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External Evaluation of the LFMWB programme

Final report

13 January 2026

Mandated by:

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC
Thematic Cooperation Division
Section Climate, DRR and Environment (CDE)

Laurence von Schulthess
laurence.vonschulthess@eda.admin.ch
Caroline Mayer
caroline.mayer@eda.admin.ch

Authors:

Franziska Schmid
schmid@kek.ch

Georgios Eftychidis
g.eftychidis@gmail.com

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Acknowledgement

The evaluation team extends its sincere appreciation and gratitude to SDC Bern, the SDC office in North Macedonia and foremost to Farmahem for their continued support and flexibility in enabling the team to fulfil this mandate. This included logistical and content preparation for the mission providing essential documents and resources, facilitating meetings with key stakeholders, and addressing practical challenges such as travel arrangements, interpretation services and local transportation. Without this dedicated support, successfully completing of the external evaluation would not have been possible.

The evaluation team

The mandate was implemented by a team of two external experts. The tasks were attributed among the team as follows: Franziska Schmid, team leader and evaluation methodology expert, and Georgios Eftychidis, a forestry and fire management expert from Greece, were both involved in the preparatory work of the evaluation, contributed to interviews, meetings with key stakeholders and project-site visits. During the 2-week mission to the Western Balkans, they closely collaborated in analysing and discussing findings. The evaluation report was drafted by Franziska Schmid based on the joint discussions and on material prepared by Georgios Eftychidis.

List of Abbreviations

CBC Fund	Community-Based Competitive Fund
CFP	Country Focal Point
CPI	Country Partner Institution
CPS	Country Project Staff
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
GFMC	Global Fire Monitoring Centre
HAFL	Bern University of Applied Sciences – School of Agricultural, Forest and Food Sciences
LFM	Landscape Fire Management
LFMWB	Landscape Fire Management in the Western Balkans
NPO	National Programme Officer
MoC	Memorandum of Cooperation
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
ProDoc	Programme Documentation
REA	Regional Executing Agency
RFMC	Regional Fire Monitoring Centre
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of References
USFS	US Forest Service
WB	Western Balkans

Summary

Introduction: Wildfires are on the rise globally and the Western Balkan region is among the most affected region in Europe. The neighbouring countries regularly share transboundary fires. The programme Landscape Fire Management in Western Balkan (LFMWB), funded by SDC aims at addressing the increasing fire risk by facilitating cross-border and cross-institutional approaches and knowledge exchange and promoting a paradigm shift from suppression of the fires to preventive measures. The programme implements a network-approach on the regional level as well as on national and sub-national levels with participating countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

Scope and purpose of the evaluation: The external evaluation of the LFMWB, covering its activities from February 2022 to September 2025 aims at providing insights to guide short-term adjustments until the end of the first phase and to inform the planning of the second phase of the programme. While covering all six OECD/DAC criteria emphasis is given to **relevance**, **effectiveness** and **efficiency**. Since the first phase of the programme is still in course, the evaluation provides evidence on tendencies especially regarding effectiveness.

Methodology: The evaluation was conducted by a team composed by Franziska Schmid (KEK – CDC) and Georgios Eftychidis between August and December 2025 with a 12-days mission to the region. The external evaluation used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to answer the evaluation questions including semi-structured interviews, document review, project-site visits, and an online survey. A total of 46 interviews (partly online) has been conducted including SDC, LFMWB implementers, CPI and selected country network members as well as grantees from the CBC Fund.

Overall assessment and findings:

Relevance: The programme's objectives are exceptionally relevant. They are a direct and appropriate response to the region's documented "dual challenge": the increasing fire risk and the deep-seated structural and institutional deficiencies. The network-based approach and the introduction of the landscape fire management concept are highly suited to bridging the critical "sectorial gaps" between forestry, civil protection, and agriculture. The high-level buy-in from all partner countries since the preparatory phase confirms the objectives are fully aligned with their national priorities. The preventive approach to landscape fires is a novelty in the region.

Coherence: The programme demonstrates good coherence, a strong alignment with thematic goals of SDC as well as with national priorities and synergies with other international actors.

Effectiveness: The programme effectively reaches its goals by establishing networks, providing technical advice, fostering knowledge exchange, and setting clear methodological guidelines for the development of the key knowledge products. The regional as well as the country networks are functional, and the respective stakeholders actively engaged. It could be observed that the work in the country networks informed the revisions or amendments of laws, by-laws or strategies, and other guiding documents. The programme has already contributed to changing the discourse, moving "from reactive fire management to a preventive one".

Efficiency: Due to a prolonged preparatory phase with administrative difficulties, spending on activities is relatively low. The organisational set-up for coordinating a regional programme with 7 sub-regional components seems to be lean. The division of roles and tasks among the programme implementers and partners is viewed critical, especially the role of the network

coordination mechanism. The REA as well as the CPS, considered as the “backbone of the programme” act very efficiently.

Impact: Results at the output and outcome levels are evident, namely the contribution to the paradigm shift from suppression to a more holistic view of landscape fire management. However, it is difficult to assess whether the programme has contributed to the stated impact. Although there are promising signs, it is a long way from translating strategies and policies into concrete actions in the field and into changed management practices on the ground.

Sustainability: While the foundations for sustainability (policy integration, strong partner interest) are in place, the mechanisms for sustainability are not yet established. The programme's benefits, therefore, remain largely "donor-dependent".

Recommendations:

The evaluation team is proposing following recommendations to SDC for making adjustments until the end of the 1st phase and for planning a 2nd phase of the programme.

A) Recommendations for short-term adjustments:

- Resolve any administrative hurdles that would the programme continuation, especially related to the expired MoC.
- Prioritise activities and facilitate processes to ensure that LFM-strategies can be finished and adopted by the end of the 1st phase.
- Capitalise the knowledge products, data as well as lessons learnt in a regional synthesis.
- Ensure technical guidance for the implementation of the CBS-projects and seek mechanisms to transfer their results and lessons learnt feed into the country and the regional networks.

B) Recommendations for 2nd phase of programme:

The general recommendation is to continue with a second phase as the programme successfully established transboundary and cross-sectoral collaboration to address a pressing topic and thereby laid the foundation for a paradigm shift in landscape fire management which is a novelty in the region.

- **Reformulation of goals and result chain** to ensure that activities effectively contribute to the desired goals.
- **Establish a clearer programme governance** to have a distinction between the steering committee or partner meeting and the regional network. That allows for strategic planning and decision making.
- **Refine the regional network approach** by clarifying the purpose of the network as well as the roles of its members thereby assigning an appropriate role for RFMC as well as establishing a functioning coordination mechanism.
- **Give more attention to different network types:** While the regional network has more the character of an exchange platform among peers, the country networks are so-called science-practice-policy interfaces. This requires an understanding of the logics of the involved fields, and calls for the programme stakeholders (CPS, CPF, RFMC, etc.) to assume different roles in the different networks.

- **Ensure ownership of country stakeholders** by institutionalising the model of the cross-sectoral networks at country level, so that landscape fire management becomes part of the official system, with clear procedures and budget lines.
- **Develop a programme design** that more clearly distinguishes between the regional and country components, and prepare robust guidelines which at the same time are flexible enough to account for the different directions of the country networks. The implementation strategy should follow a thematic, result-oriented design and may require adjustments. When the programme has more country-specific component, then it is recommended to more closely involve the SDC offices in the countries and to build on their established portfolios.
- **Put emphasis on the Community-Based Competitive Fund** focusing on larger, thematically coherent consortia rather than many small, isolated projects.
- **Prioritise institutionalisation** related to the positioning of programme-funded staff within ministries, and furthermore to retain the CPS within the programme and transition them into state structures.
- **Develop sustainability strategies** that includes the institutionalisation of the network approach, and possible co-funding.

1 Introduction and background

1.1 Context of Western Balkans

The Western Balkan (WB) region is among the most affected in Europe by landscape fires (LFs), experiencing an average of over 100,000 hectares burned annually in the last decade, and peak years such as 2017 with 215,000 hectares burned. The increase of fire risk is driven by two main factors: climate change, which results in more frequent and severe droughts, and socio-economic shifts, particularly rural abandonment, which leads to the accumulation of unman-aged fuel loads. Furthermore, it is estimated that 90-98% of all fires are human caused, predominantly resulting due to negligence and deliberate agricultural burning. In some countries burning is pursued for economic and criminal reasons, such as to cover illegal logging. Furthermore, there is an unofficial belief among regional stakeholders that some fires are due to arson and intentionally set to convert forest lands into open spaces, potentially allowing private owners to obtain building permits for the land in the future. The Programme Documentation (ProDoc) mentions that in North Macedonia specifically, while the human factor is a dominant cause, a major portion of fires are officially recorded under as "unknown" because institutions lack the clear evidence required to prove arson in court, even when the human cause is obvious to local practitioners, and eventually because local authorities often avoid explicitly attributing responsibility in order to prevent tensions with local communities, adopting a more politically cautious approach to fire reporting.

In general, the central challenge, however, is not environmental but also institutional. The region's response to LFs is hindered by structural and political factors, including a traditional focus on reactive fire suppression rather than prevention, which frames fires primarily as agricultural and forest incidents to be extinguished rather than as landscape-scale risks requiring integrated management. The institutional landscape in all countries is characterised by explicit deficits in institutional capacities, complex and fragmented set-ups with unclear responsibilities, and poor intersectoral and transboundary cooperation. This lack of coherence is particularly evident between the key sectors of civil protection, forestry, agriculture, and environment, which often operate in isolation.

1.2 Programme LFMWB

The programme Landscape Fire Management in Western Balkan (LFMWB), funded by SDC aims at addressing the increasing fire risk by facilitating cross-border and cross-institutional approaches and knowledge exchange and promoting a paradigm shift from suppression of the fires to preventive measures. The programme aims to establish a network-approach at the regional level as well as at national and sub-national levels with participating countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*¹, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. The already formally existing Regional Fire Monitoring Centre (RFMC), based in North Macedonia was identified as vehicle for strengthening the regional cooperation.

In the opening phase, SDC carried out in-depth scoping studies, needs and potential assessments in close collaboration with global (GFMC), Swiss (HAFL), regional and national

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UN Security Council resolution 1244 and the International Court of Justice Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

stakeholders. The main objective was set to establish a working cross-border cooperation among the following states: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Therefore, a lot of efforts was dedicated to identifying the key ministries in each country. This led to the commitments of lead ministries to act as country partner institutions (CPI) and hosts of the country focal points (CFP)². The official letters were included in SDC’s main credit proposal. The timeline of different credit proposals is found in Table 1.

Credit Type	Duration	Budget	Signing date	Remarks
Opening Credit Nr. 7F-10344 .01	01.09.20219 – 31.03.2020	CHF 25'000	19.11.2019	
Additional Credit to opening credit	01.09.2019 – 28.02.2021	CHF 80'000	25.03.2020	Additional credit and extension of duration for preparing a full-fledged strategic document
<i>Total Opening Credit</i>	<i>01.09.2019 – 28.02.2021</i>	<i>CHF 105'000</i>		
Main Credit Phase 1	01.03.2021 – 28.02.2025	CHF 3'980'000	11.03.2021	
1 st Change of Duration	01.03.2021 – 31.12.2025	--	22.12.2021	Selection process of implementing organisation took longer, later start of activities
2 nd Change of Credit Duration	01.03.2021 – 01.03.2027	--	18.01.2024	Time needed to establish formal/contractual relationships, define roles, and contract and train staff
Additional Credit	01.03.2021 -01.03.2027	CHF 330'000 (total Phase 1: CHF 4'415'000)	29.02.2024 (release done: 11.03.2025)	Extension of implementing time induces additional fees and salaries for REA, RFMC, CPS

Table 1: Credits released for the LFMWB programme with duration and signing date.

The programme is designed for 8 years, covering two 4-year-phases. In the first phase, activities started in February 2022 and will end in December 2026 (see Figure 1).

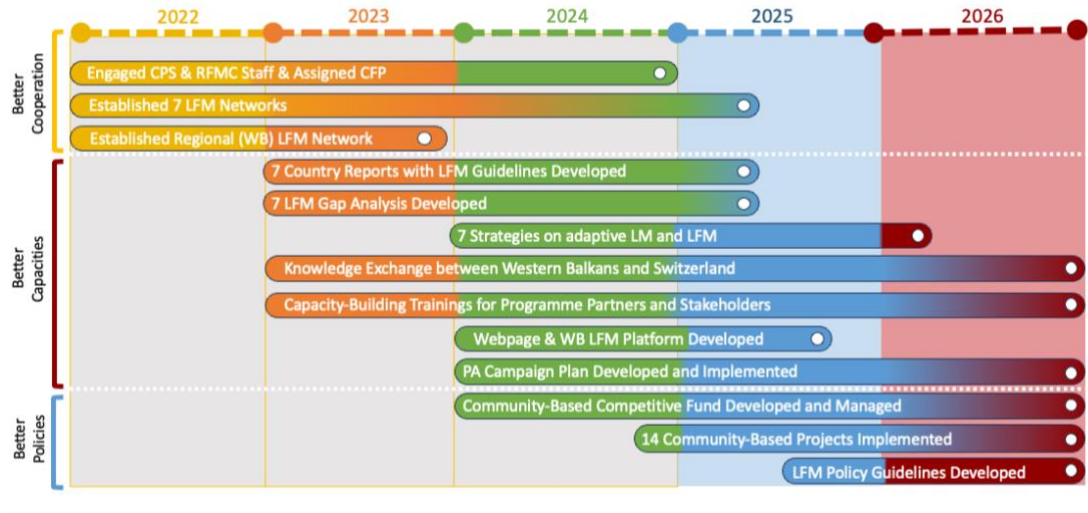


Figure 1: Overview of programme key activities. Source: REA.

² In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the ministries related to forestry are located at entity’s level. Therefore, CPI and CPF are nominated both in Republika Srpska and Federation BIH.

The **programme logic** is based on building a regional network with the assignment of country focal points CFP (output 1.1), the strengthening of a regional coordination mechanism (output 1.2) and the consolidated exchange with Swiss and global stakeholders (output 1.3). While the establishment of country networks (output 2.1), the knowledge exchange (output 2.2) and the public awareness building (output 2.3) contribute to enhanced capacities, the preparation of a regional policy (output 3.1) and national policies (output 3.2), and community-based pilot projects (output 3.3) inform a landscape fire management. These outputs should lead to 3 outcomes formulated as a lasting regional network for cross-boundary knowledge exchange and cooperation (outcome 1), strengthened capacities on LFM approaches (outcome 2), and revised policies to support landscape fire management (outcome 3). Ultimately, landscapes and forests are managed more sustainably from which people and livelihoods will benefit (impact).

The programme is active at **different levels**: regionally, at country levels, and within communities. It furthermore fosters exchanges with international and specifically with Swiss stakeholders. As a result, many different stakeholders are involved. The programme **targets** public authorities and national stakeholders as well as selected rural population groups (cf. Credit Proposal).

The programme is **structured** by a steering committee, a Regional Executing Agency (REA), and advisory support to the programme. The steering committee/ partner meeting **governs** the programme, consisting of SDC Bern and SDC North Macedonia, RFMC, GFMC HAFL and the 7 CFP. The steering committee met – after a kick-off meeting in April 2022 – 7 times to date. During these meetings, the committee members review the activities that have been implemented, the achieved results, and plan the next steps. The REA holds a secretary role in the steering committee.

The REA is responsible for the programme management and coordination, operational planning, monitoring, and reporting to SDC and manages the budget. Furthermore, REA manages the competitive fund. REA has contracts with the country project staff (CPS) and with RFMC staff, which are directly funded by the programme, as well as with the backstoppers.

Farmahem, a private company of North Macedonia, together with Helvetas won the public tender for the REA. Their collaboration builds on former long-term collaboration. Following the request by SDC, Farmhem took the lead in taking over the REA while Helvetas acts as its backstopper.

HAFL as one of the promoter of the programme has an advisory role to the programme and furthermore is responsible for the activities that includes the knowledge exchange between the Western Balkans and Switzerland.

The programme is entirely funded by SDC with a total sum of CHF 4,415,000 over more than seven years for planning and implementation. The operational implementation of Phase 1 covers nearly five years, from February 2022 to December 2026.

1.3 Purpose, objectives and scope of the evaluation

After 3.5 years of implementation, SDC commissioned an external evaluation to guide short-term adjustments until the end of the first phase and to inform the planning of the second phase of the programme. It is important to note that this evaluation does not constitute an end-of-phase review. Rather, it is primarily **formative and prospective** in nature, while also providing results-oriented evidence where possible. The evaluation aims to generate learning for programme steering.

The objectives of the evaluation as outlined in the ToR are to provide 1) an objective **assessment of results achieved** so far, 2) to provide **short-term recommendations** for the remaining period of the first phase, and 3) to provide **recommendations for the planning** and the implementing **of the second phase** (see Annex 1). This includes an assessment of the institutional sustainability of the RFMC, the effectiveness of the competitive fund and the progress of integrating LFM approaches into national institutions.

