to the MTR report. The presentation of the MRT findings shall include all relevant links between evaluation questions, data collection, analysis and conclusions; they shall be presented in a structured and transparent manner. Conclusions and recommendations should be underpinned by a strong set of evidences.

## 5. Schedule and deliverables

The expected outputs are:

- ✓ An **inception report** including refined key evaluation questions; valuation matrix; work plan and schedule.
- ✓ A **draft 20-page MTR report**;
- ✓ A **final 20-page MTR report + Annexes**
- ✓ A two-page summary of key findings, lessons, recommendations and messages from the MTR report, that can be disseminated to the wider public for general information on the project's results and performance to date.
- ✓ A **webinar** on key findings, including **15 slides summary presentation** of key findings

### MTR Report – Content

The 20-page MTR report will follow the format below:

- A. Title page including project identification details
- B. Executive Summary (including at a minimum the methodology, findings and recommendations)
- C. Table of Contents
- D. List of Abbreviations and Acronyms
- E. A short introduction to project/programme – context and description
- F. Purpose of the MTR
- G. Evaluation Issues and Questions
- H. Methodology (including approach to data analysis)
- I. Findings – organized according to the key evaluation questions
- J. Conclusions and lessons learned
- K. Recommendations – actionable recommendations clearly linked to findings and lessons
- L. Appendices (ToR; Data collection instruments; MTR schedule/timetable; List of people met/interviewed)

## Expected deliverables and tentative timeframe

Milestone/deliverable	Indicative completion date
Recruitment of MTR Consultant	July 9, 2021
Start date and Consultant appointed	July 12, 2021
An inception report including refined key evaluation questions; valuation matrix; work plan and schedule	July 16, 2021
Draft MtR report	July 30, 2021
IUCN comments on draft report	August 20, 2021
Final Report, two-page summary and webinar	September 3, 2021

## Duration of the assignment

The duration of this assignment will last over the period from the signing of the contract to **30 September 2021**.

## Meetings and travel

The consultant will participate in a number of physical and/or online meetings for validating all necessary outputs. At this stage there is no travel envisaged in light of the ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. If a need for traveling will arise, this need will be assessed by the ADAPT PMT and if approved it will be subject to IUCN's travel policy. Approval of costs for travel will be subject to prior written approval by IUCN ECARO and submission of all receipts.

## Budget

The maximum available budget for this Mid-term review is EUR 15,000. The Consultant shall be paid by IUCN according to the following payment schedule.

## Schedule of payments

The total fee estimate will be used as the basis for the schedule of payments. The following represents the schedule of payments (in % of the total fee).

<b>Instalments</b>	<b>% of the total fee (Euro (€))</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> instalment after receipt of a signed copy of the consultancy agreement together with a first invoice	30% (4,500 €)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An inception report including refined key evaluation questions; valuation matrix; work plan and schedule.</li> <li>2. A draft 20-page MTR report;</li> </ul>	30% (4,500 €)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. A final 20-page MTR report + Annexes</li> <li>4. A two-page summary of key findings, lessons, recommendations and messages from the MTR report, that can be disseminated to the wider public for general information on the project's results and performance to date.</li> <li>5. A webinar on key findings, including 15 slides summary presentation of key findings</li> </ul>	40% (6,000 €)

The consultant will be remunerated after approval of deliverables submitted according to the tentative timeframe agreed under section 'Expected deliverables and tentative timeframe'.

## A.2 Data collection instruments

During the consultation process with the relevant stakeholders, an ADAPT MTR Questionnaire was prepared. It was designed as a tool that accompanies online/live interviews, hence containing all the relevant questions and sub-questions. Participants were not obliged to fill in the answers as the Questionnaire was in place primarily to inform on topics to be covered over the course of the interview. In the later stages, if the participants wanted to elaborate more on their answers, they were stimulated to fill in the answers and send them back to researcher.

