



# Programme Development Guide in Gaining Support from GAA Sector

---

This document is as approved by the REC Caucasus executive Body (Collegial Trio) and is set out at the end of the document.



## Table of Contents

1 Engagement with the Governments and Aid Agencies .....	3
1.1 The GAA Context.....	3
1.2 The RECC Context.....	4
1.3 GAA Funding Sectors .....	4
1.3.1 What motivates aid?.....	4
1.4 What is RECC's value in the eyes of the GAA's? .....	4
1.5 How does RECC stay ahead of the game?.....	5
1.6 Why choose GAA funds? .....	5
2 Project Design.....	6
2.1 Best practices for project design .....	7
2.2 Beneficiaries, Stakeholder and Partner Involvement (BSPI) .....	7
2.3 Problem Analysis .....	8
2.4 Situation Analysis and Feasibility .....	9
2.5 The Logical Framework Approach (LFA).....	9
2.5.1 How to Develop a logical and feasible strategy .....	9
2.5.2 The matrix "reloaded" .....	10
2.6 The project is over simplified .....	11
2.7 Understanding the Distinction Between Results, Outputs, and Outcomes. ....	12
2.8 What donor wants to see, how RECC work improved the situation.....	12
2.9 Planning for Long-term Capacity and Sustainability .....	13
2.10 Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) .....	14
2.11 Communications Outreach.....	14
3 The proposal RECC shop window.....	16
3.1 Introduction.....	16
3.2 Pre-proposal formulation, Getting Started.....	16
3.3 Next Steps .....	19

# 1 Engagement with the Governments and Aid Agencies

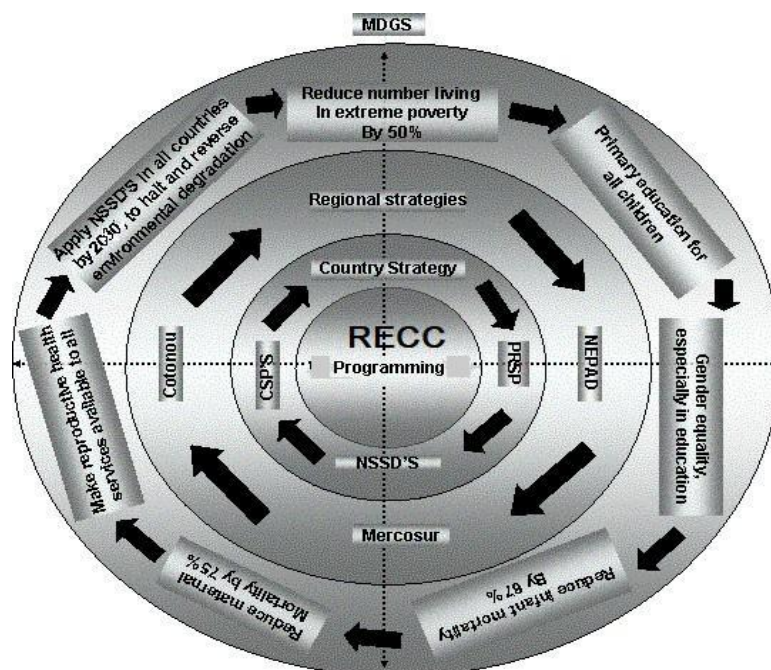
RECC has engaged with Governments and Aid Agencies (GAA) since 2003, achieving significant growth in funding for the South Caucasus regional network of RECC's Central and Country Offices. To maintain current funding levels and influence GAA environmental policy, approaches must be coordinated and aligned with common goals. This is crucial, as competition for funds is increasing and political or economic crises may divert resources.

In this context, RECC's offering—"Environment Protection and Sustainable Development"—must be presented in a manner that resonates with donor objectives, without compromising RECC's identity or mission. It is essential to demonstrate how RECC work contributes to the broader development agenda. When seeking support, consider the project from an external perspective: Why is it important? What change will it deliver? Who benefits? How will it be sustainable? Clear answers to these questions provide a strong foundation for GAA funding.

Programmatic integration and partnerships are equally important. While sharing resources can be challenging, integrated programmes enhance RECC's credibility, strategic positioning, and potential for financial support. Failure to pursue these approaches risks ceding opportunities to competitors.

## 1.1 The GAA Context

When developing a strategy to engage with a government or Aid Agency, it is essential to understand the GAA marketplace and its drivers. This marketplace includes many actors, each with a distinct product and position, of which RECC is only one. Effectiveness requires a clear understanding of this context. The international development agenda, broadly defined by the United Nations Millennium Declaration of September 2000, established the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to address global hunger, poverty, and related human suffering. Any engagement strategy must consider both donors and recipients, as these global goals are reflected at regional and local levels through instruments such as country-level Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs).



## 1.2 The RECC Context

Does the RECC mission broadly align with these goals? Its stated aim - “to stop the degradation of the planet’s environment and to build a future in which humans live sustainably”- clearly links environmental preservation with overall development. While this connection is valid, RECC must be more explicit in presenting its development relevance.

Specific projects and programmes often articulate biodiversity objectives and alignment with RECC’s mission, but the broader development vision is less emphasized. For example, in RECC’s Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) initiative, we clearly describe the benefits of land resources for ecosystem services, yet we must also communicate their contributions to livelihoods, climate-smart agriculture, food security, and sustainable tourism. Highlighting these linkages demonstrates RECC’s relevance and ensures that sustainable agriculture and biodiversity remain integral to development agendas, even where plans often overlook them.