While all six OECD/DAC criteria were required, it was agreed with SDC in the inception phase, that emphasis would be given to **relevance, effectiveness** and **efficiency**. As the first phase of the programme is still in course, the evaluation provides evidence on tendencies especially regarding effectiveness, while impact and sustainability are approached from a forward-looking, prospective perspective.

The evaluation covered the activities implemented during the first phase, from February 2022 to October 2025 with focusing on **regional and country-networks activities** as well as on the competitive-fund mechanism. A closer look was taken at five selected community-based projects. During the inception phase, it was agreed, that the activities related to the knowledge exchange between the Western Balkans and Switzerland, and to awareness raising weren't treated. The assessment of the knowledge exchange would have meant to conduct interviews with Swiss stakeholders. The awareness raising activities would have required a different methodological approach with media analysis and/ or a public opinion-poll.

The **main purpose** of the evaluation is learning for programme steering. The evaluation results shall support SDC in better understanding whether the interventions logic has worked resp. the programme is on track to achieve the set goals. Furthermore, the evaluation shall support SDC to decide on short-term adjustments and to inform the planning of the second phase.

2 Evaluation approach

2.1 Methodology

The external evaluation used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to answer the evaluation questions for the six OECD/DAC evaluation criteria and for questions related to gender-responsive approaches and advancing social inclusion set out in the ToR (Annex 2). The evaluation questions were refined and rearranged slightly during the inception phase. A 12-day field mission was conducted in the region from 26.10.-6.11.2025, covering North Macedonia, Kosovo*, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (both entities). The work plan and the mission schedule and itinerary are provided in Annex 3.

Document review: The evaluation team systematically reviewed strategic and operational documents, including the SDC credit proposal, programme documentation (ProDoc), logical framework, and the annual progress reports for 2022, 2023, and 2024, issued by SDC. Furthermore, REA provided an extensive database on programme documents, and the website LFMWB comprises information including country-specific documents elaborated during the programme. Find the list of documents reviewed in Annex 4.

Semi-structured interviews: The evaluation team conducted a total of 46 interviews (partly online) with various stakeholders consisting of 1 to 2 persons per interview from SDC, LFMWB implementers, CPI and selected country network members as well as grantees from the CBC Fund (see Table 2). The list of interlocutors is included in Annex 5. The majority of the interviewees with physical meetings was pre-selected by SDC and Farmahem. During the inception phase, it was decided, to include the CPS and the National Programme Officers (NPO) of SDC in the region. The interviews followed an interview guide tailored to the interviewee's role in the programme and expertise (see Annex 6).

Groups of interest	Number of persons consulted
Semi-structured interviews	28
SDC (HQ, regional office NMK)	4
RFMC	1
GFMC	1
HAFL	1
Helvetas	2
CPS	7
CFP	7
Network members	5
Group discussion	6
REA	6
Project (site) visits	9
Grantees from CBS-fund	9
Short interviews	3
SDC NPO	3
Total interviews	46

Table 2: Overview of persons interviewed.

Short interviews with SDC NPO: Although not part of the programme, the national programme officers of SDC in the countries were partly involved to facilitate administrative hurdles related to the signing of the Memorandum of Cooperation. They shared their perspectives on the LFMWB programme in terms of its alignment to the priorities and objectives of their portfolio as well as on the set-up procedures.

Project-site-visits: Organisations of 5 community-based projects (whereof 1 a cross-border projects) with the implementing organisations, grantees of the competitive fund, were visited. That allowed for gathering insights from the practitioners on the value of these projects.

Short survey among country network members: An online questionnaire with 5 questions was developed and distributed (via REA and CPS) to members of the country networks to capture their perspectives on the functioning, usefulness and persistence of the networks. 32 (of around 140) persons answered the survey, which means a return rate of ca. 22%. Engagement was likely constrained by the short time frame and the English-language format. Find a compilation of answers in Annex 7.

Data analysis: Qualitative content analysis was the primary analysis method used for the data collected, in order to highlight key topics of interest and concern from the perspective of the various partners and beneficiaries, highlights trends, strengths, challenges and areas for improvement. All prospective insights from interviews were consolidated in a manner supporting learning and strategic decisions for the future of the programme.

Triangulation: The evidence collected from the various sources mentioned above were cross-checked with other sources and within the team to enhance consistency of the findings. The team composition with two evaluators with different thematical and methodological background also contributed to triangulation.

A validation workshop on 15.12.2025 served to present the draft report and to discuss the findings with SDC, Farmahem, Helvetas and HAFL. The provided feedback during the workshop and in written was duly considered by finalising the evaluation report.

Review of the theory of change and reconstruction of result chain: The evaluation team reviewed the theory of change as outlined in the initial and revised logframes and ProDoc. Furthermore, they prepared a result model of the LFMWB programme that supported the evaluation as well as potential recommendations for future developments.

2.2 Challenges and limitations

The evaluation process encountered several challenges related to the programme's timing and structure. These were addressed through specific methodological adaptations as defined during the inception phase.

- **Mid-phase Evaluation:** The assessment was conducted in late 2025, significantly before the phase ends in December 2026. Many key activities, most notably the community-based projects, had only just commenced implementation in late 2024 or early 2025. Furthermore, the programme's first year (2022) was designated a "preparatory year". Progress was significantly hindered by administrative and political delays in securing the memoranda of cooperation (MoC), particularly with Albania and Serbia. This delayed the formal establishment of some national networks, and the start of the activities.
- **Geographic and time constraints:** The 12-day field mission schedule was intensive and, as per the ToR, could only cover a selection of the partner countries and of the stakeholders involved in the programme. Nevertheless, the CFP and CPS from the countries not visited were interviewed online.

3 Findings

This chapter is based on the review of documents and feedback provided by stakeholders during interviews, meetings and project visits. It is structured according to OECD/DAC criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability, and includes the findings related to the community-based projects and the review of the programme logic.

3.1 Findings on relevance

The programme LFMWB has been highly relevant in putting an emerging and pressing environmental subject on the agendas. The Western Balkan region is documented as one of the most affected in Europe by landscape fires. The risk is exacerbated by climate change and socio-economic changes. The programme was able to analyse the complex situation with its underlying risk factors such as impacts of climate change, socio-economic developments as well as land-use practices (cf. ProDoc), and to formulate a concise concept on “landscape fire management”. Thanks to an early engagement of stakeholders from key ministries in the region – even before the programme design was finalised – , it has succeeded to develop a joint view of the problem.

Addresses increasing fire risk in the Western Balkans: Many interviewees draw on statistics and made references to recent fire seasons, highlighting specific fires, their causes and consequences. They mentioned the widespread practice to burn agricultural residues, the lack of capacities to control such fires, as well as abandoned or unmanaged pastures. Fires often start in the “open land”, and not in the forests, but spread to them. Furthermore, they stated deficits in early detection of fires or limited capacities in tackling fires on the ground. They agreed that the programme addresses the “right issue”.

Existing gaps in policies and legislation: Fires that start in the “open land” are not covered in the forest legislation or policies in most countries. Further laws regulate specific aspects of fire, e.g. legislation on emergencies which cover also “urban” fires, or others that include preventive measures, e.g. regulations on managing pastures. Respondents confirmed that the programme gives the opportunity to analyse the existing gaps and at the same facilitates to close them. The programme was very timely to provide information or support ongoing processes of law revision or strategy development in the forest sector. In Serbia, for example, the forest development programme draws on these new elements. In North Macedonia, the government tasked the harmonisation of 17 laws that include all aspects of fire management.

Political commitment: The ministries of the involved countries, already before the onset of the programme, committed themselves as “country institutions” and nominated focal points within their institutions. The programme identified the “correct” entry points with the departments resp. directorates of forests within the respective ministry, and the adequate position within the organisation with the head or director. This engagement was later reinforced by signing the memorandum of cooperation (MoC) and thereby got the approval by the minister resp. the government. This reflects the high priority the involved countries give to prevention. The programme also showed the necessary sensitivity to deal with the complex political context in Bosnia and Herzegovina to include both entities as forestry is regulated at entity level. While the representative of the Republika Srpska highly estimated this integration, his counterpart in the Federation considered it as a drawback that the programme doesn’t address the state level of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Regional approach has proven to be appropriate as the countries share similar ecosystems, climatic conditions but also socio-economic trends. Many respondents confirmed that “fires don’t stop at borders” and that small countries with shared borders need efficient transboundary cooperation. While for other topics, regional programmes exist (e.g. for water utilities³), the programme is the first one in the region that addresses landscape fires. Furthermore, in a politically complex region, a technical, science-based network serves as a platform for confidence-building and facilitating dialogue. SDC NPOs confirmed that this is a purposeful approach to set a topic on the agenda.

Focus on prevention: The interviewees underlined that a preventive approach to landscape fires is a novelty in the region. Other international initiatives mostly focus on preparedness and suppression, thereby addressing civil protection. The term “landscape fire” stands for unplanned and uncontrolled fires burning in the vegetation of natural, cultural and (peri-)urban areas. Some respondents mentioned that it was difficult to translate the term into the local language, not only literally, but “*it was difficult to communicate that they need to change their mindset*” as a CPS put it. This shows that the concept of “landscape fire management” can be considered as “bridging concept”.

3.2 Findings on coherence

The programme demonstrates good coherence, a strong alignment with thematic goals of SDC as well as with national priorities and synergies with other international actors.

The programme exhibits strong internal coherence with SDC's strategic priorities. The credit proposal explicitly confirms that the initiative is fully in line with the Swiss International Cooperation Strategy 2021-25. The programme is managed by the SDC's Thematic Section on Climate, DRR, and Environment, and its design directly reflects this focus. It is aligned with their framework programme and is seen as a key topic where Switzerland has an "added value".

The programme was explicitly designed to align with and be embedded within national-level programmes and priorities, rather than creating parallel structures. The intervention logic is to integrate LFM-strategies directly into the "national planning frameworks" of the partner countries, such as their NDCs (Nationally Determined Contributions), NAPs (National Adaptation Plans), and DRR strategies.

The programme also links with international actors:

- Links with JICA's DRR project in the Balkans exists. The JICA-financed North-Macedonian Forest Fires Information System (MKFFIS) was identified in the programme's design as an "excellent example to replicate". The 2023 Progress Report confirms that CPSs actively participated in JICA-led trainings on this system and on Eco-DRR in Japan.
- Connection to the FAO Global Fire Management Hub: This synergy is operational, with CPSs participating in multiple FAO-organised events, such as the "International Day of Forests" and workshops on "Strengthening Sustainable Forest Management in Kosovo".

³ Regional Capacity Development Network (RCDN) for Water and Sanitation Services, co-financed by SDC

- The programme has established also synergies with other actors. The 2024 Annual Report details a knowledge exchange and workshop on prescribed burning with the US Forestry Service.
- The programme was also formally presented at the European and Central Asia Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in Budva (Montenegro) in November 2024.

3.3 Findings on effectiveness

Findings related to the 3 outcomes

In the following, we present our findings grouped around the 3 main goals, 1) reaching better cooperation, 2) strengthening capacities, and 3) ensuring better policies. We structure the findings only loosely related to the logframe, in order to capture the range of results achieved across different levels and with different stakeholders.

In short, the programme effectively reaches its goals by establishing networks, providing technical advice, fostering knowledge exchange, and setting clear methodological guidelines.

1) Better cooperation

Regional network: Respondents unanimously confirmed the regional network as the added value of the programme. The CFP and CPS showed engagement from the beginning of the programme which is reflected in their continuous participation in meetings even though some persons were nominated late or MoCs were only recently signed. For example, this was the case for Serbia, where both, CFP and CPS, participated in the programme activities from early on, although the MoC was signed much later.

The CFP underlined the importance of knowing each other – their counterparts – and of of a common problem understanding related to landscape fire independently from their specific socio-political contexts. Furthermore, they reported learnings and good practices, both from the neighbouring countries but also from international stakeholders. Several interviewees highlighted the 8th International Wildland Fire Conference in Porto, Portugal (2023) and the Swiss study tour in May 2025 as important opportunities to increase knowledge, but also as trust-building moment among themselves.

Joint activities or initiatives that extend beyond the programmes' scope could be an indication of a “lasting” regional network (statement for outcome 1) but they haven't been mentioned in the interviews. However, based on the level of cooperation among CFP and the interaction observed between CPS, the emergence of such initiatives appears plausible in the near future.

While the regional network with the CFP forms the “steering” or “partner” committee, they are also responsible for planning and overlooking the activities. The commitment to the goals of the programme and the development of common approaches creates ownership. The CFP (with support from the CPS) are important to connect the regional level with the national context. As one interviewee puts it: *“we have been aware [of the need]... to have a focal point as a mediator or a facilitator dealing with all ministries related to landscape fire management”*.

CPS as a regional team: Beyond their function in the countries, CPS have developed a team of collaboration and mutual support. They regularly exchange information, share experiences, and assist each other in problem-solving, thereby strengthening the regional coherence of the

programme. This informal cooperation fosters the transfer of knowledge and good practices between countries and supports a shared understanding of landscape fire management challenges across the Western Balkans. The CPS value the regional knowledge exchange very high; they benefit from direct contacts and learn new practices.

The evaluators also found evidence that better cooperation has been achieved at national/entities level:

National/ entity networks: The programme developed a clear and robust methodology that helped identifying and engaging the relevant stakeholders, structuring the meetings and preparing the common documents. In all countries resp. entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, LFM networks – or working groups – have been established and are operational. As the signing of the MoC marks the official start for the national networks, in some countries, first meetings took place in 2023, while in other countries, these gatherings started only in spring 2025. Despite these asynchronous processes in the countries, but thanks to the continuous efforts and preparatory work of CFP and CPS also in Serbia and Albania networks could be established without major delay.

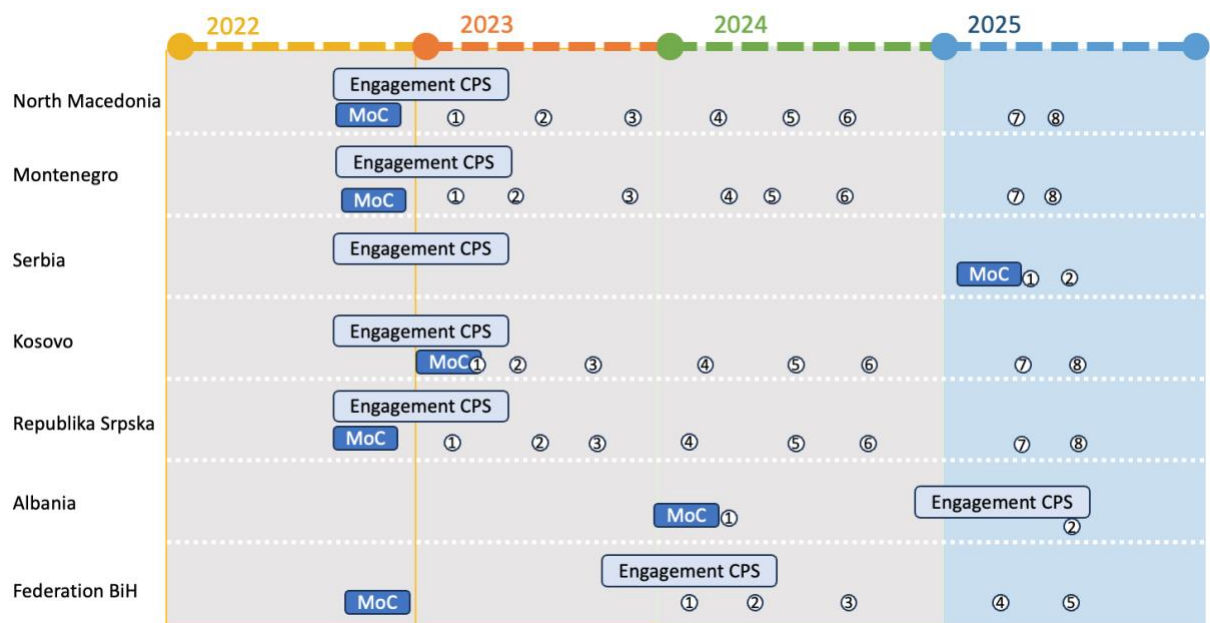


Figure 2: Timelines with dates of CPS assignments, signing of the MoC, and – with numbers – the meetings of the national networks (indicated by the numbered circles).

Based on a thorough stakeholder analysis, all stakeholders relevant to the topic of LFM could be mobilised and invited to networks meetings. The CFP, CPS as well as the interviewed network members reported that the right stakeholders participate in the process considering the political contexts of the countries. For instance, due to the federal system of the Federation BiH, over 60 institutions are part of the network, although only 20 to 25 of them are actually active.

They also mentioned a continuous participation of the stakeholders from the beginning (sometimes with different representatives of the same institutions), the active and good

collaboration as well as the ownership. Furthermore, they observed, that some of the stakeholders also engage bilaterally, and discussing issues of common interest beyond the programme.

