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Fifth Meeting of the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee  
for the GEF Pacific Ridge to Reef Programme

Nadi, Fiji 28th July 2019

**Response to Mid-Term Review recommendation 17 – Communications**

The Committee is invited to:

- i. **Consider** the MTR Recommendation 17 on the communications strategy; and on this basis
- ii. **Endorse** the proposed approach to review the R2R Communications Strategy.

## Background

Communications and the effective use of the media were identified by the terminal evaluation of the GEF Pacific IWRM Project as a critical element of efforts to raise awareness, to stimulate support for necessary policy and legal reforms, and for global outreach with donors and sister initiatives in the Caribbean and the Indian and Atlantic Ocean Small Island Developing States (SIDS). The review also identified communications and media efforts of the Pacific IWRM initiative as being essential to ensuring that best practices generated through national IWRM demonstration projects and national policy development processes were captured, shared and effectively communicated to guide the longer-term sustainability and scaling-up of investments.

The GEF Pacific Regional IW R2R Project is aimed at building an enabling environment at the national level for linking IWRM with Integrate Coastal Management (ICM) in to an integrated R2R approach. The basis of the GEF programmatic approach is to gain synergies across GEF Focal Areas and Implementing Agencies through coordination, information, and knowledge sharing.

The R2R programme was developed to provide an opportunity for Pacific SIDS to develop and implement integrated approaches for the sustainable development of island economies and communities. The principal barriers to the introduction of integrated approaches to environmental and natural resource management in Pacific SIDS, identified through the Pacific IWRM project were:

- Fragmented, single sector development efforts (including those funded by donors);
- Limited institutional capacity, knowledge and application of ICM and IWRM practices and tools;
- Limited experience and capacity in linking IWRM and ICM;
- Insufficient involvement of key civil society and other stakeholders on 'Ridge to Reef';
- Economic pressures resulting in inadequate resourcing for environment and natural resource management;
- Weak governance structures and lack of government/donor interest in supporting integrated approaches across sectors; and
- Insufficient political and public awareness of the role water, land, and biological diversity play in economic development, public health and environmental protection.

In an area as diverse and vast as the Pacific, coordinating integrated approaches is a key factor. In the same context, communications and the effective use of the media are critical for the effectiveness of project efforts to strengthen visibility, awareness, information and knowledge sharing in order to stimulate support for necessary policy and legal reforms, and for global outreach with donors and similar initiatives in other SIDS.

The R2R regional communications strategy aims to:

- Develop awareness and knowledge of target audiences of the programme and activities;
- Support regional and national coordination, and dialogue;
- Facilitate knowledge networks and exchange through the Pacific R2R Network, Online Communities of Practice and information and other knowledge sharing fora;
- Improve the capacity of policy makers and opinion leaders to advocate for R2R solutions through mentoring and sharing of effective approaches, regional and national best practice and lessons learned.

## Mid-Term Review Key Issues:

The IW R2R Regional Programme Coordination Unit has been effective in delivering technical assistance on strategic communications to national projects in a number of ways, such as:

- i. Document guides and training for NPMs on developing national communications plans related to promoting the national demonstration projects through a hands-on, learning-by-doing approach, and providing specific technical advice related to communications campaigns – e.g., script writing for radio talk shows discussing environmental issues, development of Project Progress Reports and guidance on drafting experiential notes;
- ii. Social media training and syndication of updates on national project activities, development of communications material for national project communications and outreach (posters, booklet, product briefs, folders etc.);
- iii. Video production (e.g. Vanuatu Rapid Coastal Assessment 2018, Tuvalu Water Quality Monitoring exercise 2019) and photography; and
- iv. Media relations and writing releases

However, RPCU does not have a communications strategy for raising awareness on R2R among different audiences: NPMs, local communities, PSC, IMC or its equivalent. Many of the communication outputs witnessed or reviewed by the MTR refer to individual activities (such as tree planting) that are positioned within a broader R2R framework. The project communications strategy needs to be vigilant that its primary role is to communicate about the project objective, which is R2R, and de-emphasise micro-scale activities (although such can be good communication/promotional opportunities where successful).

The project's RapCA/ IDA/ SOC/ SAF Policy-Interface Model limits and leaves strategic communication towards the tail-end of the process. It narrowly construes the task of strategic communication as document publication and “selling” the product to policy-makers for endorsement and adoption. However, strategic communication should from the very beginning input into how the assessment and strategy framework could be better aligned with existing priorities and planning processes, to enhance the chances these are adopted as national documents. For example, had communications been considered as a relevant strategic planning tool at the outset it is highly likely the project would have adopted a more ecosystem goods, services perspective from the outset, and focussed on supporting mainstreaming into existing mechanisms and frameworks instead of creating new ones.

The Mid-Term Review Recommendation 17 states that: *Communications should be considered and integrated into project activities (e.g. IDA-SOC/R2R, mainstreaming plans etc.) from their very beginning and be used to identify target audiences, influence the nature of data collected and indicators being used and improve the understanding of how constraints to R2R uptake can be reduced to increase the impact of the project on policy.*

## Response to Mid-Term Review Recommendation 17

1. The overarching communications objectives guiding implementation is outlined in the Communications Strategy endorsed by the RSC1 (2016), include:
  - i. Improve stakeholder access, and awareness of the GEF Pacific R2R programme;
  - ii. To support regional and national coordination for R2R (ICM/IWRM) in the Pacific;
  - iii. To foster a Community of Practice/Interest in coastal and water resource management for improved information and knowledge sharing.

2. However, SPC agrees with the MTR recommendation, and recognizes the broader project and communications goals to empower national level stakeholders to support the project/ programme and the adoption of R2R approaches through strategic planning, capacity building and coordinated local actions to sustain livelihoods and preserve ecosystems services. This can be realized through the achievement of national and regional project outcomes, and the communications of lessons at local, national and global levels.

**Programme Coordination Unit Approach to MTR Recommendation 17**

3. The RSTC is invited to review and endorse the RPCU approach to MTR Recommendation 17, as below stated:
4. Taking heed of the MTR recommendation, and specific to the Regional IW R2R project, a strategic communications lens will be applied to the Theory of Change and its applications in the identification of target audiences, and improving the understanding and impact of the project on policy;
5. Further, specific plans for communications and advocacy of the project goal, outputs, activities and lessons learned will be based on a clearly defined/established Theory of Change (ToC) concept and tools to be reviewed and recommended by the RSTC to the 4<sup>th</sup> Regional Steering Committee for adoption for testing and trial;
6. The two major concepts that are being tested by the Regional IW R2R project are:
  - i. Innovative technologies and related solutions that successfully integrate and mainstream R2R concept across water, land, forest and coastal areas of 14 PICs. The project is currently using a number of tools and methods to deliver on such integration and mainstreaming, and these are technological/methodological continuum (IDA-RAPCA-SOC-national SAF/SAP-Regional SAF) including the stress reduction measures;
  - ii. Resource governance dimensions in mainstreaming R2R aligned with the community to cabinet approach in planning and policy.