REC Caucasus is committed to gender equality and social inclusion across all programme design and implementation. The Programme Development Guide integrates gender-responsive approaches at every stage, supported by designated institutional capacity (Gender Mainstreaming Officer). All references to gender align with REC Caucasus’s forthcoming Gender Action Plan (GAP), updated Gender Policy, and donor Gender Guidance, ensuring that interventions address gender-specific needs and risks, enable equitable outcomes, and meet donor and accreditation requirements for gender-responsive adaptation programming.

## 1.3 GAA Funding Sectors

The GAA sectors have their geographical focus, which can be based on historical ties, foreign policy objectives etc.

### 1.3.1 What motivates aid?

Aid, broadly speaking, is not primarily driven by altruism or fairness. It serves political and economic objectives, advancing foreign policy, opening new markets, or accessing untapped resources. Bilateral aid flows often closely reflect these foreign policy priorities. Multilateral donors operate similarly, but on a global scale, promoting mechanisms that support member countries’ programs, such as economic reforms, trade agreements, or structural adjustment policies. In essence, donors seek to leverage aid to achieve broader strategic outcomes, including trade expansion and stronger political alliances.

## 1.4 What is RECC’s value in the eyes of the GAAs?

When considering donor priorities, it is important to recognize the unique assets that RECC brings to potential partnerships. While elements such as RECC’s outreach to supporters, brand recognition, and technical expertise are relevant, the primary factor that attracts Global and Regional Actors (GAAs) to collaborate with RECC is its regional network in the South Caucasus, comprising its Central and Country Offices.

RECC’s network allows it to effectively demonstrate how regional and global policy issues impact local communities. Its extensive field presence provides a distinct advantage in designing and implementing programmes aligned with the principle “Think Global, Act Local.” Whether engaging with donors at the local, national, regional, or international level, the value of RECC’s South Caucasus regional network should never be understated.

This network enables RECC to showcase the state of the region’s precious environmental and natural resources, the drivers of their decline, and the measures needed to reverse these trends. Importantly, the South Caucasus network should not be seen merely as RECC, but as a collective of RECC, its partners, donors, and local communities. This integrated regional network represents RECC’s primary value proposition and key differentiator in donor engagement.

## 1.5 How does RECC stay ahead of the game?

As in all sectors, competition for donor resources is intensifying, with an increasing number of organizations pursuing the same funding opportunities. This trend is driven by several factors, including donor fatigue among the public and the fluctuations of economic conditions. As a result, organizations are compelled to diversify beyond traditional funding sources to sustain operations.

- Given its clear objectives and well-defined impact areas, the GAA sector has become an attractive source of funding for a broader range of NGOs. To maintain and strengthen its market position, RECC must: Clearly understand the priorities and expectations of GAAs.
- Treat GAA funding as a strategic focus rather than a short-term solution.
- Invest adequate resources in project development to ensure high-quality proposals.
- Adopt integrated approaches that link regional, national, and local perspectives.
- Leverage the strength of RECC's South Caucasus regional network of Central and Country Offices in both implementation and communication.
- Ensure a coordinated approach across offices, projects, and stakeholders.
- Support priorities with tangible actions; if RECC is not prepared to invest, donors are unlikely to commit.
- Submit well-written, relevant, and compelling proposals that align with donor objectives.
- Be prepared for rigorous scrutiny and maintain high accountability standards.
- Remain open to new ideas, perspectives, and innovative approaches.

## 1.6 Why choose GAA funds?

GAA funding is not a short-term solution; securing support from a GAA requires significant time and effort, with a typical funding process taking up to eighteen months. Beyond financial resources, GAAs offer strategic value to RECC:

- GAA funding is generally long-term (3+ years), compared with RECC's typical funding commitments.
- Provides support for initiatives that other donors may consider less attractive but are central to RECC's mission.
- Enables RECC to leverage additional funds from other donors.
- Offers insights that can inform donor policies and program design, even from projects that do not fully meet all objectives.
- Encourages consideration of the broader context, such as biodiversity loss and regional environmental challenges.