Trust-building efforts: It was also mentioned that bilateral contacts were needed to reach the stakeholders and to explain the importance of their commitment. For example, in North Macedonia, the State Statistical Office had to be convinced that their work relates to LFM. In Serbia, due to bureaucratic difficulties to reach the Ministry of Emergency Management. Due to lack of interest, and of staffing, representatives of agriculture in the Federation of BiH don't attend the meetings.

Careful update of stakeholder analysis: During the course, new stakeholders were also identified. For example, in Serbia an analysis revealed that poor maintenance of power lines had caused numerous fires in 2024, with over 600 incidents recorded on a single day (8.7.2024). Therefore, they intend to include the national electricity company in the country network. While the network members mainly stem from national (or sub-national) institutions, academia, NGOs or umbrella organisations, there are reflections on how linking with the local level. Although municipalities have responsibilities related to forest management or firefighting, they lack capacities, human and financial resources.

View of network members: They all highly valued the programme and the chosen preventive approach. Furthermore, they underlined the importance of the intra-sectorial collaboration and reinforce their commitment. They appreciated the professional process design, stating that they were consulted not only during meetings, but also in the preparation of the documents. They could give their written inputs and comments, and they were satisfied with how carefully it was taken up.

2) Better Capacities

We differentiate between capacities on implementing LFM-approaches and capacities to manage and run networks. The latter include project management, learning and monitoring, knowledge management, negotiation skills etc.

Following a capacity assessment and based on a capacity building plan, a series of trainings and workshops have been provided to CPS (CFP). The acquired skills directly translate into successfully established national networks, with well-prepared meetings and trainings, as well as high-quality documents.

Institutionalisation of CPS within the ministry has proven crucial and was successful in all countries. The role of the CPS in implementing the programme should be particularly emphasised, as their contribution has proven essential for ensuring continuity, communication, and coordination at the country level. It was particularly evident that the CPS are fully integrated in the processes and structures of their working environments, and have close collaboration with their CFP. Based on the interviews, we summarise:

In **North Macedonia**, cooperation between the CPS and the CFP is described as excellent, with daily contact and joint planning. The CPS emphasised that programme work is fully integrated into the ministry's regular activities, enabling continuous knowledge transfer and institutionalisation of prevention measures.

In **Kosovo***, both the CFP and CPS highlighted that hosting the programme within the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Rural Development has been a turning point, as it has strengthened ownership and interdepartmental coordination. The Forestry

Department has now integrated prevention and risk mapping into its planning framework. The fact that the CPS had previously worked in this department also facilitated linkage and communication for the purposes of the programme.

In **Serbia**, cooperation among the CPS and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Water Management was found to be highly constructive. The CFP stated that he would retain the CPS within the Ministry even if the CPS position did not formally exist, as he highly values her technical and scientific competence. The CPS described collaboration with the ministry as efficient and pragmatic.

In the **Republic of Srpska**, the CPS maintains robust connections with the country network. The cooperation with the CFP is both smooth and constructive, and the CPS is regarded as active and effective. The CPS underlined that the programme “created a space for cooperation that did not exist before between the technical and civil protection services.”

In the **Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina**, where competencies are divided between entities and cantons, the programme has played a significant role in encouraging dialogue and harmonisation of approaches. The role of the CPS and the excellent cooperation with the CFP have resulted in the CPS being frequently assigned to represent the ministry (CPI) on wildfire-related matters at the international level.

The capacity of the CPS to act as technical focal points has significantly improved the operational flow between the RMFC, REA and country administrations. As several CFPs noted, CPS reduce the administrative and technical workload of the CFPs by maintaining constant contact with REA and RFMC, following up on programme progress, and ensuring that information flows effectively in both directions – from the regional to the country level and vice versa.

Various interviewees recognised the CPS for their professionalism, commitment, and technical competence. Their strong engagement and sense of ownership have earned the programme credibility among participating stakeholders. In several countries, ministry staff emphasised that the CPS “*represent the programme within the institution*” and that their daily presence has made the LFMWB more visible and trusted.

The **common methodology** for structuring the national networks and developing country documents, developed by REA, can be considered as a success factor. The programme foresees a structured process to prepare country documents that are approved by the network stakeholders. The lead for these tasks lies with the CPS; RFMC advises and supports them, e.g. with expert reviews of draft documents.

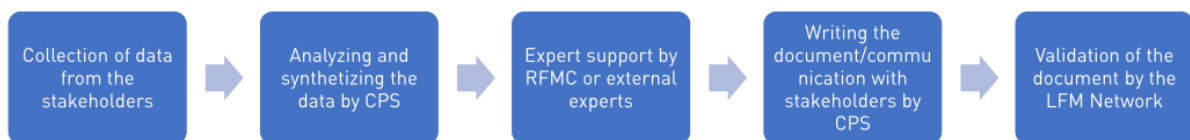


Figure 3: Methodological approach to prepare knowledge documents. Source: REA.

The common methodology helped for creating a common understanding of the programme and fostered mutual learning.

In a 3-step-sequence, country documents are prepared:

- **Step 1 – Country Reports:** The first phase focused on the preparation of country reports with LFM guidelines, which document the institutional frameworks, legislation, and operational practices related to forest and landscape fires in each country. These reports provided the initial baseline for identifying capacities, gaps, and challenges.
- **Step 2 – Gap Analysis:** Based on the country Reports, each country then conducted a gap analysis comparing the existing state of play in wildfire and landscape fire management with the programme’s objectives and principles. This process facilitated inter-ministerial dialogue and the prioritisation of needs in prevention, suppression, and post-fire recovery.
- **Step 3 – Country Strategy:** The final phase concerns the drafting of country strategies that address landscape fire management in an integrated and cyclical manner – covering prevention, preparedness suppression, and restoration – while embedding these actions within broader land-use and rural development policies.

The following table shows the status of progress of the different knowledge products. The national strategy, although noted as completed, needs to be formally adopted by the country network members.

Document	Completed	In process	Not yet started
Country Report with LFM Guidelines	7		
LFM Gap Analysis	5	2	
National Strategy	4	1	2

Table 3: Overview of status of knowledge products.

In Albania and Serbia, where initial delays were reported, both the country report and gap analysis are now to be completed, and work has entered the third phase of drafting the country strategy. Most countries are currently progressing through this phase, with some nearing completion and others at an advanced stage and are expected to finalise without significant delays.

A series of **technical workshops and trainings**, e.g. on prescribed burning, LFM in protected areas or LFM cases from Greece, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Bosnia Herzegovina, were offered by the programme. Several CFP and CPS referred to specific courses, that accounts for their strengthened capacities.

Trainings for national networks: Several countries have organised, with the support of REA, a 2-days training on Climate Change, Landuse, and Gender Equity that were widely attended. Due to a lack of detailed information, the evaluators cannot assess the enhanced capacities of the participants, but they understood that such trainings are carefully monitored. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, this training was jointly prepared and organised by the CPS from both entities.

The **technical guidance provided by RFMC** throughout this process was recognised by stakeholders for its high-quality scientific support and methodological consistency in assisting the preparation of the country documents. Nevertheless, other voices reported a perceived decline in responsiveness and engagement in country-level follow-up in the last months. Parts of this decreased support can be assigned to recent additional professional duties of Prof. Nikolov. On the other hand, this perception highlights the increasing operational demands

placed upon the RFMC, which is tasked with supporting the programme not only at the regional level but also in scientific and technical follow-up across all participating countries.

Capacity building of RFMC staff: Several training sessions on administration and finance were provided by REA to RFMC staff. However, the evaluators could not assess whether the training strengthened the staff of RFMC, nor how the strengthened capacities have been applied by RFMC to manage and facilitate the regional network and to act as the foreseen “knowledge hub”. The role of RFMC in the programme will be further discussed under the criteria of efficiency.

3) Better Policies:

During the above mentioned three-step-process, gaps in country strategies and legislations are identified, and they will be addressed in the preparation of national LFM-strategies. These strategies will be validated and approved by the involved stakeholders. This will be an important step for ensuring that these documents will also guide the implementation. As mentioned above, no national strategy on LFM is approved so far.

At the same time, the evaluators could state that the work in the country networks informed the revisions or amendments of laws, by-laws or strategies, and other guiding documents. The programme has already contributed to changing the discourse, moving "from reactive fire management to a preventive one". This is evidenced by the fact that the LFM terminology and approach were taken up on several occasions. Some examples are:

In **Kosovo***, LFM terminology is now influencing forthcoming forestry by-laws. The Ministry has already announced its intention to integrate LFMWB outputs into its forthcoming Forestry Development Plan. The dynamic institutional environment of this young state, which is in the process of developing new policies and structures, provides a favourable environment for advancing landscape fire management objectives.

In **North Macedonia**, the integration of LFM concepts into official strategies represents a "major paradigm shift".

In **Albania**, the programme directly influenced the national dialogue by initiating the drafting of a the National LFM Strategy.

In the Federation of **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the gap analyses are used by ministries as reference documents.

In **Serbia**, the currently prepared forest management plan refers to the concept of landscape fire management.

In the **Republika Srpska**, the programme informed the new Nature Protection Law.

4) Further observed achievements

Data and products developed: CPS reported that they collect, process, and manage fire-related data. Official datasets are obtained from national forest departments and other relevant agencies and compiled in tabular (Excel) and spatial data formats. These data are incorporated into country reports. However, the data are neither centralised nor harmonised across countries, which limits their use for cross-country analysis and map production. The collected data could add value at both country level, by supporting integration into official statistics, and at regional level, by enabling the development of a regional database. This also applies to

other outputs produced at country level, as CPSs and CFPs expressed an interest in synthesising country-level findings at the regional level.

Well managed and up-to-date programme website: The evaluators noted that the first two sets of documents produced through the aforementioned methodology – the country reports and the gap analyses – are already available on the programme’s online platform for each country, ensuring transparency and accessibility of information.

Public awareness campaign: CFP and CPS referred to the recently launched campaign that was prepared by REA and adapted to country specific contexts with the support of ministerial PR divisions. In several countries, the campaign has increased visibility of both the programme and the CPS, as some were invited to participate in TV interviews.

5) Findings on the community-based projects

The projects from the CBC fund are a key mechanism for translating strategic objectives into local action, fostering community participation, innovation, and awareness in landscape fire management. Grantees across all visited countries expressed strong appreciation for the transparent tender and selection process and user-friendly electronic interface. The grantees, however, mentioned difficulties in administrative procedures, mainly due to national registration of the projects and tax difficulties of international funding (VAT exemption) which delayed the project start about 2 to 3 months.

The evaluation team visited five community-based projects a, representing a diverse sample of local contexts, organisational capacities, and thematic approaches. While some had close contacts with the CPS during the starting phase, they wished for more continuous support, and some expressed a closer exchange with the country network. The evaluators observed technical weaknesses in some projects (e.g. promoting the concept of planting fire-resistant trees to elementary school kids) which should be addressed providing scientific advice to the project implementers. Some grantees mentioned that they were able to engage experts within the framework of their projects. However, given the limited availability of trained LFM experts, the evaluators consider that merely engaging experts is not sufficient if they are not adequately trained in, and aligned with, the landscape fire management concept. In this context, the programme has a role to play in developing, endorsing, and facilitating access to appropriately trained expertise.

Although the projects show some innovative and promising approaches, they remain scattered "spots of activity" lacking the coherence and methodology for regional replication. There are four primary factors that prevent these "spots of activity" from becoming a cohesive regional model: 1) Thematic fragmentation since the projects pursue divergent objectives – which to some extent was intended – that do not aggregate into a unified regional strategy. 2) Technical shortcomings since the implementation is led by local NGOs with limited landscape fire management expertise, and these groups are not consistently supported by central LFMWB actors such as the CPSs or the RFMC unless they proactively seek assistance. 3) Currently, these projects function as "showcases" for awareness rather than systemic interventions. They lack the formal procedural documentation and budget structures necessary for the relevant authorities to scale them to additional / adjacent municipalities. 4) Information sharing during the project implementation is lacking and capitalisation of relevant information is currently limited. This means that the project progress and successful results in one country often remain unknown to practitioners in others due to the absence of a centralised regional repository and of communication during the implementation.

3.4 Findings on efficiency

In general, it is challenging to assess the efficiency of policy-related, capacity- and awareness-raising activities, as specific costing is difficult to calculate, and the benefits are methodologically difficult to delineate. However, some qualitative statements can be made regarding the cost-effectiveness of the programme. The following chapter also focuses on the organisational set-up and the appropriateness of the implementation.

Financial Resources: According to the financial reporting in the annual reports (2022-2024) the programme has a very low financial implementation rate, indicating a significant inefficiency in spending.

- By the end of 2022 (Year 1), only 6.51% of the total phase budget had been spent.
- By the end of 2023 (Year 2), cumulative spending was only 11.58% of the total phase budget.
- By the end of 2024 (Year 3), cumulative spending had reached only 26.27% of the total budget.

This low financial efficiency is a direct result of the administrative delays. The 2022 report attributes the low spending to the "preparatory year", and the 2023 report explicitly links it to the MoC signing delays in Albania and Serbia, which resulted in the postponement of national workshops. The programme anticipates a higher level of spending in 2025 and 2026, driven by the implementation of the 12 CBC Fund grants.

Allocated human resources: The programme is implemented by REA (5 team members), their backstopper Helvetas (2 experts), the 7 CPS, and 4 members of RFMC. While at the start of the programme, HAFL (1 expert) was mandated by SDC, it holds now a contract with REA. The number of RFMC staff involved might seem high but is due to the programme design that foresees a hand-over in the network coordination from REA to RFMC. Based on the feedback given, the evaluators couldn't assess to what extent (e.g. full-time equivalent) the human resources and the backstopping services have been used. However, for coordinating a regional programme with 7 sub-regional components, this organisational set-up seems to be lean.

Evolvement of roles and task division: The roles, responsibilities and tasks are outlined in the ProDoc. Since the programme has at its heart to establish and run networks, the implementation and the network coordination cannot be clearly separated and seem partly overlapping. This especially applies for the "network coordination mechanism". The ProDoc foresees that RFMC should take over this role in the long-term; however, some tasks to acquire this role have shared responsibilities, for instance the development of a strategy for regional LFM network coordination. Helvetas has a mandate to advise REA in knowledge management and regional networking, while REA supports RFMC in the development of a strategic manual and, at the same time, assumes the role of network coordinator. In this set-up, REA holds the lead which is originally foreseen for RFMC. While such a participatory approach creates ownership, it is, however, not very efficient. Furthermore, it can be problematic when decisions have to be taken. As the interviews revealed, there are divergent perceptions on the functioning of the network.

Critical role of RFMC: The RFMC assumes various roles in the programme, that also evolved during the time. Following the initiative of HAFL and GFMC, RFMC was identified as key organisation in the Western Balkans to prepare a programme on landscape management. The idea was to enhance regional hubs within the GFMC building on former relations in the region.

SDC mandated RFMC together with HAFL to prepare an entry proposal. It should be noted that the credibility and influence of the RFMC in the region are also closely associated with the work and reputation of Prof. Nikolov from the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Skopje, who manages the RFMC for the Western Balkans. Prof. Nikolov's scientific standing and professional integrity are widely recognised by the CFP, and his presence has been a key factor in the onset of the programme in building institutional trust and acceptance of the LFMWB approach. The programme designed a regional network with RFMC acting as a "knowledge hub" – a role distinct from that of a "network coordinator". To fulfil this role, the programme aims at strengthening RFMC by building staff capacity and enhancing managerial and financial capacities. However, this design reflects with a centralised view of a network, and the head of RFMC also assumed the role of scientific and technical knowledge provider. RFMC staff are preparing the regional network meetings and are present at country networks meetings. As we understood, RFMC head is the main contact for communication, technical/methodological support and scientific advice; some CPS also reported exchanges with his staff. CPS mentioned that they expect more systematic technical and scientific support and closer interaction with RFMC on country-specific issues. In particular, they expect RFMC to organise structured and consistent training activities addressing different landscape fire management challenges, ranging from scientific and policy aspects to operational practice.

For running a network (or interrelated networks), a robust coordination mechanism is needed that facilitates communication and exchange, provides organisational and technical guidance, assesses capacity needs and plans trainings etc., organises and drafts meetings. It was not very clear for the evaluators who takes on these tasks. Interviewees stated that these tasks often are fulfilled by REA. CPS mentioned communication and reporting to RFMC and REA, which didn't become clear if this is a duplication.

Programme acting as network: Largely the same actors, together with representatives from SDC, GFMC, and HAFL, participate in both the steering committee or partner meetings and the regional network. As a result, the programme is steered by actors who simultaneously constitute the core network members and, from a programme logic perspective, also represent the primary target group.. Based on the documents and interviews, however, it seems that partner meetings mainly cover operational aspects, and this, in turn, matches to the structure of a network. While transferring responsibilities is considered important, the dual roles raise questions, when it comes to decisions on staffing, budgeting or prioritisation of activities, but also on the strategic development of the network.