### II.1. ADAPT Mid-Term Review Questionnaire

<b>Relevance</b>				
<i>Do you find ADAPT relevant for your economy?</i>				
<b>5 – Very relevant</b>	<b>4 – Fairly relevant</b>	<b>3 – Moderately relevant</b>	<b>2 – Slightly relevant</b>	<b>1 – Not relevant</b>
<i>Do you find ADAPT Objective 1. Strengthen knowledge and awareness of nature-based disaster risk reduction solution among decision makers, natural resource managers and communities, relevant for your economy?</i>				
<b>5 – Very relevant</b>	<b>4 – Fairly relevant</b>	<b>3 – Moderately relevant</b>	<b>2 – Slightly relevant</b>	<b>1 – Not relevant</b>
<i>Do you find ADAPT Objective 2. Enhance integration of nature-based solutions and equitable climate-smart planning into adaptation and disaster reduction policy, relevant for your economy?</i>				
<b>5 – Very relevant</b>	<b>4 – Fairly relevant</b>	<b>3 – Moderately relevant</b>	<b>2 – Slightly relevant</b>	<b>1 – Not relevant</b>
<i>Do you find ADAPT Objective 3. Increase implementation of nature-based disaster risk reduction solution, relevant for your economy?</i>				
<b>5 – Very relevant</b>	<b>4 – Fairly relevant</b>	<b>3 – Moderately relevant</b>	<b>2 – Slightly relevant</b>	<b>1 – Not relevant</b>
<b>Additional interview questions:</b>				
How appropriate and relevant is the ADAPT approach and intervention logic in terms of its objectives, and within the context of the six targeted economies and the Western Balkans Region?				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the specifics of the participating economies (political, environmental, rule of law, etc.), and have they have been addressed by ADAPT in a way that key issues, actions, outcomes, and deliverables have been identified?</li> <li>• To what extent is the ADAPT fit-for-purpose to promote increased knowledge, capacities and awareness on Nature-based disaster risk reduction solutions among decision makers, natural resource managers and local communities;</li> <li>• To what extent is the ADAPT fit-for-purpose to promote increased awareness on and commitment to gender equality, gender mainstreaming and gender-sensitive interventions, and linkages with NbS;</li> <li>• To what extent is the ADAPT fit-for-purpose to promote the successful implementation of on-the-ground NbS for DRR through the ADAPT pilots and scale up;</li> <li>• To what extent is the ADAPT fit-for-purpose to promote increased capacity in targeted economies to design NbS projects for submission to global funding facilities</li> </ul>				
Has there been any change since the project was formulated that might have affected its relevance? If so, what are these changes and to what extent the project has managed to adapt to ensure it remains relevant?				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has there been any economy specific changes (except the Covid-19 outbreak) that have impeded the relevance of ADAPT in either economy?</li> <li>• In what ways has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted the ADAPT progress (delays, cancellation, etc.)?</li> <li>• How did the pandemic impacted the ADAPT knowledge products, capacity building activities, policy and planning processes as well as pilot activities? Are these impacts still ongoing?</li> </ul>				
What adaptive measures were taken and/or should be taken going forward to address and mitigate the impact of Covid-19?				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did the adaptive measures due to Covid-19 and other circumstances implemented by ADAPT cause any administrative burdens (renegotiations, production of new strategic documents, etc.) for economies, and were these relevant enough to delay the implementation of ADAPT objectives?</li> <li>• Given impacts from Covid-19, at this point in time, will all project activities be successfully completed by the current project end date, or will there be a need for adjustments (in timeframe and/or targets)?</li> </ul>				
<b>Commentary (answers)</b>				

<b>Effectiveness</b>				
<b>How effective is ADAPT?</b>				
5 – Very effective	4 – Fairly effective	3 – Moderately effective	2 – Slightly effective	1 – Ineffective
<b>Additional interview questions:</b>				
How effective has been the ADAPT project so far? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What has and has not worked so far and why?</li> </ul>				
How effectively has the ADAPT project engaged with national policy makers and natural resource managers in the six targeted economies to raise interest in and understanding of NbS? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there an effective solution in which local policy makers can be further engaged in ADAPT implementation? Would this prove to be effective in achieving ADAPT objectives in a greater extent?</li> <li>• Were ADAPT actions complimentary to ongoing economy specific policy actions?</li> </ul>				
How effectively has the ADAPT project been to position NbS as effective solutions to address climate risks, increase resilience and enhance compliance with EU policies such as EU Acquis and other international frameworks? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What were the standards in place to ensure that the pilot site selection was effective?</li> <li>• How effective is ADAPT in promoting networking between 6 economies, and has closer cooperation between the Western Balkan economies created additional value when it comes to achieving ADAPT objectives? Has it helped to achieve economy specific objectives as well?</li> </ul>				
How effective has the ADAPT approach been so far to support learning and knowledge sharing within and across the 6 economies and more broadly in the Western Balkan regions, to create synergies and to underpin and scale up local and national achievements? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What were the reasons for not adopting a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework for ADAPT? Has this resulted in any negative impacts, e.g. non-systematic data gathering, reporting issues, etc.</li> </ul>				
To what extent are the ADAPT MEL strategy and tools adequate and effective to keep track of progress in view of i) understanding the results and, ultimately, the impact of the ADAPT project and ii) detect any needed implementation adjustments for better progress towards results? What adjustments to the MEL system are recommended? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the lessons learned on how to improve the communication lines between ADAPT and stakeholders, namely national policy makers? What are the best practices in effective communication of the ADAPT objective and NbS?</li> </ul>				
<b>Commentary (answers)</b>				
<b>Achievements and challenges in moving towards objectives and outcomes</b>				
<b>How would you assess ADAPT's results so far?</b>				
5 – Very good	4 – Good	3 – Moderate	2 – Sub-moderate	1 – Not good
<b>Additional interview question:</b>				
To what extent has the ADAPT progressed in achieving the expected outcomes in each of its key intervention areas? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have any policy documents (strategies, regulations, etc.) been adopted as a direct result of ADAPT? Have any policy documents been adopted containing NbS standards? Were those documents adopted according to the existing plans and dynamics or had ADAPT influenced their inclusion and prioritisation, and if so, how?</li> </ul>				
What are the early markers of changes among decision/policy makers and other relevant partners that demonstrate that the ADAPT is on its way to enhance integration of NbS into national policies for CCA and DDR and national resource management plans? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the lack of project (action) plans for pilot project implementation had any impact, eg. delays, overlaps, and such? Would it be useful to adopt such plans at this stage of the ADAPT implementation process?</li> </ul>				
What are the enabling/constraining factors influencing the achievement and non-achievements of the outcomes? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which economy specific deliverables have been achieved? Are there some deliverables that will not be achieved, and what are the reasons behind this? Have some new deliverables occurred during the implementation that could be included as those which are economy specific?</li> </ul>				
Are there any unintended consequences as a result of the ADAPT interventions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were there any indirect positive or negative impacts, as a result of ADAPT?</li> </ul>				
What efforts are being made to ensure sustainability of the ADAPT results in the longer term?				
<b>Commentary (Answer)</b>				