## 2 Project Design

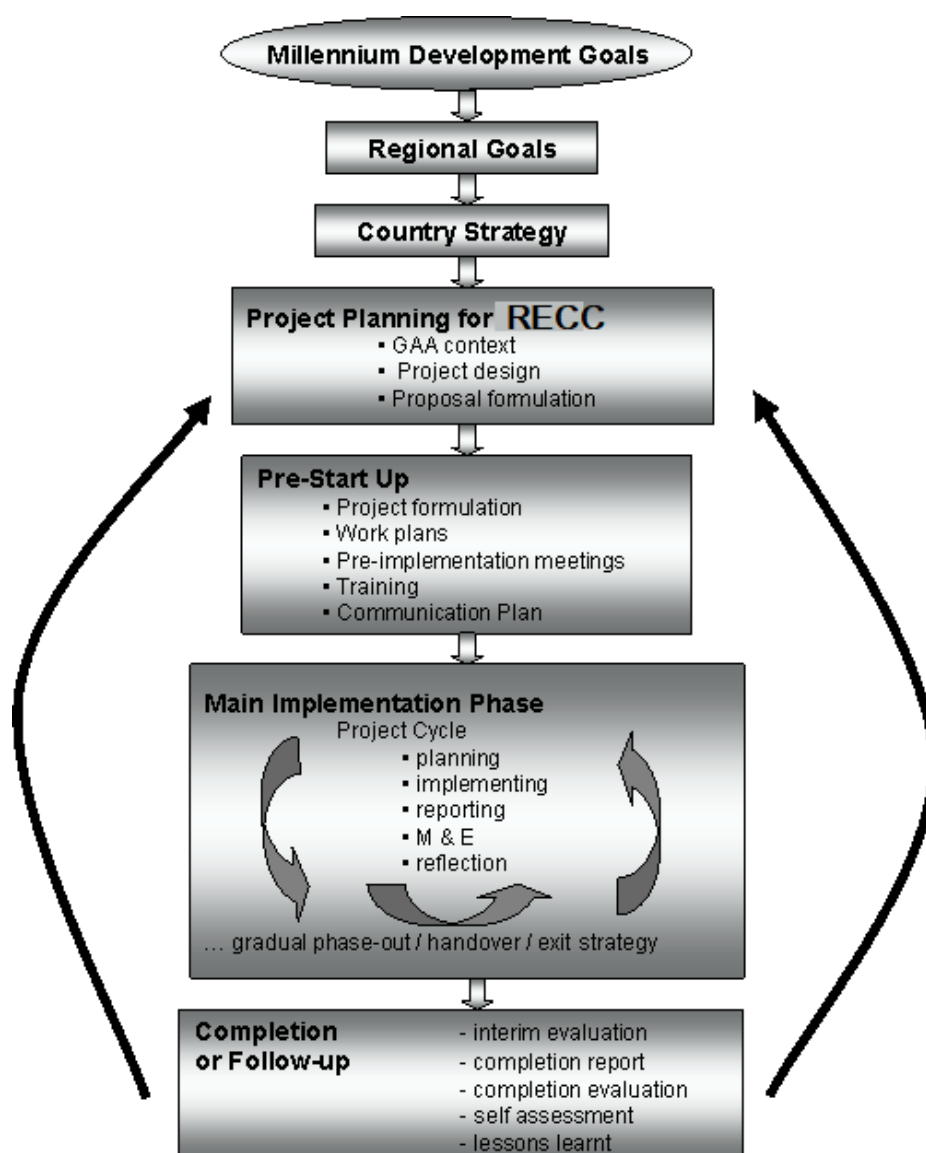


Figure 1. Project Design Matrix

The purpose of the project design section is to enhance RECC's effectiveness and the sustainability of its programmes and projects in engaging with GAAs. This section does not attempt to cover the topic exhaustively, nor does it prescribe a rigid methodology; rather, it highlights the key issues RECC must address to maintain its strong reputation with both stakeholders and donors, particularly within the GAA sector.

Good project design is not about applying fixed methodologies or following rigid management procedures; it is about ensuring meaningful conservation impact. Achieving this requires genuine collaboration with stakeholders, designing projects that deliver tangible benefits, and reflecting RECC's mission in every intervention.

While these principles are critical for engaging with GAAs, they are equally applicable across all RECC programmes and projects to ensure true conservation outcomes. This guidance has been formulated to:

- Increase the success rate of RECC proposals with GAAs.
- Promote consistency in the approach to project design.
- Serve as a showcase of RECC's added value, professionalism, and outcome-oriented approach.

All Donor submissions shall use the relevant concept-note or full-proposal template (see sample template in Annex 5) and follow the approval timeline.

## **2.1 Best practices for project design**

There are 8 factors that are critical to good formulation.

1. Stakeholders and partner involvement.
2. Problem Analysis.
3. Thorough situation analysis.
4. Development of a logical and feasible strategy that clearly expresses goals and purposes and how outputs and activities will be achieved.
5. Identification and articulate cross cutting issues.
6. Long-term capacity and sustainability.
7. Rigorous and open monitoring and evaluation planning.
8. Incorporate activities that effectively communicate project objectives, progress, and outcomes to relevant stakeholders.

## **2.2 Beneficiaries, Stakeholder and Partner Involvement (BSPI)**

Projects that lack meaningful engagement with beneficiaries, stakeholders, and partners (BSPI) are inherently less effective. Early involvement of these groups in the planning process is critical: if they are not consulted, who is the intervention truly for? Reflecting on RECC's work, the sustainability and ownership of interventions depend on locally grounded engagement.

Top-down or externally driven planning risks producing interventions that are neither embraced nor maintained by local communities—a common outcome of “typical northern aid” approaches, which often show limited impact. In contexts where RECC offices struggle to demonstrate their identity as local NGOs rather than extensions of international donors, insufficient BSPI at the planning stage is often a key factor.

### **Benefits of BSPI during planning:**

- Empowers communities to take ownership of their development.
- Ensures project goals and purposes are relevant to the intended beneficiaries.
- Aligns programmatic strategies with local conditions and feasibility.
- Builds effective partnerships and enhances beneficiary ownership, which supports successful implementation.
- Strengthens sustainability of outcomes.
- Can improve cost-effectiveness by leveraging local partners.

Meaningful participatory processes require more than a single stakeholder workshop. They are ongoing and require time, patience, and careful resourcing. RECC must consider:

- Allowing sufficient time to engage stakeholders.
- Evaluating the cost-effectiveness of using RECC staff versus local partners.
- Identifying local partners best positioned to facilitate engagement.

### **Identifying stakeholders and partners:**

Stakeholder and partner groups will vary by context, but their expectations generally align: meaningful participation, transparency, accountability, and relevance of the intervention to local needs.