Efficient programme coordination and management: Farmahem acts as REA and efficiently handles the administration, logistics, coordination, and financial management, and maintains constant communication with all actors. Furthermore, they administer the programme budget, contracted 7 CPS and hold contracts with their backstopper Helvetas and with HAFL. Furthermore, they act as signing party of the MoC. Farmahem is widely recognised for its efficiency, responsiveness, and commitment. Across all interviews, Farmahem was described as proactive, accessible, and solution-oriented, demonstrating strong management capacity. The success in coordinating the numerous activities across countries was due in part to the REA proactively taking on a network- coordination role beyond its original implementing mandate.

CPS as "motor of the programme": The organisational model to hire, assign and fund staff that are embedded and hosted within a country ministry proved to be key. The CPIs provide office space as an in-kind contribution and access to the ministerial structures. This set-up is highly efficient, making the CPS the "institutional backbone" and "motor" of the programme at the national level. Their contribution has proven essential for ensuring continuity,

communication, and coordination at country level. It was particularly evident that the CPS are fully integrated within the operational environment of their respective CPIs.

Difficult formalisation of cooperation: Interviewees mentioned concerns about the formalisation of cooperation between Farmahem – as private company of North Macedonia – and the country ministries serving as CPIs. In several countries, the signing of MoC between the Programme and the ministries faced delays, partly due to the legal and procedural complexity of concluding agreements between governmental bodies and a private company, but also due to bureaucratic hurdles or different priorities. This challenge required additional coordination efforts from Farmahem, Helvetas and SDC, often involving the Embassies of Switzerland in the respective countries to facilitate the process. The evaluators recognise that Farmahem invested considerable effort and time to overcome these administrative obstacles, ensuring that all MoC were eventually signed and the programme could proceed normally.

Monitoring: It has to be underlined, that the REA has successfully operationalised the logframe by developing a monitoring tool based on the defined indicators. Furthermore, they “translated” the sometimes vague or open formulated indicators (e.g. “effectiveness of existing national policies” or “network active and well established”) to operational metrics. The annual progress reports for 2023 and 2024 demonstrate that this monitoring and evaluation system is functioning. The REA and CPSs are actively collecting and reporting data against the measurable indicators (e.g. “no. of country reports,” “no. of articles,” “no. of stakeholders aware”). Overall, the system has been effective in capturing programme progress.

3.5 Findings on impact

Satisfactory tendency to achievement: Results at the output and outcome levels are evident, namely the contribution to the paradigm shift from suppression to a more holistic view of landscape fire management. Due to the short implementation period, but also due to the existing attribution gap, it is difficult to assess whether the programme has contributed to the stated impact, especially in terms of provoking political changes that lead to sustainable forest and landscape management. Although there are promising signs, it is a long way from translating strategies and policies into concrete actions in the field and into changed management practices on the ground. The community-based projects could have a bridging function by bringing the new LFM-concept to local communities and feeding back effective approaches to the policy level.

Reaching the LFMWB target groups: The programme effectively reaches its direct target groups; however, it does not yet reach the beneficiaries (*“people who depend on these landscapes for their livelihoods and socioeconomic development”*). For further reflections on the target groups see also chapter 3.7.

3.6 Findings on sustainability

Sustainability is not given automatically: While with the positioning of CPS within CFI marks an important step to initiate (policy) processes towards a sustainable landscape fire management, the sustainability of the activities and the networks is not automatically given. We couldn’t observe a clear resp. shared vision for running the regional as well as the cross-

sectorial networks concerning its coordination mechanism and functioning without the programme. While the respondents confirmed their high will to continue with both a preventive and a networking approach, they also pointed at their high dependency on external funding of key staff. Furthermore, they mentioned administrative and political constraints to employ staff or allocate necessary budgets.

3.7 Findings on the programme logic

Overall, the impact hypothesis and the theory of change of the LFMWB programme is solid to cover the complexity of the multi-stakeholder and multi-level intervention. However, it is difficult to understand the pathways of intended change or the causal links between the results (outputs – outcomes – impact).

Outcome statements not very precise: The 3 outcomes are formulated openly and do not explicitly state whose capacities the programme seeks to improve, who should cooperate better or who should adopt revised policies. Additionally, while outcome 1 aims at the “*regional knowledge exchange and cooperation*”, also outcome 2 aims at “*capacities... for cross-sectoral collaboration*”. The activities suggest that outcome 1 covers the regional, and outcome 2 covers the country-specific programme components. In Outcome 3, “*the revised policies*” are rather an output, while the second part “*..to support sustainable landscape management*” insinuate a variety of stakeholders.

Outcomes commonly are understood as the change in the behaviour of an actor and achieved short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention’s outputs. Consequently, a more precise formulation of the outcomes would help to understand the interlinkages between outputs and outcomes. For instance, it is not clear, how the community-based projects contribute to “*revised policies and strategies on LFM in place*” (outcome 3). Furthermore, the logframe contains ambitious indicators at goal and outcome levels that will be difficult to measure due to many confounding factors.

Objectives and target groups of some activities not always clear: Some activities lack explicit and well-specified target groups (e.g. public awareness campaign or research grant for students). As stand-alone activity, it can be deduced for the mentioned examples that the broader public or students are meant; however, it is less clear, how these activities are embedded in the whole programme, how they contribute to the outcomes and how they address the target groups of the programme. Without clearly answering “Why are we doing this activity and for whom?” and specifying who should be addressed with each activity, process, or product, the effectiveness of these initiatives may be compromised. Activities are not an end to themselves but should contribute to the overall goals (outcomes and impact).

While the logframe for some activities clearly states CPS and RFMC as target groups (e.g. activities 1.1.1, 1.1.2). In others, the same actors assume the implementing role (e.g. 2.1.1 to 2.1.4.). This dual role of some actors can be problematic if the sphere of influence of the programme is not well reflected.

Target groups of the programme: A clear picture of the target groups of the programme is related with the boundaries of the programme: Who should benefit from the products and services of the programme?

Based on the analysis of the log frame and the theory of change, we understand the target groups and their relations as a sequence, namely the capacity building of selected key actors as a prerequisite to manage knowledge networks and engage in policy processes (see Figure 4). From a programme logic’s angle, we see the RFMC, the 7 country focal institutions (CPI, with their CFP as well as the respective CPS) as the direct **target groups** of the programme. The members of the country networks are considered as (indirect) target group. While the implementing organisations of the community-based pilot projects (grantees of CBS fund) are also considered as target groups, the involved community members are likely to be indirect target groups. Rural communities in the Western Balkans are seen as beneficiaries of the programme (“end target group”). The Swiss actors and the GFMC are seen as partners of the programme.

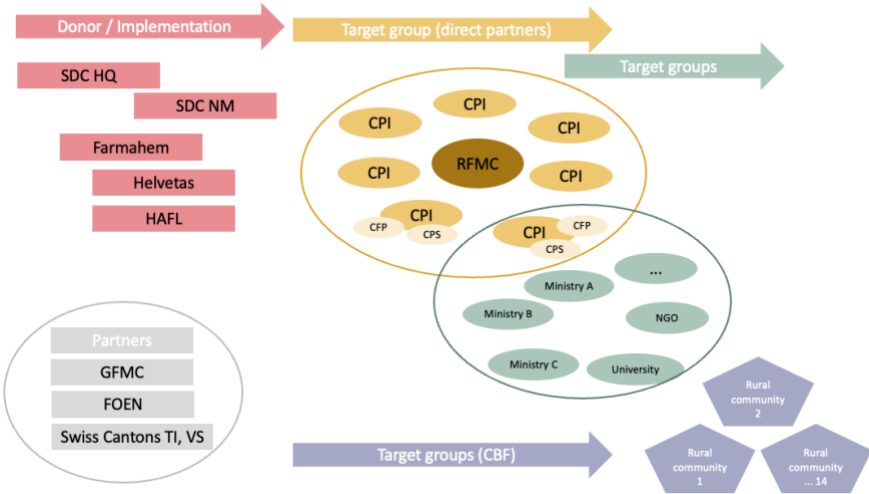


Figure 4: Stakeholders of the programme with their respective role. Own figure based on information in the credit proposal.

We acknowledge that the documents and the programme communication use a different terminology, considering the CPI and RFMC as “implementing or programme partners” and members of national networks as “stakeholders”. From our perspective, we are not intending to introduce a new wording but offering a different view on the programme and its boundaries.

The concept of outcome mapping is a valuable tool to conceptualise the “target groups” of a programme or a project and could be of use for analysing the LFMWB programme. The concept focuses on changes in the behaviour, relationships and actions of boundary partners who are influenced by a project. It identifies “boundary partners” as the main actors who interact directly with the project and whose behaviour is to be changed. Outcome mapping emphasises that a project can only contribute to change, as the ultimate responsibility for changing behaviour lies with the people affected. As shown in Figure 5, the influence of the project decreases as the intervention progresses, while the influence of the partners increases. The concept recognises that social change is complex and non-linear and that control over the effects achieved is limited.

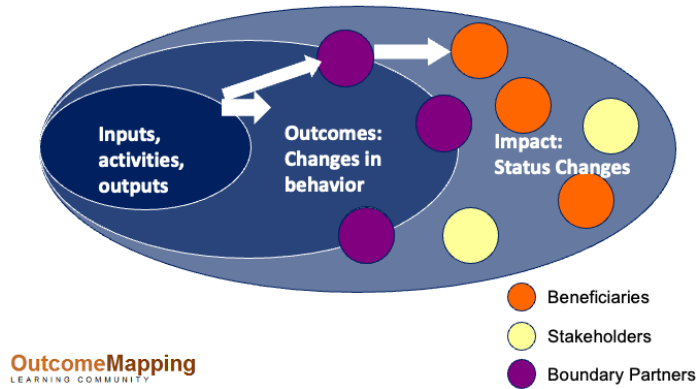


Figure 5: Schematic representation of a project's influence on achieving the desired impact.

Result model: The result chain is a tool for depicting, in a specific and graphical way, how change should come about. For the evaluation, we prepared a result model that supported us to understand how the realised or planned activities lead to the expected results (outcomes) and how the effects are interlinked (see Figure 6). Based on the provided logframe and the theory of change of the LFMWB programme, we propose to distinguish between **immediate outcomes** and intermediate outcomes in order to better differentiate between effects at a) the level of the direct target groups (CPI, regional network), and b) the level of the country network members and involved community stakeholders resp. those targeted to implementing concrete actions and LFM practices. Furthermore, we suggested differentiating a regional and a country-perspective, acknowledging the fact, however, that the activities are implemented in parallel. As **intermediate outcomes**, we consider the extent to which cooperation and revised national policies have been embedded in states' procedures and structures and led to locally based landscape fire management procedures.

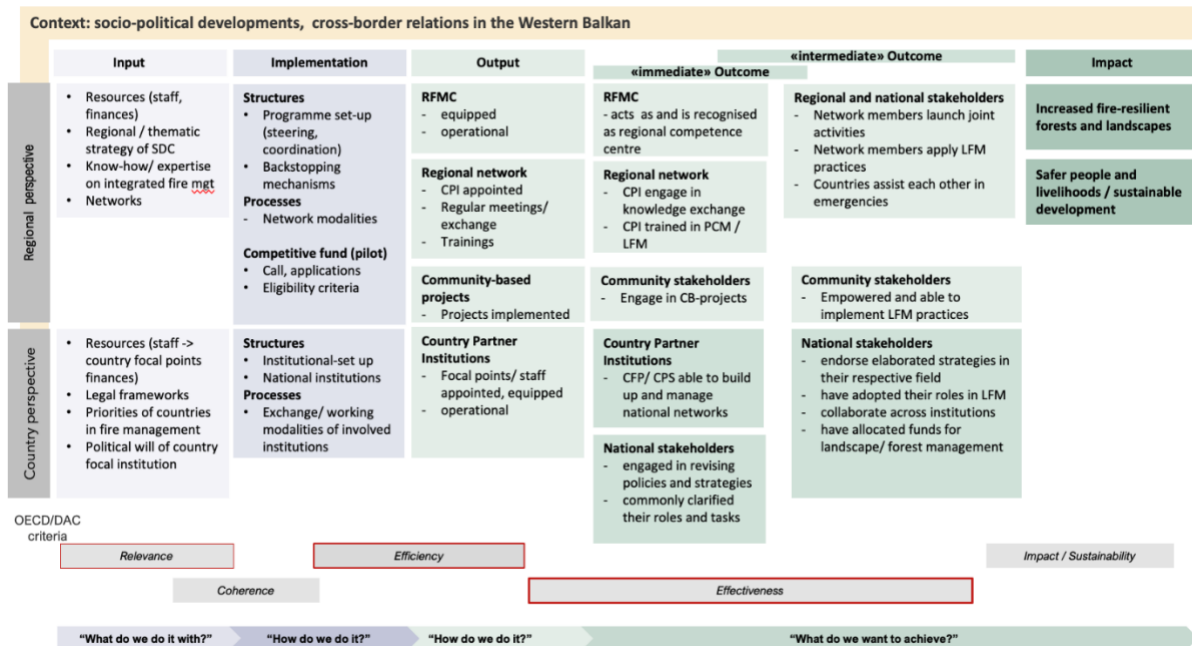


Figure 6: Proposed results model. Boxes in red highlight the main criteria of the evaluation.

4 Conclusions

The evaluation concludes that the LFMWB programme is a highly relevant and effective intervention that has successfully established the foundations for a regional paradigm shift in landscape fire management.

- The programme's objectives are exceptionally relevant. They are a direct and appropriate response to the region's documented "dual challenge": the increasing fire risk and the structural and institutional deficiencies. The network-based approach and the introduction of the LFM-concept are highly suited to bridging the critical sectorial gaps between forestry, civil protection, and agriculture. The high-level buy-in from the partner countries since the preparatory phase confirms the objectives are fully aligned with their national priorities.
- The planning of the programme demonstrated a sound strategic choice in engaging cooperating countries primarily at the ministry level, as this facilitates policy endorsement and institutional ownership of the LFM-approach and recommendations developed by the programme.
- The programme identified the "correct" entry points with the departments resp. directorates of forests within the respective ministry. Former contacts in the region, the high recognition of RFMC (as GFMC partner), and the careful outreach to potential stakeholders proved to be crucial to create a sound network basis.
- The programme is considered to be highly effective. Despite the late start, it is successfully delivering its core outputs. The networks at country and regional level are established and functional. Key knowledge products are being systematically completed.
- The three-step methodology to develop country reports, gap analyses, LFM-strategies is one of the programme's greatest strengths, combining structured analysis, institutional engagement, and capacity development into a cohesive system that enhances both country and regional resilience against landscape fires.
- While the foundations for sustainability (policy integration, strong partner interest) are in place, the mechanisms are not yet established. The programme's benefits, therefore, remain largely "donor-dependent". The evaluation found no evidence on the two critical factors for sustainability: 1) The formal institutionalisation of the CPS/CFP roles within national government structures beyond the programme's duration, and 2) the allocation of dedicated national budget lines to finance the LFM networks after SDC funding ends.
- The multi-level network approach with a regional network and country networks and CPF and CPS functioning as connecting links, proved to be very successful and is highly valued by all participants.
- The evaluators observe clear differences in the character and purpose of the country-level- and regional networks and conclude that not sufficient attention is paid to shaping and running them managing them in accordance with these differences. The regional network gathers the "forestry community" with RFMC, GFMC and HAFL facilitating access to current scientific knowledge in forest management and fire ecology. In this

sense, the regional network has the character of a “community of practitioners”⁴. In contrast, the country networks have a much stronger focus on cross-sectorial collaboration where academia represents only one stakeholder group among several others.

⁴ Communities of practice often focus on sharing best practices and creating new knowledge to advance a domain of professional practice. Interaction on an ongoing basis is an important part of this.

5 Recommendations

The evaluation team is proposing following recommendations to SDC for making adjustments until the end of the 1st phase and for planning a 2nd phase of the programme. The recommendations are built on the capitalisation of the 1st phase, further developments and a consolidation of changes in the last period of the programme to ensure sustainability beyond the programme and SDC's funding.

5.1 Short-term adjustments (until the end of the first phase)

- **Resolve any administrative hurdles:** The MoC ends with the date of 31.08.2025 which was previously the end of the first phase. An extension of duration should be made quickly to ensure the commitment and participation also formally correct. As soon as the decision for a second phase is taken, we recommend starting with the procedures to establish new MoC and consider SDC resp. the Swiss Embassies to take the lead negotiation them directly with the partner governments. These extension of duration might also apply to other contracts, e.g. with CPS.
- **Prioritise activities and facilitate processes:** As the programme shows promising results related to better policies, priority should be given that country networks develop their national LFM-strategies and adopt them before the 1st phase ends. Formal recognition by the governments would be an add-on but might not be realistic due to political processes. Such a prioritisation would require work and budget reallocations and additional support for selected countries. It could also lead to refrain from – or postpone – planned activities.
- **Regional synthesis:** The developed knowledge products, the collected data on fire, as well as the lessons learnt should be capitalised on a regional level and made accessible for fostering knowledge management.
- **Ensure guidance of the pilot projects of the CBC Fund:** To achieve their intended results, it is important that the projects reps. the grantee organisations receive technical and scientific advice. Furthermore, we recommend organising a workshop or event among the grantees organisations to capitalise practices and experiences. The programme should also ensure that these lessons learnt feed into the country and the regional networks.

