

Terms of Reference
Consultancy
for
The Final Evaluation of the Project on Leopard Conservation
in the South Caucasus

1. Background of the Project

The Caucasian Leopard, also named the Persian Leopard (*Panthera pardus tulliana*), is one of the subspecies of Leopard. It is a charismatic animal entitled as "Europe's last leopard", which is driving and demonstrating conservation efforts in the Caucasus Ecoregion. Once native to almost the entire Caucasus ecoregion, today, there are only small and isolated (sub-) populations. Poaching of Leopard and its prey species, human-wildlife conflicts, habitat destruction and fragmentation (e.g. illegal timber cutting, mining or unsustainable grazing), insufficient management of protected areas, inadequate law enforcement, and the lack of awareness of the local population are the main threats. Although the conservation measures implemented during the last years brought some positive results in terms of stabilization of prey population (e.g. Bezoar Goat, Armenian Mouflon; both globally threatened species) and an increasing sighting and records of breeding of Leopards in main target areas of the WWF Leopard Conservation Project in the South Caucasus. To ensure viable populations of Leopard in the Caucasus, the reduction and elimination of the above-mentioned threats is necessary. WWF already has broad experience in addressing these topics from other projects in the Caucasus.

The given three-year project (July 2020 – June 2023) is implemented in the South Caucasus region - Armenia and Azerbaijan. In particular, the project area covers territories of the southern part of Armenia, part of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan (the south-western part of Azerbaijan) and Talysh Mountains of south-eastern Azerbaijan. More information on target protected areas and communities will be provided to the selected consultant.

The project encompasses five main objectives addressing areas of human-wildlife conflicts, monitoring the status of Leopard and its prey species, protected areas management effectiveness, supporting a network of caretakers, and raising awareness. The project is expected to have a conservation impact in two main directions: (i) important landscapes in South Caucasus remain as a habitat for the critically endangered Leopard and its prey; and (ii) positive trends in population numbers of leopards and prey species.

2. Objectives of the Consultancy

The consultancy has two main objectives:

- Conduct end-of-project evaluation of WWF Leopard Conservation Project in the South Caucasus focusing on aspects identified in the evaluation criteria i.e. relevance and quality of design, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and adaptive management of the project; and
- Provide a project evaluation report and recommendations for the project's next phase to direct at maximizing impact.

3. Evaluation Methodology

Chapter 4 provides evaluation criteria and main guiding questions for the evaluation methodology. The consultant proposes further detailed evaluation approaches to ensure that feedback from programme beneficiaries and other key stakeholders overall follows and addresses the evaluation criteria of the Relevance and Quality of Design, Effectiveness, Impact, Sustainability and Adaptive Management presented in Chapter 4.

4. Evaluation Criteria and Proposed Guiding Questions

4.1 Relevance and Quality of Design

Assessments of relevance and quality of design should consider:

- To what extent does the programme focus on and remain relevant to issues of the highest priority?
- Has the project taken the most efficient strategic approach to get the impact?

The final evaluation should make recommendations regarding the future design/approach, taking into account changes in key contextual factors or the status of targeted biodiversity issues that have occurred since the project started.

4.2 Effectiveness

Evaluating the effectiveness of an intervention involves:

- How functional and effective are the caretaker network? Are caretakers satisfied with the existing network setting and support, and are they willing to continue their engagement as Leopard conservation project caretakers?
- Is the performance of the Environmental Inspectorate (of southern Armenia) effective? Is the effectiveness measured/documented clearly?
- Is the selected staff of target Protected Areas (supported via the project's capacity building component) satisfied with the training and what kind of capacity would they like to develop in the future?
- Is the management of target Protected Areas generally satisfied with the capacity building component and what are the primary needs of support in the next planned phase of the project?
- Are the villagers satisfied with pilot measures for the mitigation of human-wildlife conflict? What do they want to see more in this direction in the next phase of the project?

4.3 Impact

The impact is a measure of the broader consequences of the intervention at local, national and regional levels. The impact can be measured through the following areas of questions:

- Question to officials responsible for biodiversity conservation and/or protected areas in the countries: how important is WWF's support for the conservation of Leopard and its prey species? What would have happened if the WWF's intervention had not taken place?
- Do you think that supporting the development of the communities with small-size donations contributes to a better acceptance of WWF's work/Leopard conservation? What does make you think that? How do you know?

- What kind of influence has the caretaker network had on the awareness of villagers from respective communities? E.g. are the cases of poaching or illegal cutting decreased because representatives of the communities take care of wildlife and habitats?
- Schoolchildren and teachers: Are the schoolchildren and teachers in the communities where school campaigns are conducted well aware of the importance of Leopard conservation? What do they think about Leopard conservation? Do they observe a change in their attitude towards Leopards (compared to the start of the project)? If so, in what ways?
- How well is the project coordinated? Are the similar approaches and activities well-structured under one regional vision to contribute to the common goal?

4.4 Sustainability

Sustainability is a measure of whether the benefits of an intervention are likely to continue after external support has ended. The sustainability factors should be taken into account at the design and implementation cycles in addition to being assessed in the evaluation. Key questions to be answered shall be:

- To what extent does the project include key sustainable factors in its design, such as support of key stakeholders, involvement of local communities, financial sustainability of activities, etc.?
- What external factors could have a high or medium likelihood of undoing or undermining the future sustainability of project positive impacts? Is the project adequately anticipating and taking measures to ensure resilience to these?

4.5 Adaptive Management

Adaptive management is a measure of the extent to which the project regularly assesses and adapts its work and thereby ensures continued relevance in changing contexts and strong performance. Key questions to be answered during the evaluation shall be:

- Is the project managed adaptively? Which kind of changes happened over the course of the project implementation? Did these changes contribute to better performance?

5. Time schedule

The work will be organized in the following time frame:

- May 2023: Pre-field visit reviews of the relevant materials to be provided by WWF.
- June 2023: Field visits to Armenia and Azerbaijan and a visit to WWF Caucasus Programme Office in Georgia.
- July 2023: Draft reporting and provision of the final report, including recommendations.

Particular dates within this general schedule of the evaluation work will be further specified with the selected consultant.

6. Deliverables

6.1 Inception report that includes the detailed methodology, work plan/schedule and evaluation matrix for the project evaluation to be further coordinated, discussed and agreed with the project team.

6.2 The draft report in English includes, but not limited to, the following: cover page; table of contents; an executive summary; the objectives of the evaluation; methodology; eventual limitations of the evaluation; evaluation analysis and findings; conclusions; and recommendations.

6.3 The final report in English includes, but not limited to, the following: cover page; table of contents; an executive summary; the objectives of the evaluation; methodology; eventual limitations of the evaluation; evaluation analysis and findings; conclusions; and recommendations.

7. Required Qualification, Experience and Competencies

The consultant shall provide evidence that she/he has the necessary qualifications, experience and competencies to implement the given assignment and shall meet the following requirements:

- Proven knowledge in the targeted focal area(s) – biodiversity/species conservation and project/programme evaluation.
- At least 10 years of relevant professional experience.
- Ability to work constructively in a team and with different stakeholders in a complex environment and under a strictly defined timeline.
- Strong research and analytical skills.
- Strong writing/reporting skills with excellent command of written and spoken English.
- Experience working in the region and/or evaluating the similar project(s) will be an advantage.
- Adhere to WWF's values: Knowledgeable, Optimistic, Determined and Engaging.