<b>Group</b>	<b>Motivation</b>	<b>Potential Beneficiary</b>
Local Communities	Improved living conditions, more economic opportunities	Yes
Local Governments.	More Resources and more influence	Yes
National Governments	Increase net wealth of the economy	Yes
Local NGOs.	More resources, recognition, Increased capacity	Yes
Private Sector.	Economic opportunities, access to natural resources. Profit!	No
International Aid Agencies.	Development Goals, principally to reduce poverty	No
International NGOs.	To achieve their mission and gain recognition for their work.	No
Bilateral Assistance	Political influence, economic opportunities.	No
Multilateral Assistance	Create economic opportunities for their members and shareholders.	No

In summary BSPI in project design is a key success factor for ownership and sustainability. For any intervention, the major impacts for the programme require that beneficiaries and stakeholders may have to go through a behavioral change. Would RECC change its approach in a similar scenario? The key message is that effective beneficiary, stakeholder, and partner involvement (BSPI) at the planning stage sets the quality and integrity of the entire process.

This engagement contributes more than any other factor to achieving meaningful change. It also reinforces the principle that people, not biodiversity alone, are the ultimate beneficiaries of effective conservation. For the donor-funded projects, the stakeholder consultations must be documented (agenda, list of participants, minutes) and disclosed with the proposal package as outlined in the Stakeholder Engagement Framework of REC Caucasus.

The Guide requires gender-balanced stakeholder engagement throughout project preparation. Consultation plans must ensure proportional representation of women and marginalized groups and must provide for separate focus-group consultations where cultural, logistical, or power-dynamics considerations would otherwise limit participation.

Programme teams are required to document efforts to remove participation barriers (for example, by providing childcare, scheduling meetings at accessible times/locations, providing interpretation/translation, or offering transport stipends). Stakeholder Engagement plans must explicitly include outreach to women’s civil society organizations and other gender-focused actors, and record how the inputs of these stakeholders’ shape project design and safeguards.

### **2.3 Problem Analysis**

Together with Stakeholder Analysis, Problem Analysis is another central tool in the design and management of any activity or intervention.

For the donor-funded projects, root-cause analysis shall identify at least one donor specific Strategic Results Framework core outcome that the project will address. The purpose of Problem Analysis is to identify the real—rather than assumed—development needs and to address root causes rather than just symptoms. It is a constructive process that provides an opportunity to engage

stakeholders, beneficiaries, and potential partners, increasing their commitment to addressing the identified problems.

Problem analysis can help by:

- building a better understanding of the underlying causes of development issues.
- building BSPI consensus.
- identifying potential constraints.
- aiding the analysis of the real causes of the problem.
- helping establish meaningful relationships with other implementers.
- helping establish an actual size of the problem and the likely resources needed.
- build consensus and commitment at all levels of the organization.

A good analysis of the proposed activity can reveal 'upstream' issues that need to be tackled before the activity 'downstream' can take place and may highlight underlying issues affecting the sustainability of the activity.

## **2.4 Situation Analysis and Feasibility**

Situation Analysis examines the context, intended changes, and beneficiaries of a project. It identifies opportunities, risks, stakeholder interests, and needs, using relevant socio-economic and conservation tools. For donor-funded projects, key findings are summarized in the proposal to support funding decisions.

At RECC, analysis is multi-level, combining quantitative and qualitative data, integrated into biological assessments, and aligned with conservation visions. It recognizes that human activities shape outcomes and that sustainable interventions require balancing social, economic, and environmental factors. Partner and stakeholder engagement from the planning stage is essential.

Analyses should consider “without intervention” (baseline) and “with intervention” scenarios to assess feasibility and inform project design. Feasibility testing ensures projects are realistic, cost-effective, and able to deliver results that attract donor investment.

All Situation and Problem Analyses must include a gender and intersectional assessment. Teams identify gendered roles, access to resources, and power dynamics affecting the core problem, specify vulnerable groups, and justify target selection. Tools may include disaggregated data checklists, stakeholder power-mapping, and intersectionality matrices. Each root cause should map to donor outcomes, showing how gendered constraints are addressed in the theory of change.

## **2.5 The Logical Framework Approach (LFA)**

### **2.5.1 How to Develop a logical and feasible strategy**

The Logical Framework Approach (LFA) provides a clear way to present a project’s strategy and actions. While widely known, it is often perceived merely as a donor compliance matrix, and the associated jargon—such as “objectively verifiable indicators” or “log-frame”—can be intimidating. To counter this, the LFA should be promoted as a practical tool for monitoring, evaluation, and communication, rather than a rigid project management requirement.

For the donor-funded projects, each matrix shall include at least one donor core outcome indicator, baseline, annual target and final target. Each log-frame must align with the Donor Strategic Results Framework, identifying at least one core outcome and populating baseline & target. Gender-responsive indicators and gender-specific outcomes will be incorporated in the Logical Framework for RECC. The Logical Framework (log-frame) section is updated to require gender-responsive outcomes and indicators wherever gender-differentiated results are expected or where the intervention can influence gender equality. All indicator tables must include sex-disaggregation and, where relevant, age-disaggregation, and must be tagged against the institutional GP and project

ESMP/GAP elements. Projects must also identify at least one gender-specific indicator (process or outcome) that measures changes in access, control, participation, or benefits for women and marginalized groups. Where feasible, indicators should reference Donor core indicators or SRF outcomes to ensure comparability and compliance.

A well-structured logframe promotes comprehensive planning, provides a clear visual map of the programme, and enhances the quality and clarity of project design. It defines outcomes, outputs, and impacts, establishes indicators and baselines, and forms the basis for effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

Once RECC problem and situation analyses are complete, the lo frame can be developed to:

- Define the project’s scope and focus.
- Agree on the planning process with stakeholders.
- Develop a coherent project strategy.
- Identify assumptions and assess risks, adjusting the design if risks are too high.