5.2 Recommendations for planning of 2nd phase

- The general recommendation is to continue with a second phase as the programme successfully established transboundary and cross-sectoral collaboration to address a pressing topic and thereby laid the foundation for a paradigm shift in landscape fire management which is a novelty in the region.
- **Reformulation of goals and result chain:** Based on the reflections in chapter 3.4, we suggest developing more precise outcomes (and impact) statements and establishing a result chain, to distinguish immediate outcomes for direct target groups from

intermediate outcomes, such as the formal embedding of LFM policies into state structures. This clarity is necessary to ensure that project activities contribute directly to systemic changes rather than remaining isolated nice side-effects.

- **Establish a clearer programme governance:** A more evident distinction between the steering committee or partner meeting and the regional network would allow for strategic planning and decision making. This applies foremost for the strategic direction of the network approach. We recommend rethinking the composition of the steering committee, e.g. with – at least – representatives of SDC, CPF, REA. We consider the participation of the CPF as important for creating ownership.
- **Refine the regional network approach:** Drawing on the conclusions, we recommend clarifying the purpose of the regional network as well as clarifying “network roles” independent from the institutions, the “manual for strategic coordination of the regional network” already is an important step in this direction. We furthermore recommend, to reshape the regional network by letting go the original model with a central (scientific) knowledge hub and replacing it with more multi-directional mechanism. The network will need an adequate and robust coordination function that goes beyond the mere provision of knowledge. The clarification of the future role of RFMC will be crucial, which means to make effectively use of its strengths as a scientific knowledge resource rather than a network facilitator. Furthermore, it includes to rethink the network composition depending on the network type. If the character of the regional network evolves towards a “community of practice”, it could be expanded by leverage the academic network to include academics from the region. Additionally, a regional training scheme could be launched by connecting partner universities to formally establish a joint postgraduate curriculum or master’s course in landscape fire management. Such an initiative would contribute to create a critical mass of professionals in the region.
- **Give more attention to different network types:** While the regional network has more the character of an exchange platform among peers, the country networks are so-called science-practice-policy interfaces. This requires an understanding of the logics of the involved fields, for instance that while science strives for deep insights and the transfer of knowledge, policy looks for solutions and societal optimisation. Furthermore, the different network types call for different network coordination and for the programme stakeholders (CPS, CPF, RFMC, etc.) to assume different roles in the different networks.
- **Ensure ownership of country stakeholders:** Given the strong commitment of stakeholders, it is important to continue working with the country networks. A logical next step is that the prepared documents enter the policy dialogues in the countries. The gap analyses provide an excellent basis to identify concrete measures. As one respondent put it “*we want to move from documents to action*”.

Therefore, we strongly recommend institutionalising the model of the cross-sectoral networks, so that landscape fire management becomes part of the official system, with clear procedures and budget lines. The programme could help by supporting the development of a national framework that defines institutional mandates, inter-agency protocols, and standardised procedures. Additionally, the programme could assist in mainstreaming fire management tasks into annual institutional work plans and budget cycles, accompanied by targeted technical support and capacity building for both national and local levels. This would ensure that landscape fire management is not a programme, but a sustained national practice embedded.

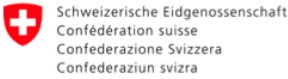
In the countries, we consider it important, to move from a strict preventive to a more integrated approach to also address the needs and commitment of stakeholders from civil protection. This enables clarifying roles and duties between the stakeholders as they are often entwined, e.g. for collecting data or for suppression (e.g. in Republika Srpska the firefighting duty lies with employees of the forest enterprise).

- **Programme design:** We recommend a design that more clearly distinguishes between the regional and country components while defining their links. The methodology of preparing sequent documents strongly structured the work of the first phase and serve as a crucial “backbone”. For the next phase, we recommend developing similar robust guidelines which at the same time are flexible enough to account for the different directions of the country networks. Such an approach requires an understanding of the main needs and priorities of the countries are; we recommend compiling them at a regional level. This would allow also for identifying focus areas that are of common interest for all participating countries. Examples could be to create an interoperable information and monitoring system on fire, or cross-border simulations.

The implementation strategy should follow a thematic, result-oriented design and may require adjustments. When the programme had more country-specific components, then it is recommended to more closely involve the SDC offices in the countries and to build on their established portfolios.

- **Put emphasis on the Community-Based Competitive Fund:** The supervision of community-based-projects could also be part of the regional component. However, we recommend that the fund focuses on larger, thematically focused and coherent consortia rather than many small, isolated projects. Bottom-up initiatives could still be considered, but it requires a closer support from programme, e.g. bringing organisations with similar objectives together or allowing a project to cover a broader range of municipalities, stakeholders etc. This redesign must be paired with enhanced technical supervision for grantees, as the limited guidance on LFM pilots often constrained projects’ scalability and replication potential.
- **Prioritise institutionalisation:** The positioning of programme-funded staff, the CPS, within ministries – and the recognition by them – has proven to be a success factor for achieving the results. This can already be seen as first step towards institutionalisation. At the same time, the programme invested in capacitating competent professionals. Therefore, we strongly recommend finding possibilities (e.g. multi-annual contracts) to retain the CPS within the programme and transition them into state structures.
- **Develop sustainability strategies** includes the institutionalisation of the network approach (see above), but also funding and organisational aspects. Thus, we recommend to: **1) Examine alternatives for long-lasting network coordination mechanism:** The above discussed redesign of the network will result also in clear profile for a coordination mechanism that is specifically tailored for the needs of its participants. To handover the coordination after the programme ends, an appropriate organisation or institution should be examined. An academic institution could be an option as they are more independent from political priorities but on the other hand, they are subjacent to the logic of science. **2) Explore co-financing:** SDC should actively explore co-financing options with other donors (e.g. USFS, FAO, OSCE) and consider adding a "global component" to programme. This would align with SDC's thematic section goals and leverage the programme as a "flagship" model for other regions.

Annex 1 Terms of Reference



Swiss Development Cooperation
Thematic Section
Climate, DRR, and Environment

Terms of References for Evaluation

Landscape Fire Management in the Western Balkans (LFMWB) Programme

Phase I: 1 February 2022 – 31 December 2026

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1. Purpose of this document

This document sets out the requirements and criteria for the external evaluation mandate of the first phase (February 2022 to December 2026) of the **Landscape Fire Management in the Western Balkans (LFMWB) Programme** mandated by SDC's Climate, Disaster Risk Reduction, and Environment (CDE) section and implemented by the regional executing agency (REA) Farmahem, with backstopping support to REA from Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation.

The Terms of References (ToRs) describe the LFMWB programme and define the context, purpose, objectives, and scope of the external evaluation. They serve as the guiding document for the evaluation process and its expected deliverables. The selection of the evaluation team and the contract with the consultants for the evaluation mandate will be based on these ToRs.

2. Background information and context of the evaluation

Landscape fires (LF)¹ have been on the rise across the globe over the past two decades. Climate change (CC) induces a higher frequency of extreme weather conditions, which lead to more frequent, prolonged and severe droughts and heatwaves, thereby increasing the likelihood of fire occurrence. The Western Balkan region (WB) is among the most affected regions in Europe. In this region, LFs have repeatedly burned forests, agricultural lands, and nearby semi-urban areas, averaging over 100,000 hectares (ha) per year during the last decade – with a peak of 215,000 ha in 2017. LF primarily affected the forest ecosystem services², but their impacts also caused loss of agricultural yields and biodiverse pastures, damaged public and private assets and affected people's health – most notably through air pollution - and livelihoods, even causing loss of life. It is expected that the negative impact of LFs on people, economic activities and the environment will increase in the future.

The rising frequency and severity of LFs in the WB can be attributed not only to climatic changes but also to structural and institutional shortcomings in managing natural disasters and landscapes. The lack of sustainable land use practices, coupled with increasing fuel load³ from rural abandonment, as well as fires started by people who then fail to control their spread, exacerbates fire risks. Furthermore, institutional deficiencies at national and WB regional levels hinder effective coordination among government agencies, local authorities, and communities, resulting in inadequate responses to the evolving challenges posed by CC, land use changes and human ignorance. At the level of the WB region, there is a lack of established coordination mechanisms between neighbouring countries, which regularly share transboundary fires and, overall, similar political and operational challenges. Given the climate risks, integrated landscape fire management (LFM) approaches, combining landscape management, climate adaptation, and disaster risk reduction strategies, are essential to address the issue. However, a key challenge for the LFMWB program lies in the regional context, where countries are highly heterogeneous, and crisis management for fires, as well as effective preparedness, unfortunately often play a secondary role

There is an increased political recognition in the WB region that sector policies, mainly related to civil protection, forestry, agriculture and environment, need to be overcome, respectively articulated, to pave the way for coherent and comprehensive action. Challenges and deficiencies linger at various levels: at national level, there are explicit deficits in institutional capacities, in the cooperation between government agencies and local authorities, and in the collaboration among relevant stakeholders, including local communities. At the level of the WB region, there is a lack of established coordination mechanisms between neighboring countries, which are regularly sharing transboundary fires and, overall, similar political and operational challenges. A particular issue of the region also lies in the limited exposure of national stakeholders to global dialogues in the dynamic field of LFM.

This growing willingness of Ministries to take stronger action and implement preventive measures, which extend beyond national borders, presents a valuable opportunity to promote regional forest and

¹ Overarching term for unplanned and uncontrolled fires burning in the vegetation of natural, cultural and (peri-)urban areas.

² Benefits provided by the environment to humans, such as water, air and nutrient cycling. In addition, forests represent important carbon sinks, and potentially provide one third of the climate solution according to the IPCC (2019).

³ Volumes of combustible material such as dead wood and vegetation.

landscape management within the framework of broader land use approaches to prevent future devastating events. Switzerland has a lot to offer both in terms of science and practical experience of dealing with the prevention and management of forest fires from the national, sub-national and local level. This know- and do-how shall be further mobilized and forms the fundament of the LFMWB programme.

The LFMWB initiative aims at addressing the mentioned shortcomings and promoting integrated LFM approaches by facilitating regional collaboration, stimulating global knowledge sharing, and working through, and strengthening existing structures in six countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo⁴, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia). Its overall objective is to increase the resilience of WB forests and landscapes to fires, benefiting the people who depend on these landscapes for their livelihoods and socioeconomic development. The initiative aims at facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogue and action to promote integrated LFM, which will increase the resilience of society and the environment, serve the economy, and in particular the lives and livelihoods of remote rural populations in fire-prone areas in the WB. The programme will do so by fostering better cooperation, capacities and policies through the following three outcomes:

1. Better cooperation: A lasting regional network is established and contributes to cross-boundary knowledge exchange and cooperation in LFM.
2. Better capacities: Strengthened capacities on broader LFM approaches allow for an effective cross-sectoral collaboration at multiple levels.
3. Better policies: Revised policies and strategies on LFM are in place to support sustainable landscape management at local, national and regional levels.

The implementation of the LFM programme depends largely on the legal frameworks, the institutional set-up and organisational capacities of the six countries. The most important institutions and organisations involved in LFM are government institutions of forestry, agriculture, environment, internal affairs, civil protection, and defence, but also municipalities, private forest owners, farmers, and professional organisations. One of the challenges is precisely the multiplicity of stakeholders, representing different interests in the use of landscapes, which are called to develop a common landscape-level understanding and approach to address the core challenges of land use change, the effects of climate change on ecosystems, and the management of LFs.

The Regional Fire Monitoring Centre (RFMC), a civil society organisation, plays a key role in facilitating exchanges between the scientific community, public agents and policy makers of the WB countries, providing knowledge and policy advice, and broker relations with other organisations. Hosted by the Faculty of Forest Sciences, Landscape Architecture and Environmental Engineering "Hans Em", Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, North Macedonia, the RFMC is the main centre of competence on LFM in the WB region. It is part of the global LFM network coordinated by the Global Fire Monitoring Centre (GFMC), to which seven other regional centres are affiliated.

Furthermore, various Swiss institutions are involved in the programme setup, both to share their experience with the WB countries, notably in the prevention and suppression of fires and in post-fire management, and on the other hand, to learn from the southern European forest ecosystems. This will be of value for Switzerland, which is expected to experience similar climatic conditions in the future. More specifically, targeted knowledge exchange activities have been set up with the Swiss Federal Office of the Environment FOEN (early warning, public communication), the Swiss Federal Institute for forest, Snow and Landscape Research WSL (research, monitoring) as well as with the cantons Ticino, Valais and Graubünden that have extensive experience in managing forest fires. Within the SDC, a close collaboration with the WB Division and in particular with the cooperation office in North Macedonia was set up to take advantage of synergies and ensure coherence between the SDC programmes in the WB region and the LFMWB initiative.

Farmahem has been tasked with the overall coordination of the programme in the role of the Regional Executive Agency (REA). They were selected through a public tender and are responsible for the

⁴ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ISJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

overall administrative and financial management. This also includes the contractual arrangements with the partner institutions and the management of the competitive fund for local activities. Framahem is supported by Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation (HSI) in this role. Additionally, the Bern University of Applied Sciences / School for Agriculture, Forest and Food Sciences (HAFL) is tasked with enabling and strengthening the involvement of the selected Swiss institutions, ensuring an overall coherence in the Swiss – WB collaboration on LFM. Both partners, HSI and HAFL, operate through contracts with Framahem. On the side of the implementing countries, an official country partner institution (CPI) has been nominated in each country, which host the country focal points (CFP), committed to mobilizing and engaging with relevant national stakeholders. The evaluation will examine the institutional and managerial setup of the programme and its strengths and weaknesses.

The LFMWB programme uses a participatory approach that includes the local population in its processes, promotes gender equality, and further strengthens public awareness of the importance of safeguarding natural resources. The establishment of a competitive fund within the programme allows supporting local, community-based initiatives (in form of pilot projects).

The LFMWB programme is part of a broader effort to advance climate change adaptation and mitigation, and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), contributing to both international climate goals⁵ and, indirectly, to peacebuilding efforts in the WB region. Furthermore, the project aims to shift from a reactive fire management approach to a preventive one, which is especially important considering that over 90% of all fires are human caused.

The intended engagement is CHF 4'415'000 for the 1st phase from February 2022 to December 2026. A second phase of the LFMWB programme is foreseen from 2027 onwards.

3. Evaluation purpose and objective

This external evaluation will be a systematic and objective assessment of the first phase of the LFMWB programme. The aim is to determine relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability⁶ of the present undertaking, and to provide information about the needs and reasons for an ongoing commitment. The evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learnt into future decision-making processes. The evaluation will contribute to the accountability (summative focus) and learning (formative focus) of the programme, as specified in the SDC evaluation policy. To this end, the evaluation shall provide an overall and comprehensive picture on the LFMWB programme results achieved so far in phase 1, provide evidence of its current or expected (long-term) effects and their durability, and identify learnings and possible ways for improving the LFMWB programme.

Hence, the purpose of this external evaluation is (i) to provide SDC with an external and objective assessment regarding the achieved results of phase 1 so far, (ii) to provide recommendations for the remaining period of implementation of phase 1, and (iii) to provide recommendations for the planning and implementing of phase 2.

3.1 Scope

The evaluation applies to interventions implemented during the first phase of the LFMWB programme, from February 2022 to October 2025. Since the evaluation will take place before the full completion of this phase, it will not be able to fully consider interventions occurring after October 2025, even though the official end of Phase 1 is in December 2026.

The aim is to take stock of the project implementation, the development of partnerships, and the results achieved so far, while the implementation of Phase 1 continues in parallel. This provides the opportunity to develop short term recommendations for the remaining period of the current phase, as well as medium- to long-term recommendations regarding the second phase of the programme.

⁵ 2030 Agenda and Sendai Framework

⁶ The evaluation should be guided by the OECD/DAC criteria: OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation: [Better Criteria for Better Evaluation. Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use](#) (2019).

The evaluation is expected to be conducted between September and November 2025, with visits to the partner countries during the second half of October 2025. A timeline will be presented in chapter 4.3. The geographic scope will include the six implementing countries, with field visits in at least four of them. The concrete travel plan, including the specific countries where field visits will take place, is still under discussion. In the countries without field visits, virtual meetings will be held with the main partners and stakeholders.