<b>Efficiency</b>				
<b>How efficient would you assess ADAPT's so far?</b>				
<b>5 – Very efficient</b>	<b>4 – Fairly Efficient</b>	<b>3 – Moderately efficient</b>	<b>2 – Slightly Efficient</b>	<b>1 – Not Efficient</b>
<b>Additional interview questions:</b>				
To what extent are the current ADAPT operational modality and governance/management structure efficient in contributing to its overall achievements?				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were there any staffing or procurement issues, and how have they influenced ADAPT implementation?</li> </ul>				
To what extent are the ADAPT outputs in balance with the level of effort, time and resources spent?				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the ADAPT budget been used according to the programming or was there a need for budget adjustments, and why? Has the programmed budget proved to be adequate in accordance to the mid-term needs?</li> </ul>				
How efficient is the ADAPT in ensuring inputs (money, human resources, activities) are converted into the desired outputs according to the planned schedule?				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Given the complexity of the organisational and management structure of ADAPT, have there been any negative impacts that have occurred as a direct result of such a structure? Were there any communication bottlenecks? Is there an economy specific organisational problem?</li> </ul>				
To what extent are the roles, responsibilities and relations among the PMT, National NbS Coordination group, national field experts, Project Steering Committee (PSC) and the Project Advisory Group (PAG).				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the absence of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, how were M&amp;E activities performed? Were they performed in a systematised fashion, and apart from yearly reporting, did the stakeholders have regular access to project results?</li> </ul>				
PSC and PAG working effectively to guarantee an efficient management of the ADAPT and its good governance?				
How efficient is the collaboration between PMT, IUCN Commissions and IUCN Thematic Programmes?				
<b>Commentary (Answer)</b>				
<b>Coherence</b>				
<b>How coherent is ADAPT?</b>				
<b>5 – Very Coherent</b>	<b>4 – Fairly Coherent</b>	<b>3 – Moderately Coherent</b>	<b>2 – Sub-moderate</b>	<b>1 – Not Efficient</b>
<b>Additional interview questions:</b>				
To what extent is the ADAPT project coherent with country priorities and needs and in supporting mainstreaming of NbS approaches and interventions that meet NbS Standard?				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were there any coherences identified between ADAPT and other projects in the same field, financed by international donor organisations, EU funds, or others? Has there been a need for adjustments in order to minimise overlaps or excessive administrative burden of national policy makers and other stakeholders?</li> </ul>				
How coherent and complementary are the ADAPT activities vis-à-vis other policies and initiatives undertaken by country Governments and other regional and international partners engaged in promoting resilience to climate change in the Western Balkans?				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is ADAPT coherent with national action plans for EU assessment chapters?</li> </ul>				
<b>Commentary (Answer)</b>				

### A.3 MTR schedule/timetable

Due to circumstances that caused delays (elaborated in the Evaluation Issues and Question chapter), the work plan had been slightly adjusted. The changed timetable is coloured in red, while the initial timetable was coloured in green.