### 2.5.2 The matrix “reloaded”

<b>Summary and intervention logic</b>	<b>Performance Questions and Indicators (Objectively verifiable indicators and targets)</b>	<b>Monitoring Mechanisms (Sources of verification and information)</b>	<b>Assumptions and Risks.</b>
<b>Goal (Overall objective) This is the situation you want to improve and is wider than that of the project itself</b> <b>Purpose or Project Objective</b> <b>This is what you want the project to change and should be measurable.</b>	<b>Performance questions</b> what are the high-level impacts or outcomes. <b>Indicators for project purpose.</b> <b>Lower-level impacts and outcome indicators</b>	<b>How will information be gathered</b>  <b>How will information be gathered</b>	<b>For long term sustainability of project.</b> <b>Assumptions in moving from purpose to goal.</b>
<b>Outputs or Results.</b> <b>What must be delivered to achieve the project purpose,</b>	<b>Performance questions for each output-output indicators</b> <b>The needed inputs</b>	<b>How will information be gathered</b>	<b>Assumptions in moving from outputs to purposes</b>
<b>Activities</b> <b>Actions taken by the project to deliver the outputs</b>			<b>Assumptions in moving from activities to outputs.</b>

#### **Overcoming some common problems**

Outcomes, outputs and activities become confused. How do you include cross-cutting objectives? How do you deal with assumptions? Addressing sustainability.

## 2.6 The project is over simplified

Traditionally, the log-frame approach emphasizes a single project purpose. However, for larger and more complex programmes, restricting the LFA to one purpose can be limiting. In such cases, the LFA should be adapted to reflect multiple interrelated purposes, ensuring that each component contributes to the overarching programme objectives while remaining measurable and coherent. Introduce multiple project purposes and use the idea of a cascading log-frame, view RECC programme as one master log-frame with a series of smaller log-frames with each purpose regarded as a sub-project.

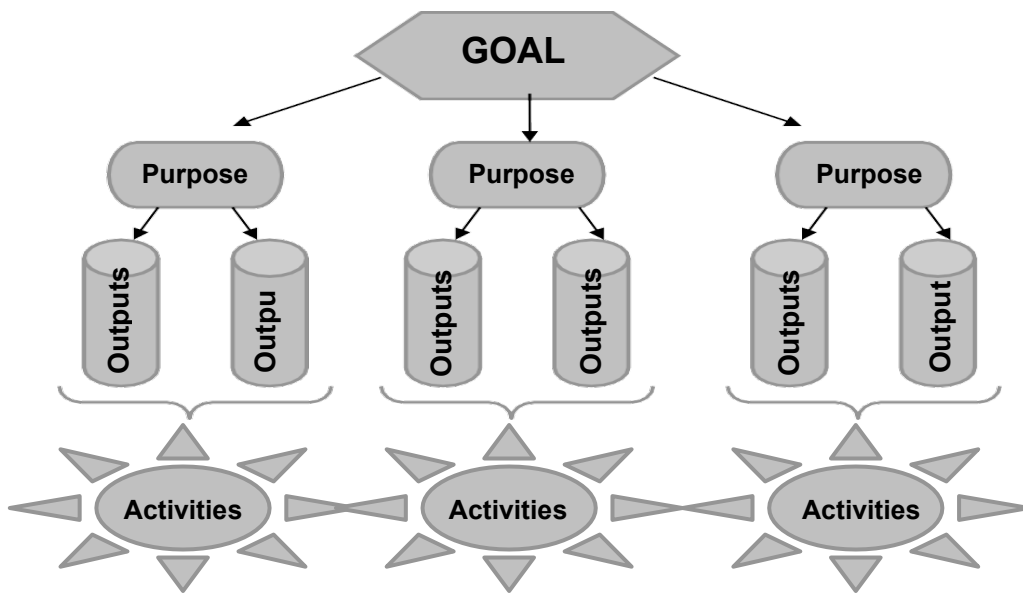


Figure 2. Log-frame approach

Table 1. Log-frame Table Sample

Summary and intervention logic	Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
Goal Standard matrix	Four levels 1 x goal 1 x Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simple</li> <li>• Widely used and understood</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doesn't work well for large multi-component programmes.</li> <li>• Does not make outcomes clear</li> </ul>

<b>Multiple purposes</b>	Four levels 1 x goal As many project purposes as need, any number of outputs per purpose and activities per output	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintains standard Matrix</li> <li>• May better fit the type of programmes RECC does, TDP approach for example.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More complex</li> <li>• Does not help monitoring outcomes</li> </ul>
<b>Nested logframes</b>	Several interlinked, Standard Four level Logframes, each project purpose has a separate logframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintains standard Matrix</li> <li>• Enables a focused “sub-project approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More complex</li> <li>• Need to provide overview of cross cutting issues</li> </ul>
<b>Managing outcomes Extra layer</b>	Five levels 1 x goal 1 x Purpose Key outcomes any number of outputs per outcome and activities per output	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Makes a clear distinction between output, outcomes and purpose levels.</li> <li>• Promotes innovation of standard LFA approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More detail must be provided in the log-frame.</li> </ul>

## 2.7 Understanding the Distinction Between Results, Outputs, and Outcomes.

The term “outcome” is frequently a source of confusion, as different people often interpret it differently. In its strict sense, an outcome refers to the achievement of a result; however, in development practice, it is understood as the change that occurs as a consequence of achieving that result. While RECC, like other organizations, is evaluated in part by the results attained, it is essential to consider whether these results have led to meaningful change. Expressing outcomes solely in quantitative terms risks reducing them to tangible outputs, rather than reflecting their broader impact.