The evaluation will assess the overall performance of the programme and the extent to which the planned programme outcomes and outputs have been achieved since the beginning of the first phase in February 2022. The breadth and depth of the evaluation will be informed by the indicative evaluation questions that the evaluation team seeks to answer (see chapter 3.2).

A special focus shall be laid on the following aspects:

- the efficiency and effectiveness of the project, with less focus on impact and sustainability. This is because of the current stage of project implementation; it is assumed that there will be limited information available to assess impact and sustainability at the time of evaluation.
- the extent of the national and regional cooperation, national policies and activities related to LFM that have been/are being formally embedded in states' procedures, and are sustainably established, and the extent to which locally based LFM procedures are in place and are effectively minimizing the risks of LFs.
- the LFMWB programme's strong commitment to advancing social inclusion and promoting gender equality as integral components of its activities, and the extent to which the programme has been able to develop and implement gender-responsive approaches.

3.2 Evaluation questions/ key focus area

The following questions will guide the evaluation. They are indicative rather than exhaustive. At the beginning of the evaluation mandate, the evaluation team, in consultation with the SDC CDE section, will further refine and prioritise the questions.

<p style="text-align: center;">Relevance <i>Is the intervention doing the right things?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent do the LFMWB programme's objectives respond to the needs and priorities of the partner countries, the WB region and SDC? - To what extent has the LFMWB programme managed to raise awareness and understanding of fire management, as an element of DRR, and contributed to build the capacities to move from reactive to preventive fire management at the national and regional (WB) level?
<p style="text-align: center;">Coherence <i>How well does the intervention fit?</i></p>	<p>Internal coherence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent is the intervention complementary to other SDC interventions in the same countries and thematic field (consistency, complementarity and synergies)? - To what extent is the LFMWB Programme coherent with and implementing the FDFA CDE section's Programmatic framework 2021-24 and 2025-28? <p>External coherence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent is the LFMWB Programme coherent with the partner countries' national programmes? Are the interventions aligned with, regional, national and local priorities and policies of partner countries and institutions? - To what extent is the intervention compatible with interventions of other actors (bilateral and multilateral donors, private sector, UN, NGOs, etc.) in the countries of the WB and thematic field (complementarity and synergies)?

<p>Effectiveness <i>Is the intervention achieving its objectives?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent have the planned results (better cooperation, better capacities and better policies) been achieved (or are likely to be achieved) at local (community/ municipality), national and regional (WB)? - Which major factors (consider power dynamics, politics, stakeholder relations, etc) have influenced the achievement or non-achievement of the expected results? How and why does this impact the implementation of the programme? - How do the involved stakeholders assess progress in the implementation of the LFMWB programme? What is their level of satisfaction with the programme?
<p>Efficiency <i>How well are resources being used?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent is the intervention implemented cost-effectively and timely? - To what extent was the chosen approach appropriate? Which alternative approaches might have led to similar results at lower costs? - Was the programme implementation results-oriented? - Are the resources (human, financial) allocated efficiently and used as planned? Where would adjustments make sense regarding phase 2? - How appropriate was the programme set-up, management, decision-making, monitoring and steering? What needs to be adjusted in view of phase 2?
<p>Impact <i>What difference does the intervention make?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which positive, lasting effects can be identified where and at which level (local, national, regional)? What does it need to be sustained in the long run? - What is needed / must be adapted to ensure the achievement of the intended impact at the end of the programme?
<p>Sustainability <i>Will the benefits last?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How far have the implementation strategies been oriented towards a logic of sustainability? What measures, if not already, should be put in place to have a sustainable impact? - What is the potential for scaling up of a) LFM activities within countries, and b) LFM in other regions of the world? - How are women and girls, elderly and youth (LNOB), addressed in project design and implementation and how are they included in cooperation processes and capacity building? - What is needed / must be adapted to achieve sustainability of the programmes impact?

Further Questions

<p>Gender Equity / Social Inclusion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was a gender analysis conducted and used as a basis for implementation? At what level was it applied. - How do the revised policies address gender equity? - To what extent was the programme able to go beyond awareness of different needs, interests, and experiences (gender-sensitive) and effectively address these differences (gender-responsive)?
<p>Competitive Fund</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent is the competitive fund valued by the stakeholders? - How was the selection process organized and implemented by REA? - How balanced, diverse, and inclusive (political, geographical, institutional and gender) was the choice of supported projects? - How advanced is the implementation of the projects now, and how realistic is the completion by the end of phase 1? What does this mean for the second phase of the programme?

4. Evaluation process and timeframe

4.1 Evaluation methodology

An evaluation team of two consultants with complementary knowledge and expertise is foreseen. The responsibility for assembling the team lies with SDC. Interested consultants are free to already propose a team of two. The evaluation team will be accompanied by a translator for the field visits and virtual meetings with the partners and stakeholders (Serbo-Croatian and Albanian). For the field visits a driver will be organised by SDC.

The evaluators will design the evaluation set-up and select an appropriate methodology/approach for the evaluation. The ToR will therefore merely articulate values and principles that need to be upheld in the evaluation process and leave the further and detailed planning to the evaluators.

The consultants will analyse the LFMWB programme from both a thematic and conceptual perspective. They are expected to provide a clear and comprehensive description of the results achieved, as well as the lessons learned. The evaluation should be both backward- and forward-looking, and include actionable recommendations directed towards SDC and the implementing partners of the programme. The evaluation methodology should appropriately incorporate cross-cutting issues such as gender equity, human rights, and social inclusion.

Before conducting interviews and field missions, the consultants will review all available and relevant documentation, including but not limited to the credit proposal, logical framework, progress reports, board meeting minutes, project documents, and the Results Reporting Framework (RRF). This desk review will provide a solid foundation for subsequent data collection and analysis.

Field visits will be conducted in at least four countries. The logistic of the visits will be organised by the consultant team in coordination with Farmahem and, where relevant, in collaboration with SDC. Since interviews will be conducted, the consultants will need to determine whether these will be structured, with pre-prepared questions tailored to stakeholders. The design of these interviews should align with the overall evaluation methodology and ensure that key evaluation questions are addressed.

The evaluation must be participatory, involving all major stakeholders and partners directly or indirectly associated with the LFMWB programme.

A meaningful variety of methodologies and data collection processes should be applied, tailored to the evaluation questions. This includes the triangulation of various data sources and methods to enhance the validity and objectivity of findings.

4.2 Deliverables

The following deliverables are expected to be submitted by the evaluators:

- Inception Report (max 10 pages without annexes), including a confined description of evaluation questions (evaluation matrix) and the evaluation framework.
- Draft evaluation report (max. 30 pages without annexes), including: Executive Summary, Introduction, Description of the development intervention, Findings, Lessons learnt, Challenges, Recommendations.
- Restitution meeting / workshop: to discuss first findings and for SDC to give feedback, inform on final steps based on a brief presentation of key findings and recommendations using PPT.
- Final evaluation report: formulated in a clear and understandable way. It should convey essential information in a precise and comprehensible manner. It describes the methodology and provides direct and explicit answers to key questions formulated in the ToR. The report should distinguish between the results of data analysis and the findings, interpretations and assessments of the evaluators. The conclusions must be clearly derived from the findings and the recommendations must be clearly based on the conclusions. The report should distinguish between operational and strategic recommendations and indicate the intended user of each recommendation.

4.3 Timeline of the evaluation and work volume

Activity	Date (Indicative)	No. of days per consultant	Responsibilities
Kick-off meeting (f2f or virtually)	Mid Sept	1	SDC, Consultants
Desk review, preparatory work, questionnaire	2 nd half Sept	3	Consultants
Interviews with Swiss stakeholders	2 nd half Sept	2	Consultants
Inception report (including draft, feedback and finalisation)	30 September	2	Consultants, SDC (for feedback)
Field mission with data collections, interviews, evaluation workshops, etc. Including debriefing with REA at the end of field visits (ev. virtually).	2 nd half October	12	Consultants
Draft Evaluation Report	1 st half November	3	Consultants, SDC (for feedback)
Workshop with SDC and implementing agencies	2 nd half November	1	SDC, Farmahem, Helvetas, HAFL, Consultants
Final Evaluation Report	30 November	2	Consultants
Total per consultant		26	

5. Requirements for the evaluators

5.1 Competency profile of the evaluators

The consultants are expected to bring relevant evaluation and thematic expertise. These skills can be shared across the two-person team, with each consultant contributing complementary strengths:

- In-depth knowledge of complex ecosystems and landscapes, including their interactions, and expertise in their management;
- Solid experience in landscape fire management and prevention;
- Knowledge of the political, social and development context in the countries of the WB and experiences in working in the region;
- Knowledge of legislation related to the nature and environment in the WB countries;
- Knowledge of SDC, as a governmental development agency and the international cooperation in general;
- Experience with and knowledge of cross-cutting issues such as gender equity, social inclusion and LNOB;
- Solid experience with project cycle management of development programmes;
- Solid experience with evaluations of development programmes and relevant expertise on evaluation methodologies;
- Ability to apply the DAC evaluation standards;
- Excellent communication, writing and reporting skills in English language.

Annex 2 Evaluation matrix

Find below an evaluation matrix presenting the evaluation questions, corresponding data collection methods and sources, and the key stakeholders/interviewees to be engaged throughout the evaluation process as well as the criteria for judgment.

Evaluation questions	Data collection and sources	Criteria or indicator used to form judgement	Stakeholders to be covered
Relevance			
To what extent does the programme's objectives respond to the needs and priorities of the partner countries and the regional stakeholders?	Semi-structured interviews Document review: ProDoc, CP, regional/national documents, national DRR/ fire mgt strategies, NAPs (if accessible/ available in English)	Alignment with national strategies/ priorities Responsiveness of the programme to the needs in advancing LFM in the region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CPI: CFP and staff, CPS • RFMC • SDC, Helvetas, HAFL
To what extent can the programme promote a paradigm shift of reactive firefighting to a preventive approach?	Semi-structured interviews Survey	<i>Descriptive in identifying good practices and gaps</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CPI: CFP and staff, CPS • Country Network Members • RFMC • SDC, HAFL, GFMC
How well-suited is the network-approach (regional network and country networks) to foster an integrated LFM-approach?	Semi-structured interviews Survey Document review: SDC's documents (ProDoc, CP), gap analysis, stakeholder analysis, concepts of similar approaches (GFMC), annual progress reports, meeting minutes, cooperation agreements	Comprehensiveness of project design to reach its objectives Suitability of the network-approach to reach the relevant stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CPI: CFP and staff, CPS • Country Network Members • RFMC • REA, SDC, HAFL, GFMC
To what extent meets the instrument of the competitive fund the needs of piloting integrated LFM practices in communities?	Document review: Documents of competitive fund (call, criteria, selection),	Evidence of added value, evidence of good practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CPI: CFP and staff, CPS • Grantee organisations

Evaluation questions	Data collection and sources	Criteria or indicator used to form judgement	Stakeholders to be covered
To what extent meets the instrument of the competitive fund the needs of informing national policies on LFM? How do stakeholders perceive the relevance of the competitive fund?	minutes of awarding committee, project documents Semi-structured interviews Site visits	Community satisfaction with projects; evidence of addressing local fire risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Stakeholders
How do stakeholders perceive the transparency, fairness, efficiency of the selection and allocation process?	Semi-structured interviews Site visits	Adequacy of selection and allocation process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SDC, REA, RFMC Grantee organisations
Coherence			
To what extent is the programme aligned with the partner countries' national programmes?	Semi-structured interviews Document review (secondary data on LFMWB website, accessible information in English)	Degree of alignment of programme with national programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CPI: CFP and staff, CPS Country Network Members
To what extent does the programme's objectives respond to the priorities of SDC (thematically/ regionally)?	Document review (SDC thematic and regional strategies, SDC portfolio) Semi-structured interviews	Degree of alignment of programme with SDC's priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SDC HQ and regional office
Effectiveness			
To what extent have the planned results been achieved (or are likely to be achieved) at local (community/ municipality), national and regional (WB)? → <i>divided in sub-questions below</i>	Document review/ review of the monitoring data	Suitability and fulfilment of logframe indicators	
How effective is the network approach to connect the LFM-related stakeholders in the region/in the country? (outcome 1)	Semi-structured interviews Survey Document review: minutes of network meetings, progress reports	Intensity and quality of exchanges supported by the programme between partners and institutions in WB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CPI: CFP and staff, CPS Country Network Members RFMC SDC, HAFL, REA, Helvetas
To what extent contribute the pilot projects to engage community stakeholders?	Site visits Semi-structured interviews	Degree of community participation (number/diversity of participants).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CPI: CFP and staff, CPS Country Network Members Grantee organisations

Evaluation questions	Data collection and sources	Criteria or indicator used to form judgement	Stakeholders to be covered
To what extent contribute the pilot projects to connect local and national stakeholders? (outcome 1)	Document review: progress reports, project reports	Evidence of linkages created between local actors and national institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Stakeholders
How effective is the regional / country network to exchange best practices on LFM? To what extent contributes the exchange/ knowledge exchange to launching LFM-measures and projects? (outcome 2)	Semi-structured interviews Document review: Annual progress reports, meeting minutes	Evidence of acquired knowledge/ strengthened capacities Evidence on joint measures/ actions Frequency and quality of exchanges (meetings, workshops, joint outputs).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CPI: CFP and staff, CPS RFMC, REA, SDC, HAFL, Helvetas
To what extent contributes the revision of policies/ strategies to establish/ institutionalise an integrated LFM-approach? (outcome 3)	Semi-structured interviews Survey Document review: Annual progress reports, documentation of policy revision, national documents (where available and accessible)	Number and quality of revised/adopted policies and strategies. Degree of integration of LFM in national frameworks Degree of institutional commitment to apply revised policies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CPI: CFP and staff, CPS Country Network Members RFMC, REA, SDC, HAFL, Helvetas
To what extent contribute the pilot project with their practical evidence to support policy dialogues? (outcome 3)	Site visits Semi-structured interviews Document review: progress reports	Evidence of pilot project results cited in policy discussions and integrated in policies. Stakeholder recognition of pilot projects as credible evidence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CPI: CFP and staff, CPS Country Network Members Local Stakeholders
What factors (political, financial, institutional, stakeholder relations) helped or hindered progress in the country (resp. in the region)?	Semi-structured interviews Document review: progress reports, minutes of steering committee	<i>Descriptive in identifying enabling and hindering factors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CPI: CFP and staff, CPS Country Network Members RFMC, REA, SDC, HAFL, GFMC Grantee organisations
Efficiency			
To what extent is the programme implemented cost-effectively and timely?	Documents: progress reports, budget and financial reports Semi-structured interviews	Adequation of implementation rate (spent budget / planned budget) with achievements Timelines of activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> REA, SDC, Helvetas CPS, RFMC

Evaluation questions	Data collection and sources	Criteria or indicator used to form judgement	Stakeholders to be covered
To what extent are human and financial resources (CFPs, CPSs, RFMC, REA staff) allocated and used efficiently?	Semi-structured interviews	Adequation of staffing level vs. planned; workloads; timelines of activities; satisfaction of partner with REA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • REA, SDC • CPS, RFMC
To what extent supported the management, monitoring and steering mechanisms efficient implementation?	Document review: financial and progress reports, minutes of steering committee, network meetings Semi-structured interviews	Evidence of clear governance and processes Adequacy of structures and processes to deliver activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • REA, SDC, Helvetas, HAFL • CPS, RFMC • CPI, Grantee organisations
How likely will the pilot projects be implemented according to their timetable?	Document review: progress reports, project reports, contracts, timetable Site visits Semi-structured interviews	Comparison of planned vs actual milestones % of projects on track according to annual planning//logframe schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grantee organisations • REA, SDC, Helvetas, HAFL • CPS, RFMC
Impact			
Can it be expected that the programme (and the networks) contributes to integrated landscape and forest management? If yes, how? If no, why not, i.e. what would need to be changed?	Semi-structured interviews Document review: credit proposal, logframe, monitoring data, progress reports	Evidence of contribution of the programme to integrated landscape and forest management Descriptive, highlighting ways of influencing change/ refinement of intervention logic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CPI: staff and CPS • RFMC • REA, SDC, Helvetas, HAFL
Sustainability			
Which activities are likely to continue after this current project phase has ended independently of further SDC funding? If the SDC support phases out, is it likely that the network(s) continues to operate? If yes, how? If no, why not?	Document review: credit proposal, annual reports, Semi-structured interviews Survey Site visits	Evidence of institutional and financial commitments Evidence of further practices of partners to ensure sustainability Existence of sustainability strategies of the programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CPI: staff and CPS • Country network members • RFMC • REA, SDC, Helvetas, HAFL
Gender equity and social inclusion			
How has gender equality and social inclusion been taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the programme's activities?	Document review: credit proposal, tender documents, progress reports, monitoring data	Existence of gender/ social inclusion criteria in programme documents and calls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • REA, SDC, Helvetas, HAFL • CPI: CFP and staff, CPS

Evaluation questions	Data collection and sources	Criteria or indicator used to form judgement	Stakeholders to be covered
		Evidence of inclusive consultation processes Representation of women in networks, trainings, and CPS/CFP positions	
How balanced, diverse, and inclusive (political, geographical, institutional and gender) was the choice of supported projects by the CF?	Site visits Semi-structured interviews Document review (call, criteria, documentation of selection process, applications of projects)	Representation of different groups (gender, age, minority status) among project beneficiaries Geographic distribution of funded projects. Balance of institutional types of organisations (NGOs, municipalities, academic, community groups).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • REA, SDC, Helvetas, HAFL • CPIs, CFPs, CPS • Grantees organisations
To what extent is the programme contributing to closing the gender gap (in the national and sub-national institutions, at communities' level, etc.)? What are the programme's strengths in this regard? What is missing?	Semi-structured interviews Review of progress reports and monitoring data	<i>Descriptive in identifying enabling and hindering factors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • REA, SDC, Helvetas, HAFL • CPIs, CFPs, CPS

Annex 3 Workplan and mission agenda internal only

Figure 7 depicts the workplan with the kick-off meeting at the end of August 2025, a data collection phase and a field mission to selected countries from the 26th of October until the 6th of November 2025, data analysis and drafting of the evaluation report until the 8th of December 2025. The validation workshop took place on the 15th of December 2025 in a hybrid/ online format.