Table A.1: MTR work plan

ADAPT: Nature-based Solutions for Resilient Societies in the Western Balkans Mid-Term Review Work Plan 2021												
Activity	2021											
	July				August				September			
Working week	W1	W2	W3	W4	W1	W2	W3	W4	W1	W2	W3	W4
Kick-off meeting with the IUCN staff		Green	Green									
Follow-up meeting with the IUCN key staff			Green									
Initial Project document analysis												
Design of the Evaluation Matrix		Green										
Development of the Initial Consultation List		Green										
In-depth Project document analysis			Green									
Conducting consultation			Green		Red	Red						
Drafting of the Draft MtR report					Green	Red						
Correspondence with the IUCN					Green	Red	Red					
Additional meetings with the stakeholders, if necessary					Green	Red	Red					
Data validation					Green	Red	Red					
Finalisation of the MtR report					Green	Red	Red					
Development of the summary					Green	Red	Red					
Development of the PPT presentation for presenting the findings of the Final Report					Green	Red	Red					
Conducting Webinar					Green	Red	Red					

#### A.4 List of people met/interviewed

Country or affiliation	Name	Position/Organisation
Albania	Zana Vokopola	Urban Research Institute Albania
	Arduen Karagozzi	Director of Strategic Management, Water Resources Management Agency
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Igor Jevtić	Environmental Protection Department, Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina
	Lazić Svetlana	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of Republika Srpska
Kosovo	Ismail Hetemaj	Head of Nature Protection Division, Department of Environment Protection and Waters, Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Infrastructure
Montenegro	Jelena Ban	Division for Climate Change, Directorate for Climate Change and Mediterranean Affairs, Ministry of Ecology Spatial Planning and Urbanism
	Masa Radovic	Direktorate for Climate Change, Ministry of Ecology Spatial Planning and Urbanism
North Macedonia	Vlatko Trpeski	Head of Department for Nature, Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning
	Stevko Stefanoski	Head of Department for Analysis, Assessment and Strategic Planning, Crisis Management Center
Serbia	Sandra Nedeljković	Deputy Director, Public Investment Management Office
	Zdravko Maksimović	Head of the Department for Civil Protection, Municipality of Kraljevo
Donor	Maria Osbeck	Sida
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Marijana Kapović Solomun	NbS Field Expert
North Macedonia	Vasko Popovski	NbS Field Expert
IUCN	Vesna Bjedov	IUCN staff
IUCN	Andjela Klobucar	IUCN staff
IUCN	Daisy Hassenberger	IUCN staff
Serbia	Vladan Ivetic	ROAM expert

## A.5 Documents consulted

Activity Plan for the ADAPT communication strategy

ADAPT Summary of the Regional Comparative Policy Analysis in the Western Balkans

ADAPT: Nature-based Solutions for Resilient Societies in the Western Balkans, A narrative report for the period November 2019-October 2020

Draft version of the MEL strategy for ADAPT

FINANCIAL REPORT OF THE PROJECT “ADAPT: Nature-based Solutions for Resilient Societies in the Western Balkans” For the period from 1 November 2019 to 31 October 2020

FINANCIAL REPORT OF THE PROJECT “ADAPT: Nature-based Solutions for Resilient Societies in the Western Balkans” For the period from 1 November 2019 to 31 October 2020

IUCN ADAPT NbS Scoping Study Albania

IUCN ADAPT NbS Scoping Study Bosnia and Herzegovina

IUCN ADAPT NbS Scoping Study Kosovo

IUCN ADAPT NbS Scoping Study Montenegro

IUCN ADAPT NbS Scoping Study North Macedonia

IUCN ADAPT NbS Scoping Study Serbia

IUCN NbS for Resilient Societies in Western Balkans Annex 1 Intervention logic

IUCN NbS for Resilient Societies in Western Balkans Annex 2 Theory of change

IUCN NbS for Resilient Societies in Western Balkans Annex 3 Logical framework

IUCN NbS for Resilient Societies in Western Balkans Annex 4 Risk register

IUCN NbS for Resilient Societies in Western Balkans Annex 5 Work plan

IUCN NbS for Resilient Societies in Western Balkans Annex 6 Budget

IUCN NbS for Resilient Societies in Western Balkans Project proposal

REPORT ON FACTUAL FINDINGS OF THE PROJECT “ADAPT: Nature-based Solutions for Resilient Societies in the Western Balkans” For the period from 1 November 2019 to 31 October 2020

The communication strategy of The ADAPT: Nature-based Solutions for Resilient Societies in the Western Balkans