## 2.8 What donor wants to see, how RECC work improved the situation.

### Inclusion of cross-cutting objectives

The work RECC undertakes is shaped by cross-cutting issues such as good governance, gender, civil rights, and economic reform. These factors underpin development goals and must be addressed in project and programme design. Too often, they are relegated to assumptions, leading donors to perceive RECC programmes as weak on context.

A thorough situation analysis identifies the international, regional, national, and local factors affecting the project. RECC must then decide how to address these issues—either through dedicated activities or by aligning communications and policy work to complement programme objectives.

Recognizing and integrating these cross-cutting issues is crucial. RECC projects often act as catalysts for broader change beyond the immediate scope, representing one of the organisation’s greatest potential outcomes and a key selling point.

## Assumptions

Assumptions form the backbone of the project, they specify necessary conditions that fall outside the direct management of the project, that must exist for the project to achieve its objectives. Too often, the assumptions column is treated as a “dumping ground” for issues—particularly those related to institutional change—seen as beyond the control of project designers. In reality, these assumptions represent challenges that must be acknowledged and addressed to ensure project success.

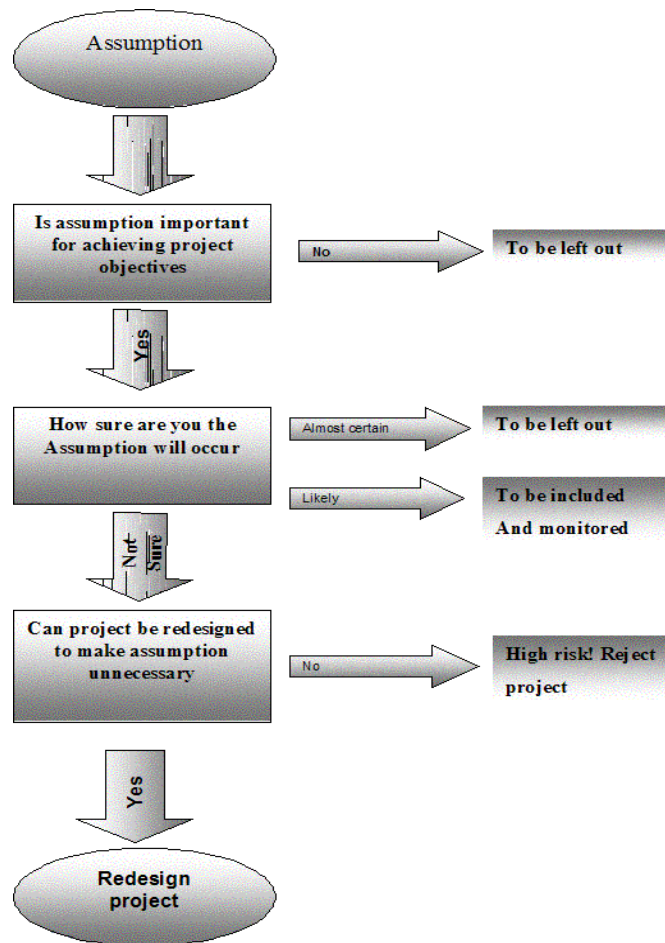


Figure 3. Assumptions Matrix

## 2.9 Planning for Long-term Capacity and Sustainability

Aid effectiveness has often been limited by low stakeholder involvement, resulting in weak ownership and short-term impact. Infrastructure-focused projects frequently neglected long-term maintenance, and donor-driven priorities sometimes misalign with local needs. Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) provide a framework for country-led, results-oriented, participatory, and long-term poverty reduction, while also promoting governance and accountability. However, PRSPs alone do not guarantee genuine local buy-in.

### Implications for RECC:

- Sustainability depends on early and meaningful engagement with stakeholders and capacity building.
- Projects should be designed for eventual handover to stakeholders capable of

- continuing the work.
- Embed sustainability into project design, alongside stakeholder involvement, to ensure long-term conservation impact.

### **Practical Approaches:**

- Position the project within RECC's broader programme context, linking complementary capacity-building activities.
- Frame interventions as part of a longer-term strategy (e.g., 10–15 years), recognizing that skill development and behavioral change require sustained engagement.

## **2.10 Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)**

The M&E systems need to be an integral part of the project design and implementation. It should be adequately planned, managed, resourced and should not be viewed as just as a conditionality of an agreement. M&E guidance is revised to require sex- disaggregated baseline data and outcome measurement for all gender-relevant indicators. Baseline design must capture gender-differentiated vulnerabilities, adaptive capacities, and access to services. Evaluation questions shall explicitly examine gendered outcomes and unintended gendered impacts, and mid-term and final evaluations must assess progress toward the project-level GAP and institutional GP alignment.

For the donor-funded projects, all PPRs and periodic reports must include a short gender section with disaggregated results, progress on project GAP actions, and any safeguarding incidents or remedial measures. Baseline design must capture gender-differentiated vulnerabilities, adaptive capacities, and access to services. Evaluation questions shall explicitly examine gendered outcomes and unintended gendered impacts, and mid-term and final evaluations must assess progress toward the project-level GAP and institutional GP alignment.