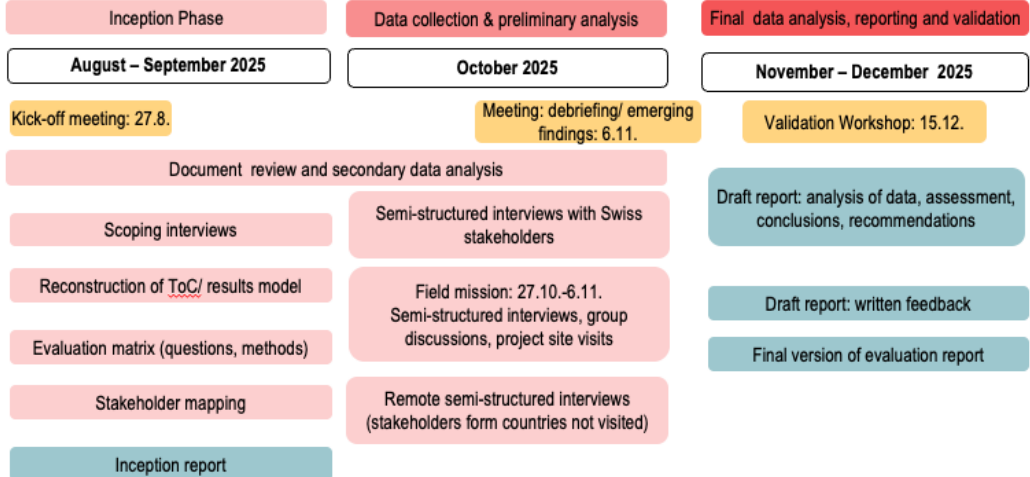


Figure 7: Schedule of work.

The mission agenda can be found in the following table.

Annex 4 List of documents

SDC Documents

- Credit Proposals
 - Opening Credit Nr. 7F-10344 .01 (2019)
 - Additional Credit to opening credit (2020)
 - Main Credit Phase 1 (2021)
 - 1st Change of Duration (2021)
 - 2nd Change of Credit Duration (2024)
 - Additional Credit (2024)
- SDC, 2025: Decision note Programmatic Framework Climate, Disaster Risk Reduction and Environment (C/D/E) 2025-2028 (internal document)
- RFMC, 2022: Programme Documentation; LFMP Blikans – Landscape Fire Management Programme in the Western Balkans.

Programme Documents (provided as SharePoint folders by Farmahem):

- Memorandum of Cooperation for Implementation of the Landscape Fire Management in the Western Balkans between Farmahem/ Swiss Embassy and Country Partner Institutions, examples of North Macedonia and Albania
- Organisational chart and minutes of steering committee
- LFM Guidelines
- Annual Progress Reports 2022, 2023, and 2024, and respective Annual Operational Plans
- Minutes of Steering/Partner Meetings
- Minutes of RFMC Meetings and Reports
- Results Reporting Framework
- Tender and Selection Documents related to the establishment and operation of the Community-Based Competitive Fund (CBC Fund)
- Minutes of country network meetings
- Draft of the Manual for Strategic Coordination of the Regional Network (2024)

[Programme Website](#), especially (per country):

- LFM Country Reports
- LFM Gap Analyses
- National LFM Strategies/Action Plans

Annex 5 List of interlocutors internal only

Annex 6 Interview guides

This is a general interview guide, which was tailored to the interviewee's role and experience with the LFMWB programme.

Nr.		Eval. Quest.
	Info about the Interview Date: xxx Ministry / Department/ Country: xxx Names and functions: xxxx, xxxx	
	<i>What has been your engagement with the LFMWB programme so far?</i>	
1	How do you describe the purpose of the LFMWB programme? What are the needs that the programme should bring a response to?	Rel.
2	In your view, how well addresses the programme your country's priorities related with forest fires, forest and landscape management? To what extent supports the programme to identify policy gaps and synergies?	Rel.
3	How appropriate do you consider the network approach to advance landscape fire management in the Western Balkans? Does it meet the capacities and needs of the involved partners? What were the most/ / least useful support measures?	Rel.
4	What is the added value for (your) institution(s) to be part of the programme? How has the programme influenced the positioning of (your) institution(s)?	Rel.
5	How well is the programme aligned with your national policy frameworks? How well fits the programme with your /your institutions' strategies/ activities in the field of sustainable forest management/ landscape fire management?	Coh.
6	Have you developed new professional contacts through the (regional) network? Has the networking led to new collaborations, projects or interventions?	Eff.
7	How do you see the role of the regional/ national network to connect stakeholders and to build capacities? Is knowledge exchange and learning happening?	Eff.
8	How could you personally/ your staff benefit from training/learning provided by the programme? Does your participation in the network led to changes in your organization's LFM approach?	Eff.
9	What would be other / complementary approaches, tools, instruments to build capacities and foster cooperations and sharing of experiences in the field of landscape forest management?	Eff.
10	How committed are you / is your ministry taking part in the regional network and to exchange knowledge and good practices? What were the main achievements or highlights?	Eff.

11	Does your ministry/ organisation initiate LFM-activities or allocate (additional) funding beyond the programme's scope or period? How likely will you continue the activities after the programme comes to an end?	Eff./ Sust.
12	How has the programme influenced your country's approach to landscape fire management? Have new LFM-related policies/strategies been developed or updated during the programme?	Eff.
13	Has the programme improved inter-ministerial collaboration on LFM? What do you consider as key factors? What are the main obstacles to effective intersectoral coordination?	Eff.
14	Which activities of the programme/ of the networks are you expecting to contribute to integrated landscape and forest management? Are other/ further activities needed?	Imp.
15	How do you assess the management, monitoring and steering of the programme? Is it overall efficient? How could it be improved?	Effic.
16	Do you consider the project implemented in a timely manner? Were the resources used in an efficient manner to reach the results? What were the relevant success (and bottlenecks) in terms of implementation and monitoring?	Effic.
17	How do you assess the assignation of CPS? How well are they integrated in your organisation's structure and procedures? How likely will you continue with such a job profile?	Effic.
18	How do you assess the likelihood of durability of benefits?	Sust.
19	To what extent do you consider gender aspects in establishing networks and policy revision?	
20	What are the main lessons learnt for you?	
21	Final comment or recommendation?	
22	<i>Regarding the projects of the competitive fund:</i> Can you describe your role/ the role of your organisation with the pilot projects? Could you establish new (and lasting) contacts to the implanting organisation/ local stakeholders? How can the experiences and results of the pilot projects contribute to policy dialogue?	

The interview guide for the project-site visits includes specific questions regarding the mechanism of the competitive fund and the pilot projects.

Nr.	Interview guide for staff of organisations awarded by the competitive fund	Eval. Quest.
	Info about the Interview Date: xxx Organisation: xxx Names and functions: xxxx, xxxx	
	<i>Please describe the focus of your project and the progress so far. What is your role in the project implementation?</i>	

1	What activities/ topics could you develop further/ implement thanks to the fund? How do you perceive the relevance of the competitive fund?	Rel.
2	Please, tell us about the tender and selection process: How transparent, fair and efficient do you consider the criteria and the information regarding the competitive fund?	Rel.
3	What are the achievements/ highlights so far? Which local stakeholder could you engage?	Eff.
4	What mechanisms do you use to ensure community participation?	Eff.
5	What environmental improvements/ social benefits resulted from the project?	Eff.
6	What kind of contacts do you have through this project with national ministries and stakeholders?	Eff.
7	How do you assess the likelihood of durability of benefits? Have there been any negative impacts or unintended consequences?	Sust.
8	Do you consider the project implemented in a timely manner? Were the resources used in an efficient manner to reach the results? What were the relevant success (and bottlenecks) in terms of implementation and monitoring?	Effic.
9	What are the main lessons learnt for you?	
10	Final comment or recommendation?	

Annex 7 Questionnaire and answers

Prepared by Georgios Eftychidis

This Annex summarises the quantitative and qualitative feedback collected through the targeted online questionnaire, distributed to Country Focal Points (CFPs), Country Project Staff (CPSs), and members of the Landscape Fire Management (LFM) National Networks, to gather quantifiable data on stakeholder perceptions of the network's sustainability, functionality, and policy impact.

Overall Response Rate: A total of 32 responses were received from institutional partners and network members across the six partner countries/entities in the Western Balkans. Of these, 29 represent unique institutions (3 institutions submitted more responses).

1. Analysis per Question

The questionnaire included five core questions assessing institutional commitment and network functionality.

Q1: Institutional Commitment to Sustainability

In which form is your institution able to ensure that the Country LFM network continues to function independently of external funding?

This open-ended question asked institutions how they could ensure network continuity (financial, administrative, or personnel-related) without external funding.

Commitment Type	Summary of Responses	Key Evidence (Translated)
Administrative/Personnel (N=14)	The largest group of institutions confirmed they can provide existing staff and use administrative structures to support coordination. This is particularly strong among academic entities, agencies, and NGOs.	"The coordination... could be assigned to existing academic staff... as part of their regular teaching." (University "Ukshin Hoti" Prizren) / "Our staff is present in the field and acts permanently... so it functions independently." (Directorate for Admin. of NP Sharri)
Financial/Budget (N=4)	A specific group referenced leveraging existing budget lines, reallocating existing funds, or optimizing current resources.	"Reallocating existing funds – Optimizing current budget lines and redirecting resources to support the LFM network." (Federal Hydrometeorological Institute) / "From our own funds provided by the budget." (Ministry of Agriculture, Water Management and Forestry HBŽ)
External Dependence (N=4)	Several responses, particularly from public enterprises and ministries, explicitly state that independent sustainability is not feasible without continued external support.	"Fully implementing the national LFM networks... without external funding is not feasible." (Public Enterprise National Parks of Montenegro) / "We can't continue without external funds." (RHSS - RS)
Policy/Legal Implementation (N=5)	Institutions focused on embedding LFM network decisions into formal governmental, legal frameworks, or data infrastructures.	"By participating in the introduction of Legal Regulation related to the implementation of LFM network decisions." (Republic Administration for Inspection Affairs) / "The Republic Geodetic Authority can enable the publication of LFM Network data within the National Spatial Data Infrastructure."
Future/Uncertain (N=3)	Some institutions indicated that while currently unfunded, future budget inclusion is possible.	"Currently, there are no financial resources, but it is certainly possible to secure funds in the Budget in the coming period." (Federal Administration of Civil Protection FBiH)

Q2: Application of LFM Tools/Practices

Has your institution successfully applied till now any specific LFM tool, practice, approach, or concept considered in the Network that led to changes in your operational work?

Response	Count (N=24)	Percentage
Yes (LFM tool/practice applied)	18	56%
No (LFM tool/practice applied)	14	44%

Key Insight: Most respondents (56%) confirm they have successfully adopted specific LFM tools, practices, or concepts in their work. This includes applications like contracts with sheep farmers for prevention (NP Sharri), community engagement projects (Organization KOD), and risk mapping data integration (RHMS). This shows a clear shift from suppression to prevention among active network members.

Q3: Formal Integration and Resource Reallocation (Sustainability Indicator)

Has your institution formally adopted new procedures or re-allocated existing resources (e.g., budget lines, dedicated staff roles, equipment funds) specifically towards Landscape Fire Management (LFM) prevention measures, utilizing documents

This question specifically addresses the institutionalization of LFM principles into formal procedures and budget planning.

Response Category	Count (N=24)	Percentage
Not yet – LFM documents under internal review	20	62.5%
We integrated LFM into existing documents (no explicit reallocation)	9	28%
Yes, we formally reallocated resources/created new procedures	3	9%

Key Insight: This finding highlights the main structural challenge. Although operational engagement is high, 62.5% of institutions report that LFM recommendations are still "under internal review," and only 9% (3 institutions: Ministry of Agriculture HBŽ, USFS, and National Parks of Montenegro) have made the formal decision to reallocate resources. This supports the evaluation's concern about financial sustainability and the "implementation gap" between agreeing with LFM principles and funding them.

Q4: Local Actor Incorporation

To what extent do you believe the current Country Network composition sufficiently incorporates the perspectives and operational needs of local actors to drive effective LFM policy and practice?

This measures how effectively the network incorporates local operational needs (e.g., municipalities, forest owners).

Response Category	Count (N=24)	Percentage
Fully Necessary/Useful	5	16%
Partially Necessary/Useful	16	50%
Insufficiently Necessary/Useful	11	34%

Key Insight: The perception of local actor integration remains mixed. While 50% of stakeholders feel the integration is "Partially" sufficient, a significant 34% believe it is "Insufficient." Notably, positive responses ("Fully") often come from NGOs and specific agencies like Organization KOD and Young Ecologists of Niksic, suggesting that non-governmental actors may feel more integrated than some municipal-level public bodies, such as Civil Protection FBiH and Volunteer Fire Department Loznica, which rated it as insufficient.

Q5: Essentiality of the Network

Considering your institution’s role and mandate, how essential is the continued existence of the Country LFM Network, along with its current support structure, for achieving your organization's LFM-related priorities?

Response Category	Count (N=24)	Percentage
Necessary	18	56%
Useful	12	38%
Not necessary (Indifferent)	2	6%
Total Deeming the Network Necessary/Essential	30	94% ⁵

Key Insight: The consensus on the network's importance is clear. 97% of stakeholders (29 out of 30) state that the network is either "Necessary" or "Useful" for their organization's goals. Only one institution (Ministry of Environmental Protection, Serbia) showed indifference. This strongly supports the program's relevance, confirming that even those with funding challenges see the platform as a vital tool for coordination and knowledge sharing.

2. Analysis per Country/Entity

Responses were categorized by the organization's location or operating entity, where possible (N=24).

Country/Entity	Total Responses	Q2: LFM Applied (Yes)	Q3: Formal Reallocation/New Proc. (Yes)	Q5: Network Essential (Yes/Fully Nec.)	Key Qualitative Finding (Q1/Comments)
BiH (FBiH & RS)	10	4	0	10 (100%)	While respondents universally deem the network useful or necessary, only one (Ministry of Agriculture HBŽ) has formally reallocated resources. Inspection bodies emphasize sustainability through "Legal Regulation", while others rely on future budget promises.
Serbia	7	2	0	6 (86%)	No respondent reported formal resource reallocation (0/7). Institutions like RHMSS and NP Tara emphasize maintaining the network through <i>existing</i> staff and administrative structures rather than creating new budget lines.
Kosovo	5	4	0	5 (100%)	100% of respondents consider the network essential. The Forest Agency (APK) and academic partners propose dedicating existing

⁵ Note: If including "Insufficiently Necessary" as a recognition of need but poor execution, the relevance is higher. However, strictly positive "Fully/Partially" responses account for 86%.

Country/Entity	Total Responses	Q2: LFM Applied (Yes)	Q3: Formal Reallocation/New Proc. (Yes)	Q5: Network Essential (Yes/Fully Nec.)	Key Qualitative Finding (Q1/Comments)
					human resources permanently to LFM tasks to ensure sustainability without external funds.
Montenegro	3	2	1	2 (67%)	All respondents (100%) have successfully applied LFM tools (Q2). However, National Parks of Montenegro explicitly warns that independent operation is "not feasible" without external finance, despite being one of the few to formally reallocate resources.
Albania	1	0	0	1 (100%)	The Agricultural University of Tirana confirms the network's necessity, offering technical staff expertise to support the network in the future
Other/Unknown	2	2	1	2 (100%)	The USFS response highlights that while they have formally reallocated resources, continued external support is needed to strengthen integration on national and local levels.
Total	32	18	3	30	

Contextual Link: The analysis reveals a clear contrast between Montenegro and BiH. Montenegro has a high operational performance rate (67% application of LFM tools), but one institution explicitly states that full independence is "not feasible." On the other hand, BiH provides the most responses (10) with a strong legal formalism but lags in financial formalization, with institutions still having LFM documents "under internal review" or simply integrated without funding.