For the donor-funded projects, the Annual Project Performance Report (PPR) shall follow the section order and annex list in the Donor Guidance to Complete PPR. An Annual Project Performance Report (PPR) in the Donor template is due within 60 days of each disbursement anniversary; tranche release is contingent on PPR clearance. Schedule slippage exceeding three months triggers a delay notification as per the Donor Policy for Project Delays (the deadlines might vary per donor).

Projects > 48 months shall undergo a mid-term review, and all projects a terminal evaluation using the donor rating rubric. An independent Terminal Evaluation shall be submitted within nine months of completion.

Any suspected misuse of donor funds must be reported to the relevant donor secretariat within 30 days, with 30-day updates until resolved.

All project records will be retained for five years after closure.

## **2.11 Communications Outreach**

RECC has demonstrated considerable innovation and success in communicating its conservation mission and raising the organization's profile. However, donors often perceive RECC's work as focused primarily on traditional biodiversity conservation, without fully reflecting its contributions to human well-being, particularly for economically vulnerable populations. This perception largely stems from the difficulty of clearly articulating how RECC's environmental approaches are linked to livelihoods.

To maximize the visibility and impact of RECC's work and effectively share lessons learned, communication strategies must be integrated into the project design phase. Currently, communications components are often absent from planned activities. For donor-funded projects, approved proposals, PPRs, and evaluations should be posted on the REC Caucasus website within two weeks of submission to the respective donor.

RECC and donors share common objectives: donors seek to ensure their funding delivers meaningful, lasting impact, while RECC aims to promote sustainable environmental practices and behavioral change. Strategic communication of RECC's work strengthens both RECC's programmes and the broader regional network, enhancing organizational legitimacy and demonstrating value to external stakeholders.

### 3 The proposal RECC shop window

#### 3.1 Introduction

This document focuses on proposal writing as a tool for selling RECC projects to donors. A proposal is the culmination of research, planning, and design, and serves as RECC’s “shop window.” Even technically strong projects may fail if the proposal is poorly presented. Proposal writing should demonstrate RECC’s professionalism, integrity, and creativity. For donor concept notes, follow the six-page limit and headings in Annex 5.

#### 3.2 Pre-proposal formulation, Getting Started

Before developing a full proposal, understand donor priorities. Proposals created in isolation often fail. Use the concept phase to market ideas and gauge donor interest.

##### Project Concept

Clearly articulate the need addressed, and ensure alignment with donor priorities and RECC’s mission. Situate the project within the Sustainable Development framework, highlighting poverty reduction and stakeholder engagement. The M&E Officer and Gender Mainstreaming Officer will monitor compliance with the Guide. For the donor-funded projects, gender-related sections of project proposals and reports will be included in the consolidated PPR annexes (GAP progress, sex-disaggregated indicators and safeguards logs) to satisfy Donor reporting expectations and to enable transparent oversight.

##### Program

Describe how the project will be implemented:

- project nature and methodology
- timetable
- Expected outcomes and evaluation approach
- Roles of RECC, partners, etc.

##### Expenses

Provide a preliminary budget to show that costs are reasonable relative to expected outcomes. This also serves as a reference for donor expectations.

##### Compiling the full Proposal

Components of a Proposal

Executive Summary:	umbrella statement of RECC case and summary of the entire proposal
Statement of Need:	why this project is necessary
Budget:	financial description of the project plus explanatory notes

Organization Information:	history and governing structure of RECC; its primary activities, audiences, and services
---------------------------	--

Conclusion:	summary of the proposal's main points
-------------	---------------------------------------

### The Executive Summary

The first page of the proposal is the most critical section. It provides a concise overview of the project, summarizing key information and serving as a persuasive “sales” document. Its purpose is to convince the reader that the project merits support. Be sure to include:

**Problem:** brief statement of the problem or needs to be recognized and is prepared to address (one or two paragraphs).

**Solution:** a short description of the project, including what will take place and how many people will benefit from the program, how and where it will operate, for how long, and who will staff it (one or two paragraphs).

**Funding:** requirements an explanation of the amount of money required for the project and what RECC plans are for funding it in the future (one paragraph); and

**Organization and its expertise:** a brief statement of the name, history, purpose, and activities of RECC, emphasizing its capacity and RECC added value to carry out this proposal. The methodology of how the organization works should be addressed in line with the Sustainable Development context.

### The Statement of Need

Once the donor has read the executive summary, the next task is to clearly present the problem the project addresses. The statement of need should be concise, persuasive, and evidence-based, demonstrating that RECC understands the issues and can effectively address them. Support your case with relevant data from authoritative sources and RECC’s experience, ensuring accuracy and relevance.

Key points to consider:

1. **Select Supporting Facts:** Use accurate, project-specific data. Avoid generic or outdated information. Ensure the scope of data aligns with the scale of the project.
2. **Offer Hope:** Present a solution that is achievable. Avoid overly grim portrayals or exaggerated claims.
3. **Consider Model Potential:** Only propose the project as a model if it can realistically be replicated and documented.
4. **Highlight Urgency:** Emphasize why the problem requires attention, using concrete examples without overstating.
5. **Differentiate from Others:** Show how RECC’s approach complements existing efforts without criticizing other organizations.
6. **Avoid Circular Reasoning:** Ensure the problem and proposed solution are logically linked, using evidence to support effectiveness.

A strong statement of need is **brief, clear, and compelling**, giving the donor confidence in RECC’s understanding of the problem and the proposed solution.