3. Analysis per Stakeholder Type

The institutions were broadly categorized based on their roles in the LFM structure (referencing Annex IV for typical roles).

Stakeholder Category	Total Responses	Q3: Under Internal Review (Sustainability Risk)	Q4: Insufficient Local Incorporation	Q5: Fully Necessary
National Ministries/Agencies (CFP/CPI level)	11	64% (7)	64% (7)	45% (5)
Academic/Technical Bodies (Universities, RHMS)	8	56% (5)	11% (1)	56% (5)
Sub-National/Local Actors (Civil Protection, Parks, NGOs)	11	64% (7)	27% (3)	73% (8)
Other (USFS)	1	0%	0%	100% (1)
Total	32	20 (62.5%)	11 (34%)	19 (59%)

Key Findings by Stakeholder Type:

- **The "Top-Down" Sustainability Bottleneck:** Contrary to the expectation that local actors would be the most fragile, the data shows that national ministries and agencies face the greatest administrative hurdles. 64% of respondents at the national level (including Civil Protection FBiH and inspection bodies) report that LFM documents are still "under internal review." In contrast, sub-national actors demonstrate slightly better integration, as smaller entities like the Ministry of Agriculture HBŽ have already managed to formally reallocate resources.

- **The Perception Gap on Local Inclusiveness (Q4):** There is a clear disconnect between how national organizations see the network and how local organizations experience it. 64% of National Agencies believe the network "Insufficiently" includes local perspectives. However, the local actors themselves disagree, with only 27% feeling inadequately included. Most local stakeholders (including NP Sharri and Organization KOD) rate the network as "Fully" or "Partially" useful, showing that the central government underestimates the value the network already offers to local communities.
- **Network Essentiality (Q5):** Sub-National and local actors are the strongest supporters of the network, with 73% calling it "Necessary" for their work. This is much higher than the 45% of national ministries that see it as "Necessary," with many respondents opting for the milder "Useful" rating. This indicates that the network more effectively serves its operational purpose for field practitioners (such as parks, fire departments, NGOs) than as a policy tool for central bureaucrats.

Overall Conclusion:

The responses to the online questionnaire clearly show that, although the LFM network is viewed as extremely important (94% positive sentiment overall) and has led to operational changes in many institutions (56% implemented LFM practices), the vital shift toward long-term institutional and financial sustainability has not yet been achieved. The high percentage of documents still "under internal review" (62.5% across all groups) and the limited formal resource reallocation (9%) support the main conclusion of the evaluation: sustainability is the program's biggest weakness. The network has successfully built a "community of practice" valued by local and technical actors, but it has not yet established the "community of funding" from national decision-makers needed for independence.

Management response to the external evaluation of the Landscape Fire Management in the Western Balkan (LFM-WB) Programme, Phase 1

Assessment of the evaluation

The evaluation was conducted by a team of two independent experts in accordance with international standards. The evaluation process was well managed and included close involvement of the different stakeholder groups, comprising the Regional Executing Agency, its partners for backstopping and advice, the Country Partner Institution (CPI) through the Country Focal Points (CFP), the Country Project Staff (CPS), the Regional and Global Fire Monitoring Centers (RFMC and GFMC) and the respective SDC staff at headquarter and in the region.

The main objectives – (i) provide SDC with an external and objective assessment regarding the achieved results of phase 1 so far, (ii) to provide recommendations for the remaining period of implementation of phase 1, and (iii) to provide recommendations for the planning and implementing of phase 2 – have been met by the evaluators. The SDC appreciates the comprehensiveness of the evaluation report and the sound analysis of key elements of the SDC's performance in the LFM-WB Programme.

The report's analysis and resulting recommendations are considered to be useful for strengthening the strategic orientation of the LFM-WB Programme. Some recommendations will have to be discussed in detail with the different stakeholders at the planning workshop for the second phase before a final decision can be taken or specifics defined.

Main findings

The evaluation confirms that the LFMWB Programme is highly relevant and effective.

Networks at country and regional levels are functional, CFP and CPS capacities have been strengthened, and key knowledge products and policy integration processes are underway. Community-based projects show innovative approaches but require more technical guidance and coherence. Challenges remain regarding efficiency, formalisation of roles, and long-term sustainability.

The evaluation concludes that the programme has successfully established regional and national networks, developed technical knowledge products, and initiated a shift from reactive to preventive landscape fire management. Key findings include strong stakeholder engagement, progress in capacity building of CFP and CPS, and progress in policy integration, although sustainability depends on further institutionalisation and formal adoption of LFM strategies.

Out of the 14 recommendations (4 related to the remaining period of Phase 1 and 10 to the planning/implementation of the second phase), 6 are 'fully agreed' (green), 7 are 'partially agreed' (orange) and 1 is not agreed ('disagree' - red) – see table below. The SDC agrees to seize this opportunity to improve its results by taking specific measures in line with the recommendation.

Overview of the recommendations

Short term recommendations (until the end of the first phase – decembre 2026)

1. Resolve any administrative hurdles (extension MoC)	
2. Prioritise national LFM strategies by country networks before end of Phase 1	
3. Regional synthesis	
4. Ensure guidance of the pilot projects of the CBC Fund	

Recommandations for planning of 2nd phase

5. Continue with a second phase of the programme		
6. Reformulation of goals and result chain		
7. Establish a clearer programme governance		
8. Refine the regional network approach		
9. Give more attention to different network types		
10. Ensure ownership of country stakeholders		
11. Programme design: clearly separate regional and country components		
12. Put emphasis on the Community-based Competitive Fund		
13. Prioritise institutionalisation		
14. Develop sustainability strategies		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree

Overview of recommendations, management response and measures

Recommendation 1		
<p>Resolve any administrative hurdles: The Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) ends with the date of 31.08.2025 which was previously the end of the first phase. An extension of duration should be made quickly to ensure the commitment and participation also formally correct. As soon as the decision for a second phase is taken, we recommend starting with the procedures to establish new MoC and consider SDC resp. the Swiss Embassies to take the lead negotiation them directly with the partner governments. These extensions of duration might also apply to other contracts, e.g. with the Country project staff.</p>		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
<p>The process of extending the expired MoCs is complex and not feasible before the end of the first phase. Therefore, it is more appropriate to leave the MoCs as they are and proceed directly with the elaboration of the new MoCs for the second phase, rather than attempting an interim extension.</p>		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
Elaboration of new MoC with all partner countries / entities	SDC / CPF	Before end 2026

Recommendation 2		
<p>Prioritise activities and facilitate processes: As the programme shows promising results related to better policies, priority should be given that country networks develop their national LFM-strategies and adopt them before the 1st phase ends. Formal recognition by the governments would be an add-on but might not be realistic due to political processes. Such a prioritisation would require work and budget reallocations and additional support for selected countries. It could also lead to refrain from – or postpone – planned activities.</p>		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
<p>The development of the national LFM strategies is part of the programme process, although the implementation rhythm varies across countries. In four out of seven countries/entities, the national strategies have already been completed. The validation and formal adoption processes depend on country-specific institutional and political procedures. These processes are foreseen in all countries, but it is unlikely that they can be completed everywhere before the end of the year.</p>		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
Continue supporting countries with tailored guidance and technical assistance to advance the completion, validation, and formal adoption of national LFM strategies.	Farmahem (the Regional Executing Agency)	December 2026

Recommendation 3		
<p>Regional synthesis: The developed knowledge products, the collected data on fire, as well as the lessons learnt should be capitalised on a regional level and made accessible for fostering knowledge management.</p>		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
<p>Knowledge products, fire data, and lessons learnt are already collected and shared (e.g., via website); capitalising them adds value by systematically linking and analysing this information to strengthen regional knowledge management.</p>		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
Scope and depth to be discussed at Steering committee (Feb. 2026), followed by implementation.	Farmahem	December 2026

Recommendation 4		
<p>Ensure guidance of the pilot projects of the CBC Fund: To achieve their intended results, it is important that the projects reps. the grantee organisations receive technical and scientific advice. Furthermore, we recommend organising a workshop or event among the grantees organisations to capitalise practices and experiences. The programme should also ensure that these lessons learnt feed into the country and the regional networks.</p>		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
<p>The benefit of the provision of further technical and scientific guidance of pilot projects has been recognized. However, it cannot be provided in the current set-up due to the short term and diverse nature of the ongoing pilot projects. This aspect will however be taken up in conceiving the CBC Fund of Phase 2.</p>		

Interest has been expressed in exchanging experiences related to CBC Fund projects; however, implementation depends on available resources and may not be feasible before the end of the year.		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
Topic to be taken up and discussed at the next Steering Committee, and Planning of Phase 2.	Farmahem / SDC	Feb 2026 / March 2026

Recommendation 5		
The general recommendation is to continue with a second phase as the programme successfully established transboundary and cross-sectoral collaboration to address a pressing topic and thereby laid the foundation for a paradigm shift in landscape fire management which is a novelty in the region.		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
A second phase is important to enable sustainable changes.		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
Planning Workshop to launch the planning process	SDC	March 2026

Recommendation 6		
Reformulation of goals and result chain: Based on the reflections in chapter 3.4, we suggest developing more precise outcomes (and impact) statements and establishing a result chain, to distinguish immediate outcomes for direct target groups from intermediate outcomes, such as the formal embedding of LFM policies into state structures. This clarity is necessary to ensure that project activities contribute directly to systemic changes rather than remaining isolated nice side-effects.		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
More precise outcomes and impact statements, and a structured result chain, will help ensure that activities contribute to systemic changes rather than isolated effects.		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
To be discussed and incorporated in the planning process.	SDC	Oct 2026

Recommendation 7		
Establish a clearer programme governance: A more evident distinction between the steering committee or partner meeting and the regional network would allow for strategic planning and decision making. This applies foremost for the strategic direction of the network approach. We recommend rethinking the composition of the steering committee, e.g. with – at least – representatives of SDC, CFP and Farmahem. We consider the participation of the CFP as important for creating ownership.		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
Clearer programme governance and a well-defined distinction between the Steering Committee and the regional network will support strategic planning and decision-making.		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
To be discussed and defined during the planning process.	SDC	Oct 2026

Recommendation 8

Refine the regional network approach: Drawing on the conclusions, we recommend clarifying the purpose of the regional network as well as clarifying “network roles” independent from the institutions, the “manual for strategic coordination of the regional network” already is an important step in this direction. We furthermore recommend, to reshape the regional network by letting go the original model with a central (scientific) knowledge hub and replacing it with more multi-directional mechanism. The network will need an adequate and robust coordination function that goes beyond the mere provision of knowledge. The clarification of the future role of RFMC will be crucial, which means to make effectively use of its strengths as a scientific knowledge resource rather than a network facilitator. Furthermore, it includes to rethink the network composition depending on the network type. If the character of the regional network evolves towards a “community of practice”, it could be expanded by leverage the academic network to include academics from the region. Additionally, a regional training scheme could be launched by connecting partner universities to formally establish a joint postgraduate curriculum or master’s course in landscape fire management. Such an initiative would contribute to create a critical mass of professionals in the region.

Management response

Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
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Refining the regional network approach depends on coordination with all relevant stakeholders and further discussion during the planning process.

Measures	Responsibility	Timing
To be addressed and clarified during the planning process	SDC	June 2026

Recommendation 9

Give more attention to different network types: While the regional network has more the character of an exchange platform among peers, the country networks are so-called science-practice-policy interfaces. This requires an understanding of the logics of the involved fields, for instance that while science strives for deep insights and the transfer of knowledge, policy looks for solutions and societal optimisation. Furthermore, the different network types call for different network coordination and for the programme stakeholders (CPS, CFP, RFMC, etc.) to assume different roles in the different networks.

Management response

Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
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Giving more attention to different network types requires coordination with all relevant stakeholders to ensure appropriate roles and approaches in each network.

Measures	Responsibility	Timing
To be addressed and clarified during the planning process	SDC	June 2026

Recommendation 10

Ensure ownership of country stakeholders: Given the strong commitment of stakeholders, it is important to continue working with the country networks. A logical next step is that the prepared documents enter the policy dialogues in the countries. The gap analyses provide an excellent basis to identify concrete measures. As one respondent put it “*we want to move from documents to action*”. Therefore, we strongly recommend institutionalising the model of the cross-sectoral networks, so that landscape fire management becomes part of the official system, with clear procedures and budget lines. The programme could help by supporting the development of a national framework that defines institutional mandates, inter-agency proto-

<p>cols, and standardised procedures. Additionally, the programme could assist in mainstreaming fire management tasks into annual institutional work plans and budget cycles, accompanied by targeted technical support and capacity building for both national and local levels. This would ensure that landscape fire management is not a programme, but a sustained national practice embedded.</p> <p>In the countries, we consider it important, to move from a strict preventive to a more integrated approach to also address the needs and commitment of stakeholders from civil protection. This enables clarifying roles and duties between the stakeholders as they are often entwined, e.g. for collecting data or for suppression (e.g. in Republika Srpska the firefighting duty lies with employees of the forest enterprise).</p>		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
Continuing to work with country networks and institutionalising cross-sectoral collaboration is important for embedding landscape fire management into official systems, depends on the engagement of national stakeholders.		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
To be considered and defined during the planning of the next programme phase.	SDC	June 2026

Recommendation 11		
<p>Programme design: We recommend a design that more clearly distinguishes between the regional and country components while defining their links. The methodology of preparing sequent documents strongly structured the work of the first phase and serve as a crucial “backbone”. For the next phase, we recommend developing similar robust guidelines which at the same time are flexible enough to account for the different directions of the country networks. Such an approach requires an understanding of the main needs and priorities of the countries; we recommend compiling them at a regional level. This would allow also for identifying focus areas that are of common interest for all participating countries. Examples could be to create an interoperable information and monitoring system on fire, or cross-border simulations.</p> <p>The implementation strategy should follow a thematic, result-oriented design and may require adjustments. When the programme had more country-specific components, then it is recommended to more closely involve the SDC offices in the countries and to build on their established portfolios.</p>		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
A clear distinction between regional and country components, while defining their links, is important. Implementation depends on the engagement of national stakeholders and understanding their priorities, including the development of interoperable information and monitoring systems.		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
To be considered and defined during the planning of the next programme phase.	SDC	June 2026

Recommendation 12		
<p>Put emphasis on the Community-Based Competitive Fund: The supervision of community-based-projects could also be part of the regional component. However, we recommend that the fund focuses on larger, thematically focused and coherent consortia rather than many small, isolated projects. Bottom-up initiatives could still be considered, but it requires a closer support from programme, e.g. bringing organisations with similar objectives together or allowing a project to cover a broader range of municipalities,</p>		

stakeholders etc. This redesign must be paired with enhanced technical supervision for grantees, as the limited guidance on LFM pilots often constrained projects' scalability and replication potential.		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
Emphasizing the CBC Fund and supporting larger, thematically focused consortia, with close technical supervision, will enhance scalability and inform decisions on follow-up beyond the pilot phase.		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
To be considered and defined during the planning of the next programme phase.	SDC	March 2026

Recommendation 13		
Prioritise institutionalisation: The positioning of programme-funded staff, the CPS, within ministries – and the recognition by them – has proven to be a success factor for achieving the results. This can already be seen as first step towards institutionalisation. At the same time, the programme invested in capacitating competent professionals. Therefore, we strongly recommend finding possibilities (e.g. multi-annual contracts) to retain the CPS within the programme and transition them into state structures.		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
Prioritising institutionalisation and ensuring continuity of programme-funded staff will strengthen results and support their transition into state structures, in line with SDC's sustainability objectives.		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
To be considered and defined during the planning of the next programme phase.	SDC	June 2026

Recommendation 14		
Develop sustainability strategies includes the institutionalisation of the network approach (see above), but also funding and organisational aspects. Thus, we recommend to: 1) Examine alternatives for long-lasting network coordination mechanism: The above discussed redesign of the network will result also in clear profile for a coordination mechanism that is specifically tailored for the needs of its participants. To handover the coordination after the programme ends, an appropriate organisation or institution should be examined. An academic institution could be an option as they are more independent from political priorities but on the other hand, they are subjacent to the logic of science. 2) Explore co-financing: SDC should actively explore co-financing options with other donors (e.g. USFS, FAO, OSCE) and consider adding a "global component" to programme. This would align with SDC's thematic section goals and leverage the programme as a "flagship" model for other regions.		
Management response		
Fully agree	Partially agree	Disagree
Developing sustainability strategies, including institutionalisation and long-term organisational arrangements, is important. Co-financing with other donors should be carefully considered to avoid compromising independence and sustainability.		
Measures	Responsibility	Timing
To be considered and defined during the planning of the next programme phase.	SDC	June 2026