## **The Project Description**

This section of the proposal outlines the objectives, methods, staffing, evaluation, and sustainability. Together, these elements present a cohesive picture of the project.

### **Objectives**

Objectives are the measurable outcomes of the program. They define RECC methods. RECC objectives must be tangible, specific, concrete, measurable, and achievable in a specified period of time. We often confuse objectives with goals, which are conceptual and more abstract. For illustration, here is the goal of a project with a subsidiary objective, for example:

**Goal:** To Increase Protected Areas in Dryland Areas of the South Caucasus (PA-DA).

**Objective:** RECC MPA-DA programme will promote establishment of one transboundary dryland protected area by 2030. 1 complete dryland system that transcends more than one country (e.g., Georgia and Azerbaijan).

The goal in this case is abstract: increasing MPA-DAs, while the objective is much more specific. It is achievable and measurable (creating three MPA-DA's each with a very different set of problems, but very replicable). With competition for financial resources so great, well-articulated objectives are increasingly critical to a proposal's success.

### **Methods**

This section describes the activities that will achieve the objectives, including **how**, **when**, and **why** they will be conducted. Methods should clearly show that RECC knows how to implement the project and ensure credibility with donors.

### **Staffing/Administration**

Describe the project team, including the number of staff, their qualifications, and specific responsibilities. Specify which staff will work full-time or part-time, and distinguish between existing personnel and new hires.

Explain how staff time will be allocated, particularly for individuals already engaged in other work.

Outline how the project will be administered, clearly indicating responsibilities for financial management, oversight of project outcomes, and reporting, especially in collaborative or large-scale programs.

### **Evaluation**

An evaluation plan should be integrated from the start, demonstrating RECC's commitment to achieving objectives and assessing performance. It serves as a management tool to refine programs and share lessons learned. For donor-funded projects, REC Caucasus will contract an external evaluator to conduct the Terminal Evaluation and submit the report to the Donor Secretariat within nine months of completion.

### **Sustainability**

Donors expect concrete evidence of the long-term viability of a project. They are unlikely to commit to permanent funding; instead, they want projects that are either time-bound with clear start and end dates or capacity-building, contributing to future self-sufficiency and/or revenue generation. Proposals should include an exit and maintenance plan addressing post-donor funding, institutional ownership, and knowledge transfer.

### **The Budget**

The budget may be a simple one-page summary or a more detailed presentation, including projected support, revenue, and explanatory notes.

### **Expense Budget**

List all personnel and non-personnel costs associated with the project, including ongoing and new expenses. Collect accurate cost data from financial staff and estimate allocations for shared resources. Summarize calculations on worksheets to track assumptions and support monitoring and reporting. Group expenses into subcategories, e.g., personnel (salaries, benefits, consultants) and non-personnel (travel, equipment, printing).

### **Support, Revenue and Statement**

For the typical project, no support and revenue statement is necessary. The expense budget represents the amount of grant support required. Include this only if grant support is already secured or if the project is expected to generate income.

### **Budget Narrative**

Provide explanations for unusual line items; omit if the figures are self-explanatory.

### **Organizational Information**

A concise overview of RECC should appear at the end of the proposal. Focus on the mission, organizational structure, programs, and expertise relevant to the project. Supplement with a brochure or other materials as needed. Include any additional documentation required by the donor, such as determination letters, financial statements, and brief staff resumes.

Even a simple donor letter requires careful preparation. Every document submitted represents RECC and contributes to long-term relationship-building.

### **Conclusion**

Every proposal should end with a brief conclusion highlighting the project's future beyond the grant period. Where relevant, outline potential follow-up activities or describe how the project could continue without additional funding. Reiterate the purpose and importance of the project, emphasizing why RECC requires support to achieve these outcomes. This is also an opportunity to make a compelling, concise appeal to donors.

All new programme concepts and full proposals will be reviewed for gender integration as part of the Secretariat's quality assurance process prior to submission. The M&E Officer, Steering Committee, Gender Mainstreaming Officer, and Social Inclusion Task Force will monitor compliance. Gender-related sections of proposals and reports—including GAP progress, sex-disaggregated indicators, and safeguards logs—will be included in consolidated PPR annexes to meet donor reporting requirements and ensure transparency.

## **3.3 Next Steps**

Submitting a RECC proposal marks the beginning, not the end, of RECC's involvement. Review procedures vary, and decisions can take from a few weeks to six months or longer. During this period, donors may request additional information, either directly or via external consultants. It is important to be patient yet persistent. If the process is unclear, refer to donor guidelines or ask for clarification.

If funding is awarded, acknowledge the donor with a letter of thanks and clarify reporting requirements, including financial and programmatic obligations. For donor-funded projects, any budget re-allocation, results-framework revision, or extension must be submitted as a Post-Approval Change request.



This document was reviewed, adopted, and approved on [date] by the REC Caucasus Executive Body (Collegial Trio) in accordance with the organization's internal governance procedures, and shall enter into force as of the date of approval.

**Headquarters**  
48/50, Mtskheta str.,  
0179 Tbilisi, Georgia  
E-Mail: [info@rec-caucasus.org](mailto:info@rec-caucasus.org)  
[www.rec-caucasus.org](http://www.rec-caucasus.org)

**Country Office in Armenia**  
1, Charents Street; 2nd floor  
0025 Yerevan, Armenia  
Tel/Fax: +374 10 574743

**Country Office in Azerbaijan**  
100a, B. Agayev Street  
1073 Baku, Azerbaijan  
Tel: + 994 12 4924173

